

Don't Let Them Take You Captive Again

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸ 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.

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.

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

I hope you find the Apostle's Creed to something very special. Where did it come from? Legend has it that each of the Apostles wrote one line of it. That sounds neat, but that is not the case. It popped around 100 AD. It is so well done that we still use it today and we use it in Catechism class as a guide to teach the young.

Now in that Creed it says that Jesus descended into hell. There are only two passages in the Bible that teach that. One of those passages is in our epistle reading for today. I admit it. When I was a young kid, I thought Jesus descended in hell to continue his suffering. But he already experienced hell on the cross when he cried out, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**"

So if he didn't descend into hell to suffer more for our sins, why did he go there? Let's read that passage from Colossians. ¹⁵ **And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.** This does not describe Jesus suffering in hell. It describes the devil and demons and all the unbelievers as suffering. They suffered defeat. And now they suffered humiliation as Jesus spiked the football on their home field. It was his victory parade.

What was his victory? **He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.** The law is the measure or test to see if we can be with a holy God in his holy heaven. And we fail that test. I can't imagine how many times I have broken the written code, God's law. If you pulled it up on the computer and hit print, I wonder how many reams of paper it will take. If you attached it to an email, it would be too big to send.

So God takes our debt of sin and nails it to cross along with Christ. As a result, God has "expunged" your record. You know what expunge means? It means to completely erase or annihilate out of existence. That is why Jesus descended into hell, to make a public spectacle of them. He rubbed their faces in it. And he gives us that victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved.

The war is over, but the fighting, however, still goes on. In the old days, all you had to do was win the big battle, march into the enemy's capitol and he surrendered. But we have seen another kind of nasty war. It doesn't involve pitched battles and capitols. Instead, the enemy fights a guerilla war, ambushing your forces, making sneak attacks and then hiding. The devil is defeated. Jesus won and with him we won. But the devil is still fighting a war of terrorism with us. Why? He is trying to take us captive again. Do you want that? That is why God through Paul tells us to resist. How? First, remember who you are.

I. *Remember who you are.*

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, Do you remember the old birch tree that was by the office entrance? It was cut down several years ago. Oh, it had leaves and all that, but when they trimmed a branch they noticed that the branch was hollow. The trunk and all the branches were hollow. So they cut it down. Then the Bodes planted another tree by my office window to replace it.

Look at the people of the world. They resemble that old birch tree. They have leaves. They look fine, but inside they are hollow. In fact they are dead. As it says in our text: ¹³ **When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh,...** That is the sad state of affairs of every man, woman and child. Let me illustrate it like this. Parents have to teach their kids how to say please and thank you and not to fight over that toy. These things do not come naturally to us. Parents never have to teach their children to lie or fight or whine or be selfish. That comes naturally to us. Oh we may have leaves like that old, dead birch tree. But before God we were spiritually dead.

So God does something about it. ¹³ **When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.** God made you alive. This reminds of the conversation Jesus had to Nicodemus. Unless you are born again of water and the Spirit, Jesus told him, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. You have a birthday. So do I. But God gives us a second birthday when he made us alive in Christ.

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. Paul takes the Old Testament surgery of circumcision and uses it to help us understand Baptism. Circumcision was minor surgery done by a priest or Levite. Baptism is radical, major surgery performed by God. In Baptism God takes away the veil that covers our sinful eyes and allows us to see what the cross truly means. Baptism connects us in a very special way with Jesus. We were buried with Jesus in his death, but as he rose from the grave, we also rose to a new life. We are alive spiritually.

That is how you received Jesus. But Paul encourages us to grow.

II. Grow in Jesus.

The Bodes did it right. Yes, they came and dug a hole and put the tree in the hole. It was planted. But they didn't just leave it alone. They watered it, a lot. Experts say that sapling trees need as much as ten or fifteen gallons of water at a shot several times a week during a hot summer. Even the next summer they made sure it had plenty of water. If you don't do that, trees may eventually dry up and die.

That is what Paul tells us to do here. ⁶ **So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.** I don't think anyone can argue that a faith that is two or five or ten times bigger and better is a bad thing. It isn't. Don't just receive Christ, Paul says, continue to live in him. Don't stick a tree in the ground. Water it.

The water, as you know, is God's Word. But be careful. There are other liquids out there, but they are no substitute for water. In fact they are dangerous. ⁸ **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.** Don't water a tree with gasoline. The gas will kill it and all the grass around it. Don't water yourself with hollow and deceptive philosophy. The believers in Colosse who first read this letter were plagued by false teachers. They claimed that Christ alone is not enough. So they would add in some of the Old Testament laws like diet or circumcision. They would add elements of pagan worship or eastern mysticism.

You know the formula well. Christ plus anything equals nothing. Christ plus nothing equals everything. Any attempt to add to Christ, to add to your salvation, will only make it null and void. Ok. So I don't water the tree with gas. I will mix gas and water. Still a bad idea. You are not saved by faith in Christ as well as some good feelings. You are saved by faith in Christ alone. This is one way the devil will attack us, by using false teaching. Remember, God canceled the code by nailing it to the cross with Christ. Don't take it off the cross. Leave it there. Don't make up a new code or set of rules you must follow. Be saved in Christ alone.

But such gasoline doesn't only come from false teachers. The sinful world of which we use to be a part has different views on sex, marriage, relationships, forgiveness and so on. This is another way the Devil conducts his guerrilla warfare, to influence us with his sinful world so we begin to desire, want, love the very same things Jesus died for. Paul encourages us, **Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ...** So put off, push away, the temptations and sins of this world. I like how Luther described our daily struggle with our sinful nature. He said we should drown that nature in our Baptism water. Put it to death. Don't be taken captive again by the world and all its temptations and sins. Die with Christ.

But Luther also said the sinful nature knows how to swim so we need to drown him again and again and again. In other words, our struggle is constant. There are times when we win, and times when we fail. But remember this. God has nailed that written code with Christ on the cross. Don't hold those sins in your hands. Take them there.

And that sapling tree? It is producing more leaves now than when it was first planted. Each year it adds another ring to its trunk and is growing. The key is water. The key is Christ and his Word. You are victorious with Christ. Don't let anyone or anything take you captive again. Rather, continue in him and grow. Amen.