

LSB Colossians 2:8 - 15 Empty Philosophies

NASB77 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Paul, of course, in his letter to the christians at Colossae, whom he has never met, and yet loves intensely, is in protect the church mode.

Paul wants them to have all the armor they will need in order to stand firm and strong against all of the different onslaughts that Satan will heave at them.

And Paul has several important things that have already come up in their church that he wants to address. The first was philosophy, and Paul simply does a comparison to worldly philosophy and being "in Christ."

Pretty simple math. Bankrupt / wealthy beyond comprehension. Empty / fullness. Satan's kingdom / Kingdom of God. No forgiveness of sins, pending condemnation of this world with it's philosophies, or Forgiveness,

adoption into God's family, fellow heirs with Christ. It's what we call;

A NO - BRAINER!

And yet most of the world is locked down in blindness. They cannot see the wide disparity which is so obvious to those of us who have been quickened to spiritual life. Once I was blind, now I see.

And now Paul, as part of his edifying through strength of convictions, as he speaks to us about being IN Christ, unfolds for us the inner depths of salvation. This is the mechanical innards of soteriology. OK big 6 syllable word. Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation by grace. The mechanics of salvation, if you will.

You say, great! This is what I've been waiting for! Tell me what I have to do to make this happen. Use simple words so I can know I'm getting it right.

OK, spoiler alert, Paul's going to walk us through the inner process of salvation and what we're going to learn is; God does all of it. Other than a repentant heart over your offense and asking God to save you, He does it all. And we learn even that repentance that leads to salvation is granted to us by God. Repentance is granted and faith to believe is the gift of God.

So Paul is going to use two metaphor's that are both outward pictures of what God does inside your heart, that you cannot do. For one thing, very practically, you can't remove your own blindness anyways.

The blind man in John chapter 9 had no power over his blindness. The only reason he got his sight restored to him was because Jesus sought him out and created new eyes for him that were complete. And oh by the way, you could test the DNA of the eyes after Jesus restored sight to them and they are the man's original eyes but with all of whatever was broken in between now perfectly re-created.

That's how the Creator of the universes fixes blindness. And the same phenomenon is true when some blind sinner suddenly sees for the first time, his offense and understands the offer of the good news. God is author of all of it. We are author of none of our salvation.

Paul's premise here, as he combats worldly philosophies is that worldly philosophy is nothing more than some conglomeration of elements of Satan's cosmos. Therefore, it's bankrupt. Empty. And very often destructive in the process. Satan is a liar and a murderer. We aren't surprised that human philosophy is often ultimately deadly.

But, counterpoint, we are IN Christ. Purchased out of this world. Saved by the shed blood of Jesus who died the death we deserved, in our place, and then gave to our accounts, His righteousness. We once were bankrupt and doomed for slated destruction and eternal separation from God.

But our eyes were opened and we were saved. We believed the gospel. By a regeneration from death to life, we became new creatures. Our spirits which were like the broken pathway of the eyes receptors and nerves to the brain in that blind man, suddenly were quickened to spiritual sight and life. We left Satan's cosmos behind and were transferred into God's kingdom.

Paul is going to expand on that miracle by using two metaphors of common physical things as pictures of what God has done inside our hearts. One is more awkward to talk about than the other but we'll get through it and you'll understand the inner picture.

Circumcision and baptism are both physical entrance barriers into Judaism. All males born in Israel to jewish parents were circumcised according to the law of Moses on the eighth day. It was a uniquely jewish thing that separated jews from everyone else. Only God could have thought this up.

It was a forever reminder that pro-creation after Adam's sin, could only result in another sinner. We know now that there are health benefits that only God would have known that benefited His people. But mostly it was

what separated jews from everyone else on earth. It made them distinctly jewish. Distinctly God's chosen people.

Baptism, during jewish times, was also a ceremonial washing. When a gentile wanted to convert to judaism, baptism was a necessary cleansing ritual. So both acts are in a way entrance gates into judaism. One for blood jews and one for converted jews.

Paul uses both of those very common metaphors to speak about what God has done inside our hearts, when He saved us, and when we became christians.

Circumcision at that time in history was a defining mark of distinctness that literally separated the jewish people, the chosen people from the rest of the world.

