[slide]

You know that moment when you just need someone to **do what you say RIGHT NOW?** [slide] Your kid is running and you can see the trajectory leads right into the street and cars are coming. You just need them to LISTEN TO YOU and STOP.

Or something less scary: you’ve got a nice family dinner and the table is nicely set –Thanksgiving or Mother’s Day or something- and Uncle Biff goes to pour some red wine, but he’s talking and not watching what he’s doing and [slide] suddenly the glass is overflowing onto the table deep red merlot going everywhere. Now you could say: Biff, darling, the wine you’re pouring has filled the relatively small volume of the glass and is rolling over the side drenching and staining the lovely white linen tablecloth, you might wish to shift the angle of the bottle’s opening upward so as to discontinue the wasteful and untidy deep red flow of the wine. But this is not the moment for lengthy explanations.

*So what you will say is: Biff, BIFF,* ***STOP!!***

Or the time when I shut and locked the car door on a girlfriend’s thumb. [slide]

The only words from her mouth in a low, intense, but controlled voice: *open the door.* But the situation had me embarrassed and discombobulated so I’m standing there gibberishly explaining and apologizing as she continues to repeat: low and controlled: *open the door, just open the door.* There would be time for lengthy apologies and explanations later when her thumb was set free.

In last week’s text Paul gave the Colossians the quick, pithy, emergency message [slide] they needed to hear:Col.2:6  Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,This is the heart of the matter, the centerpoint, the kernel, the thesis statement of the whole letter.

Now that that has been said, and the point has been made Paul can now take the time to explain the whys and wherefores behind this bumper-sticker sized theme.

There’s a lot to talk about in 2:8-15. I’d hoped to cover it in one Sunday but it will take two. This week [slide] we’ll consider: **Captivity or Christ** and **Soverignity & Circumcision**. And next week we’ll consider **Immersion & Identification** and **Disarmed and Displayed.** So we begin with…

[slide] **Captivity or Christ** [Your Choice]

Col. 2:8    See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than **according to Christ.**

So let’s do a little survey: [slide] How many of you, in your email have received a promise of a financial gift from a **Nigerian Prince** or some other well-to-do, high-ranking personage from an African country who’s been imprisoned unjustly, exiled or kidnapped- but can’t access his sizeable wealth. **He’ll reward you richly if you send him money now** [wimpy]. One version of this scam was from a Nigerian Astronaut stuck on a secret soviet space station needing 3 million to get home.

Remember the **Disney movie Pinocchio?** [slide] Remember Pinocchio headed off to school with a shiny apple for the teacher.

But he meets well-dressed Fox, Dishonest John, who with his slick tongue talks our “little wooden boy” into skipping school and becoming an actor. That’s [slide]  **Empty Deception- pretty words that are ultimately meaningless to trick and trap unsuspecting [gullible] victims.**

**Philosophy** is the love of wisdom, of deep, and intricate systems of thinking- not necessary evil but ultimately wrong because *Jesus is absent from the equation.* Paul, himself, loved wisdom but after the Damascus road **Jesus** was always **the center** of Paul’s wisdom. All wisdom and knowledge flowed from King Jesus, as in 2:**3** in [Jesus] are hidden allthe treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Unthinking, unwary minds can be taken captive by Philosophy and Empty deception- chained up in “the traditions of men” and the shackled to “the elementary principles of the world.”

[slide]  **“Traditions of men”** includes the writings of the Rabbi’s, perhaps even the law [absent of Christ].

**“Elementary Principles of the world”** is harder to nail down. Some see “Elementary Principles of the World” as purely to **human rules and rituals.**  **Others** see “EPoftheW” as referencing the **four cosmic elements** and the various **gods that controlled** them. **Wright** believes [EPoftheW] is about local deities, the small gods the Colossian pagans see as ordering and controlling life- the forces that set the pagan cultures traditions, customs, superstitions, and mores.

