

SESSION 6

Christ's completeness

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Colossians 2:8–15

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God makes the believer complete in Christ and ready to grow in Christ.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

Students will trust in the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross and choose individuals with whom they will share Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:9, 10).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ How many laps have you taken around a store looking for raisins, twine, wax paper, or yeast? What items have you frustratingly struggled to find on more than one occasion?
- ☐ Not finding the items you need in a timely manner can be irritating and even a bit embarrassing. Not finding anyone to point you in the right direction can be equally frustrating. After a couple laps, you might start to feel like you have entered the twilight zone.
- ☐ Read Colossians 2:8–15. Believers are in Christ. They have all they need in Him. Christ never frustrates us when we go to Him for help.
- ☐ As you teach this session, challenge your students to realize the completeness of Christ. They are in Christ and will find all they need for their spiritual growth in Him.

Session Summary

Paul warned the Colossians to keep their guard up, because false teachers wanted to destroy their faith. He affirmed that Christ is truly God and that the Colossians were complete in Him. They were buried with Christ and risen with Christ, and God had forgiven all their trespasses. Christ was all they needed.

Session Starters

Option 1—Hardest Products to Find

Gather

- Toothpicks, raisins, twine, and other products that are hard to find in a store (optional).

Steps

1. Display any items that represent products that are hard to find in a grocery or hardware store.

ASK: What items in a grocery store or hardware store have you struggled to find? (Q1)

ASK: When, if ever, have you given up your search, concluding the item doesn't really exist!? (Q2)

2. Transition to the Bible study.

When you go to Christ for help, there is no wandering around to see where He put His grace, peace, or joy. Paul wrote to Colossians that they don't need to be shopping at the "store" being promoted by false teachers. All they need in Christ is available, easy to access, and never out of stock.

Option 2—Out of Stock!

Steps

1. Have students share about a time when they went to a store or shopped online and found the item they needed was out of stock.

ASK: How do you react when an item you need is out of stock? Do you blame the store or the nearest store employee?

ASK: What would the Christian life be like if you never knew whether the grace, peace, joy, comfort, or strength you needed was "in stock"?

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul warned the Colossians not to think they would ever go to Christ for help and find Christ was all out of that kind of help. Christ is complete and believers in Christ find all they need in Him.

Bible Study

In writing to the Colossians, the apostle Paul cut across the false religion of his day to declare that all the Colossians needed was Jesus Christ.

The word "spoil" in Colossians 2:8 means "to carry off plunder."

I. Christ Is the Complete Savior (Col. 2:8–10)

A. Christ's complete doctrine (2:8)

Soon after a person becomes one of the Lord's sheep, religious wolves attack him or her. Jesus warned his disciples to beware of false prophets that come as ravening wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). Paul issued a similar warning to the church in Colosse.

READ: Colossians 2:8. **ASK:** What was Paul communicating to the Colossians by telling them to beware of the Colossian heresy? (Q3) *That they had something to lose; that the Gnostics' teaching was dangerous; that the believers had to be proactive in their defense of the doctrine of Christ.*

When Paul warned the Colossians lest anyone "carry off plunder," the Colossian believers were the "plunder" Paul had in mind. Paul understood new believers are especially vulnerable to the attacks of false teachers. Often new believers have more misguided zeal than knowledge, and this zeal makes them more vulnerable to false teachings.

ASK: When have you witnessed a believer succumbing to the persuasion of a false religion? (Q4)

False religion, like the one threatening the Colossians, thrives on philosophy and empty deceit. Although philosophy that is based on the Bible is helpful, philosophy that is based on human tradition and basic principles of the world is harmful. The heresy threatening the Colossians wasn't Bible-based. The teachings were therefore vain or worthless in providing salvation. But they remained harmful in that they threatened to undermine the gospel.

By "tradition" Paul meant those teachings invented by men and passed from generation to generation. Such teachings are assumed true simply because of their longevity. The theory of evolution is a modern example of a human tradition that has been passed down through several generations and is now assumed true by society at large.

The basic principles of the world that Paul mentioned could refer to immature, even childish ideas. When compared to the truth in Christ, the heretical teachings of the false teachers in Colosse were rather elementary. They were basic in that they were not derived from careful, mature thinking.

Basic principles could also mean elemental spirits, like those connected to stars and planets in astrology. In astrology people need special knowledge to escape what is otherwise determined by the alignment of planets and stars. Such special knowledge to control one's fate was like the special knowledge being sold by the false teachers who were threatening the Colossians.

Whether Paul meant immature ideas or those related to spirits and stars is not particularly important. His point is that Christ's doctrine is superior to man's ideas because Christ's doctrine is true. The Colossian heresy was not Christ's doctrine (2:8).

ASK: What "basic principles" taught by the world seem rather childish when compared to Bible doctrine? (Q5) *The idea that life formed by chance and evolved into countless different forms; the belief that the alignment of stars and planets controls people's lives.*

The Colossians needed to understand that Gnosticism's teachings conflicted with the doctrine of Christ.

