**The Letter to the Colossians**

**The Gospel in Heathen and Multi-Religious Society - #7**

**Baptism - The New Circumcision**

**Colossians 2:11-23, 3:1-5**

**Colossians 2:11**

*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not done by human hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh through the circumcision of Christ.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Paul introduced this teaching using the same old language of those who lived under the Law.

2. He brought forward once again the difference in circumcision: it is not of the flesh (he is saying) but of the spirit, not done by human hands but divine, not a removal of a fragment of flesh but freedom from all corruption by removing the root of the old life. It is not the Law that can do for this but Christ the Lord, the giver of the Law. He says, note, in him also you were circumcised, and again, through the circumcision of Christ. By putting off the body of the sins of the flesh he referred to the saving act of baptism.

3. If this seems odd to you it is because for too long we were reading our church tradition rather than the NT. In Baptism we put off the soiled life. It is as Luther once said, “we are drowned in the water.” It is time to decide to be baptized and to live a new life.

**Why is the ‘body’ mentioned?**

In the next verse (2:12) Paul says we are “*buried with him (Christ) in baptism.*” Paul called saving baptism a type of death (implying this in buried). He gave the good news of resurrection “*in whom you were also raised.*” And since we still have a mortal nature, he went on, through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead: believing in the power of God we await the resurrection, having the resurrection of Christ the Lord as a pledge.

So even if we think that it is symbolic the meaning is eternal: we die, we are buried and we are also raised.

**Our Death**

It is essential to notice that sin and death are not two items, sin brought death (Rom 5:12) but death ruled like a king and death brought sin in the many forms of self-defence.

**Colossians 2:13**

*And you, dead as you were in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made alive with him, forgiving you all your trespasses.*

**Notes and Studies**

Sin destroyed us all, imposing on us the sentence of death. But the God of all made us sharers in the life of Christ the Lord, and bestowed on us forgiveness of sins. By uncircumcision of the flesh Paul was referring to wickedness, explaining that whereas uncircumcision of the body causes no harm to those in that condition, uncircumcision of the soul harms both body and soul. From this he shows that bodily circumcision is of no benefit to the circumcised; on the other hand, it is removal of wickedness that brings about true salvation.

Christ did not pay but *erased* our debt

**Colossians 2:14**

*Erasing the bond against us with its decrees which was not in our favor, and removing it from notice by attaching it to the cross.*

**Notes and Studies**

Theodoret of Cyrus –

“Some commentators claimed the *bond* is the Law: after its curse “the people said.” Scripture says, “*We shall do all that the Lord our God has said, and we shall.*” But that was the Jews’ bond, not on all people. So my view is that our body is also called a bond: through it we commit every unlawful action — with our eyes looking without restraint, with our tongue speaking inappropriately, with our ears taking in harmful teaching, committing theft and greed and homicide by hand. God the Word, therefore, in taking on our nature, kept it (his body) free of all sin and erased the record of our debts incurred by us in it to our detriment. By allowing it (his body) to be attached to the cross, he cancelled the debt of us all; and by fulfilling the Law he brought it (the Law) to an end, useful though it proved of old to Jews alone, but in no way suitable for us. Instead, he gave us the evangelical decrees, promising us salvation through observance of them. Despoiling the principalities and the authorities, he boldly held them up to ridicule, *triumphing over them through the cross* (Col 2:15). Since the demons had influence over us through the body’s passions, Christ by being clad in a body proved superior to sin. He abolished the influence of the adversaries, and made their weakness obvious to all people, granting all of us the victory over them through his own body.”

(Commentary of Colossians, ch 2:14)

**Colossians 2:16-17 - Christian Freedom**

*So let no one judge you in matters of food or drink, or a particular festival or new moon or Sabbath, which are a shadow of what is to come.*

**The Roots of our Freedom**

1. The union of the divine and the human in Jesus our Lord has ended the mediation of the Law. There is no third party that can bring us to God but the Son of God.
2. The Law has come to an end as a mediator; do not in any way be deceived by those endeavouring to sow among you a different seed of the Law’s observances. As Theodoret noticed,

