

## 12,3,20 Col. 2 vs. 9-23 Retroactive Positional Sanctification

I'm going back to our study in Colossians. If the Lord moves us into another tangent, we'll go there, but for now we will move forward from where we left off in chapter 2.

Let's begin by reading through the section we'll be looking at.

“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over every ruler and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision performed without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings, having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

In just this one section Paul shows us that what Christ did for us at Calvary resulted in the complete removal of our three enemies from retaining dominion over us.

The world, the flesh and the devil have been conquered and the Lord has moved us into that victory through our union with Christ.

So, if you're thinking, “that's great, but that's not my experience at all.”

Then, that's what we need to look at, because that is exactly what has happened.

Just notice a few of the statements Paul makes:

- The removal of the body the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. . . buried with Him in baptism.
- Raised with Him . . . in the working of God.
- Disarmed the rulers and authorities . . . having triumphed over them.

The goal of our lives here is first to see what Christ has done and then allow the Spirit to bring all the Lord has accomplished *for us* to completion *in us*.

We are to set apart (sanctified) in spirit, soul and body. The work of the Holy Spirit is to confirm, strengthen and establish us – to bring our position in Christ into our experience.

He does this through life experience, not just through knowledge.

Here's how this author explains it in his comments on 1 Pet. 5:10;

“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

“Something has got to be done in us as well as *for us*. We want to proceed on the line of having things done *for us*, heaven intervening *for us*, our difficulties removed *for us*, having a straight path made *for us*. Heaven may be ready to come in, the Lord may be prepared to work for us, but it is not sufficient for Him – and it would not prove good enough for us – if that were all. The very principle of spiritual growth and maturity demands that He keeps the objective and the subjective balanced; that is, that something is done *in us* as well as *for us*. It is the principle of the Cross again. He died for us – that is the objective. We died in Him – that is the subjective. Here are two sides in spiritual experience. He keeps the balance of things. We have to have this balance wrought in us rather than viewing the position merely objectively. We must be saying, "What does the Lord want to teach us about this? What does He want to do in us in this matter? There is something He is after in us. “

What He is after is that we would experientially enter into the value of what it means to be joined as one spirit with the Son of God, who is in the process of sharing His life with us as we grow.

When spiritual advance is happening, there is going to be a growing inner antagonism toward the flesh – we increasingly see why it was so important to the Lord that our old man be crucified rather than redeemed or repaired.

We are not shocked or dismayed by seeing more and more that “in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing.” (Rom. 7:18).

Many times, as the Lord exposes what He wants us to hate in our flesh, so we’ll turn away from it, we make the mistake of assuming that ‘flesh’ is all we are and that we are not only not growing, we must be degenerating.

But in reality; this is just His way of bringing us into alignment with Him on how vital it is that the flesh, the body of this death, be set aside.

The same is true in relation to the world.

In Gal. 6:14 Paul wrote,

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

The Cross is like a giant barrier between who we now are in Christ on one side, and the flesh and the world on the other.

We not only growingly despise the flesh within, but we increasingly see through the evil and hypocrisy of the world without.

And as this happens, we discover that there is a freedom that comes from finding ourselves less attached to this world system.

“The things of this world grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”

Doctrine is giving way to experience. That which was done *for us* is now becoming real *in us*.

I’ll share another author’s comments on this:

“The progress and increase of spiritual life mean this, that the gap widens all the time between the children of God and those in the world. That is not to be taken literally in this sense, that we begin a mistaken system of shutting ourselves off, getting out of touch. That is a wrong application of the principle. The Lord Jesus is preeminently our example in that He could move in any circle, and He did so deliberately, publicans and sinners, all classes, He moved among

them, but His power *over* them was in His basic difference *from* them. Let us be careful how we are caught in this great movement of conforming to this age. To conform is to lose spiritual power.”

So, we can start to see how absolutely essential it is that we see how the cross has set us free from these enemies – their control and their deception.

This inward working of the Holy Spirit bringing the truth of our position in Christ to us through spiritual growth, through experience, is the truth that sets free.

Knowledge doesn't set free; it only lays the foundation. We have to go through what the Lord takes us into to see freedom increase over our lifetimes.

Now, notice how verses 13 and 14 lay out this principle:

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

The Lord couldn't begin His work in us to bring us to full conformity with His own righteousness until first the sin question was completely resolved. In Vol. 4 of Robertson's "Word Pictures in the New Testament", he describes this term;

“The Greek word translated “cancelled out” (v. 14), suggests the smearing of letters written on wax. Our certificate of debt was hostile to us in that it hounded us through a guilty conscience and scriptural warnings. Christ erased the debt and removed the certificate. God crucified this certificate with Christ on the cross. What the metaphor says is that Jesus took the condemning indictment and nailed it to His cross—presumably as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers that were holding it over men and women as a means of commanding their allegiance. If there is an analogy here, it may lie in the fact that Jesus' own accusation was fixed to His cross. Just as His own indictment was fastened there, says Paul, so he takes the indictment drawn up against his people and nails it to His cross. His victorious sacrifice sets them free from their bankruptcy and bondage.”

