

Colossians 2:9-12

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The supremacy of Christ is the foundation for all things. There are many practices and traditions meant to reflect this reality. Paul implores the Colossians not to confuse the traditions with the supreme foundation.

In the previous section, Paul warns the Colossian believers not to be taken in by the elementary things of this world. He is making his case for the supremacy of Christ, as the true manifestation of God, and pleading with the Colossians to walk in the ways of this supreme Christ rather than in the ways of the world. This applies to either worldly philosophies or self-seeking religious traditions. Paul warns the Colossian believers not to be duped by false teaching, teaching that centers upon anything other than Christ.

In this section, Paul makes the case that Christ is all the Colossians need as a foundation for life. He starts by saying, *for in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*. This is, perhaps, the most succinct description of the divinity of Christ: God became man. *In Him*, that is Jesus, *all the fullness of Deity dwells*.

The word *fullness* here can also mean completeness. Jesus is not a hint at God. He is not a reflection that suggests more. Jesus is completely God. *In Him* is the *fullness* of God. There is nothing that needs to be added to Christ to complete a picture of *Deity*.

The word *Deity* literally means, “the state of being God.” This use of *Deity* is the only place in Scripture the Greek word, “theotes,” is used. It encompasses all of the realities that make God—perfection, supremacy, the Creating power of heaven and earth, etc. Jesus is not God’s prophet or representative; He is God Himself, in all His fullness. God came to earth, lived a perfect life, and died to reconcile us to Himself. It is upon this understanding that all wisdom stands.

And the incredible paradox is that this full *Deity dwells in bodily form*. We saw in Chapter One that the Divine Jesus created all that is. This divine creator then became a part of His creation. This complete manifestation of God took on the shape of a human and came to earth to live and die. The Creator became a creature in order to redeem His creation.

Paul adds what seems like a bit of an aside here, *and in Him you have been made complete*. What this means is that the manifestation of God, the life and death of *Deity in bodily form*, is the place in which each human finds its completion. We need Jesus, and nothing else but Jesus, to be complete.

He has done the work. He has met the requirements. We are placed into Him when we believe (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are made complete when we walk in His ways, and in the work which He prepared for us (Romans 8:1; Ephesians 2:10). Through Christ, we can be restored to our original design, which is to steward the earth in harmony with Him ([see commentary on Psalm 8](#)).

All of this speaking of being in Christ and walking in His ways is in contrast to the “traditions of men,” the “elementary principles,” and the “deceptive philosophy” of the world that Paul warns against in Colossians 2:8. When we depend on materialism, our own reason, or any host of things other than the extreme supremacy of Christ, we allow ourselves to be led astray. Instead of reaping the greatest treasures of life, we gain emptiness and loss.

Our true completeness is in Christ alone. We can only become fulfilled in our design when we walk in the ways of our Designer. We have the power to walk in the ways of our Designer because He dwells within all who believe (Colossians 1:27b). It remains for us to choose to listen to Him and walk in His ways (Galatians 5:16-17). Instead of acknowledging a substitute authority, and following that authority, we gain our greatest benefit when we recognize that *He is the head over all rule and authority*. We are back to the recurring theme of the supremacy of Christ.

Philosophy tends to place human reason as supreme. This leads to futility. Paganism tends to place human appetites as supreme. This leads to addiction to our passions, which is a path of self-induced destruction. The anecdote to both of these maladies is to recognize that Jesus *is the head over all rule and authority*. If we recognize this, then we can use our reason to understand what God tells us, believe it is true, then act upon it.

The word for *rule* here is the Greek word “*arche*.” It means “beginning” or “origin.” It includes a supremacy of time. God pre-exists everything. He created all that is, physical and spiritual (Colossians 1:16-17). Therefore, He is the source, the standard. He is the thing we measure against. All rule—moral rule, the “laws” of nature, etc.—come from Him.

Jesus is also the *head*, which means He gives directives. Your brain in your head tells your arms and legs what to do. All authorities that exist are subjugated to Christ, who is the supreme head over all (Matthew 28:18; Romans 13:1).

The Greek word translated *authority* in the phrase *He is the head over all rule and authority* is “*exousia*” and it means “power,” “force,” or “capacity.” Thus, Jesus is the source of all effort. He is the fuel behind our choices, our limits, and our capabilities. This means we have an infinite resource living within us and can tap into this resource in order to walk in His ways.

Put together, *rule and authority*, encompasses the beginning of things and the energy to sustain them. God is the *head* of both. If we try to follow a way that is apart from Him, we are living in misalignment with the head. We will, accordingly, be plunged into chaos and confusion.