**The way I read it all those explanations fit together nicely:** There are spiritual forces in the world- rulers & authorities- that want to see us trapped away from God in Philosophy and empty deception. These spiritual forces- demonic rulers and authorities- are adept at influencing unwary cultures with outlooks, attitudes, traditions, customs and superstitions that are **anti-Christ.** For instance:

Our own [slide] culture has been taught to prize: rebellion against authority, Wealth gets a pass, Beauty gets a pass, Youth is prized over age, Getting ahead by cheating or lying is acceptable, Feeling shame, admitting you are wrong is a mark of weakness. The powers that be, our own cultural “rulers and authorities” have given us lots of philosophies to live by:

**“Kindness is my religion”** Seeing is believing, **Take What you can, give nothing back,**

Practice random acts of kindness and senseless beauty. **Nothing Matters.** Pay it forward, **Faster, Higher, stronger;** Your pain today will be your strength tomorrow, **Carpe Diem,** All you need is love, **Good enough isn’t good enough,** progress not perfection, **It’s better to light a candle…** We must become the change… **Liberty equality, fraternity,**

I will survive, **Do no harm,** be intentional, **Be best,** Simplify, **one thing at a time,** count your blessings, **Do all the good you can,** obstacles are stepping stones, **Take Two, They’re Small,** Fortune favors the bold. **Tomorrow is another day,**

It’s not that these traditions of men, these philosophies are all inherently evil- some of them are lovely- even inspiring. Where they fall short is that they’re missing **Christ Jesus the Lord**. [slide]

**Col. 2:6**   Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him,

Col. 2:8    See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than **according to Christ.**

[slide] **Kindness** is a good thing, but in the end it cannot save you. **Carpe Diem** is

an excellent motto but it’s only half-baked until you’re seizing the day for King Jesus. **It’s better to light a candle…** but that light needs to come from the Light of the World. **I will survive-** is a great song and a good motto but it’s only fully realized when you survive because you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Without Jesus all those philosophies are just the chains and shackles of captivity.

**The measure is Jesus Christ. The measure of any philosophy or elementary principle of the world is**: Does it match up with Jesus Christ and the Gospel. [slide] JESUS IS THE ONE TRUE MEASUREMENT against which every principle, tradition, and idea must be compared and, if it’s found wanting, discarded.

But these forces of deception are nothing for you to be afraid of. They have NO power over you **IF** you belong to Jesus because [slide] Jesus is: 10b … the head over all rule and authority… And He has: **14** …canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; And through King Jesus God **15** …disarmed the rulers and authorities, Hemade a public display of them, havingtriumphed over them through Him [Christ].

Paul is primarily talking here about spiritual forces in the world that would like to see us taken captive **but Jesus has bested them all.**

Still, *God has assigned us with the responsibility* to **“See to it”** that we are not taken captive by deceptive philosophies, to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,” to live “**according to Christ.”**

Now a thoughtful Colossian might ask: [slide] Why? Why the Lord Jesus Christ? Why him? What makes him superior? Why **“according to Christ”** rather than according to Phrygia or Cybelle or Attis [local goddesses]. *This brings us to…*

[slide] **Sovereignty and Circumcision**

9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

**Why “according to Jesus?”** There is a Truth that can be said about Jesus of Nazareth that cannot be said about ANY other ruler or authority- mortal or spirit, local deity or traditional god, elemental spirit or Roman Emperor. [slide] **All the fullness of deity, all the Godness of The Creator God, existed on earth in the physical human body of Jesus.**

Of all the great religious leaders of the world [Buddha, Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Lao Tzu, Muhammad], **only Jesus claimed to be God in human flesh**.  And His followers –ordinary people just like you and me- were convinced of this. Late in the first century **John wrote** about [slide] The Word who was simultaneously WITH God and WAS God. John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. And John goes on to identify this **Word** as the human man “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Some years earlier [@63] Peter wrote: **2Pet. 1:16** For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes…

And in Colossians alone Paul has told us: **Col. 1:15**    He is the image of the invisible God, **16** For by Him all things were created,  *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, **2:9** …in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

[slide] In **Mark 14** Jesus is being questioned by the high priest: 61 “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One?*” **62** And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” **63** Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? **64** “You have heard the blasphemy;

It was not blasphemy to say you were Messiah. But it was blasphemy to declare yourself the “Son of the Blessed One.” The Chief Priest knew that Jesus was claiming to be God’s Son, God’s equal. A few years later Paul writing to the **Ephesians** about God’s power wrote:

**Eph 2:19** …That power is like the working of his mighty strength, **20** which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [slide] **21** far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. **22** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The resurrection of Jesus–which has significant, reasonable evidence as an historical event time and space- was the incident that would ultimately settle the question of Jesus’ identity. In his intro to Romans Paul writes [slide] that **Jesus**  **Rom. 1:4** … was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.[NLT]

The question from our imaginary Colossian is **why “according to Jesus?”** Why is Jesus the only measure? And the short answer summing up all of the above is: **Because Jesus of Nazareth is Lord, Messiah, and the incarnated God of the universe.**

