

Community Group Discussion Guide

In Him

September 24, 2023 | Colossians 2:6-15

MOTIVATE

Starter Question

⇒ *How does repetition help us learn? Can you give examples?*

Optional Activity: As a group, count how many times Paul used phrases like “in him,” “with him,” or “of him” in Colossians 2:6-15 (ESV) in reference to Christ.

⇒ *What does Paul’s repetition reveal about his theme for this portion of his letter?*

DISCUSS

After using Colossians 1:1-2:5 to introduce his letter and greet the Colossians, Paul addressed false teaching that threatened these new believers. Paul’s repeated references to Christ in Colossians 2:6-15 are an indication of the subject of his debate: the doctrine of salvation through the person and work of Jesus. The predominant error Paul sought to correct was a failure to recognize the sufficiency of Christ to fully meet the needs of His followers.

Colossians 2:6-7 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Paul used “therefore” to segue from the prolonged opening to his letter. He challenged the Colossians to see the relationship between receiving Christ and walking in Christ.

- Receiving Christ: Faith focused on the sufficiency of Jesus alone for salvation.
- Walking in Christ: Living out the day-to-day reality of that salvation by connecting faith to practice, belief to behavior.

⇒ *Why should our conduct be consistent with Christ’s lordship?*

In verse 7, Paul listed four characteristics of what it means to have Christ’s lordship transform the way believers live:

1. **Rooted in Him:** “Rooted” comes from the agricultural world. Roots exist to give the plant a strong foundation and to help the plant grow. Paul’s use of the perfect tense verb expressed the continuing results of an action completed in the past. Having received Christ, the Colossians were to continue to live in ongoing submission to Jesus.

⇒ *What are some practical ways you have “rooted” yourself in Christ?*

⇒ *Has this “rooting” helped you surrender more of life to Him? Explain your answer.*

2. Built up in Him: Paul moved from an agricultural metaphor to an architectural one that pictured a building being constructed in Christ. “Built up in Him” implies that believers are still under spiritual construction and not yet a finished product. This is the process of sanctification.

⇒ *What is God currently building in you?*

3. Established in the faith: Paul confirmed that the Colossians had been taught the elements essential to their faith. This truth effectively rooted them, giving them the foundation on which they could grow in the knowledge of the truth already revealed in Christ.

⇒ *How has what you’ve been taught about Jesus laid a firm foundation on which to build your faith?*

4. Abounding in thanksgiving: Thankfulness should be the natural response to the work of God in believers’ lives. Gratitude overflows when we recognize that not only are we complete in Christ, but we also can grow spiritually in Him. A thankful believer who appreciates the significance of salvation and spiritual maturity is not easily led astray.

⇒ *Why does thankfulness make us less vulnerable to false teaching?*

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Paul finally began to address false teaching that threatened the Colossians and attacked the doctrine of salvation. These believers faced the threat of being captivated by such teaching and lured away from their devotion to the absolute supremacy of Christ. The word “captive” means “to carry away” or “to kidnap.” Applied to Paul’s teaching, it referred to the Colossians being snatched from the light of the gospel they received in Christ and carried back into the slavery of deception and darkness (Colossians 1:13).

⇒ *How can false teaching still manage to beguile people into thinking it is truth?*

⇒ *Why must all spiritual truth be “according to Christ?”*

Paul gave two origins of this false teaching, neither of which is Christ:

1. Human tradition: A product of the human mind, it represented man’s attempt to arrive at truth apart from God. It was meaningless and devoid of truth. It promised much but delivered nothing.

⇒ *What is the danger of seeking spiritual truth apart from God?*

2. Elemental spirits of the world: This may be a reference to angelic powers or heavenly bodies, which were incorrectly perceived as being in authority over humanity and the world. Whatever his exact meaning, Paul’s point was that these were inferior to the fullness found in Christ Jesus the Lord.

⇒ *What worldly forces threaten to distract modern day believers from Christ’s authority?*

Colossians 2:9-10 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

False teaching usually strikes the person and work of Jesus Christ and the believer's identity in Him. False teachers in Colossae proposed that more was needed to make Jesus' disciples complete.

To counter this false teaching, Paul reiterated what he said about Christ in Colossians 1:19: He is "the fullness" of God. In the Old Testament, "fullness" refers to God's presence. The basic affirmation of Christianity is that God was perfectly and completely present in Jesus when He came to the earth in bodily form to bring salvation. Since Christ is the fullness of God and believers are in Him, we have the completeness we desire and do not need to look anywhere else.

