

The Provision of the Gospel

The Cross

Colossians 2:8-15

Introduction

In verse 8 of Chapter 2, Paul writes, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ." (Col 2:8 NIV)

False teachers were telling the Colossians that there was a higher spiritual "fullness" (*pleroma*) that they lacked. To obtain this fullness, they needed to "graduate" beyond Jesus (who they viewed as a lesser spirit) to a devotion to other spiritual rulers (2:10b) and other practices (2:16-23).

Paul warns them against these false teachers and gives them some very different counsel (read 2:9,10a). In verse 9, he says, "For in Him (Jesus) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." (Col 2:9-10 NKJV)

In other words, we don't 'graduate' beyond Jesus. Jesus is the fullness of deity in bodily form, and He is far above all other spiritual rulers. Their 'graduation' was only a trap to control others spiritually. Jesus has come to set your spirit free to become what God created you to be. But other spiritual forces at work in this world seek to capture and enslave your spirit to their spiritual domination and control.

Jesus was the fullness of God revealed in human flesh. The fullness we receive through Jesus provides every resource we need to grow and mature spiritually. The Apostle Paul says that all Christians need to mature spiritually. We do this by learning and living the scriptures.

The Apostle Peter says that God has "given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust." (2Pe 1:3-4 NKJV)

Verse 3 tells us that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col 2:3 NKJV)

Jesus is the living Word of God! Spiritual maturity isn't moving on to a better source of treasures (mainly because there isn't one); it is becoming more familiar with God's treasures and using them to enrich your life and help others. All of these treasures and benefits Jesus provided for us through His death on the Cross.

The Cross is the means through which we overcome sin and inherit an eternal life of incredible treasures. It is God's radical provision for our spiritual lives. Some problems in our lives are symptomatic, while others are root problems. Verses 11-

15 reveal our root problems and how the Cross provides the solution to these problems. Verse 11 says, "In Him (Jesus) you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Col 2:11-12 NKJV)

Accepting Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is what makes us complete in Him. "Look at verse 13, "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross." (Col 2:13-14 NKJV)

I. The Cross Cancels Our Debt

The Cross has canceled our "certificate of debt." The first provision we receive when we accept Jesus as our Savior is that God cancels the debt of our unrighteous deeds. Certificates of debt are legal statements of either personal financial debt (IOU) or criminal guilt. You get a certificate of debt when you receive a traffic ticket. It states your violation and the penalty you owe for it.

We have a certificate of debt to God, which is one of our root problems! Every time we violate God's perfect moral character, we accumulate real moral guilt before a righteous God. And we're not just talking about "big sins!" It includes thoughts and omissions as well as actions.

This guilt is "hostile" to us because it brings us under God's righteous judgment and causes us to try and hide from God. Our culture has a colossal blind-spot here. We recognize the reality and destructive power of guilt, but we want to view it only in psychological or sociological terms. There is some truth to this, but the Bible says that our root guilt is theological: We stand as convicted felons before God.

Any real solution to our guilt must deal with *His* certificate of debt. Your debt is to God, not to humanity. Other religions say, "You must pay your own debt." But Christianity says, "God has already paid your debt through Jesus' death on the cross."

The Romans nailed a certificate of debt to Jesus' Cross. The charge was sedition because He claimed to be King of the Jews. But He was innocent of this crime because He was the rightful King. Jesus was innocent of *all* sin before God and humanity. More importantly, He was the only person never to receive a certificate of debt from God! Instead, God took all our debts and "nailed them to His Cross." God applied all of our guilt to Jesus and judged Him in our place.

In Jesus' day, when a criminal had served his punishment, the authorities would write the word *tetelestai* ("paid in full") across his certificate, which he could then produce to prove he was no longer liable for judgment for that crime. The Apostle

John writes that just before Jesus died, he cried out, "It is finished!" (read Jn.19:30). The word finished is "*tetelestai*." Jesus' final words were, "Your debt has been "paid in full" through My death!"

Through the Cross, God is willing to forgive *all* your transgressions and cancel out your certificate of debt. But to receive this incredible gift, you must accept Jesus' sacrifice as full payment for your sins. Imagine being hopelessly in debt, facing the prospect of being imprisoned and sentenced to hard labor for the rest of your life. What if a benefactor was willing to write a check to cover your entire debt. Would you refuse the offer? The issue is no longer your debt but your willingness to accept payment of your debt by someone else. In the same way, it is no longer your sins that are the issue, but your willingness to receive Jesus' gift of forgiveness.

God goes even further. He not only offers to forgive us for our sins and cancel the debt we owe Him. He also gives us eternal life. All of this has been provided for us by Jesus and His death on the Cross. The moment you accept Jesus' payment for your sins, God wipes out your sin-debt forever and welcomes you as if you had never sinned against Him! The Cross cancels your debt to God.

II. The Cross Changes Our Nature

Through the Cross, God has made another radical provision for another root problem. The Cross also changes our nature. Verse 11 says, "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ." (Col 2:11 NKJV)

Circumcision was a visible, continuous reminder that Israel owed its existence to Yahweh, who created them out of nothing. Everyone in Abraham's household witnessed the miracle of Isaac's birth. From that point on, every male understood why they were circumcised. Their entire race – their very existence – began with a miraculous act of God. God's power proved to be greater than all of the natural laws that govern our world – even death itself!

