

THE SUPERIORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS

COLOSSIANS 2:11-19

There is no one or no thing we need to be right with god except being in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

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The Superiority and Sufficiency of Jesus

Colossians 2:11-19

The more I study through the book of Colossians, the more I realize how closely our culture parallels the early church. It never ceases to amaze me how easily Christians are confused by television preachers, false teachers, and legalists. It seems that we are attracted to people who demonstrate some sort of supernatural or metaphysical power. We are attracted to people who use a lot of religious language, and who appear to be very religious. They almost become self-appointed judges and authorities for the Christian faith.

As we have said through our study of Colossians, there were at least three outside influences trying to worm their way into the church. And the danger of each of these threats is that they would appeal to Christian concepts and use Christian language. For example, there were Jewish people who were trying to get Christians to become Jews in addition to being Christian. After all, Christians believe the Hebrew Scriptures are inspired by God as well. And so these Jewish teachers tried to confuse these early Christians by trying to convince them they had to follow Jewish religious laws in addition to believing in Jesus. In particular, they were teaching that Christians should undergo circumcision, follow the kosher dietary laws, and celebrate the Jewish holy days. Think about how holy and spiritual Christians would look if they submitted themselves to keeping all these religious rules. People would look up to them and say things like, "Look how holy those people are."

There were several famous schools of philosophy around in the day. One famous school was known as the Sophists. They were trained in the art of argumentation and debate. They could make convincing arguments about anything. They sounded good but in the end, they were simply false teachers. But what made them sound so good is that they could use Christian words and concepts. So they also sounded very Christian and very intelligent. And so the early church was impressed at how smart, relevant, and holy they sounded. They were no doubt good at storytelling. And then there were the Gnostics. They incorporated strict rules for living, combined with mystical concepts and religious language. People were attracted to their mystical powers and religious practices. What was so destructive was that they infiltrated the church and started to impress these young believers. Paul's message was don't be confused by self-appointed judges and authorities. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is the Savior and Lord of the church and their individual lives. Jesus is all you need.

Look there will always be these same types of people who infiltrate the church. They will look and talk very religious and they will do a lot of religious things. They will set themselves up as leaders, authorities, and judges. But don't be confused.

There was once a woman who was married to one of these guys thought of himself as important and an expert on everything. He was always right and never stopped correcting people, especially his wife. She got tired of it and just started pointing out to him that he was simply misguided.

One day, they were out and came across one of those fortune-telling scales. He dropped a coin into the slot and out came a little fortune-telling card that read, "You are a born leader, with superior intelligence, quick wit and charming manner. You have a magnetic personality and are attractive to the opposite sex." He handed it to his wife and said, "Read it and weep!"

She read the card, turned it, and said, "It has your weight wrong too."

I guess I shouldn't be surprised anymore at how gullible Christians are but I am. When people who have been attending church for years and years came up to me several years ago and asked me about the truth of the book and movie The DaVinci Code, I asked myself, "Where have these people been all the years I have been preaching to them?" People continue to ask me about the

television preachers and miracle workers. It's even amazing to see how easily false teaching can invade a church and take it over.

The problem is that most Christians don't know the truth of the Bible because they don't read and study it. The easiest way to spot counterfeit religion is to know what the truth is. Here is the most important truth and is the main idea of this morning's text. **THERE IS NO ONE OR NO THING WE NEED TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD EXCEPT BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.**

Again I have to tell you that this passage is difficult to preach on because there is some difficulty in translating some of the phrases. They have at least two different legitimate and acceptable ways to translate them. I will try and deal with them while at the same time not obscuring the plain meaning of the passage.

I. Jesus Gives Us Life (Vs 11-12)

Through His Death And Resurrection, Jesus Makes Us Right With God.

Paul reminded the Colossian church that only Jesus gives us life in verses 11-12. **THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION, JESUS MAKES US RIGHT WITH GOD.** There is nothing that can be added to this truth. This is the major theme of Paul's preaching. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul summarizes it like this:

"⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9 / NIV).

There is no special mystery or religious thing that can be added. We are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is a gift from God to be received. The truth of that will manifest itself in two ways.

