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## Colossians 2:11-15, *Identified in and with Christ!*

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**General Idea:** When we come to Christ, we are identified in Him, circumcised, and baptized spiritually, so our sinful nature becomes less and He becomes more. This is not about a physical procedure or ritual; rather a spiritual, God-centered and God-led endeavor. We are spiritually circumcised in Christ. This means our sinful nature is cut off and removed in God's eyes and we are set free. As Christ lived, died, and was raised from the dead, we are also symbolically buried and we rise to have new life and freedom imparted to us. We are in Him, to be raised in Him because we have faith and action of that real faith by our trust in Him. Real faith turns into action, if we do not, we are dead in our sins, empty and purposeless, and our sinful nature will have control over us. We are alive in Christ; God has forgiven our trespasses and sins, removed our damning evidence that was against us and then canceled our debt, and we are now released from our legal demands of the Law by our reconciliation in Him. Thus, we must continue our growth in Him as He nails our sins to the cross, and annuls our guilt bearing our shame Himself. Because of Jesus triumphant over sin, He bears the culpability of our sin; He will disarm our evils and the evils against us, showing their true shame, even as He will do in the world. We now have victory by the cross of Christ!

### **Contexts and Background:**

Paul is seeking to unlock some critical doctrines of the faith that often get confused and skewed. The Colosse church was adding Jewish legalism, mixing it with Greek philosophy, and thus demanding that men have a legalistic circumcision in order to become a Christian. Circumcision is not wrong; the demanding of it is wrong, because it becomes a power of the flesh and not Holy Spirit. Paul set out to show that we need no outward sign to have grace and faith. The only true sign will be the fruit we produce (Gal. 5:22-23). Paul was not saying that either this or baptism were wrong, but because we have already been delivered from the "tomb" of sin and depravity, why seek to add to His grace? Paul's point was that it is wrong to demand we have power in the flesh and say we must add it to our faith as the sign of being a Christian. This passage is also a hallmark of Reformed Theology that Christ is sufficient to save all, but not all will be saved. Not because He is not powerful enough, but because of the purpose and providence of God and the fact of our refusal to take the offer of grace because of our desire to remain in sin.

### **Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *In him.* Meaning our union in Christ, our "mystical" membership and unity in the body of Christ now and in eternity, also stated in Christ or in Jesus. It is mystical because we can neither possibly fully define nor understand it. When we are saved, we are in Christ and He dwells in us while He also represents us before the Father. Thus, we have full access to His grace and blessings. What could be greater than this? The answer is: *nothing*. The point is that false teachings, complicated rituals, and empty philosophies can do nothing but distract, confuse, and hurt us (John 15:1-8; Rom. 6:4; 8:9-17; 1 Cor. 6:15-17; 2 Cor. 1:4-5; Gal. 5:24; Phil. 3:1-14; Col. 1:24; 3:3-4)!
- *Circumcision.* Referring to the removal of the foreskin of the male prepuce that represented the cutting away of sin and being separated unto God for an infant, and undergoing a change of heart for the adult convert. But, the circumcision that Paul speaks of here is more of a "spiritual circumcision," the connection of the people with God, (*Circumcise your hearts*) so we can engage our "covenant relationship" with Him (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Rom. 7:14-25). Circumcision refers to an abiding consecration sign of belonging to God and our Jewish citizenship. It is the covenant distinction as God's chosen people that became a national ordinance, setting the Jews off from the rest of the Gentile world (Gen. 17:10-13, 24-27; Ex. 12:48; Josh. 5:2-9; Judg. 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam. 14:6; 17:26; 2 Sam. 1:20; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 31:18; 44:7-9).
- *Putting off.* Meaning "breaking away from" or "putting off" our old sin-driven life. Referring that there is no need to follow the Old Covenant when we have a new one. We do not need to follow legalism of the law or man's rules for our salvation and growth. We are now children of Abraham. This also means

to throw off what hinders us—any sin or obstacle to our relationship with Christ (Acts 15; Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-29; Phil. 3:3).

