

Beware

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Date: 19 July 2026

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[0:00] As you're making your way back to your seats, go ahead and grab your Bible and open to Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2.

Now, I'm sure you recall, because you listened so carefully to every word that comes out of my mouth. We've been talking about ways that we can be better learners and better listeners. And last week, I introduced you to three questions. How can I use this? Why should I use this? When will I use this? And so we're going to look for a second at that second question. Why should I use this? Why must I use what we're talking about this morning? That's a really important question. Now, I want to warn you, this morning we're getting into some theology that you may think, okay, that's nice, but what does it mean? How is it practical?

And we're getting into some metaphors that Paul uses that are difficult to explain and connect. Why does that matter? Why does this matter to me? I'll tell you why.

[1:12] We're heading into the heart of Colossians this week. This is the centerpiece of what Paul was trying to communicate when he wrote to the Church of Colossae. And so these things, they might be heady.

It might be tempting for you to think, well, you know, that's for Bible nerds. I don't need to know this theology stuff. If I needed to know that or wanted to know that, I would enroll in seminary.

No, doctrine matters. And the truths that we're going to talk about were at the center of the songs that Tim and Libby sang, Lettuce and Singing. Tom stole a lot of my thunder in a good way.

That's all right. You set the table. That's perfect. Because it's all God's Word. But this is very important. It's critically important as we face the trials and difficulties in just reality of life.

And as we confront our calling. And so as we go through the Word this morning, I want you to ask that question repeatedly. Why must I use this? Why does it matter?

[2:15] Now, before we head into the sermon, the last week I told you about what they do in my granddaughter Sunny's karate class. They kneel and they quiet themselves and they think about having a good session where they're going to learn.

They're going to be focused on learning. They're going to be focused on doing what they're told so they have the moves right, so they don't hurt each other. There's just a pause. I was thinking about that and I realized as you read through the book of Psalms, scattered in the margin of your Bible, at seemingly random spots, you'll see the word *selah*.

S-E-L-A-H. *Selah*, I think is how it's pronounced. We're not sure what that means, but the best guess is that what the Psalm writer is telling us is pause.

Stop. We tend to think, oh, I've got to read my 47 chapters for the day, because that's what we all read for our devotions every day, right? 47 chapters. I've got to finish my devotions.

I've got to zip past this to get to the next thing. No. Pause. Think. Why must I use this? We want to do that before we enter into God's word, before we contemplate what he has for us this morning.

[3:28] So we're going to pause for a few seconds, not terribly long, but I want you to think through. Why must I use this? What is God's message? Lord, what is your message to me today?

So let's do that together. Let's *selah*. Thank you.

Lord, you had the psalmist write, be still and know that I am God.

One of the translations says, cease striving. God's striving is such a part of our lives. It's almost our identity. We don't know what to do if we're not striving.

But you want us to be still and to quiet our hearts and to listen. I love where it says, I think in Psalm 131, that as a weaned child quiets himself or herself in their mother's embrace, I want to quiet my soul before you, Lord.

[5:00] Let us be like that, ready to receive your love, your guidance, your counsel, just a reminder of all that we have in Christ. And I pray, Lord, as we look at Colossians this morning, that once again, we would be reminded that what we have in Jesus is beyond words.

It is truly awesome in the fullest measure of that word. God, I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So you should be in Colossians 1, 2, excuse me, Colossians 2, it's probably the same page. Turn there if you're not there already. Let's do a little bit of a review. Last week, we focused on Colossians 2, 6, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so also walk in Him.

I shared that little slogan I saw at the coffee shop yesterday. This is so good, it has to be true. That's the basis for everything we believe, is this good news that Jesus recognized that we were sinners, died on the cross for our sins, while we were still sinners. sinners, while we were dead, while we were helpless, God intervened. And if you remember, we looked at the fact that that's true about our salvation. We were lost, we were dead, we were in a rebellion.

[6:18] God intervened, we heard the good news, we repented, turning from our way to follow God's ways, and entered into a new life. And as you receive Christ Jesus as the Lord, so also walk in Him.

That's actually the pattern for how we address the challenges we face in life every single day. And we're going to talk about those this morning. Remember those principles I bring up all the time. Life is hard. Our calling is hard. But the gospel's so good. And that's what I want you to get a hold of.

That's what I want you to come away from week after week is what we have in Christ is the best possible news ever. It's like Christmas every day. Let's remember that.

And that's the pattern. So as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so also walk in Him. You recognize the challenges of life. Oftentimes someone else comes alongside and shares a verse with you or shares a truth or encourages you.

[7:20] And that encouragement, you recognize, it's not up to me, this is God's work. And you turn to Him, you receive the help that He's offering, and you go out and you face whatever the challenge is that's in front of you.

Or you answer the call that God has for you to go and share the gospel with somebody to live out this new life that we have in Christ. But we recognize it's God's work. I got a great story.