A. DYING TO SELF-INTEREST (11)

First of all, we will die to self-interest in verse 11. You see, people that are attracted to these false teachers, mystics, and miracle workers are self-focused. They want to receive something. They are focused on what God can do for them. The idea of receiving Jesus as Savior is to acknowledge Him as Lord. That's not just Lord of the generic universe, it means that Jesus is Lord of my life. It means that we die to self.

Let me start by laying out the primary theme of this verse. Jews entered the faith community by being circumcised and having their babies circumcised on the 8th day. We also learned in our Old Testament studies that the word "cut" plays a prominent role in the religious life of Israel. In circumcision, the foreskin of the penis was cut off. In entering a covenant with His people, God cuts a covenant with them. If people reject the covenant of God, they are cut off.

Circumcision was a way in which the Hebrews demonstrated their commitment to follow God's laws and to declare their allegiance to Him. However, Moses and the prophets of Israel recognized that just because people conformed to religious rules, that didn't guarantee that they authentically loved God and it did not mean they were God's children. They must also be committed to God in love. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said this to the people of Israel:

"⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done— burn with no one to quench it" (Jeremiah 4:4 / NIV).

It seems as if there were Jewish teachers that were telling these Christians at Colosse that they had to be circumcised in addition to their faith in Christ in order to become children of the covenant. But Paul reminds them that when they gave their lives to Jesus in faith, Jesus Himself circumcised their hearts. Look at the phrase, "in putting off of the sinful nature." Actually the literal reading is something like, "in stripping of the body of flesh." So the simple meaning seems to be that when we gave our lives to Christ, He gave us new life in Him while we died to selfish lives that served our flesh, the world, and the devil. And further, this was a supernatural work of Jesus, not some ritual ceremony done by a human.

Now there is an alternate reading to this verse. The words are basically the same but they have a slightly different nuance. If you look at the last phrase in the verse, the NIV reads like this, "But with the circumcision done by Christ." But a legitimate reading would be, "but with the circumcision of Christ. In other words, the suffering and death of Jesus, is what we are connected to. His flesh was stripped away at the cross and the circumcision of Jesus refers to this awful death He endured for you and me. That would go nicely with verse 12 that talks about his burial and resurrection.

There is no way to determine which interpretation is correct. But there is the possibility that both are correct and interplay with one another. For example, in physical circumcision, we throw away the foreskin of the penis. In conversion we throw away our selfish, self-centered, and self-absorbed lives. We do this by identifying with the suffering and death of Jesus. So the first sign of a life that has been given to Christ in faith is that we die to self-interest.

B. EMBRACING GOD'S INTEREST (12)

The second sign of a life given to Jesus in faith is that we embrace God's interests as described in verse 12. I think that one of the most graphic illustrations of the truths taught in baptism is one of drowning and a burial at sea. In other words, Jesus was buried in a tomb after His death on the cross. There is nothing more final than being buried. There is finality to the acceptance that the person is dead. In a burial at sea, the body is weighted down, wrapped up and the body sinks to the bottom of the sea. In baptism, when we go under the water, it symbolizes our death. We die to Satan's claim on our lives. We die to our own claim on our lives. We die to the world. In other words, we drown and are dead to the world.

When we come up out of the water, it symbolizes resurrection. Jesus did not remain dead and buried. He was raised from the dead by the power of God. When we came up out of the baptismal waters, it is as if we were dead, and then Jesus gave us spiritual CPR. He breathed the Holy Spirit into us and became living souls.

Also please do not miss the phrase, "power of God." There is real spiritual power at work in the universe. Before conversion, we were physically alive but spiritually dead. Spiritual death means that we were under the power and control of Satan. When we received Christ, we were made spiritually alive as well. We were born again and now we are under the power and control of God the Holy Spirit. We will talk more about that in the next section but for now we must understand that there are only two choices in life, to be connected to Christ and live or to be under the power and control of Satan and to be dead and remain dead. The Bible makes the choice simple.

THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION, JESUS MAKES US RIGHT WITH GOD.

II. Jesus Defeated Our Enemies (Vs 13-15)

Jesus Defeated Everything That Stands In The Way Of Our Being In A Right Relationship With God.