- *Sinful nature.* This refers to our heredity of sin, the universal, wicked sin-character of humanity: Original Sin. We placed ourselves under sin, and anyone who has ever lived was and is under this curse. This creates the sinful desires that lure us with passion to what is deceitful and evil. The decay of our understanding of our separation from God the Father, and even, as a Christian, our standing in Christ and virtue will cause the decay of ourselves and our culture. This means to be controlled by our desires of sin and rebellion, and having careless disregard of truth—or consequences! It is our natural, sinful nature to desire what is wrong and to destroy (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 5:12-21; 7:1-6; James 3:9; 2 Pet. 2:14; 3:3).
- *Circumcision done by Christ.* Meaning our covenant of grace that gives us membership in His Kingdom and heaven. This refers that Christ is the One who washes away our sins, who redeems and saves us. This is about our salvation and the application of personal spiritual growth and renewal (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 1:29; 2:13; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21).
- *Buried with him.* Christ was birthed into history and lived a full life, honoring God and remaining sinless; His death pays for our sins and atones for us. We are united with Him, our sins are buried, and then we are raised with a new life in Christ.
- *Baptism.* Baptism symbolizes our identification with the sign and seal of the salvation we received from Christ and also represents Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. This means our covenant relationship with God is declared by our outward sign of the public profession of our faith. It is not the act itself that signifies or saves; rather, *my heart has changed, I now belong to Christ and no one else!* It symbolizes the washing away of sin and our new birth renewal in Him and Him alone. As in circumcision, it is a sign we are members of the Body of Christ, His Church, and now the sign of the covenant we have in Him that bridges both Testaments. This is not about mode, type, or ritual, but rather our response for the gift of His grace so that we make a declaration—a promise to be a committed Christian of principles and virtue (Gen. 7:7; Acts 2:38; 15; Rom. 2:38; 4:11; 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-29; Phil. 3:3; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21; 4:1).
- *Raised with him.* Jesus actually credits His sacrificial death to us to atone for our sin so we are not condemned by it, and gives us empowerment for faithful living. Because of His resurrection, we too are raised—not only in our new life and security for today, but to a place in heaven for eternity. In Christ, we are free from the guilt of sin, although we may fall to its influence and power and thus it still takes our effort to put it off, as this passage testifies. This also means we share both in Christ's joys and in His pain (Rom. 3:19; 5:15-19; 6:3-11; 7:1-6; 8:1; 1 Cor. 12:14-26; 2 Cor. 5:14-16; 2 Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 1:4, 11, 18-23; 2:6-7; Col. 3:1, 12-15; Tim. 2:11-12).
- *Through your faith.* Meaning God is working in us. We are the crucible in which God moves and displays His wonder; we are the operation where God expresses His Work of fruit and faith so others can see Him.
- *Dead in your sins/Trespases.* God not only overcame sin, He forgives us of our sins; and then He takes our guilt away too (John 3:3-5, 16; Rom. 5:12-21)!
- *Alive with Christ.* Meaning our new life of abundance in Him. We have to see how much we have been given and forgiven; then, we can have gratitude and build our lives of faith and fruitfulness in Him. The Christian life is simple; it needs no elaborate traditions or ceremony to receive His Word and then to offer ourselves up to Him. These do not result in salvation; they are our response for being saved. Ironically, so many Christian groups over the centuries have confused and complicated what God has

made, moving Him further away from the people and needs. This is not just the Catholics; it includes many of us who forget who and what we are in Christ.