Circumcision is used by Paul as a shorthand word for the entire nation of Israel. If Paul is talking about the jews, he often shortens up his descriptor to simply calling them "the circumcision." In Galatians 2 Paul is giving some history and he uses this term that way;

*7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to **the circumcised** 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to **the circumcised** effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), gal. 2:7,8*

And again later in that chapter when Paul speaks of facing off with Peter over Peter's hypocisy says the same thing. In a way. Same idea.

*11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the **party of the circumcision**. 13 And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, Gal. 2:11-13*

So when Paul is using the word with the article THE preceeding it, he isn't speaking of the physical operation, he's speaking of the nation of the jews as opposed to everyone else. It was their distinctive separating mark.

But then in Romans 2, Paul also speaks of the distinctive as representing a distinctive separation to God, not of the physical thing, but of the heart.

25 For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

So Paul is speaking in spiritual terms here in our passage. Circumcision is a distinctive separation from the rest of the world into an obedient ownership and relationship with God. And it is not a physical operation, it's a heart operation. Spiritual circumcision that separates us out of Satan's cosmos and into God's kingdom.

Now, my modesty is Victorian and this whole topic is awkward for me. Obviously not so for Paul. So this is proof positive. If it's in the Bible, when we get to that verse, we're going to talk about it.

11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

The idea here, that circumcision is meaningless, unless it's inner, and not just outer, is as old as Moses. Here's a little history that shows very well

where Paul's mindset is coming from. It has to be inside. Outside means nothing . . . to God.

In Deuteronomy 10, as Moses is preparing Israel to receive their inheritance of the promised land, listen to what Moses says to them;

12 “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the LORD’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? 14 “Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 15 “Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. 16 “Circumcise therefore your heart, and stiffen your neck no more.

Deut. 10:12-16

God Himself, through Moses, tells Israel, your physical circumcision means nothing to me, I'm looking for circumcised hearts. God always looks on the inside, not the outside. Circumcision set the Israelites apart from the nations, but it didn't set anyone apart to God. It removes you from the nations but it doesn't connect you to God, unless it's inside, and not just outside.

Later in Deuteronomy, this idea is again stated, inner circumcision of the heart, but here, God Himself prophecies of a time when He will perform that inner circumcision of the heart.

Deuteronomy 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Deuteronomy 30:6

Again, emphasis on the inner, not the outer.

Later on, through the prophet Jeremiah, as Israel is about to be carried into

captivity, God pleads with them, this same exact idea.

*4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord;
remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem;
lest my wrath go forth like fire,
and burn with none to quench it,
because of the evil of your deeds.” Jer. 4:4*

He could have said, sanctify yourselves to the Lord. Separate yourselves to the Lord. But he chooses the word circumcision and uses it interchangeably with the idea of a people who are set apart unto God. A special group set apart, separated from the rest of the world, set apart for God.

In the new testament, in Acts chapter 7, Stephen pushes the button that gets him martyred with these words. This is what triggered the jews to stone him to death!

51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Acts 7:51

I guarantee you that every man who picked up a stone to pile on top of Stephen that day was circumcised. But Stephen not only tells them their hearts are uncircumcised, but also their ears. Hearts of stone. Ears that are deaf as stones.

Finally, as we get our heads around this concept, listen to Paul again, speaking here to the first european church, the christians at Philippi;

*3 For **we are** the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—Philippians 3:3*

Archaic to us, but not to Paul, who came out of judaism to be the apostle to the gentiles. Paul here says, the church is the true circumcision, while the

jews who reject Christ are the false circumcision. We ARE the circumcision. Go up to Raleys and tell the cashier. What a conversational entrance mechanism. Just don't tell them I told you to do it.

The church is the true circumcision in that by a heart operation, made without hands, it is set apart unto God, even as the jews of old were set apart unto God by the distinctive of physical circumcision.

That's our introduction, and with that background, listen again to what Paul tells the church at Colossae about their salvation experience.

11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

By way of review here, for our context, picking the paragraph up in the middle, Paul had been comparing worldly philosophy to being IN Christ. The dichotomy of world vss Christ. Bankrupt ideas as opposed to having a spiritual life connection to the person who spoke the worlds into existence out of nothing.