The Cross is a spiritual circumcision that separates us from a life in the flesh to a life in the spirit. The Gnostics urged the Colossians to undergo physical circumcision as a step toward spiritual enlightenment. But Paul says that is ridiculous because believers are spiritually circumcised when they embrace the work of the Cross and let go of the world.

Circumcision was the Old Testament ritual that drew attention to the root problem of our sinful flesh. It's not that we merely violate God's standard and accumulate a certificate of debt; it's that we are born as slaves to sin! Because of man's fall in the Garden of Eden, humanity is in bondage to a sinful nature. We are born with a sin nature. That's what Paul means by the phrase "the body of the flesh." We commit sins because it is our nature to sin. Before we accept Christ, we are slaves to sin.

Circumcision was Abraham's acknowledgment that the physical realm cannot fulfill God's spiritual promise, but God's spiritual promises will always produce a physical miracle. Circumcision was the symbol of our need for radical spiritual surgery. We need deliverance from the power of sin, which only the transformation of our sin nature can accomplish. That's what the Bible means when it says we need a new heart. In Deuteronomy 10: 16, God told Israel, "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer."
(Deu 10:16 NKJV)

It's a problem that most of us don't come to grips with until after we accept Jesus and receive God's forgiveness. We receive a new nature that wants to follow God's will, but we also realize there is something deep within us that is still very self-centered and resistant to God. We discover that even though we have changed. Some destructive behaviors are still as strong as ever, even after we choose to follow Jesus.

As a Christian, there is a constant battle between the flesh and the spirit. In Galatians 5: Paul addresses this problem. He says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." (Gal 5:16-17 NKJV)

The flesh is always pulling on you to embrace the sin nature again and become a slave to sin. God knew we couldn't solve this problem, so He promised that the Messiah would do this when he came. Moses records this promise in Deuteronomy 30:6 when he writes, "And the LORD, your God, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." (Deu 30:6 NKJV)

Paul says that Jesus accomplished this through His death on the Cross. In verse 14, Paul says Jesus "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." (Col 2:14-15 NKJV)

Not only did Christ's death pay the penalty for your sins and remove the guilt of your sins, but He also "disarmed" Satan's authority over your nature to sin so that you can experience a growing freedom from sin's control. The Cross is the key to dealing with your sin and guilt before God and is also the key to achieving a lasting moral change in your life! We'll take a closer look at how to apply this truth to our lives when we get to chapter 3.

When we received Christ, we partake of His divine nature, which helps us reject the lie that we are doomed to live in slavery to sin, and it affirms God's promise that His Spirit can help us live in real freedom. Even though everything in your past may tell you God's way won't work and you're doomed to be a slave in this world, our new nature in Christ affirms God's Word and helps us choose God's ways over the world.

Your growth in faith unleashes the Spirit's guidance and power to liberate you and show you God's way and timing.

III. The Cross Defeats the Opposition

The Cross has also disarmed all demonic control over us. The provision God has made through the Cross provides deliverance and freedom from Satan's control. Verse 15 says, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." ([Col 2:15 NKJV](#))

These "principalities and powers" are demonic spirits, which Paul tells the Ephesians are "the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." We don't need to argue or debate the existence of demonic spirits. The Bible declares that they exist and exert a controlling influence on fallen humanity. Ephesians 2:2 says, "And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." ([Eph 2:1-3 NKJV](#))

Most of us have personally experienced the destructive power of Satan and his demons before we came to Christ. Even after you receive Christ and start following Him, you will cross paths with the demonic realm. They will tempt you to disobey God's will or can accuse you of being rejected by God. They like to cast doubt on God's truth and threaten you with thoughts of disaster or failure.

Does God have a provision for this root problem? Yes, He does! It's Jesus and His death on the Cross! Jesus is greater in authority and power than any demonic ruler. Verse 10 says, "and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." ([Col 2:10 NKJV](#))

Sin brought us under Satan's dominion. But Christ's death on the Cross breaks Satan's authority over us! At the Cross, we were transferred from the domain of the devil into Christ's kingdom.

But demonic rulers still exist and can still attack you if you listen to their lies and follow them. When you receive Christ, these demons that have been "disarmed" have no authority to rule over you or prevent you from accomplishing God's will for your life.

Conclusion

There is great power through the Cross of Christ. The provision of the gospel has come at the expense of the Cross. The gospel message proclaims that even though we are born in sin, God's plan is to rescue us. But His plan is very costly, and humanity cannot afford to pay for it.

God has chosen to pay the cost of our salvation himself. Death is the penalty for those with a sin nature. And Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

(Rom 3:23 NKJV)

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 6:23 NKJV)

Therefore, only a sinless person can rescue us. Jesus is that sinless person. He is the member of the Godhead who took on the form of sinful flesh and chose to pay the penalty for our sin, on the Cross to rescue us from sin. Therefore the Cross turns out to be the most expensive gift ever known to humanity.

The good news is that God, through the Cross, has provided every resource needed to live a triumphant and victorious life both now and forever. God has given us everything we need to mature in Him. When we accept the salvation Christ has provided, we need to focus on these resources and grow in our understanding and appreciation of them.

We need to learn how to apply them to the crucial areas of our lives. So are you growing in your faith? Are you vibrant and victorious? Do you listen and follow God's instructions revealed in the scriptures? Don't keep the miracle provision of the gospel to yourself! Share the gospel message with others. Reach out to your family, your friends, and your coworkers and give them a chance to inherit this incredible eternal life! Why? Because the time is short! The end is near, and Jesus is coming again!