B. Christ's complete deity (2:9)

The heretical teachers in Colosse believed that Jesus Christ was not God in the flesh. They reasoned that matter is essentially evil, and therefore a holy God would not assume a human body. Representing Gnosticism around AD 100, Cerinthus taught that Jesus was Joseph and Mary's son but that He was wiser than and more righteous than other people. At His baptism, God's spirit of power came upon Jesus and made Him the spiritual Christ Who performed miracles. Cerinthus further taught that the "Christ" forsook Jesus at the cross.

Paul stated that all the fullness of the Godhead was in Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God. The Gnostics were wrong about Christ. Paul made that abundantly clear.

READ: Colossians 2:9. **ASK:** What did Jesus do to prove the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in His body? (Q6) *He was born of a virgin, performed miracles, lived sinlessly, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven.*

Numerous other passages outside of Colossians present Jesus as equal with God (John 10:30), doing things only God could do (John 1:1–3), and being worshiped by people who recognized Him as God (Matt. 2:11; 28:9). Paul wrote that God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).

ASK: Why is it essential to believe Jesus was God incarnate while He was on earth? (Q7) *The integrity of the Bible and our future hope of salvation rest on the fact of the deity of Christ.*

C. Christ's complete dominion (2:10)

READ: Colossians 2:10.

Believers are complete in Christ; that is, they are filled full in Him. The verb tense communicates a permanent connection with Christ. Believers will forever be filled in Christ. The verb also teaches us that being filled in Christ was done to us and not by us. In Christ believers have all that

pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, and He dwells in believers.

Because we are in Christ, we may draw upon Him as an inexhaustible source for whatever we need. He supplies forgiveness for our sins, peace for our trials, wisdom for our decisions, comfort for our tears, guidance for our steps, strength for our burdens, joy for our hearts, and His presence for our hours. Even lonely times can be good times if we lean on Him.

TESTIMONY: Describe a time when you felt particularly needy and found what you needed in Christ. (Q8)

Being complete in Christ, we don't have to try to earn salvation or struggle to keep it. We don't have to wonder if God loves us. We don't have to dwell in the past or fear the future. We can claim the present as an opportunity to serve God in the name of His Son, and we can anticipate thanking Christ in person for giving us all we ever needed.

Jesus Christ is not what the Colossian heretics said—an emanation from God, a spirit being who occupied a low place in a chain of spirit beings between God and man. Paul stated that Jesus is the head of all principality and authority (Col. 2:10). Angels, kings, presidents, and governments rank beneath Him. Nations rise and fall according to His sovereign will, and someday every head of government will bow down to Him. He is also the head of the church. As believers we owe Him our love, worship, and loyalty. He deserves all honor and praise.

ASK: How should the truth that you are complete in Christ affect your assurance of salvation? (Q9) *Believers should rest in their salvation because the matter is settled. There is nothing left to earn or shore up.*

ASK: How should being complete in Christ affect your worship? (Q10) *Believers' worship should be filled with gratitude for the certainty of salvation in this life.*

II. Christ Offers Complete Salvation (Col. 2:11–15)

A complete Savior provides complete salvation. Jesus Christ has given believers position and privileges.

A. Complete acceptance (2:11)

The false teachers at Colosse believed circumcision and the observance of dietary laws and holy days would enhance their converts' spirituality. Christians, however, are already complete in Christ; He is all they need.

READ: Colossians 2:11.

In Christ, believers are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands. Such a circumcision is spiritual rather than physical. Circumcision

in Old Testament times identified Abraham and his descendants as the people of God's covenant (Gen. 17:1–14). Tragically, many Jews failed to understand that circumcision did not make them God's people. Unless they had faith in their hearts, the outward mark of circumcision was insignificant. Only a circumcision of the heart makes sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike, acceptable to God.

READ: Deuteronomy 10:12, 13.

When we trusted in Christ as Savior, the power of the sin nature was stripped from us by Christ. Although we still sin, the sin nature does not dominate our lives as it did before we knew Christ. It is no longer our master. We have a new Master, Jesus Christ. Paul wrote elsewhere that our old man is crucified with Christ, meaning that our body of sin is destroyed and our obligation to serve sin is over. Because we are dead with Christ, we are free from sin's mastery over our lives (Rom. 6:6, 7).

ASK: Why are the words "of Christ" so important in Colossians 2:11? (Q11) *The words "of Christ" signify that salvation is through Christ and not through human efforts.*

B. Complete identification (2:12, 13a)

READ: Colossians 2:12.

The believer is identified fully with Jesus Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and risen with Him. When Jesus Christ was buried, the believer was buried with Him. When Jesus Christ arose from the dead, the believer arose with Him. Identification with Christ ended a life of slavery to sin and began a new life in Christ.

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:17. **ASK:** What evidence in your life shows that all things became new when you trusted in Christ for salvation? (Q12)

Just what kind of baptism united us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection? Some suggest water baptism. Water baptism, however, doesn't unite a sinner with Christ; it simply declares that he or she is already in Christ. Throughout the book of Acts, we read that water baptism was granted only to believers.

