

# The Gospel's Forgiveness

Forgiveness of sin is found only through faith in Jesus.

## COLOSSIANS 2:4-15



...AND  
...ation  
...if any  
...owels and  
...e likened,  
...g of one accord,  
...e through strife or  
...ness of mind let each  
...than themselves,  
...y man on his own things,  
...so on the things of others.  
...nd be in you, which was also  
...us:  
...ing in the form of God,<sup>2</sup> thought  
...bery to be equal with God:  
...made himself of no reputation, and  
...pon him the form <sup>20</sup>of a servant, and  
...as made in the likeness of men:  
... And being found in fashion as a man, he  
...umbled himself, and <sup>40</sup>became obedient  
...unto death, even the death of the cross.  
...<sup>9</sup> Wherefore God also <sup>45</sup>hath highly exalt-  
...ed him, and <sup>50</sup>given him a name which is  
...all above every name:  
...<sup>10</sup> That at the name of Jesus every knee  
...should bow, of things in heaven, and things  
...in earth, and things under the earth;

2:14,17 <sup>14</sup> 2:18 Matt. 26:38, 42; John 10:18; Heb. 5:8; 1:22 <sup>17</sup> 2:9 John 17:1-2; Acts 2:33; Heb. 2:9  
<sup>20</sup> 2:20h, 1:20-21; Heb. 1:4 <sup>23</sup> 2:10 Isa. 45:23; Matt. 29:18; Rom. 14:11; Rev. 5:13

...ath) over  
...his priority  
...nd glorified.  
... church of its  
...kingdom of God,  
...n, that they stand  
...nd elected military pride.  
...nd ready for combat re-  
...nemy's level of strength  
...ss or the distracting entice-  
...e church must manifest  
...adness. "One spirit" expresses  
...er's unified attitude. One mind  
...e soul") means that believers share  
...n rather than present divisions

love, same accord [lit "the same soul"], and  
...the same goal (one mind).  
...2:3-4 Strife or vainglory recalls the prob-  
...lem Paul condemned (1:15, 17). Lowliness,  
...the antidote for wrong attitudes, results  
...in considering others as more important.  
...Additionally, humility considers the inter-  
...ests (things) of others. Proper relationships  
...include the contrast "not only, but also."  
...Personal responsibilities demand con-  
...sideration, but the concerns of others are  
...equally important.  
...2:5-11 This is one of the most difficult  
...passages in the Bible, prompting various  
...[GK] *kenosis* [lit "emptying"] theories at-

...on to at all costs). Jesus c-  
...clung to equality with God,  
...privileges to become humi-  
...2:7-8 The phrase made him-  
...tation is much debated. Th-  
...der what Jesus gave up. If I  
...did not divest Himself of c-  
...ributes. Two statements acc-  
...verb. First, God the Son be-  
...Form (cp. v. 6) indicates tri-  
...Second, the likeness of me-  
...emptying and servanthood  
...*homoōmos*) differs from "I  
...Two statements explain I-  
...humbled (cp. v. 3). Fir-

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## How do people try to deal with their sin apart from Jesus?

When Spanish sailors discovered the Galapagos Islands, they found so many giant tortoises that they named the islands after them. (Galapago is Spanish for “tortoise.”) Except for a few zoos, the islands are the only place these animals live. We can find them only if we are looking in the right place. In spiritual terms, God’s forgiveness works the same way. God makes it abundantly available, but we must be looking in the right place.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The second chapter of Colossians opens with Paul expressing his anxious concern for the Colossian believers. He referred to that concern as a great struggle, likely, indicating the intensity of his ongoing prayers for them. To his concern for the church, he added his intense desire for their encouragement and unity, as well as their understanding of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ.

This week’s passage opens with his statement of the reason for his anxious concern: He did not want them to be deceived by false teachings. He had become aware of false teachers who were seeking to deceive the Colossian believers with fine-sounding reasoning and impressive rhetoric. The efforts of the false teachers in their midst were aimed at leading the members away from their first love for Christ and their convictions about His person and work. Paul directed them to continue to follow Christ with gratitude, just as they had been taught from the beginning. Even though not physically present with them, Paul assured them that he was with them in spirit and

deep concern. Believers then and now are to remain faithful to Christ and true to His gospel.

Paul’s challenge to the Colossians to carefully evaluate what they believed focused on two main points. First, he called them to embrace the faith that had been delivered to them—faith that relied on Christ alone for a relationship with the Father (Col. 2:6-7). Second, he urged them to reject the false teachers who promoted other ideas and options (2:8-15). By emphasizing these truths, Paul reminded the Colossians of the absolute sufficiency of Christ’s work on their behalf. The heretics might rely on special knowledge or legalistic rituals, but nothing they offered could provide what only Jesus freely offered.