**AND MORE** [slide] …as such Jesus has complete supremacy and utter sovereignty. 1:**16** Forby Him all things were created,  *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. And, as in 10b … He is the head over all rule and authority;

There is no god or king that is His rival let alone his superior. [slide] **Phil. 2:9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And because of his identity and his power and authority and his willing sacrifice on your behalf- [slide] 10 …in Him you have been made complete…

If the one who is God incarnate, holding all power and authority, giving up his own perfect life for you, suffering death on a Roman Cross and also blazing a trail for your future by rising from the dead in a resurrected physical body made for the coming new age… [slide] then **WHAT ELSE COULD YOU POSSIBLY NEED?**

You certainly don’t need to “submit yourself to decrees such as do not handle, taste or touch according the commandments and teachings of men [2:20b-21]. [slide]

*Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow.*

His Sovereignty is utterly secure and so is your salvation [slide] because: 11 …in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; NLT nicely simplifies some of the challenging issues that surround this verse translating it like so: **Col. 2:11** 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.

Our Colossian Christians have concluded that their faith will be enhanced if they add various requirements of the Torah to their faith and practice. Male Circumcision was the physical mark of God’s covenant with Abraham- it was the *ultimate indicator* of belonging to God’s chosen people.

Undoubtedly Paul is using **circumcision** here because of our Colossians misguided desire to “flesh out” their faith in Christ by adding obedience to Torah onto their faith in Christ. Paul is saying to them: you sillyheads, *you don’t need anything else but Jesus.* You are complete in Him. [slide] **Jesus, himself -**in dying for you and rising from the dead**- has, in fact, spiritually circumcised you in a way that marks you as God’s people in a fashion far superior to anything the Hebrews knew.**

See for Paul It’s the heart not the body that needed circumcision. He tells the Romans… [slide] **Rom. 2:28** For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; … To the Galatians he says:

**Gal. 5:6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love [NIV].

Paul is trying to get them to realize that in putting their faith in Lord Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection [baptism] **their fleshly nature** [sinful nature] **has been cut away** [surgically removed?]**.**

It’s a [slide] spiritual circumcision because it is … a circumcision made without hands… And it is absolutely, unquestionably effective because it is the circumcision of Christ; whose sovereignty is unchallenged.

In summation: here’s the “Cliff’s Notes [slide] version: **JESUS** is God.

**JESUS-** who is God- has, in his death and resurrection, utterly saved you from sin and so death. **You need nothing else.**

**JESUS** –who is God and has saved you completely - is THE highest authority- none higher. Every other ruler and authority is subject to Him.

**JESUS** –who is God, the highest authority, having saved you completely- has accomplished in you a spiritual circumcision that marks you as God’s child*- better than the Jews ritual ever could in that our sinful nature has been cut away from us.*

[It’s best not to press “cut away” too far as we still deal with our “fleshly nature.”Yes it’s been cut off from the curse and condemnation that fed it, and over time it will die and ultimately fall off us completely come Christ’s return and the new age.]

All of that has been accomplished for you by our Lord Jesus Christ.

And He is the singular measurement to which all traditions and philosophies must be held up. **His rightful place is at the center of your life as Lord and King.**

**As such you are not without responsibility.** [slide] It is yours to “See to it that no one takes you captive…” with fancy, deceptive ideas that sound lovely but are empty and hollow. You must hold up all the traditions and philosophies of men to the measure of Jesus.

Jesus has done everything necessary to make your salvation complete.

But the responsibility to guard his place in your heart belongs to you.

[Prayer, internalizing scripture, engaging in gathered worship]

In truth, when we come to Jesus, our sinful nature is not “surgically removed.” If it were, I suspect sin would not be an issue for us. But it is. Instead our “sinful nature” is mortally wounded by the work of Christ and it is losing its power over us, and it will, at his return, when we are renewed, restored and resurrected fall away completely.

I hesitate to use this example but I’m quite certain all of you will be listening if I do. In Marysville we had a little farm with a large garden, chickens, ducks, dogs and a small herd of sheep. Our Ram bred our ewes so we had lambs most every spring. A number of those lambs were ram lambs. Too many rams in the herd is a bad thing so it is typical shepherding practice to castrate the ram lambs early on. A typical method is the fitting of a tight rubber ring to the neck of the scrotum cutting off blood supply to the testes. Over time they simply die and drop off. That was Rebekah’s job.

Jesus in his death and resurrection has mortally wounded our sinful nature. It has been cut off from the curse and condemnation that fed it. It will not recover and over time it will die and ultimately fall off of us completely [in the new age at Christ’s return.]