The hot-button issue of the early church that drives much of the narrative in the New Testament was a dispute over whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised (and follow Jewish custom) in order to become righteous (Acts 15:5). Do followers of Jesus who are not of Jewish background need to follow Jewish customs? The council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 addressed this disputed question, and decided “No.” But many forces continued to press the issue, and many of Paul’s writings address the issue as well—including Paul’s letters to the Romans and Galatians.

After laying out the foundational truth of Jesus's supremacy, Paul addresses this hot-button issue by saying, *and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands*. Circumcision was a symbol of belonging to God's covenant (Genesis 17:13). It was a physical distinction between the people of Israel, God's people, and the surrounding nations. This mark of distinction was also a discipline of obedience, following the tradition God gave to Abraham.

What Paul is saying here is that the revelation of Christ contains within it a *circumcision made without hands*. Meaning, it is being set apart spiritually rather than physically. Circumcision had become a tradition that superseded the spiritual reality behind it.

The process of being made a part of the New Covenant is not like that of the Old, which required a physical circumcision. Rather, the New Covenant requires a spiritual circumcision of the heart. This is something that is found in Christ.

Paul works to unpack this a little. This new kind of circumcision is accomplished, Paul says, *in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ*. The word for *removal* here is the Greek word "apekdysis," and it means "putting off" or "setting aside." It does not mean "removal" in the sense of eradicating or getting rid of. The flesh is always going to be there. But *by the circumcision of Christ*, we are capable of *setting aside* the *flesh*.

Jesus has made a way for the law to be fulfilled (when we walk in the Spirit; Romans 8:1). We are *circumcised* into God's New Covenant not with a physical transformation, but with a heart that chooses to accept the work of Christ.

The revelation of Christ has made a way to become a part of God's family solely through faith. Jesus used the example of the Israelites, who were healed of the venom of snakes when they had enough faith to look upon the bronze snake, lifted on a pole. In the same way, Jesus said we are delivered from spiritual death from the venom of sin when we look in hope at Jesus lifted upon the cross (John 3:14-16).

Then, we gain the great benefits of walking in the ways of the New Covenant when we walk by faith and follow in obedience (Colossians 3:23-24). When we walk by faith in the Spirit, we fulfill the Old Testament laws in a new and living way (Romans 8:1; Galatians 5:13-14).

This is the means by which the Colossians can gain the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom of God (Colossians 3:23-24). It is by receiving the work of Christ in their lives, then walking in the resurrection power of the new life gained in Him.

This is how Christ has made a way into this new spiritual circumcision of the heart: *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, all of this is happening *in Christ*. It is a spiritual reality. When He was put to death on the cross, He paid the price for the sins of the world. When we believed, we were *buried with Him* because we were made a part of Him. The word *baptism* is the Greek word "baptisma" which means to be submerged. Rather than translating, the English translators transliterated. Here being *buried with Him in baptism* refers to being submerged into the person of Christ.

When we believe, we are submerged into Christ, which makes us a part of Jesus's death. This is pictured by water baptism. But we don't remain in Jesus's death. We also are *raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead*. We now have the resurrection power of Jesus within.

Therefore, if we want to experience all the benefits that life has to offer, we must choose to join in living as Christ lived, through the power He has given us to walk in His path. That includes taking part in Christ's sufferings, which leads to the greatest of rewards: to share in Christ's reign (Romans 8:17b). This suffering of Christ includes living a life of service. It is walking in sacrificial love, serving the best interest of others, loving our enemies, etc. It is a laying down of ourselves, trusting in God for our reward, rather than seeking benefit from the world.

Then, *having been buried with Him in baptism*, we are also privy to join Him in redemption and resurrection—in which you were also raised up with Him. Jesus defeated death, and through His power we have also been *raised up with Him*, spiritually for now, but will be physically resurrected with a new body (1 Corinthians 15:54).

We participate in this spiritual rebirth *through faith*. We are born anew through faith (John 3:14-16). Then as children of God, our role and responsibility in this relationship to the Head is obedience. To trust in Him. To believe in Him. To submit to Christ and commit to His Kingdom. It is in working heartily to please God in all we do that we can gain the reward of the inheritance (Colossians 3:23).

We place our *faith in the working of God, who raised Him (Christ) from the dead*. *Faith* has an object. We have the stewardship to decide what we choose to trust in; what power we submit to and depend upon. Everyone has faith in something, whether it be materialism, affirmation of people, or *the working of God*. By choosing to trust in *the working of God*, the Colossians can more fully join in those workings. This includes the daily sufferings and resurrections of the Kingdom of God. In this way, they can gain the greatest rewards available during our life on this earth.

Biblical Text

⁹ For in Him all the fullness 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.