“The phrase ‘a particular festival’ was well put: they were not in a position to celebrate them. I mean, how would it be possible to make your way from Phrygia to Judea three times a year to celebrate the feasts in Jerusalem in accordance with the Law, and especially since Pentecost is close to Easter, when a journey of more than fifty days is involved? By a shadow of things to come he referred to the Law to bring out that the grace of the New Covenant was prefigured in it; he went on to say as much. But the body is Christ’s. In other words, the evangelical way of life fills the role of a body, whereas the Law the role of a shadow. Now, the shadow precedes the body when the light is rising, so that while the Law is a shadow, grace is a body and Christ the Lord is a light.” (Ibid)

**Colossians 2:18 - How can we be disqualified?**

*Let no one disqualify you.*

**Notes and Studies**

1. Paul is talking about “disqualify” as losing the goal for which Christ came.
2. Those who combined the observances of the Law with the Gospel diverted their attention from Christ to themselves. That is the pure and the impure, the clean and the unclean.
3. Let no one disqualify you. Then he brings out more clearly the resultant harm: Opting for self-abasement and angel worship, following directions beyond their ken, idly puffed up with human opinions. Those who supported the Law encouraged them to worship the angels, claiming in this to respect the Law. This affliction persisted in Phrygia and Pisidia for a long time. Hence a synod that assembled in Laodicea in Phrygia forbade by law praying to the angels; to this very day you can see chapels to Saint Michael among them and their neighbours. Those people, then, were giving that advice — namely, those addicted to self-abasement and claiming that the God of all is beyond sight, reach and comprehension, and that divine benevolence must be secured through the angels (his meaning in self-abasement and angel worship). The phrase “puffed up” is not inconsistent with self-abasement. While making pretense of the latter, they were in fact in the grip of the affliction of arrogance. The phrase, “following directions beyond their ken,” means adopting their own ideas.
4. He next went on to say as much: “*Idly puffed up with human opinions, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, supplied and supported by its ligaments and sinews, will grow with a growth that is from God.*” (verses 18-19). Again he called Christ the Lord “head” and the structure of the Church “body,” using all the terms metaphorically. Just as in the case of the body the brain is the root of the nerves, and through the nerves the body has the senses, so from Christ the Lord the body of the Church receives both the founts of instruction and the basis of salvation. What sinews are in the body apostles, prophets and teachers are in the structure of the Church?

**Colossians 2:20-22 - Christ liberated us from the systems of the world**

*So if with Christ you died to the elements of the world, why do you submit to regulations as though living in the world? No touching, no tasting, no handling — which are all to do with corruption through use, according to the commands and teachings of human beings*.

1. Paul brings baptism forward: you were buried with Christ in baptism, you became dead to the Law. So how do you put up with those teaching this, and believe some foods are lawful and others unlawful, ignoring the fact that none of this is fit and proper? By “commands and teachings” he referred not to the Law but to these people’s obsolete instruction.

2. “Dead to the Law” means not to live or to be judged by the Law

**Colossians 2:23 - The Old has Gone**

*All these things have an appearance of wisdom in recommending supposed devotion, self-abasement and rigorous asceticism, but are of no value in checking indulgence of the flesh.*

1. One noted is enough: whatever we do for ourselves comes back to the self (not God).
2. We introduce our own beliefs, which are not in the Law’s intention, such as what the Two Great Commandments say about Love

**Chapter 3: Colossians 3:1-2 - Risen with Christ**

*If, then, you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Have a mind for things above, not for things on earth.*

It is quite common to think that we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, but in fact it is also our resurrection.

**Ten Reasons for Celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus**

1. The Gospel of Jesus is about life. The resurrection of Jesus is the evidence that this good news of life does not end but is eternal, because Jesus Himself is the good news and his resurrection means eternal good news.
2. All the promises of Jesus are meaningless if Jesus remained under the power of death; but because Jesus defeated death, Jesus can fulfill what Jesus has promised.
3. Jesus gives his life to us in the two great sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. If Jesus is dead these two sacraments are memories of a dead person and this is not good news.
4. The words of Jesus are not the words of a dead man who is no longer with us, lives only in our memory and his words are only those that we remember. But being the risen Lord his words come to us by the Holy Spirit, who gives life, and who raised Jesus from the dead; that makes the words of Jesus give life by the Holy Spirit, and also connect us to Jesus’ life.
5. The resurrection has proclaimed for us the kind of life we will have in the kingdom; it is life without corruption or death but is fully human.
6. The resurrection is the event, which proves Jesus’ love for our humanity. What was taken in the Incarnation was not temporary but now has become immortal; thus we shall be immortal like Jesus.
7. The resurrection established the unity of the divine and the human in Jesus. This eternal union is the guarantee of our union.
8. Our prayers in the name of Jesus are not prayers in the name of someone who is under the power of death, but is the Victorious Lamb of God.
9. Death was the main obstacle in our life, which has colored even our love for each other; but now the Lord is risen and sacrificial love does not come to an end. It is given to us to share in the eternal sacrificial love of the risen Lord.
10. The promise of sending the Comforter, the Spirit, who will dwell in us forever, is meaningless if we have no eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The resurrection of Jesus is the only reason for our resurrection on the Last Day.

