

We Have So Much To Be Grateful For

Col. 2:11-15

Have we ever thought about such questions as: What happens when you come to faith in Christ? Are all our sins forgiven? How is that made possible? When we hear what Paul wrote in today's passage we'll find the answer to these questions and find also that *we have so much to be grateful for*. I'm sure in the end that's what the church at Colossae must have felt. Why? They were facing all sorts of religious arguments and opposition to what they believed about Jesus, affecting their confidence in the truth about Christ.

Every generation of Christians faces such threats, and the best defence we can have against such religious arguments and opposition is to be thoroughly grounded in the basics of faith in Christ. This puts us in a much stronger position to be able to withstand persuasive, but unbiblical, teaching. We need to be confident in who Christ is and what he's done and the word that teaches us.

We have so much to be grateful for. For what God has done in the person of Jesus, so much so I want to jump straight in here and give you the most comprehensive (yet succinct) statement in scripture with regards to our deliverance. Ponder, appreciate and be awed at these words: **"he forgave us all our sins"**. ALL, our sin. We were in huge debt to God, condemned to an eternity separated from God, and Christ has cancelled that debt, taken it away, he has forgiven all our sin, completely. *We have so much to be grateful for*.

(Text) So you also **are complete** through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.

12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

13 You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, **for he forgave all our sins**.

14 He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

15 In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his **victory** over them on the cross.

We can never ever fully mine the depths of what Christ accomplished for us by the work of the cross: it is limitless. And this is why we appreciate, and remember and wonder and worship, Jesus.

The moment we stop having gratitude for Christ and the cross is the moment we have become complacent, and dry, and in need of a spiritual re-set in our Christian walk. I am aware – *even for myself* – of how easy we can drift into going through the spiritual motions, we give the appearance of all being good, but our hearts have cooled for love for Christ.

We know when we're beginning to lose something of the wonder and work of the cross. It is when "he forgave us all our sins" no longer means much to me and I *now* need an excuse to worship. I'm certain you don't want to be stuck there. You don't want to be dry and complacent but would much rather press on in your relationship with Christ.

These few verses alone give us all the truth and every reason required to do just that.

Go back to verses 9 and 10 for a moment because it's there we find the context for what Paul writes in verses 11-15

(Col. 2:9-10) For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. **So you also are complete** through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

Why would Paul use such language as: "you...are complete"? To push back on the thinking that what Jesus did for our deliverance was not enough, that more was/is required.

...and verses 11-15 are Paul's explanation of what that complete-ness looks like: let's look at v. 11 to begin...

Deliverance in Jesus is COMPLETE (11-12)

11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.

There is a strange set of words here we wouldn't normally use today but actually contain an important relational truth. There was for all Jewish boys dating back to Abraham a requirement in the law for circumcision of the flesh, to belong to the nation of Israel.¹ God had commanded Israel to be separate from all non-Jews, and circumcision did just that. Typical Israelite belief was not a matter of being good or bad but only that he was circumcised. That same belief was carried through to Jewish leaders in Paul's day.

What was the real meaning of circumcision?

Think about the part of the body where circumcision was performed. It's where reproduction occurs. It also means what we are born with (*sin*) is passed on.

¹ Where the idea of infant baptism and covenanting children into the family of God came from.

We realise then, that what God wanted the people to know, is that this (sin) must be cut out of our lives. The “flesh” was to be cut away.

For most Jews if you’d had the operation, you thought you were in good standing with God, and it certainly made you feel special. However, what God really wanted was the *cutting off* to be reflected in a complete *inward change* and newness of heart. That is **complete** removal (cut off) of unbelief, bad attitudes and disobedience; these are the tendencies of the flesh.

The flesh represents that tendency in our nature toward sin and sinful habits. I know I can remember what I was like as a child with mum and dad, particularly as a teenager...(e.g’s). I’m sure we all have had similar experiences ourselves, with our own kids...and we are like that with God: *defiant and selfish*.

There is a load of emphasis in the OT that an inward, heart change was/is the real issue and what God is wanting.

O people of Judah and Jerusalem, surrender your pride and power. Change your hearts before the Lord, or my anger will burn like an unquenchable fire because of all your sins. (Jer. 4:4) Therefore, change (*circumcise*) your hearts and stop being stubborn. (Deut. 10:16)

The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. (Deut. 30:6)

Think of Abraham, circumcised 14 years after he believed in God. It wasn’t circumcision that ‘saved’ him, it was his change of heart.

We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. (Rom. 4:10-12)

Gods emphasis is that the heart be circumcised *of all* that would stand in the way of pressing on in Christ. This is not a work we do; it is a work of Christ. He ‘performs’ a “spiritual circumcision” in/on us when we come to faith in him.