- *Forgave us all our sins.* Jesus did not just hurdle over sin; He eradicated its guilt and penalty. He removed all that the law required and covered our sins so we are clean and pure before God the father, so He can pardon our debt and set us free in our new life in Him (Rom. 5:12-21; 6:23).
- *Canceled/blotted out.* Meaning to plaster over or wash off (Rev. 7:17; 21:4).
- *Written code/handwriting/record of debt.* This refers to a contract of debt, an IOU (I owe you, a promissory note, *I will pay you back*). Sin in Judaism is considered to be debt against God, and when one repented, the sins were “blotted out” of the debt-ledger of God. The Day of Atonement celebrated and practiced this. Today, this is called *Yom Kippur*. It was not a feast, but rather a fast, as the distinctive purpose of this day was to bring the collective sins of the people for the whole preceding year to remembrance and confession before the people, so that it might earnestly be dealt with and then atoned for (Lev. 16; 23: 26-32). The illustration here is that Jesus takes our debt of sin and pays for it Himself, so there is no need to continue to be legalistic. Literally, He who is Righteous endured the Law’s curse, was made sin for us who are sin as in unrighteous, then cleansed that sin, declaring us clean before the Father (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 4:4)!
- *Regulations/ordinances.* Meaning a public decree. God called humanity fallen and sealed in sin, and only Christ can liberate us (Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Eph. 2:15).
- *Disarmed/spoiled/Principality/power/authority.* Meaning our sin has been stripped off. We have victory in Christ so that hostile powers can do nothing to us. Christ has conquered evil, sin, and Satan. Satan was disarmed and thus he has no power to control or intimidate. (See the last study for more info.) Here, it also means being a prisoner of war and having just been released from torture and bondage. Now, it is not the cosmic powers who take us captive; rather Christ who triumphs over them, who captivates us, takes them captive, and protects us (Zech. 3:1; Matt. 12:29; Luke 10:18; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 8:33-38; 16:20; 2 Cor. 2:13-15; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:8-10; Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 12:10)!
- *Spectacle/show.* Christ displays His triumph over sin and we are free while Satan is the one who is the captive spectacle! The word means the Roman army overwhelmingly conquering and vanquishing the enemy, which, at that time, they were very good at. Then, they took the prisoners and displayed them in a victory parade that was of a great shame for the conquered. Jesus totally took Satan’s power away. He has no advantage over you. Jesus won the battle of good and evil—not *almost* or *barely*, but it was definitely a match worth mentioning (Ezek. 18; Matt. 12:29; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 2 Cor. 2:14; Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 12:9; 20:2).

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

We, as human beings, tend to sway easily by ideas, people’s personalities, new encounters, and experiences that tantalize us. New religious formats and thinking are appealing as we seek the latest and greatest, but what we think is great usually is not. We become captive to traditions and influenced by arguments and feelings that are persuasive. But, we must never substitute our ideas for God’s! We will follow the latest fad and want more. We get bored with our car and want a new and better one, and so forth. We do this with our doctrines too! The advertising machine in Madison Avenue knows this well, as we all want more, and they use this trait to appeal to us, pushing us in the direction they want to sell or influence us in some way. At the same time, we must be on guard not to allow such things to infuse, influence, or govern us. We have His Word, wisdom, influence, and Holy Spirit; there is nothing better! We have His fullness; there is no better filler than His presence! Therefore, we must be aware of our nature to seek what is wrong and fleeting, and always be on guard. Never allow yourself to be cheated by wrong thinking or chasing the wrong things, because they rob us of greater opportunities and treasures in Christ! The bottom line is we do not need any substitute or the world’s distractions because we are complete in

Him! Do not be the one who seeks to please the world while rejecting our Loving and living Lord, in your doctrines or in your life!

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. Before you became a Christian, what did you think of Christians, especially the pious and mature people of faith?
2. What does "spiritually-circumcised" or Baptism mean to you? What should it mean? How has your life been buried and raised to have new life and freedom imparted to you?
3. How is the Christian life simple? Why does it not need any elaborate traditions or ceremony?
4. What does being identified in Christ mean to you? What happens when you are not? How does having a trust relationship in Christ give you a full and purposeful life?
5. What were your attitudes and relationships like before when you were dead in your sins? Did you feel empty and purposeless? How did your sinful nature have control over you? How do you feel and act now?
6. What does it mean to you that you have been forgiven, your sins are canceled, and your debt has been released so that you are reconciled to Christ?
7. Why should you continue your growth in Christ? How does the fact that Christ nailed your sins to the cross motivate you?
8. How and why is your faith by facts that are tangible (concrete, able to see and feel) impacting? What is intangible in your faith?
9. How does the decay of our understanding of God and our standing in Christ affect your virtue? How will this cause the decay of yourselves, your church, and our culture?
10. How do we share in Christ's joys and pains? How can you tell others that Jesus nailed your sins on the cross and He disarmed the evil of the world?
11. How is God working in your life? How are you the crucible in which God moves and displays His wonder to others? How can you be more?
12. How do our critical doctrines of the faith often get confused and skewed? What are the motivations and goals of the false teachers who do this? What can you and your church do to be on guard and protect the sheep and honor our Lord?