Some of the mystics of Paul's day were trying to confuse the early Christians by telling them that there were all sorts of spiritual realities and personalities that interacted with human being. And based on knowing which were good and which were evil, it would be important to know how to appease them and how to tap into their supernatural power. For Christians, we know that Jesus defeated all powers that can try to harm us. In verses 13-15 Paul encouraged the Colossians not to be confused because Jesus defeated our enemies. **JESUS DEFEATED EVERYTHING THAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF OUR BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** It's important to remember as we study through this section that the people of Paul's day were superstitions. The people who became Christians probably were frightened of the spirit world. They would be afraid to violate some superstitions law. They could also be afraid to violate some cultural norm. In the United States, many people who call themselves Christians are superstitions.

All over the world, people have mixed Christianity with all sorts of demonic religions. Voodoo is a mixture of Christianity with demonic religions. I just read an article in the June 30, 2008 edition of Newsweek magazine that talks about the use of psychics in the business and governmental world. Many huge companies and investment companies are using psychics. The article was on a particular psychic Laura Day. She reported making over \$10 million over the past 15 years. The article also stated that government officials also use psychics. People who claim to be Christians consult psychics, astrology, and participate in all sorts of demonic activities. Jesus died to set us free and yet, we constantly look for ways to be enslaved all over again.

A. SIN ENSLAVED US (13)

In verse 13 Paul reminds the Colossians and us that sin enslaved us. Look at the different phrases in this verse, "dead in your sin," and "alive in Christ." Let me once again remind us that death in the Bible means separation. People who do not know and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior are physically alive but spiritually dead. They are separated from God. If they physically die while still separated from God, then they will be eternally separated from God. This eternal separation is called hell in the Bible.

On the other hand, the only way for sinful people to be connected to God is to be forgiven of all our sins by the blood of Jesus. Jesus makes us alive. He connects us to God. Eternal connection to God through Jesus is called heaven. Sin enslaves us and keeps us separated from God. Jesus took care of that by defeating sin on the cross. The only way to break free from sin is to stay connected to Jesus. Jesus set us free from the bondage of sin.

B. OUR PRIDE ENSLAVED US (14)

We tend to forget that oftentimes we are our own worst enemy. In verse 14 we are reminded that our pride enslaves us as well. I'm pretty sure that this verse specifically refers to the Old Testament Law as it had been practiced during the days of Paul and Jesus. I think it can also have to do with cultural laws or any sort of laws. First of all, people who think they are keeping the law are often judgmental of others who are not. There is a sort of pride that comes with being religious or looked up to in a cultural setting.

On the other hand, honest people who try to keep these laws realize very quickly that we just can't do it. It takes hypocritical behavior and attitudes to pretend in front of people that we are actually keeping these laws.

In reality, the law is good in that if we are honest, we have to admit how bad we really are. And that should lead us to grace. Jesus died to demonstrate to us how evil we are and how much we need to depend only on the righteousness of Jesus. This is the kind of humility that will connect us to God and give us life. If we live by grace, we will be living far above the law. Jesus set us free from the bondage of pride.

C. SATAN ENSLAVED US (15)

Jesus set us free from sin, from pride, and also from the bondage of Satan. Satan is described as enslaving us in verse 15. My friend (Peter Germann) was sharing some of his thoughts with me concerning the connection between free will and God's sovereignty. He put it like this. The Bible describes us as being slaves of righteousness or slaves to sin. In other words, we are all subject to some power. These powers are real and they exercise authority over our lives. We have the free will to choose which power we will serve. But once we make that choice, we are subject to all its ruling authority. I think that Peter nicely summarized that. We will either be under the influence of Satan or God. To be sure, evil looks powerful and mighty and often desirable. When Jesus was suffering and dying on the cross, the power of evil rejoiced and celebrated, only to find out that in Jesus' death, people were now set free from the power of sin, Satan, and death. This verse is written in military terms. Jesus stripped away all the power of Satan and this world. Jesus disarmed them. Secondly, he made a public spectacle of them and triumphed over them. This refers to the procedure used by conquering Generals. They would disarm their prisoners and parade them through the streets as a sign of their victory over their enemies.