Again, first He must die for us before He can live in us. Because we are in union with Him and because all barriers between Him and us have been removed, we have the fullness of His life being shared in us now by His Spirit.

We know such a small fraction of what that fullness is going to be once Christ is fully formed in us.

The cross removes the barrier; it opens the door to us. The Holy Spirit is now free to bring all that Christ is to us.

As we look at these things it's important to remember that the single motivation for Christ to have done all this for us is love. For God "so loved."

He wasn't required to do so; there was no legal or moral obligation to spare us, let alone share His glory with us.

These verses should sound familiar, but place what we've seen in Colossians as a grid over them;

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring charges against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, but rather, was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom. 8:31-34)

The cross makes all this possible; the resurrection brings us into union with Christ and at His coming, everything He has suffered *for us* will be fully realized *in us*.

Heb. 12:2; "Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

He had one motive in all that He's done – His own incomprehensible love and passion to see us restored and to be with Him forever.

When the reality of what Christ went through to save us fully dawns on us in heaven, it's no wonder we will spend eternity worshipping. We will know what we were saved from and we will know what our salvation has brought us into.

There is a culminating phrase in vs. 15;

“When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public example of them, having triumphed over them through the cross.”

The word translated “disarmed” should be translated “stripped off”. In John Gill’s commentary on this verse he writes;

“Principalities of hell, the infernal powers of darkness, the devil that had the power of death, the accuser of the brethren, with all his works: these Christ has divested of their armor, with which they were clothed; as is usually done to enemies, when they fall into the hands of their conquerors and in which they trusted to have ruined men, as sin, the law, and death; he has ransomed his people from him that was stronger than they, and taken the prey out of the hands of the mighty; he has bruised the serpent’s head, demolished his works, destroyed him, and all his powers, and defeated all their counsels and designs against his elect; whereby he gave the death blow to Satan and his powers.”

This cosmic war which began with Lucifer’s rebellion in eternity past reached a place of dominion over humanity with the fall of Adam.

A second Adam was needed to both resist all the deceptions that destroyed the spiritual life of the first Adam and to pay the price needed to end the punishment of the condemned – to remove that punishment from fallen humanity and place it back on the head of the serpent.

The next segment of Col. 2 (vs’s16-23) almost seems misplaced, until we notice a key word in vs. 16. Then Paul’s strategy is obvious.

“Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath day— things which are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Take care that no one keeps defrauding you of your prize by delighting in humility and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding firmly to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and

teachings of man? These are matters which do have the appearance of wisdom in *self-made religion* and humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

Paul uses the word “therefore” to move from explaining a theological position based on the work of Christ to the implications of that position in the deception the Colossians were facing.

Sparks once said that “the problem with Christians is that we don’t believe our beliefs.”

Our theology ultimately defines our experience of the Christian life (or lack of experience).

I’ll give an obvious example in our generation and then explain what the Colossians were up against.

Gen. 11:4; “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves . . . “

“We can emerge from this crisis a better world. We must build entirely new foundations for our economic and social systems. One silver lining of the pandemic is that it has shown how quickly we can make radical changes to our lifestyles.” (World Economic Forum)

“We will transform all the kingdoms of this world as we are worked into its systems. From there we must display His dominion and rule. It is very hard to imagine the Church bringing answers to the issues of life when much of our eschatology anticipates world conditions getting worse and worse. (Our) practical vision is to invade and transform the world system.” (Bill Johnson)

“I will not allow any interpretation of the scriptures that destroys hope for the nations and undermines our command to restore ruined cities...I refuse to embrace any mindset that celebrates bad news as a sign of the times and a necessary requirement for the return of Jesus... I don’t believe that the last days are a time of judgment.” (Kris Vallotton)

“The global elites are using this great reset to further the new world order. But they are not the only ones promising a better world for all. Another group with their own scheme for a reset can be found in the visible church. Driven by the machinery of the New Apostolic Reformation, the reset goal seems godly on the surface - take dominion and usher in the kingdom of God. But the teachings and methodology of the NAR, contradict scripture.

The builders of Babel wanted their tower to "reach heaven" (symbolic of a high tower) The NAR believe they can bring heaven down to earth, until the conditions on earth resemble heaven. The scriptures categorically teach that lawlessness and apostasy will increase in the last days, and that conditions in the earth will deteriorate. NAR "apostles and prophets" like Bill Johnson and Kris teach the opposite. As believers, we should be aware of both reset efforts - one by the world, the other by the New Apostolic Reformation. Any teaching that promises a Christian utopia on earth prior to the return of Christ, is a lie." (Luis Shirk)

One part of our study of the Bible is what's called eschatology – the study of last things or end time events. If our eschatology matches the scriptures, then we can see the reality of what's happening in the world and we will be building our house on the rock of God's Word – when the storms come; our house will stand.