Pete and I ended up having a conversation earlier this week. Did you get a sunburn, by the way? I apologize. So you guys, you're not going to think well of me after this.

So I'm under the overhang here in my car, running with the air conditioning on. Pete's going into practice. I said, hey Pete, how's it going? He comes over the window. The sun's beating down. And we stood, well he stood there. I sat in my air conditioned car and we talked for an hour. An hour. Thanks Pete. So, but the core of the, there was a lot of good stuff we talked about, but the core of it was this.

[8:26] I am very self-conscious, I think is the right word. When I share the gospel, it's such important news. And every time I share the gospel, whether it's in the context of standing here at the pulpit or face-to-face conversations with people, I'm really conscious.

I don't think I do this well. I don't think I'm clear. I think I muddled, I muddled up the good news. And so I'd ask Pete, because last week I was really focused on sharing the gospel as part of that Colossians 2.6.

I said, Pete, was that clear? And he said exactly what I needed to hear. And it's what you need to hear. He said, John, people get saved in the weirdest circumstances.

I think I've told you the story, I remember one year at camp, we were planning for a gospel presentation on Thursday night. And all the kids that were going to get saved got saved on Wednesday night during the Moonlight Swim. God's going to move when God's going to move.

Our job is to be faithful, but to trust that ultimately, He's at work. I needed to hear that. You need to hear that. Because God is at work in your heart.

[9:42] He's at work in your soul. He loves you. He has great plans for you. It says that in Jeremiah 29. It promises that all things work together for good. We need to trust God and shift the focus from ourselves to Him.

That's going to be our focus this morning as we go forward. So, Eliana, give me the next slide. I want you to look really closely at this slide. So, Beware is the sermon title today.

Beware. Beware. In the New American Standard and in the English Standard Version, verse 8 begins with, See to it that no one takes you captive.

I like the word beware better. That's what the King James uses because it's more harsh. And if you look, you've got three Navy SEALs or Delta Force or whatever, servicemen who are ready to go into battle.

And I tell you, they are frightening. They are loaded with well over 100 pounds of equipment. Guns and weapons and bullets and grenades and defensive armor.

[10:54] I talked to my brother once. He served with the Special Forces. I said, You know, I don't think it's very fair when our guys go into battle. And he says, No, no, it's not about being fair. It's about winning.

And they're armed and ready for combat. What we're going to talk about today is how you get ready for the combat that you're going to face in life. What you're going to have to deal with as you go out into the world, as you carry the face of Jesus to a world that needs to hear about Him, you need to look like one of these SEALs.

Armed and ready because we're going into battle. So let's read Colossians 2, 8 through 15, and then we'll get into the details. 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.

For in Him, in Jesus, all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form. And in Him, you have been made complete. And He is the head over all rule and authority.

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, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

[12:26] 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, 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.

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Now you remember, I told you that the purpose of Colossians was to address a heresy that was starting to bubble up across Asia, the Colossian heresy.

And He was getting them prepared to face it, to know what to say, to know how to protect themselves from this heresy. And there's one quick thing I want to point out that's at the core of what we're going to talk about today.

Six times the phrase is repeated either in Him or with Him. Jesus Himself is the answer to the Colossian heresy.

Jesus is the answer Himself to the challenges that we face to what we believe, what we know to be true in our hearts. Ultimately what it comes down to is the person of Jesus Christ.

[13:45] Not how many verses you've memorized, not how well you can stand up and you've memorized apologetics and facts about the Gospel and the Bible. No, it's Jesus Himself. In Christ we have these things.

We're going to come back to that over and over again. So as we think about being in warfare, that imagery is common throughout the New Testament.

We're going to come back to that in several different places. But there's some things that we need to know as we head into combat. First of all, we need to be aware of the enemy. We need to know the forces that are arrayed against us and Paul deals with that.

The second thing we need to know is what makes us vulnerable. Where are we weak? Or what do we need more work on so that we're better capable of facing whatever's going to come against us? My brother that I was just talking about as part of his military service did training here in the U.S. of soldiers that were about to be deployed to Iraq. Iraq.

[14:49] And he tells the story there was a guy that would come down and they were doing hand-to-hand combat practice and it became very apparent to my brother, this guy was National Guard, he was not ready to go to Iraq.

He was out of shape. He didn't have the techniques for anything of being a good soldier in place. So as an act of mercy and kindness, Josh broke his arm.

Josh is my brother. I was like, what? He saved that man's life. Or he saved the life of people that would have been in a foxhole with that man. He wasn't ready.

Josh saw his vulnerability and acted to make sure that he would be safe. We need to be aware of our vulnerabilities so we can be positioned in such a way that either together we can be protected or we know where we need to focus on all this array of things that we have in Christ.

What is the particular thing that speaks to where I'm vulnerable and where I'm in need? So we need to know our enemy. We need to know what makes us vulnerable. And last of all, we need to be armed and we need to be prepared for action.