# COLOSSIANS 2:4-15

**4** I am saying this so that no one will deceive you with **arguments that sound reasonable**<sup>A</sup>. **5** For I may be absent in body, but **I am with you**<sup>B</sup> in spirit, rejoicing to see how well ordered you are and the strength of your faith in Christ. **6** So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, **continue to walk in him**<sup>C</sup>, **7** being **rooted and built up**<sup>D</sup> in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and **overflowing with gratitude**<sup>E</sup>. **8** Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and **empty deceit**<sup>F</sup> based on **human tradition**<sup>G</sup>, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ. **9** For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ, **10** and you have been filled by him, who is the head **over every ruler and authority**<sup>H</sup>. **11** You were also circumcised in him with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, **12** when you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him **through faith**<sup>I</sup> in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. **13** And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. **14** He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.

## Passage Outline

Continue (Col. 2:4-7)

Be Careful (Col. 2:8-10)

Remember (Col. 2:11-15)

## Key Words

- A. "Plausible arguments" (ESV) that might sound reasonable but aren't theologically accurate
- B. Paul demonstrated a pastor's heart for his churches.
- C. Walking in Christ involves a daily decision to continue following Him.
- D. Paul called the church to be "rooted and firmly established in love" (Eph. 3:17).
- E. Truly receiving the gospel causes one to be full of thankfulness.
- F. Many deceptive methods can be used to take one's mind captive and distract from God's Word.
- G. Christians are called to be built up in Christ and not in tradition.
- H. All authority has been given to Christ (Matt. 28:18).
- I. Our faith is in Jesus' resurrection and not our works.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul understood that the false teachers' ultimate goal was to *deceive* the Colossians. Because their teaching had no real spiritual substance to offer, they relied on the power of persuasion to fool the Colossians. Even from a distance, Paul could discern the true condition of the Colossian church. The Colossians' faith had held up under pressure, and they refused to scatter when attacked. They had demonstrated the *strength* of their faith in Christ—a quality that Paul urged them to expand.

## **How can a believer go deeper and grow stronger in understanding Christian truth?**

The false teachers were active and determined to lead the church into compromise. They weren't simply misguided Christians who meant well. They were carrying out a systematic attack on Christian faith—spiritual warfare designed to pull people away from Christ. That's why Paul told the Colossians to *be careful*.

## **What are some things people trust as truth? Where do these fall short when compared to the Bible?**

### **KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son.**

Christ is the eternal Son of God.  
(See John 1:1-3.)

Jesus was the cornerstone of Paul's argument against the heretics, because only He possessed *the entire fullness of God's nature* in His earthly body.

**BIBLE SKILL: Review a Bible dictionary article.** Review an article on the incarnation in a Bible dictionary. Look up some of the references identified in the article. Write a summary of how you understand the incarnation of Jesus. How do the passages you examined help you more fully appreciate Jesus? How does the incarnation demonstrate the power and love of God?

The false teachers were likely urging the Colossian Christians to add certain “spiritual” practices to their lives as a way to complete their salvation. Since He had completely transformed their lives, they didn't need to add anything else to the mix. The Colossians had given a physical testimony of their faith. They had been buried with him in baptism.

## **How does baptism serve as a means for declaring a person's faith in Christ alone?**

Paul encouraged the Colossians to remember both who Christ is and what He has done. Salvation is only possible through Him. No special knowledge or legalistic ritual even comes close. As they recalled these truths, Paul's readers would understand that the false teachers were on the wrong side of history—and eternity.

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to remain faithful to Christ and His gospel.
- Believers must carefully examine the teachings of others in light of Jesus' being fully God and fully human.
- Through faith in Christ alone, we find forgiveness and victory.

**What safeguards have you put in place to help you remain faithful to Christ? How can you strengthen those safeguards?**

**What practical steps can you take to filter messages through the truth of the gospel? What will have to change in your life to make that happen?**

**What can you and the members of your Bible study group do to acknowledge and celebrate Jesus' work in your lives? How can you help others discover Him?**

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Spiritual maturity grounds us in the gospel.

**Read Colossians 2:4-7, contemplating what it means to be rooted in the faith.**

The Colossians had not simply learned nice doctrines. They had *received Christ Jesus Himself*. They had accepted Christ as their Savior and their *Lord*. Jesus needed to remain their focus. Since they were making steady progress, Paul urged the Colossians to maintain their course. The false teachers were tempting them to pursue a different path. Christ gave the Colossians an anchor against the heretics' deceptions. Paul used three strong words to describe just how this anchor would keep them grounded in the gospel. First, they would be *rooted*. Strong trees stand up against storms when their roots run deep. Sometimes, the roots of multiple trees will connect and provide added strength. Second, they would be *built up in him*. The deeper the foundation, the higher a building can reach. That solid base provides strength and integrity for growth. Finally, the Colossians would be *established in the faith*. While this could have referred to personal faith, Paul was likely talking about the larger Christian faith that was in the heretics' crosshairs. The Colossians' maturity would counteract this ongoing assault on true Christianity. Christ would help them recognize the emptiness of false doctrines and uphold the true knowledge of Christ. As the Colossians continued to mature, they would overflow with *gratitude*. When believers understand the depth of God's forgiveness and faithfulness, they respond with thanksgiving.