In the same way that spiritual circumcision is a cutting away of the sinful tendencies of the old and former way of life, *baptism* is a public and symbolic burying of those tendencies. They have been cut off and in baptism we die to them and are raised up in new life in Christ.

(Col. 2:12) For you were buried with Christ when you were baptised. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

I think circumcision is actually very helpful imagery. Why? It speaks to the absolute separation of what was old and now is new. There is a sense of finality to the old sinful habits, tendencies and desires. now, only to be ruled by the Spirit.

When you became a Christian you experienced a spiritual circumcision. We said yes to Christ and in that moment ALL of those sinful tendencies were cut off by Jesus and you were made new. *Deliverance in Jesus is Complete!*

Does this mean I don't sin anymore? If those sinful tendencies were cut off why do I still sin? We're new on the inside, saved by the work of Christ, we have a new and clean heart, **but**, it's in an old physical body that is subject to temptation.

Paul explains that ongoing tension best in Romans 7...the things I don't want to do are the things I find myself doing...he's saying my new self wants to obey God but there's still something at work in me ("my members" – Rom. 7:23) that war against this...he's saved, but he still sins...

Then he says in Rom. 8:5-6 – and there's a key in here – Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

Here's the key teaching: *The deliverance Jesus* has provided is full and *complete*, now, let the Holy Spirit control you, bringing your outward behaviour and thinking into line with the inward change of heart that took place. It is letting the Holy Spirit bring us into line with his word and what is of Christ: daily submitting to the Spirit.

Forgiveness in Jesus is COMPLETE (13-14)

(13b, 14) ...**He forgave us all our sins**, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

Let me ask a question: can you be more dead, than dead? Outside of Christ you are spiritually dead, you are flatlined, no heartbeat, dead in your sin. And there a person remains until such time as they accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. And in accepting Christ a human being is moved from being dead to alive (v.13).

A heard a story recently about a pastor who was at an event in Alaska, he came across what he considered to be saddest person he ever met. "I've just come from the doctors" the person said "and I don't have long to live"

The pastor asked did he know Jesus, have you ever heard the gospel. "Yes I've heard about Jesus but there are some things I don't understand" Some people might have said oh well let's pray this prayer, but the Pastor: "I'm gonna cancel all my plans and we'll spend the day working it out together"

So they did, promise after promise...then they came back to John 3:16 and the pastor said "read it?"... "I have!"... "read it again"... "I get it, I understand, I'm completely forgiven!"

There is no person on the face of the earth that is beyond the touch of God's grace. There is no person so bound and dominated by any sin or sinful habit where Christ cannot come into that person's life – when that person confesses Christ as Saviour – and completely set them free and forgive them.

I am utterly convinced of this truth. Please catch the enormity of this. that we are forgiven, that we see ourselves forgiven and we believe ourselves as forgiven. Now if we can see ourselves at the foot of the cross, with Jesus looking down at us with his beaten and bloodied and sacrificed body, with his arms and legs stretched out...saying "I forgive you all your sins"²....if every Christian could capture that, how free we would be, could be, might, be; how worshipful we would be, how kind we would be. I am talking about *living out of* the knowledge and the gratitude of this act because I *feel it* intensely.

All your sins, recorded (mine would be a whole ream of paper), Jesus has them in his hand and the spike is driven through that hand nailing them to the cross: forgiven! Is Paul saying that all people are forgiven? No. Who then is forgiven? Look back at verse 12: those who have put their faith in Christ.

I wonder sometimes whether we have more of an issue with our sin than God? We continue to remember what God has forgotten. (Isa. 1:18) For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Scripture says (he) has "He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross." This was like a legal document, a bond, think of it as an I.O.U. If someone had given me an I.O.U with \$100K, that means I was in debt to him for that. Then, he *cancelled* the debt. Except in Gods case it was all our sin written on there. He tore it up, cancelled it!

There were at least two kinds of paper used in ancient times, papyrus - made from the bulrush – and vellum, made from an animal's hide, both were fairly expensive and wouldn't be wasted. And since no ancient ink had any acid in it, the ink never bit into the papyrus or the vellum paper, it just laid on the surface. If nobody messed with it, it would remain there because it didn't bite into the surface.³

In order to preserve his paper and for cost saving purposes sometimes a scribe would simply take a sponge and wipe the ink off the papyrus or the vellum, and use it again. And that's exactly what Pauls saying here.

² See Psalm 32:1; Isa. 1:18; 55:7; Acts 13:38; Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:4

³ https://www.precepttaustin.org/colossians_214-151

When you confessed you sin and received Jesus Christ, God reminds you it has been nailed to the cross, the penalty has been paid, your sin *wiped clean*; completely!

