



Colossians 2:9–12

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him

through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Reflection

Today's passage comes from Colossians 2:9–12; it's as if Paul just simply can't stop talking about the supremacy of Jesus and what it means for this young gathering of believers in Colossae,

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circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossae is the smallest city that Paul writes to in the New Testament. And he does so most likely because of the strong ties he has with this young church through his close friends and fellow gospel workers Epaphras and Philemon. The Colossian church is under siege by false teaching and this is nowhere more evident than in Colossians chapter two. Perhaps it's a form of first-century Gnosticism, a mystical blend of Eastern and Greek pagan religions with some Jewish practices added in for good measure. The first century was notorious for this. It's known as syn-

cretism, the blending of religions and cultural practices which typically occurred in cosmopolitan areas, multicultural melting pots where citizens from many different religious and cultural backgrounds lived and worshipped together. The same problem is usually present, to a greater or lesser degree, in most of the churches that Paul writes to in the New Testament. For example, the situation in Galatia appears to be even more dire than what is happening in Colosse. In his letter to the Galatians Paul dispenses with all pleasantries and starts with this blast,

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – 7 which is really no gospel at all. Ev-

idently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! Gal 1:6–8

Paul's astonished. He's angry. He writes bluntly and with great urgency. Because there is no more important truth than the gospel of Jesus Christ. All eternity hangs on our response to the gospel. And so when false teachers rise up and try and change or distort the gospel, and reduce it to no gospel at all, it is hard to imagine a more dire turn of events in a young Christian community. And again today, we catch glimpses of how this is happening in

Colosse from Paul's words. Listen to them again,

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Again, we find this language of fullness – not incomplete, or partial or preliminary,

just the first rung on a ladder heading towards some supreme being – but fullness. In Christ all the fullness of God lives ... in the bodily form, not spiritually but bodily, flying against Gnostic and Platonic thinking that matter was evil and the body merely a prison for the soul. Again, we have Jesus as the ‘head’ over every power and authority, not one small ‘g’ god amongst many, but head over the entire spiritual realm. And then we have talk of the Jewish rite of circumcision; only in Christ our hearts have been circumcised by the Holy Spirit, doing away forever with the physical rite of circumcision which is now superseded and made obsolete by the circumcision of the heart, the new covenant blessing that it always pointed forward to anyway.

And so once more by raising Jesus to

his appropriate position, the highest of heights, Paul attempts to snuff out this insidious false teaching before it catches flame. Paul refuses to have Jesus relegated to sit as one amongst many small 'g' gods and to see Christianity blended in with all manner of other first century beliefs and religious practices. An example today might be the Baha'i faith, an offshoot of Islam that teaches that all faiths in fact worship the same god and that Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad are each simply manifestations of this one god. And so they blend and borrow and contradict and pick and choose and discount and discard and lead seekers away from the one true God of the Christian Bible to eternal damnation in hell.

There can be nothing more dangerous

than blending the gospel of Jesus Christ with other religious or cultural traditions and turning it into no gospel at all; into a false gospel that no longer saves. Jesus Christ is our all sufficient saviour. In everything he has the supremacy. And there is nothing to add to his redeeming work on the cross which we receive by grace (not any work or ritual) through faith.

And so we have the fullness of Christ and empty philosophies. The truth of the gospel, and a thousand competing voices that would distract us from the truth. And our old life put to death now that we are risen with Christ. This is who we are in Christ, and these are the foundations on which we stand.

Think

Consider today how you might be at risk of blending your Christian faith with the idols of our world, the false gods of materialism or celebrity or self-actualization that are so easy to unwittingly pursue. Think about the foundations of the Christian faith. Think about the priorities of Jesus Christ. It's so easy to get caught up in career, and mortgages, and affluence, and children's sport, just like everyone around us and end up seeking the same things in life that they do.

But Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things, all the things we truly need, will be added to us as well. Are you seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness? Or are you at risk of succumbing in part or

in whole to the lure and distraction of the world with all its find sounding arguments that in the washup are nothing more than hollow and deceptive philosophies?

Pray

Pray today that you would seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Pray today that the rule and reign of Jesus Christ and his ongoing mission in our world might be the defining pursuit of your life. Pray today that personal holiness and right living in our world might be your practice and your joy. And pray to day that the growth of the kingdom of God might lay restlessly on all our hearts and that we might pursue the growth of his kingdom ahead of our own.