⇒ *How do you know that Christ alone is enough?*

Colossians 2:11-12 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Paul chose two familiar physical rituals to explain salvation and life in Christ. Paul presented the spiritual reality behind these rites. The point is that believers are saved totally and exclusively through the work of God, not through any human activity.

1. Verse 11: Circumcision: God instituted circumcision as a physical sign of His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17). Every male was to be circumcised as tangible testimony that he was in a covenant relationship with Yahweh. The Jews mistakenly thought the physical ritual was sufficient by itself. Yet even the Old Testament is clear that physical circumcision saves no one (Deuteronomy 30:6). This becomes more evident in the New Testament (Romans 2:28–29).

⇒ *Are we still tempted to mistakenly believe that a physical ritual can save us?*

Paul's mention of the "circumcision of Christ" was prompted by the false claim that Gentile Christians lacked the crucial, physical mark of circumcision to identify them as God's people. The circumcision of Christ refers to what He underwent physically in His crucifixion and death.

Paul likened the Colossians experience of spiritual conversion to physical circumcision. Not done by hands, this was a "spiritual operation" of putting off the sinful nature that stood for their old lives of sin and rebellion. This was done by God and signified a cleansed heart through Christ.

⇒ *Discuss this quote: Spiritual circumcision, received through Christ's death, takes care of a problem that physical circumcision never could.¹*

¹ Garland, D. E. (1998). [*Colossians and Philemon*](#) (p. 157). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

2. Verse 12: Baptism: Paul spoke of the baptism of the Spirit that takes place at the moment of salvation. Believers are united and identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-4). It isn't the physical act of baptism that saves us. It is God who makes us alive with Him through Christ.

⇒ *It what ways do you identify with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection?*

Colossians 2:13-15 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

The Colossians had been challenged by errant, local Jews, who refused to accept the validity of their hope in Christ. These antagonists argued that unless Gentiles converted fully to Judaism and became circumcised, they remained forever excluded from God's covenant promises.

⇒ *Why do Christians continue to be pestered by those within or without the church who allege that they fall short in some area necessary for salvation?*

Paul challenged the Colossians to focus on what Christ accomplished through His saving work on the cross. It is this sacrifice that laid the foundation for the forgiveness of sins.

Paul proclaimed that everything that ever needs to be done to secure salvation has been accomplished once for all by God through Christ's death and resurrection. God took away the charges that doomed us to eternal separation from Him. Thus, those who are in Christ lack nothing.²

⇒ *How do we lay claim to this salvation?*

Part of the reality of spiritual fullness is the cancellation of a debt we could never pay. Paul's metaphor may allude to the practice of placing the charge against the criminal on his cross. This indicated the debt to society was canceled since the crime was now paid for in full.

Paul spoke of "the record of debt" which stands against us with all its legal demands. The word Paul used here refers to a certificate of indebtedness—like an ancient IOU that acknowledges the obligation to pay a debt. The IOU exacted a penalty for nonpayment—death. God nailed the incriminating list of unpaid debts to the cross of Christ. When Jesus died, the condemning document was destroyed.

⇒ *If Christ is all-sufficient for your salvation, do you need any other mediator or deliverer except Him? Explain your answer.*

² Garland, D. E. (1998). [*Colossians and Philemon*](#) (pp. 157–158). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

In His sacrifice, Jesus triumphed over Satan and all other authorities at war with Him. He broke their power, stripped them of their controlling influence over humans, and publicly shamed them. This imagery comes from a Roman military practice. When a general won a victory, a triumphal procession made its way through the streets, with the successful general leading the way. His army followed, reveling in their victory. Bringing up the rear were defeated soldiers, subjected to public ridicule, and paraded for all to see.³

⇒ *If Satan is a defeated foe, does this mean we will not have any future conflict? Explain your answer.*

TRANSFORM

1. Personal application: In Christ, we have complete salvation, full forgiveness, and absolute victory. As believers our task is to continue to live exclusively in Christ and to abound in thanksgiving for what God has done for us.

⇒ *How can you use your faith in Christ's death and resurrection to address new assaults on the supremacy of His sacrifice?*

⇒ *How can God's truth so permeate your life that it controls all you think and do?*

2. Pray: Thank Jesus for your salvation made possible by His full and complete sacrifice. Ask God to protect you from any teaching that undermines the truth of the gospel of Christ. Praise God for making you truly alive in Him.

STUDY: Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, pages 304-320.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, Colossians and Philemon*, pages 138-171.
- *Shepherd's Notes, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, pages 50-54.

³ Anders, M. (1999). *Galatians-Colossians* (Vol. 8, pp. 307–308). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.