

† Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 2:13-15

The power of the cross of Christ (Part 2)

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

A person's greatest desire and his greatest need are not always the same. People desire a great number of things that they in fact do not need. And yet we are constantly calling our desires "needs" and sometimes even our needs as nothing more than desires. We think we need "this or that"? We need high-speed internet. We need cable TV. We need a nicer apartment or home. We need the latest kind of iPhone or the newest video game. We need the hottest DVD and so on and so forth. And on the flip side, we say we desire God's Word or more involvement with other believers or more prayer rather than consider such things as absolute needs in our lives. A person's greatest desire and his greatest need are not always the same.

In an almost shocking and seeming unrealistic statement, listen to what Paul regarded as our only true and earthly needs saying in 1 Timothy 6:8 -

If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

Are you kidding me? Just food and covering? In context; every other kind of material possession is just icing on the cake; an added blessing. And again in Philippians 4:11-12 we see Paul once again making less of material things than we are generally comfortable with saying:

11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

In other words, we need to make a clear distinction between true needs versus desires. And we are really good at pursuing the one; our own desires for things and stuff at the neglect of the other; our true need or needs.

But this begs a question for us; what are our true needs? What do you really need today? Obviously we need food and covering. We might also include in such a consideration genuine companionship or relationships. But even all of these things, when looked at in light of eternity are but mere trifles in comparison to our greatest need. And what is our greatest need? Now we must look to things spiritual and biblical and realize that we are created being; creatures and therefore responsible, accountable to the Creator. We learn from Scripture that because we are all "in Adam" – born in his image and live and act in his likeness, that we have sinned against that Creator; we have assaulted His glory and have exchanged the truth and wonder of God for a lie,

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worshipping and serving the creature, that is ourselves, rather than the Creator, who is and is to be forever blessed.

The Scripture makes it clear that because of sin, because we are bent to seek to do things any other way than God's way, we are separated from God. We have a broken relationship with our Creator. We are conceived and born into this sin, this nature, inclination and bent to constantly reject who God is and what He has said and done. We are absolutely and without question at enmity, hostility, and willful separation from God. We are born hating God. And contrary to what many think, this attitude is mutual. For those who remain as being "sons of Adam" rather than being transformed into "sons of God"; hear Scripture's testimony toward those who have not yet not been reconciled, those not yet made right with God as found in Psalm 5:4-6.

4 For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You. 5 The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. 6 You destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

This is strong language, is it not? Is this true? Is this our condition, our state before coming to Christ? Hear again the testimony of Scripture. In Romans 8:6-8 we read:

6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

God is not pleased with sinners. These verses make it clear that there is no such thing as a "sensitive-seeker". According to the Word of God there is not one living human being that seeks the God of the Bible on his own. And this then reveals to us our greatest need; that need is to be made right; reconciled; put in right relationship to God. But how? ***If*** we are really as bad off as what these few Scriptures we have read state, then what can be done? ***If*** we are not even able to subject ourselves to God, then how do we escape the doom of God's punishment and wrath on our sin? ***If*** we are by nature and by action hostile, God-hating sinners with no inclination to see this changed in us or without any self-means to correct this condition, what are we do to? Have we, or do we rightly cry out with the testimony of Paul, "***Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death" (Romans 7:24)?*** Do you know his answer? Did Paul, in answer to his own question, plead the merits of his great knowledge of the law of God; or of his pedigree as a Hebrews among Hebrews; or to the morality of his life? Paul knew his greatest need was deliverance; salvation from sin's presence, power and penalty. Where was this deliverance to be found? In the next verse, in Romans 7:25, Paul declares that God has met his need, "***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***

Beloved, our God has met our greatest need, deliverance from sin's power and penalty by means of the cross! According to our text, God took all the sin we engaged in, along with its power and penalty and "***nailed it to the cross!***" Through the power of the cross our greatest needs have been met. And these needs of ours are expressed in our text of Colossians 2:13-15. Last week we took the time to note the powerlessness of ourselves in verse 13, looking at our

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separated condition being dead to God; disobedient to His will and destitute of anything by which we might redeem ourselves.

We also then looked at first of several accomplishments that remedy our separation from our Creator as secured by Jesus Christ on the cross; that first accomplishment; that first need of ours being the divine work of regeneration; of being born again. Let us then look at the great needs fulfilled by the power of the cross; the work of Christ upon tree.

II. The Powerfulness of the Cross (Colossians 2:13b)

...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions;

As we have noted, prior to the merciful working of God upon our hearts, we are/were God-haters. God the Father reconciles makes us right with Himself by means of the powerful work of Christ on the cross, through the working of the Holy Spirit on us.

Because of the cross, because of God’s gracious work to nail our sins, our debts, our guilt and our Substitute on that tree, we receive, according to our text, at least four benefits; regeneration to life; remission of sins; removal of our debt; and the rejections of godless influences in our lives. Let us look at these provisions, these needs met for us by God by means of the cross.

A. Provides regeneration to life (2:13b)

He made you alive together with Him...