The idea of being IN Christ is what launches this part about inner circumcision. In Him, in Him, in Him . . . we are rich instead of bankrupt, forgiven instead of condemned by a righteous judge, full instead of empty.

All of these radical contrasts. How did that happen Paul?? Well, Christ performed an operation on your heart, that's how. It's the ultimate completion of what was prophesied centuries earlier;

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and to carefully observe My ordinances....^{Ezekiel 36:26,27}

Paul's right at the nitty gritty here. What happens inside a person when

they are quickened to new life in Christ. This is nuts and bolts inner reality that defines true christianity. This is true of every christian. Christ performs an inner surgery. A circumcision of your heart. He turns it from stone to spiritually beating living flesh.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!

If you are indeed IN Christ, it is because Christ performed a surgery on your heart. He quickened it from death to life. He took out the dead as stone heart and replaced it with beating spiritually alive heart.

He circumcised your heart making you distinctly set apart from this world, an adopted brother in His family. Circumcision set Israel apart distinct from the rest of the world. Heart circumcision sets christians distinctly apart from the dead world around us. Spiritual life, in our hearts, makes us distinctly separate from this perishing world that we remain in physically.

OK, you get the idea. But Paul, of course, loves to mix his metaphors, so while he's on the subject of spiritual circumcision, he may as well also talk about spiritual baptism, death, and resurrection. Why not.

This is the nitty gritty that rescued us out of the domain of Satan and delivered us into the kingdom of God.

Col. 1:13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

How did He do that, Paul?? Simple.

12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Again. We haven't left the sphere of inner spiritual realities here. Paul isn't

speaking of physical water baptism here any more that he was of physical circumcision.

Baptism is a picture, a little physical re-enactment for the world to witness, of what God did with us during salvation, which He and only He accomplishes on the inside.

Remember, we are IN Christ. Paul is explaining what happens for those who are IN Christ.

If your brain is as small and childlike as mine is, perhaps permitting yourself to try to understand these incredible truths in the most childlike literalism can help.

I picture myself as somehow climbing inside of Christ. Like a mouse in His pocket. I'm inside Him, in a safe place. And I'm in Him when He goes to the cross, and He leaves my sins there, at the cross, and then I'm in Him when He is buried, inside Him in the tomb, Sin said I must die, and I In Him participate in His death, and, this is my favorite part, I'm in Him when He rolls the stone away and we come up out of the grave. Sins are gone. Paid for in full by His death. And I'm still inside Him beyond the grave. In Him in death, in Him in resurrection and eternal life.

Water baptism is a picture. Immersed in death. The Psalmist pictures the waters surrounding him. Total immersion. I'm all the way under the waters, immersed. Like being buried in dirt after death. Total immersion into death. But we come shooting back out of the waters, out of the immersion in death and burial, into newness of life. Risen from the old condemned life, into a new life.

This is the baptism Peter speaks of in 1 Peter 3:21, when he says;
And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Being immersed in water is just a picture show, a dramatic re-enactment of what happened inside my heart. I am immersed INTO Christ. I'm spiritually IN Him just like I was physically immersed into the waters.

This again is the nitty gritty that calls christians out of the perishing condemned world and into Christ. All who are in His kingdom are IN Him.

13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

50 years ago, when I was young, I participated in D. James Kennedy's Evangelism Explosion ministry. It consisted of one trainer, and two trainee's who knock on doors and present the gospel. Your contacts were people who had visited the church and filled out a card with their address.

We would ask two questions that gave us our path forward in the gospel presentation.

Question 1; If you died today, are you certain you would go to heaven. Almost everybody, President Trump excluded, would say, yes, they believed they were going to go to heaven.

Question 2; If you did go to heaven and God said, why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?

Trick questions because they reveal where someone is at. If the guy says, "yeah, I think my chances are better than the rest of the knuckle heads on the block," that could be a good candidate for the good news.

Never once did someone in my recollection say; you know, *when I was dead in my transgressions and the uncircumcision of my flesh, God made me alive together with Jesus, having forgiven me all my transgressions, 14*

having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against me and which was hostile to me; and He has taken those things out of the way, having nailed them to the cross

Beloved, that's the right answer. That's exactly what happened on the day of your salvation. And, if it didn't, we need to talk.