Whenever I have to work with people who are demonized or being terrorized by demons, the battle is for truth. If you have ever seen the movie "The Wizard of Oz" you will remember that Dorothy and her three friends get into the throne room of the wizard. There is fire and smoke and a ferocious face and the voice of the wizard is booming and frightening. But then all of a sudden, Dorothy's dog pulls back a curtain, where a pathetic, little old man is revealed moving levers and speaking into a microphone. He is revealed for what he is; a pathetic old fraud. Satan tries to fool people by scaring them and by trying to deceive them. But in the death and resurrection of Jesus, He pulled back the curtain and exposed Satan for what he is, a fraud. Jesus compared Himself to Satan like this:

¹⁰The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness" (John 10:10 / NLT).

Notice both powers claim power and authority over their subjects. Jesus exercises power in order to give us life, to set us free, and to enter a love relationship with us. Satan exercises his power to enslave us, to use us, to steal from us, kill us, and destroy us. We have the ability to choose whether we want life or death. Paul encouraged the Colossians to choose life. He reminded them that **JESUS DEFEATED EVERYTHING THAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF OUR BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

III. Jesus Set Us Free (Vs 16-19)

Jesus Made The Message Of Reconciliation Simple So That False Teachers Could Not Confuse Us.

It is clear that Jesus is all we need. He is superior to anything or anyone and He is all that we need. In addition to giving us life and defeating all our enemies, Jesus gives us life as described in verses 16-19. **JESUS MADE THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION SIMPLE SO THAT FALSE TEACHERS COULD NOT CONFUSE US.**

A. FROM SELF-APPOINTED JUDGES (16-17)

I don't quite understand why, but we have this desire to always go back to slavery. Jesus set us free, and yet we continue to fall prey to self-appointed judges and self-appointed authorities. In verses 16-17 Paul warns them to remain free from self-appointed judges. The obvious target of the warning in verse 16 is the Judaizers. They were trying to force these new Christians to follow

Jewish law as well. In other words, they were to eat kosher, be circumcised, follow all the Sabbaths, and celebrate all the festivals.

But the not so obvious target could be the Gnostics. They also had this list of foods to eat and foods to avoid. They had some magical power to make one more spiritual or less spiritual. They also had some sects that demanded extreme asceticism. They would require fasting and other extreme denial of bodily needs and comforts. Again we can see how some of the early Christian groups embraced these practices of denying the body.

The problem is not so much that these people live like this, the problem is that they try to pass themselves off as mature and try and force others to embrace these practices as well. This plays itself out in modern day churches when someone gets involved in a particular ministry and then judges others for not participating in that particular ministry. The danger is that when these people talk, they are good at using religious language and they sound and look to be very holy.

But the reality is that the very best system in human existence was the Jewish Law, our Old Testament. These laws pointed to the nature, character, and heart of God. And yet, Paul refers to them as mere shadows. They were pointers to the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfills the entire Jewish history and promise.

I can't say for sure, but perhaps the early Christians were familiar with Plato, especially those who came from Greek origins. But the Jewish writer Philo also wrote a lot about Plato. What is interesting for us in this discussion that in his book The Republic, Plato had a chapter that illustrated human being as living in a cave. They were chained from birth and could only look forward. In back of them was a bridge or a walkway and in the very back of the cave was a fire. As the people would walk back and forth across the bridge or walkway, their shadows would be cast on to the wall in front of the people chained and forced to look forward. The people would see the shadows and mistakenly identify that as reality. In other words, they thought the shadows were real.

However, one day, one of these guys gets free. He turns around and sees that the people who are crossing the bridge are the reality and the shadows are cast on the wall because of the light from the fire. But then, he leaves the cave and sees the sun and realizes that the fire that cast the light in the cave is only poor imitation of the light of the sun. When he goes back into the cave and tries to explain to them about reality, they actually try and kill him.

There are so many points of comparison to what Paul is talking about but just think about what John says about Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel:

⁴Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. ⁵The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

⁶God sent John the Baptist ⁷to tell everyone about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸John himself was not the light; he was only a witness to the light. ⁹The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was going to come into the world.