The first benefit of the cross of Christ is that it provides regeneration to life. We looked at this God-provided regeneration last week. Let us be reminded that at the cross Jesus took upon Himself the death we possessed and the death we earned so that by His death and then resurrection from the grave, we might also have our death to sin and our resurrection to life. At the end of verse 12 we read that the very power of God which raised Jesus from the dead is the power by which God “**made you alive together with Him.**” In the deep recesses of your heart, God, because of the work of Christ on the cross, grants the believer the power of the resurrection, which brings our dead minds to life, and gives us affection toward God and causes us to long for obeying the things please God. All of this work of God comes before our own repenting and expressions of faith because before this we are “dead” – dead to God, not wanting God on His own terms and not having even the desire to repent or to believe until His divine change is wrought in our hearts. According to verse 13, God made you alive together with Christ and the only question then is this, “Have you experienced this?” Does this now describe you; one who by faith sees yourself to be a sinner deserving of death and unable in yourself to make yourself right before God and then in light of that by faith believing that when Jesus died for your sins, you died to your sins; that when Jesus was buried in the grave, you had the power of sin stripped off, removed from you so that even as Christ was raised from the dead unto newness of life unto God; even so you know that you have been raised to life to live for God. This beloved is regeneration. This beloved is the result of the power of the work of Christ on the cross. And it is God’s work in you.

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B. Provides remission of our sin (2:13c)

...having forgiven us all our transgressions...

The second benefit of the cross of Christ is that it provides remission of our sin. We often speak of having our sins forgiven by God, but what exactly does this mean? Interestingly enough, we are presented with what has happened to us by which God makes us alive. One of the works of God is the work of forgiveness. What is also interesting is that Paul does not use the “typical” word for forgiveness here in our text. The most commonly used word translated forgiveness in the NT is the Greek word “*apheimi*” – meaning “to send forth; or to send away”; the idea being the putting away of some penalty or obligation; the canceling of a debt. This word is used some 140 plus times. But rather than use this one word, Paul uses not only a different word, but really a series of word pictures to describe for us how the cross of Jesus makes us right with God; makes us alive with Jesus.

The verb translated in our text as “**having forgiven us**” is the Greek word “*charizomai*” – from the noun “*charis*” or grace. The word literally means “to bestow a favor or to pour out grace without condition.” The verb is in the middle voice, which simply means that this is an action carried out by God Himself and for God Himself. This means that the act of forgiveness, the pouring out of grace at the cross of Christ, while it does benefit us, was really meant to display the glory and wonder of God.

So what does all this mean? Beloved, by God’s grace and for God’s glory, God made us who believe alive with His Son, Jesus Christ, by once and for all covering our transgressions, our willful sins with grace, thereby destroying the power of our sins to maintain hostility between us and God.

Notice in our text that “**all our transgressions**”; that is each and every willful act ever committed, past, present and future that provokes the wrath of God has been unconditionally pardoned. Truly truly, as the song writer noted, God’s grace is greater than all our sin.

Beloved, this is the grace of God. This pouring out of grace implies the inability of the recipient to earn or merit such an act. It implies the sole work and moving of God to perform such an act. When God made us alive with Christ, He graciously acted on our behalf not to hold the hostility, the just due of our sins against us.

If you will look with me at Luke 7:41-43 where we read a parable of Jesus that pictures this very work for us. Jesus is speaking to Simon, a religious leader and says;

41 “A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii [about a year and a half of wages], and the other fifty [about two months of wages]. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.”

Notice that both of these men were “unable to repay” – that is, they had no means in themselves by which to have this debt removed and it is the grace, the unmerited, undeserved favor of the moneylender that removed the debt. His grace covered the debt. The moneylender “**graciously forgave**” and Simon understood that the one who would love the most is the one who experienced the greatest outpouring of this grace.

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This is what it means to have all our transgressions forgiven by God, that the power sin had to keep us as enemies of God has been nullified by the work of God. And the work that accomplished this remission, this unearned receiving of God’s grace was secured for us at the cross of Christ.

C. Provides removal of our debt (2:14)

...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

As we come to verse 14 then, we see Paul continuing the explanation of what it means to have life in Christ as it is not only the remission of our sin by the outpouring of God’s grace, but the third benefit of the cross of Christ then is that it also provides the removal of our debt to God. It is not enough for God simply to pardon or cover our sins. As wonderful as that may be, we also need the penalty of sin removed and in verse 14 we read of this removal, this canceling of our debt. And if you remember nothing else, I want you to remember how complete, how total, how definitive is this removal of our debt.

But before we look at what is meant by the phrase **“having canceled”**; let us understand what is being canceled, this **“certificate of debt.”** The idea in the text here is of a fiscal obligation, a bill; or more simply; an IOU. The word speaks of a handwritten bill signed by the debtor. What is pictured here is a document that all humans have signed as creatures of the Creator by which we pledged our complete allegiance to God. By our sins, all our transgressions, we conclusively demonstrate that we have failed to give God that allegiance. Here is the IOU, “I own God perfect obedience to His will. Signed, mankind.” This is our certificate of debt. This is your certificate of debt.