It seems best to interpret the baptism in Colossians 2:12 as the act of the Holy Spirit's uniting the believer with Christ. Paul wrote elsewhere that by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). At our conversion, the Holy Spirit baptized us into Christ, thereby identifying us with His death, burial, and resurrection. This interpretation seems to be harmonious with Paul's insistence that we are the circumcision "made without hands" (Col. 2:11) and his use of the word "faith" (2:12). When we expressed faith in "the operation of God"—God's mighty power in raising Christ from the dead—the

Spirit united us with Christ (2:12). In that instant, God snatched us from condemnation and infused life into us (2:13).

READ: Colossians 2:13a.

"The uncircumcision of your flesh" (2:13) describes what the Colossians were before God saved them. They were Gentiles alienated from God.

C. Complete forgiveness (2:13b, 14)

READ: Colossians 2:13b (last phrase).

Forgiveness is an important aspect of our salvation. The Greek word for "forgiven" in verse 13 means "remitted" or "pardoned." The first part of the word for "forgiven" is the word for "grace" or "free gift." The word "forgiven," therefore, reminds us that God pardoned our sins based on His grace, not based on our merit. According to His grace, God has forgiven all our trespasses (2:13). The word "trespasses" refers to our many deviations from the path God mapped out for people to follow.

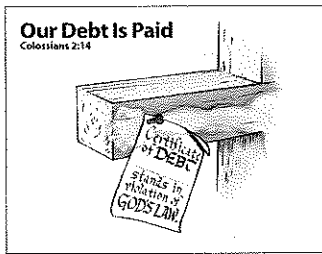
Believers positionally stand justified and righteous before God (Rom. 5:1). But as we live, we sin. Consequently, we experience guilt. But that guilt doesn't mean we are no longer justified and saved. Positionally before God we will always have our sins covered by the blood of Christ. The guilt we feel indicates that our fellowship with God has been interrupted by sin. But we can live guilt-free lives. Guilt-burdened believers need to let the closing words of Colossians 2:13 radiate in their conscience until they are convinced of the sufficiency of Christ's death. God has already covered our sins positionally, and He wants us to walk in fellowship with Him every day of our lives. If we simply confess our sins to God, He will lift our burden of guilt and restore our fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9).

ASK: What will consistently living with a sense of guilt do to a believer's effectiveness for God? (Q13) *Weaken it. The believer will be obsessed with feelings and distracted from serving God.*

ASK: Are there any sins that are so bad that a believer should feel guilty about them even after God has forgiven him or her? Explain. (Q14) *No. Our sins are removed as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12); God cast them into the deepest sea (Micah 7:19). There are no exceptions.*

READ: Colossians 2:14.

When the Roman authorities crucified a criminal, they usually nailed above his head either a copy of the law he had broken or a placard listing his unpaid debts. Colossians 2:14 pictures us as having violated God's laws. God, however, pictured the list of broken laws as having



63-R9

been nailed to the cross of Christ. Because our Savior bore the penalty of our sins, God blotted out the list of our offenses—the debt that we owed.

DISPLAY: Resource 63-R9. Direct students to the illustration with question 15 in their student books. **ASK:** What are your thoughts as you observe your certificate of debt nailed to the cross of Christ? (Q15)

The concept of blotting or wiping out helps us appreciate more fully the extent of our forgiveness (2:14). In Paul's day, when a person paid the debt charged to him on a document, his creditor wiped the ink from the document, thereby canceling all charges. Because ink in those days didn't contain acid, the writing didn't burn impressions into the papyrus or vellum writing material. So when the writing was wiped away—blotted out—no trace of it remained. The comparison is striking. Just as a creditor wiped away all traces of a debtor's charges, so God wiped away all a believer's trespasses because Jesus paid in full for those sins at the cost of His blood. Now all a believer's sins are gone, gone, gone!

D. Complete victory (2:15)

READ: Colossians 2:15.

It was customary for a conquering Roman general to lead a victory parade through the streets of his hometown. This parade, called a "triumph," featured the general riding in a chariot, followed by his victorious troops. The captives, stripped of their weapons and possessions, trailed behind. Colossians 2:15 pictures Jesus Christ as a conqueror in such a parade. He defeated Satan and his forces at Calvary, stripped them of their power, and now leads His followers in a victory procession.

ASK: What might be a news headline for the events described in verse 15? (Q16) *"Christ Leads Impressive Triumph."*

Like the first-century false teachers, pagans today refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior. Many of them prefer to entrust their lives to fate, spirits, or stars. Believers, on the other hand, confess Jesus Christ as Savior. We gladly follow Him, assured that He is leading us victoriously every step along our journey to Heaven. He is all we need. We are complete in Him!

Session Application

Steps

1. As believers, we can trust in the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross. We then ought to live like we are complete in Christ.

Have your learners complete the following sentence: Because I am complete in Christ, I will . . . (Q17)

2. Challenge your students to be active in telling others about the completeness available in Christ.

ASK: What could you tell your unsaved friends about what it means to be complete in Christ? (Q18)

ASK: Who will you tell this week about being complete in Christ? What is your plan for telling that person about being complete in Christ? (Q19)