If our eschatology is based on deception, our house is being built on sand and it will fall.

Without an understanding of dispensational theology; without knowing the difference between the Church's and Israel's eschatology, millions of believers have become a part of, or at least sympathetic to, groups like Bethel, Hillsong, and NAR or contemporary heretics like John Piper.

These are Christians who now unknowingly support Satan's final push for the Babylonian empire; the kingdom of Antichrist.

Hosea 4:6; "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

What the Colossians were in danger from (and us too, though we often don't see it) is for them to take all Paul had taught them about their absolute safety in Christ; their complete forgiveness; their eternally secure position in heaven, and then totally disconnect from the practical implications of these truths.

So, he gets specific to help them see the connection between theology and life.

He goes through a litany examples of what they were doing that was disconnected from the reality of what they should have known about who they were in Christ.

- Keeping the sabbath or a new moon or a festival
- Thinking they had to go through angels as mediators to reach God
- Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch – the traditions of man, not God

We probably aren't too wrapped up in sabbaths or new moons, or think that there are other mediators between us and God besides Christ. But I guarantee that we are constantly in danger of placing human traditions over the will of God.

There is an extremely important underlying principle around this idea of us needing to "believe our beliefs".

If we're safe in Christ and are totally forgiven of all our sins, then why do we buy into guilt over our past?

Do you think that as Peter was being led to his death at the end of his life, he was guilt-ridden over hypocritically withdrawing from the gentile believers in Galatia, or over his three denials of Christ in Gethsemane or for arguing with the Lord about the vision of the net in Acts 10?

How can any of us be free from guilt if all of us are sinners?

There's two ways we tend to approach this – Paul's way or the Colossian's way.

For Paul it was to believe what God told him about the all-sufficiency of the blood of Christ.

For the Colossians, who apparently had doubts about that, they tried to avoid guilt by locking into a works-based Christianity.

They knew they were sinners, like all of us, but rather than accept God's grace and enjoy their forgiveness, they decided to get to work and make up for all they've done wrong.

That led to two disasters:

- 1) They were deceived into thinking that their good works were helping them defeat their flesh (vs. 23 – "These are matters which have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.")
- 2) And they believed their 'tradition-based' Christianity would help compensate for their sins and secure their acceptance with God.

We don't lose guilt by penance and we don't conquer the flesh by self-righteousness.

You can see how not believing the truth can lead to a life of frustration instead of life of rest.

As this author puts it;

“Is it necessary to speak about responsibility? Should not God’s thought for us really draw out our hearts in unspeakable gratitude and worship?”

There is such a huge difference between service based on love and gratitude, and service based on fear and regret.

An entire system of Christianity has been developed over the last 2000 years that feeds on fear and legalism, but freedom only comes in knowing the truth – legalism is out; everything external written in stone, is out.

And standing in forgiveness and grace is the foundation that allows service to be simply a desire to please the One Who loves us.

(Gal. 5:1); “Stand fast therefore in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

F.F. Bruce adds this:

“The imposition of prohibitions from without can do nothing to develop new life within.”

Paul goes into great detail in the first part of Colossians 2 to make it clear that everything we were in Adam, in the old creation, was ended at the cross, so that now, as members of an entirely new species of humanity, we live out from who we are in Christ, not from who we were in Adam.

Our lives in Christ are to be a growing inner development of the fruit of the Spirit in our souls – “against such, there *is* no Law”.

It gets back, again, to who we are as a new creation, whether we *believe* that, what the implications are in terms of our Christian lives and whether that (and not the Christian religion) governs us.

Inward transformation puts us in a position to not only receive the Spirit’s leading but it frees us from the need for external, religious rules. We are to *become* what we are to do – our righteousness springs *not* from imitation, but from nature.

That development of the inner life can’t happen while outward religion drives us. Our spiritual lives depend on knowing and believing the truth.

Finally, anything other than living, growing and standing in grace steals our ability to live in the power of the Spirit. Here’s what Sparks wrote on this:

“The Lord must have a people on the earth whose spiritual resources of life, power, wisdom, knowledge, and purpose are by mediation of the Holy Spirit alone. Their means and methods must be Divinely supplied and dictated. Their energy must be directly Divine energy; which means that they must have been separated from their own (resources). It was the resolving into an earthly system of Christianity which cost the Church its Throne power at the

beginning, and there can be no recovery without taking a clear position (against) traditional (systems)."