**How can you go deeper and grow stronger in understanding Christian truth?**

## Day 2: God's Word is the only reliable source of information for faith.

**Read Colossians 2:8, understanding the warning given.**

Paul wasn't attacking philosophy in general but a particular worldview that was demonic and hollow. In contrast to the fullness of Christ, the heretics were peddling a spiritual bait-and-switch that offered only empty promises. Paul emphasized its *human tradition*, meaning it was a man-made attempt to fit God into human boundaries. The apostle also said it was based on the *elements of the world*. Originally, this idea referred to the elements of wind, fire, earth, and water. Later, the definition broadened to mean the basics of anything—the "ABCs" of a matter. Paul's point was that these teachings were clearly non-Christian since they relied on human wisdom or spiritual beings *rather than Christ*. Any doctrine that leads people away from Christ is dangerous and must be avoided. Regardless of how nicely the world's boxes are wrapped, these cheap substitutes will always come up empty. The gospel is the only reliable filter for matters of faith.

**What are some things you have trusted as truth beyond the Bible? Where did these fall short when compared to the Bible?**

### Day 3: Everything exists because of Jesus.

*Read Colossians 2:9-10, considering Christ's role.*

Jesus is completely God and completely human at the same time. The false teachers claimed that God had secrets that only a few could access. Paul refuted that claim. God revealed Himself through Christ. To know the Son is to know the Father. Just as Christ displayed the nature of God, believers should reflect the nature of Christ. Paul wrote that Jesus *filled* the Colossians at the moment of salvation, giving them immediate access to all He had to offer. He held nothing back. Spiritual maturity is nurtured through the One we trust, not what we accomplish—and Jesus has given us all we need. Of course, Christ has much to offer. He is the *head over every ruler and authority*. Everything and everyone exists because of Jesus and is subject to Him. Since He provides everything necessary for faith, believers have no reason to invest in teachings that deny Him and hold them captive.

**How does knowing our identity in Christ help us stand firm against false teachings?**

### Day 4: God provides a life transformation.

*Read Colossians 2:11-12, identifying the importance of baptism.*

Paul reminded the Colossians they had already been circumcised when they accepted Christ—but it was a *circumcision not done with hands*. The wording here indicates a work performed by God, not a human being. By receiving Christ, they had discarded their *body of flesh*. This transformation was moral, not physical. Through Jesus, their old thoughts and actions had been replaced with His thoughts and actions. Since He had completely transformed their lives, they didn't need to add anything else to the mix. In addition to spiritual circumcision, the Colossians had given a physical testimony of their faith. They had been *buried with him in baptism*. This ordinance provided a public statement that they had died to their old lives and been *raised with him through faith*. They now belonged to Christ alone. As a result, the God who had *raised him from the dead* also gave the Colossians new life. The heretics wanted the church to forget these truths and follow a path of special knowledge and ascetic practices. Paul challenged them to remember what God had done for them and to live in that truth.

**How did baptism serve as a means for declaring your faith in Christ alone?**

## Day 5: Jesus' death changed everything.

*Read Colossians 2:13-15, noting Jesus' triumphs.*

Apart from Christ, we are *dead in trespasses*. But Jesus changed everything! Paul emphasized four important things Christ does for those who accept Him. First, He makes us *alive*. By sacrificing His life on the cross, Jesus gave us life. Second, Jesus *forgave* us of the trespasses that kept us enslaved. Third, Jesus *erased the certificate of debt*. Fourth, through Jesus' death and resurrection, He *disarmed the rulers and authorities*. Jesus also *disgraced them publicly*. The cross might have seemed humiliating for Jesus. He was an innocent man experiencing a horrible death for a group of rebels who couldn't help themselves. But His death led to the glory of His resurrection—and the downfall of His enemies. They thought they had silenced the Messiah, but God turned the tables and brought them to shame. Instead of being shamed, Jesus *triumphed* over His enemies—and sealed their eternal fate.

**What did God accomplish through Christ's life, death, and resurrection?**

## TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Colossians 2, sharing with the other members of your Bible study group.

**How did Paul encourage the Colossians to combat false teaching?**

**Why must we affirm Jesus' full humanity and Jesus' full divinity?**

**Why might we be tempted to look to our own outward actions for salvation? How did Paul warn against this?**