This is the nitty gritty mechanics of how God saves sinners. He accomplishes all of it. Inside my heart. In the inner me.

I'm going to get offensive to some folks here. John Calvin and indeed almost all of christianity until a couple of centuries ago, believed in a doctrine that for lack of a happier name is called Total depravity.

What that means is what the Bible says here. When you're dead, you're dead. Dead people cannot act on their own behalf. They're dead.

If you come to my house, and you've listened to this sermon, (feeling pretty safe here), and you ask me, I'll dig out a 78RPM shellac record from the 1940's by Louis Jordan, and I'll crank up the Victrola and play his big 1946 hit; "Jack, You Dead"

*When you just ain't got nobody
Since you gone and lost your head
Rigor mortis has set in, daddy
Jack, you dead*

*What's the use of havin' muscles
When your life hangs by a thread
If you ain't got no red corpuscles
Jack, you dead*

*When you've got silver dollars on top of your eyes and people are standing around going mm mm mm, don't he look natural, whan that happen to you;
Jack, you dead*

Pretty sure theology was the last thing from his mind, but he states the premise of vs. 13 pretty well.

13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him,

When you're spiritually dead, you're dead. Spiritually as unresponsive as the guy in the song with dollars on his eyelids in the funeral home. You're not looking around for anyone to quicken you back to life. Total depravity is the biblical doctrine that says "No one seeks after God." Dead people don't seek

Romans 3:11 There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Why does God choose who He will quicken from death to life. What is His criteria? How does He decide who to make alive, since without Him doing the quickening to life, none of us would ever seek Him and be saved.

Beloved, that's way beyond my pay grade. The only answer He's given to us is: *Psa. 115:3 Our God is in heaven; He does as He pleases.*

If you hear ancient christians speaking to other ancient christians you might catch them saying something along the lines of; "it pleased God to do . . . whatever . . . ". They say that because they understand from a lifetime of God's providence and sovereignty, the reason God did something is because . . . wait for it . . . He wanted to.

King Nebuchadnezzar learned it the hard way after 7 years of walking with the beasts on all 4's, he'd lost his mind at God's command, and then 7 years later it was restored to him, God saw to it that he never lost his kingdom in all that period where he lived with the beasts eating grass. Here's what he said; Daniel 4:

Daniel 4:35

All the peoples of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does as He pleases with the army of heaven and the peoples of the earth. There is no one who can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

Why did Jesus walk all the way north of Israel to the region of Tyre? To meet one daughter of His who asked for blessing and thankfully received the childrens crumbs from the table. Or why did he sail across the sea of galilee to rescue one single demon possessed man living in tombs in a gentile land?

Why did the thief on the cross, who one gospel writer portrays as hurling insults at Jesus with the other thief, suddenly have a change of heart and repent and ask Jesus to remember him when He comes in His kingdom? Out of nowhere. Total reversal. Some switch was flipped in that thief's heart and suddenly, he believed.

How? Why? Because it pleased God to quicken him from his spiritual death to life, and he instantly saw Jesus for who He really was, and believed and asked for inclusion in His kingdom. Jesus told him, Today, you will be with me in paradise.

We don't know how or why that happens. God chooses. God quickens from death to life. In an instant. He chooses who He pleases. 10 lepers are cleansed, 9 go about the rest of their worldly lives, one comes back and worships. Why? We don't know.

We're out of time. Let's pick it up again next Sunday, if it pleases God for us to do so, and we'll finish looking at these magnificent verses that give us more questions than answers, but also give us a sense of awe at a God who is magnitudes bigger and smarter than I am.

The fact that He doesn't answer all my questions is the tip off that this book isn't the product of mens minds. This book clearly presents a God beyond

my understanding. But He is a God who graciously and mercifully has given me a pathway to Him, through His Son, the Lord Jesus.

He rescues who He rescues. And why He chose me to quicken from death to life, it pleased Him to not reveal. I don't have a clue. He tells Moses, simply, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.* Exodus 33:19 He's God. That's His prerogative. It's a mercy that He reveals all that He has revealed. It's a grace that He chooses some to redeem and adopt as His own.