Therefore, if God has forgiven me, what authority do I have to hold onto the thought/feeling I have not been forgiven? If I am not a higher authority than God and I'm not, then I might as well believe myself forgiven and forgive myself. How much forgiveness is there through Jesus? All. Full. Complete!

If we battle with the truth of God's forgiveness, it is not God, it is us, it is our belief. If I fail to see the enormity of the work of the cross, how on earth can I ever freely and completely forgive others actions against me? Because how I forgive others is totally connected to how I see myself forgiven.

Imagine this scene from a courtroom trial in South Africa: A frail elderly black woman stands slowly to her feet. Facing her across the room are several white security police officers, one of them, Mr. van der Broek, who had just been tried in the murders of both the woman's son and her husband some years before. Years' earlier van der Broek had gone to the family home, killed her son, then burned his body while all the officers partied nearby.

Several years later, van der Broek and his colleagues returned to take away the woman's husband: for months she heard nothing of his whereabouts. Then, two years his disappearance, van der Broek came back for the woman herself. She vividly remembers that evening, going to a riverside where she was shown her husband, bound and beaten, but still strong in spirit and lying on a pile of wood. His last words as the officers poured gasoline over his body and set him aflame were, 'Father, forgive them.'

And now in the courtroom she listens to van der Broek's confessions. A member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission turns to her and asks, 'How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?'

"I want three things,' she says, calmly, but confidently. "Firstly to give my husband's remains a decent burial.'

"She pauses, then continues. 'My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for Mr. van der Broek to become my son. I would like him to come twice a month and spend a day with me so that I can *pour out on him* whatever love I still have remaining within me.'

"And the final third thing. I would like Mr. Van der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This was also the wish of my husband. And so, can someone come to my side and lead me across the courtroom so that I can take Mr. van der Broek in my arms, embrace him, and let him know that he is truly forgiven.'

As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr. van der Broek, overwhelmed by what he has just heard, faints. And as he does, those in the courtroom, friends, family, neighbours—all victims of decades of oppression and injustice--begin to sing softly, but assuredly, 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. '"

How much forgiveness is there through Jesus? All. Full. **Complete!**

Victory in Jesus is COMPLETE (15)

In this way, he disarmed **the spiritual rulers and authorities**. He shamed them publicly by his **victory** over them on the cross.

When Jesus died on the cross, his last words were, “It is finished,” finished not just in terms of his earthly ministry, but in terms of securing complete deliverance, complete forgiveness and *complete victory*.

We know that Jesus was dragged through the city, stripped naked and he was nailed to his cross for charges against him. But, what they were doing to Jesus, God was doing to the “spiritual rulers and authorities” through Jesus. The cross stripped them naked, shamed them, disarmed them, leaving them utterly powerless by the greatest demonstration of love and forgiveness and power that raises the dead. He died on a cross, but in fact it was a triumphant procession.

In Colossians Paul’s imagery is that of a Roman emperor riding through the city streets celebrating his victories with all the pomp and ceremony by showing off the spoils of victory; making a “public spectacle” of their prisoners. The irony is amazing: think of Psalm 68:18: “When [Christ] ascended on high, he led captives in his train.”

In November 1945 Nazi war leaders were put on trial for their crimes against humanity, particularly against the Jews. They were found guilty of persecuting, torturing, and murdering over 7 million Jews. At the trial they were all paraded publicly before the media and the crowds gathered at Nuremberg. They stood on the stands humiliated, disgraced, defeated, stripped of their power and condemned to death and imprisonment. As the Jewish survivors looked on, what gave them great comfort was knowing that these men would never again be able to harm them.⁴

We have so much to be grateful for: God has stripped away the power of spiritual rulers and authorities. Who are? Simple: any spiritual influence or ‘voice’ that opposes God, and his word.

What Jesus did at the cross means complete deliverance, forgiveness, and victory over Satan, but there’s still a daily battle going on. Jesus has disarmed every spiritual power and authority, that might tempt, coax or influence you. Christ has done it; you walk in it. How? Allow the Holy Spirit to control your life.

In Christ we are completely forgiven, walk in that forgiveness. Complete victory, walk in that victory. Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

⁴ NIV Col Comms.

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6)

Maybe you don't know what it is to be complete in Christ. You don't believe he can completely forgive you? Ask him, ask him to help show you, that he has. Then believe it. You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Father, for this complete deliverance, forgiveness and victory, we give you praise and thanks. Thank You for what you've done in us and for us through Christ. May our thanks be apparent not just in thought, or word, but in how we live. May we live thankful lives.