**Colossians 3:3-4 - In glory with him**

*After all, you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed in glory with him.*

1. We consider ourselves dead to the world that is not under his authority.
2. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. The mystery of our resurrection is hidden in him and is working in us:

a. Our hope in the eternal life

b. We face our troubles seeing that the end is for our glory in spite of our pain.

c. Our fear of death is real but the Lord also sustains our hope that we will continue to be with Him.

**Colossians 3:5 – Dead to idolatry**

*So put your limbs to death to the things on earth — fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, which is idolatry.*

See Philemon letters that follow …

**The works of the flesh – I**

**On Fasting - A letter from Philemon**

Brother George,

May the season of this Lent be a time of renewal for you. May God our Father who has poured out his love on us in his Incarnate Son grant you joy and peace in all your doings.

I want to be more plain with you if as a Christians I must answer your question: “What did St Paul mean by the works of the flesh?”

I have suffered a great deal at the hands of false teachers who told me to despise and think of my flesh as the source of all evil thoughts. I have lived on water, salt and bread for more than a year till I could hardly walk to church and have refused to eat cheese and dates. But I had not acquired the chaste mind nor I have a pure heart devoted totally to my Lord Jesus Christ.

I reached the bottom of despair and I decided to take up the matter with Jesus my Savior and told Him that I have come here to live for Him but my mind wanders and drifts in every direction. I fasted for three days drinking water only in the evening, but my physical weakness did not weaken my mind. This is part of our false teaching. In the end I threw myself on the floor and said to the Lord, “Please take my life because I have failed.” But the Lord in His love spoke to me and here are His words:

*“Philemon my silly sheep, I care about your love not about your thoughts. Let your love clean up your thoughts.”*

And there was a moment of silence as I had not heard that before and the Lord Jesus must have decided to give me more time to understand.

I stood up and thanked the Lord but I told him, “Lord guide me to the words in the Bible so that I may have your light.” He told me to read John 14:21 and He immediately told me to read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. I have to say that I am the one that nearly killed his body by asceticism and has no love. Then The Lord said to me:

*“Stay on the road of love and you shall be saved and have eternal life.”*

I have written more than I should but stay on the road of love brother George.

Pray for me

Philemon

Arrived Easter 1966

**The works of the flesh - II**

**On Chastity - A Letter from Philemon**

Brother George,

May our Lord Jesus the Lover of mankind give you the joy of his resurrection, which we very often celebrate as His resurrection rather than our resurrection.

Our attitude to our body is basically a collection of:

1. Our past use and misuse,
2. Our imagination of how our body is a tool,
3. Then how the tool becomes no longer the tool but the goal, as if doing something is demanded by this part of the body.

In time of total abstaining from food and water, hunger hits me when my mind is not engaged or when it is empty or when it is regurgitating useless past evil ideas and enjoying imagining it.

Hunger is natural but gluttony is seeking self-power and gratification by excessive eating of food.

Sexual ideas and images are the byproduct of a lonely mind and so one who has lost the divine love which alone brings satisfaction and feeds our souls with the eternal communion with the Holy Trinity. When young people come to see me and ask how they can remain chaste, I ask them “How do they love the Lord?” rather than telling them what your false teacher told you: to sleep standing and to wear the camel hair dress to stop you from sleeping. This was no more than a torture and you have not gained hardly anything. But when we together focused on the Father’s love for sinners, you mastered your body for Jesus and your body became his body.

We used to say to each other, “I will do this and that for Jesus’ sake,” including eating and sleeping and washing. Do you remember our shared joy as we have discovered something new, but it was the eternal love and the eternal truth?

Rest in the love of God and let his love clean you up for the Father does not judge us according to our thoughts but according to the kind of love we have and the kind of love we put to practice.

Pray for me,

Philemon

No date

***Pope’s Notes***

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