

REFLECTION GUIDE

COLOSSIANS 2:6-15 | ALIVE TOGETHER

KEY TERMS

Elemental spirits - This term literally means “fundamental components” and was used to refer to things like letters in the alphabet, notes of a musical scale, or air, fire, and water (i.e. basic components of the physical world). For Paul, there was no separation between the material and spiritual realms of the universe and thus he seems to be using this term to refer both to ideologies and other “building blocks” of society, as well as to refer to the spiritual forces behind those realities.

Baptism - Baptism is a public, outward symbol that declares that Jesus has saved someone by faith. In the NT, Jesus himself was baptized (Mat 3:13-17), the earliest Christians practiced baptism (Acts 2:37-41), and Jesus included baptism as part of the Great Commission (Mat 28:18-20). Baptism illustrates that a person has died to sin (as they are submersed under the water) and has entered into new life (as they are raised back up).

DID YOU KNOW?

Most commentators consider Colossians 2:6-7 to be the “theme verse” of the letter, with the rest of the letter serving as practical guidance for “living out” verses 6-7.

BACKGROUND

Moving into the “body” of his letter, Paul exhorts the Colossians who have received Jesus to *walk in him rooted and built up in him and established in the faith* (v.v. 6-7). *Christ Jesus the Lord* is the image, wisdom, and mystery of God from chapter one, and Paul uses a physiological (*walk*), agricultural (*rooted*), and structural metaphor (*built*) to encourage the church to live their lives in Christ. Paul then warns against being taken *captive by human tradition or elemental spirits* (v. 8). And why should they trust Christ instead? Because he’s God in flesh who has authority over all human tradition and elemental spirits (vv. 9-10). As in chapter one, Paul immediately connects who Jesus is (vv.9-10) with what he did for the Colossians (vv. 11-15). First, he says they were *circumcised...by the circumcision of Christ* (v. 11). For Israelites, circumcision was a physical sign that they belonged to the people of God and Paul uses circumcision metaphorically to remind the church that—in Christ—they have access to God. Second, Paul says that the Colossians have been *buried with [Christ] in baptism...[and] raised with him through faith* (v. 12). The appeal to baptism serves to remind the church that their old ways of being in the world are dead and in Christ they have new life. Paul then explains this more fully, writing *you who were dead in your trespasses...God made alive together* (v. 13). He goes on to say that the *record of debt* which all people have occurred against God has been *nailed to the cross* and cancelled by Jesus (v. 14). Paul’s claim is that it’s through Jesus and Jesus alone that the Colossians—and anyone else—has forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God. Paul ends this section announcing that Jesus *disarmed the rulers and authorities* (v. 15). In other words, Jesus is greater than cultural ideologies or spiritual beings (see v. 8) and because the Colossians have Jesus, they have all they need.

GOING DEEPER

Think about your own baptism or one you’ve witnessed. Why is it so meaningful? Why is experiencing something physical used to point to a spiritual truth? What spiritual truths do you think God is teaching us by calling us, as his chosen children, to be baptized?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Colossians 2:6-15. What grabs your attention? Which phrases or images stand out to you?
2. Why is the command in verse 6 essential to Christianity? Why is it not possible that Christ and the gospel is the first step and something else is the second step in the Christian life?
3. In verse 8, what things does Paul say may take believers captive? What (who) are these things hostile towards?
4. What references to the Old Testament—directly and indirectly—does Paul make in these verses? Why do you think Paul intentionally mentions these here as a part of this teaching on the supremacy and sufficiency and fullness of Jesus?
5. What do verses 9-15 teach about Jesus:
 - what attributes do you see?
 - what actions does he complete?
 - what benefits does he bring?
 - what limitations does he possess?

LIVING THE WORD

6. Consider what you understood and embraced when you first trusted Christ and the gospel. What insights does this provide about how you are to continue to walk in him (vs 6)? Why do we sometimes lose sight of this?
7. In verses 6-7, Paul uses three metaphors for the Christian life (walk, tree, building). If you had to pick one, which most speaks to your personal faith journey right now? Why?
8. In verses 13-15, Paul uses plural pronouns—you all, your, us—to refer to believers who have been made “alive together” with Christ. This new life together includes being united with Christ, experiencing forgiveness of all our trespasses, removal of any condemnation and shame, inclusion in a new humanity through the power of his resurrection, and freedom from the power of evil forces who are disarmed by Christ. If these amazing truths are reality for a church community (and they are!), how should this shape our view of *church* – our experience of life together, our connection in his new humanity, our enjoyment of his eternal victory? In other words, since all of this is true, what should a church be?