¹⁰But although the world was made through him, the world didn't recognize him when he came. ¹¹Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted. ¹²But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God.

¹⁴So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

¹⁵John pointed him out to the people. He shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'someone is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did.'"

¹⁶We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us—one gracious blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. But his only Son, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart; he has told us about him" (John 1:4-18 / NLT).

Jesus is the light of the world. Don't let any self-appointed judge come in and confuse us with false doctrine. Paul always encouraged his people to stay free by knowing and embracing the truth. Jesus said:

¹²... "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life" (John 8:12 / NLT).

I used to have a professor who used to say, "Keep your finger on the text." The motto of the Covenant Church is, "Where is it written?" Jesus set us free through His death and resurrection. We stay free by living according to His will as revealed in the Bible.

B. FROM SELF-APPOINTED AUTHORITIES (18-19)

And that leads nicely into verses 18-19 where Paul warns us to stay free from self-appointed authorities. It's important to really know the Bible because these self-appointed authorities will always use and quote Scripture as if they really understand it when if we knew our Bibles could easily recognize that their doctrine is false and their humility is fake. Again, we have talked a lot about the cosmology of the world in which Paul preached. The word for demon in Greek philosophy refers to angels as well as demons. But look at the characteristics of people to worry about. They go into great detail about what they believe and what they have done over the years. They fancy themselves mature, spiritual, and knowledgeable. And they make themselves look humble. People cry and pray in public. They make themselves look and appear to be humble, when in effect it is just one more way in which they are being proud. They take pride in their public demonstrations of humility.

When the bottom falls out, they are confused, but Paul explains exactly why the bottom falls out. Look at verse 19. They have lost connection with the Head, Jesus Christ. The head gives life to the body. If the Scripture is true when it says, "If God is for us, who could be against us?" then the opposite is equally true, "If God is against us, who could be for us?" In other words, when we are right with God, nothing in this world or the next could ever separate us from His love and power. But if God chooses to take a stand against us, there is nothing in this world or the next that can possibly help us. And we know that God opposes the proud, and that goes for those who exercise their religious pride through false humility. Over and over again the Bible reminds us of this truth:

"... "God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble" (James 4:6 / NLT).

If we know God's Word and humbly stay connected to Him through Jesus, we will be able easily to spot these phony Christians. Don't be confused by self-appointed judges or self-appointed authorities. Know the truth. Listen to what Jesus says about the power of truth:

"... You are truly my disciples if you keep obeying my teachings. ³²And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32 / NLT).

IV. EPILOGUE

There is no reason for anyone to be confused. **JESUS MADE THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION SIMPLE SO THAT FALSE TEACHERS COULD NOT CONFUSE US.**

But it's tragic that people continue to be confused by self-appointed judges and authorities. It's tragic that people continually return to the bondage of sin, pride, and Satan. It's tragic that people keep trying to add their own goodness to message of salvation. Here is the plain and simple truth. **THERE IS NO ONE OR NO THING WE NEED TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD EXCEPT BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.**

There has to be a fundamental choice we make. We cannot mix anything with the Gospel. We cannot add our own lust, pride, or personal philosophy. We cannot make up our own theology. Listen to what Jesus said:

"³⁴ ... I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave of sin. ³⁵A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free" (John 8:34-36 / NLT).

I think David Hubbard in his commentary on this passage sums it up nicely:

"No wonder the cross has become a symbol of victory. The fraudulent competitors, the false gods that court our allegiance have been unmasked. They fed on our sins, exploited our guilt, used our sense of unworthiness to keep us in their servitude. Christ has set us free.

Christ, and none other, is someone to believe in, someone to belong to, someone to depend on. We don't pin our hopes on an educational system, but on Christ who is the truth. We don't stake our welfare on a political structure, but on Christ who is the King. We don't bet our lives on a technological culture, but on Christ who has the power to forgive sin and raise the dead.

Worship we will. It's part of our nature to do so. The question is not whether, but whom. The answer is the true man, the true God – the true God-man, Jesus Christ."