What is the debt? Our debt as seen in this verse is our inability to obey God’s **“decrees”** – that is His will and most specifically His Word. Here is the sum of God’s decrees as found in Leviticus 18:5

So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.

This is our obligation and if we keep this obligation, we live. But if we fail in this obligation, we incur a debt that we cannot pay. God’s decrees, when not kept, according to our text, become hostile to us; they are contrary and against us, condemning us to death. It is like a serial murderer who is condemned to serve multiple life sentences without any opportunity for parole. There is simply nothing that that man can do but be condemned. Every sin we have committed and ever sin we commit is worthy of yet another death sentence. Every sin piles condemnation upon condemnation. How many death sentences have you racked up? The testimony of God’s Word is clear, **“...the soul who sins will die”** (Ezekiel 18:4). Have you sinned? And, **“all of sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). And, **“the wages of sin is death...”** (Romans 6:23). This is our **“certificate of debt”**. This is what is **“hostile to us”**. But praise be to God for His grace and mercy by which He made us alive together with Christ. For while all this was against us we read that it was God who canceled out; literally “wiped out; smeared out; “x”ed out this debt.

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I am not sure if this is what Paul was after, but one of the ancient practices in NT times is that when a written debt was paid of, the creditor would place a big X on it and post it on the house declaring the debt fulfilled. God indeed put a big X on our debt, that X being the cross of Christ. But according to our text, God did more than just X it out. He also **has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross**. Here is the power of the cross; it not only cancels the debt of our sin, but it also takes it up and removes it; eliminates it. All our sin was forgiven by grace, canceled as our debt and then completely removed from us leaving us only with the righteousness of Christ. The verb translated “**has taken it out of way**” is the same verb used by John the Baptist to describe Jesus in John 1:29, “**Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away [lifts up and completely removes] the sin of the world!**” Beloved, how can we help but to sing with Horatio Spafford,

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Here is the power of the cross; God has made us alive together with Christ, we who were dead because of our sin, sinners by action and sinners by nature by covering our sin by His tremendous grace in that He Himself has canceled our IOU, in fact, God completely removed this IOU from the situation by nailing it to the cross of His Son. The idea beloved is that God has removed our IOU from the situation. It is no longer a part of the equation; we truly bear it no more! Here the testimony of the Psalmist. Is this your testimony? Psalm 103:1-4

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; [what are the benefits?] 3 Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; 4 Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion... 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

By nailing our sins, our iniquities, our transgressions to the cross, our IOU has been decisively removed and no longer has the power to bring upon us guilt and the wrath of God.

D. Provides rejection of godless of influences (2:15)

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

The final benefit of the cross of Christ according to our text is that it provides rejection of godless influences. Verse 15 is the conclusion of Paul’s exhortation that began in verse 8, that we “**see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.**” Jesus Christ is complete, a total Savior, able to save all those who draw near to God through Him to the uttermost. And we are complete in Him, lacking

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nothing. We do not need Christ + anything else. It is not Christ + worshipping angels; or Christ + keeping certain laws or regulations; not Christ + our good works. At the cross, God disarmed (look at the marginal reading in the NASB – divested Himself of) the ruler and authorities. Anyone and everyone; anything and everything that might be used, taught or said to be necessary for salvation apart from Christ or even in addition to Christ has been proven false by the cross. Jesus said at the cross, “It is finished!” It is done, complete; salvation has been won. The cross of Jesus proves that it is Jesus alone that saves; Jesus alone who has triumphed! God has rejected the legalism of Judaism; the false worship of paganism; the false knowledge of secret religions and mysticism. And therefore so shall we not subject ourselves to such godless influences.

In closing then, let me ask you to ponder some personal questions in light of the power of the cross to regenerate us to life; to provide us remission and removal of sin; and to provide us the knowledge that we can reject the godless influences that might cause us to trust in something or someone other than or in addition to Christ.

First, do you truly know and have you experience the outpouring of God’s grace. It is God’s grace that pardons and cleanses us from sin. Beloved, if you dwell in sin; then you are dead in sin and dwell in death. But if you dwell in grace, then you dwell in the forgiveness of God and you dwell in life because you dwell in Christ. Where do you dwell today? In sin or in grace?

Second, let me ask you, do you think you owe God anything? That is a trick question isn’t it? By way of sin and payment for our sins, we owe God nothing. What a cause for rejoicing. But by way of gratitude unto God, we owe God everything. How do you express your gratitude toward God? How is your devotional life? Your prayer life? Your worship? Your communion with the saints? Your being a witness and ambassador for Christ? What does 1 Corinthians 6:20 tell us? **“For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”** You are not your own; are you glorifying God in your body as you ought?

Third and finally, what are your influences today? What are the voices you are listening to? What are they telling you? Are they telling you Christ plus a little of this; a little of the world; a little of sensuality? Let me ask you this way, “Who do you imitate? Who are you like? Are you like worldlings, making fleshly desires into needs; or are you like Jesus making your need to glorify God your greatest desire?

I began this message by saying, “a person’s greatest desire and his greatest need are not always the same.” For the believer, and may it be for you, that your greatest desire and your greatest need are the same and that you have found them fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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