[15 : 56] We need to know how to use the weapons that God has given us as we stand in this life, as we face the difficulty of life, as we step out and obey the calling that has been given to each one of us.

A good soldier knows how to use the weapons. Every piece of that armor and all the stuff that those soldiers carry, they know in detail how to use it.

And there's no thought. It's just muscle memory. They know what to do. That's what we need to get. We're going to talk about that today. We're actually going to talk about it over the next three weeks. So today is the heart and the heart is Jesus.

Jesus, next week, we're going to talk about what not to do. And Paul is addressing what the Gnostic heretics are starting to teach.

And we're going to look at that next week as a blueprint for us of what we don't need to worry about. So I'm going to tell you not to do stuff next week. How cool is that? I think that's a first in the year and a half that I've been here.

[16 : 55] Don't get used to it. And then the third thing, the third one we're going to talk about is what we do need to do and that's, we'll be rounding the corner and heading into Colossians chapter 3. What does God want us to do to be ready for the calling that we have in life?

So let's talk about the forces arrayed against us. Look in your Bibles, Colossians chapter 2 at verse 4. Paul is speaking, I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive arguments.

So there's people out there who are trying to distract us, trying to confuse us, trying to undermine what we believe. Be aware, they're out there. And then if you look at verse 8, we've already read this once, see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of man, according to the elementary principles of the world.

So what are these forces that are arrayed against us? that we've got to be prepared to defend ourselves against? First of all, it's us.

It's our own sin. It's our own shortcomings. It's our own failure to understand what we have in Christ. We've got to be aware. James talks about the Word of God as a mirror.

[18 : 13] We need to look into the mirror, not just be hearers, but doers also. We need to put it into practice. So the first thing that we've got to worry about is ourselves. We need to look is the voice in our head that says, oh, that can't be true, or you're not good enough, or Jesus wasn't sufficient, or whatever falsehood you're believing.

You've got to address that. We're our own worst enemies. We have got to be aware that in the culture, self-help experts, probably every book on the shelf at the bookstore on self-help has a chapter on limiting beliefs.

That's actually a biblical concept. We need to be aware of our limiting beliefs. What are we failing to understand and believe about what we have in Christ? What sin are we allowing to block us from continuing to grow?

So first of all, we're our own worst enemy. The second thing we deal with is other people, whether it's just their sin and the things that they do without even conscious effort or being aware of how they're affecting the people around them.

One of the things I've noticed in Dubuque is a lot of people will come from a left turn and cut real sharp around the corner. It's like, hello, I'm right here. And if you come up to that stop sign too quick, you're going to get clipped.

[19 : 35] But they're unaware. They just keep on going. Never even aware that they were there. That's a great picture of what's going on, of how other people's sin affects us and hopefully not, but how we affect other people.

That's the unconscious ones. I'll give them some grace. But there's also people who really feel like they have a calling to disrupt and undermine what we believe. They're kind of the antithesis of

Charlie Kirk in Turning Point USA.

Their goal is to say, oh no, you Christians, you're fools. I was just reading a review about a movie that came out, Steven Spielberg's latest movie. I just forgot the title.

It starts with a D. But anyway, it's about alien invasion because, you know, that's a concern. But he talks, the core question of the movie is how do religious people confront the fact that we're not alone in the universe?

Well, my response is, duh. We already knew that. I'm not too concerned about it. But the way it's set up in the movie is the people who are trying to deal with the aliens and are agnostic or atheist are the smart ones.

[20 : 46] And the religious ones are just kind of standing there, oh, oh, oh, I don't know what to do. They're undermining your belief. They're attacking the core of what we know to be true.

We need to be aware of that. We need to fortify ourselves. And then the devil. When it says the elementary principles of the world in verse 8, that's not talking about nameless, faceless principles. That's talking about actual conscious beings, the devil and his minions. They're opposed to anything that glorifies God. And they're opposed to you.

Make no mistake. They want to undermine what you believe. The devil is alive and active on planet Earth. And if we ignore or deny that at our peril. C.S. Lewis wrote in the introduction to the screw tape letters that we as Christians make two mistakes.

One or the other. The first one is to make light of the devil. He's just a goofball in a Halloween costume with horns and a tail and a pitchfork. And we laugh at him.

[21 : 52] No, no. He's real. And serious. The other mistake we make is on the other extreme is to get so worried about what the devil is doing that we completely forget the fact, which we're going to get to at the end of this section this morning, is he lost.

He lost. We know the end of the book. The devil is insane. He's already lost the battle but he continues to fight.

Or he's just a sore loser and he's going to he knows he lost but he's going to continue fighting. But either way we get too obsessed with the devil or we make fun of him. The right thing to do is to recognize we have an enemy and we've been equipped to stand against him.

So those are who we deal with. Paul wrote about it in Ephesians 6. Eliana, you can skip to that slide because I think there's a group from Colossians. Don't worry about those.

Just go right down to Ephesians 6. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We're going to hit that again. You can tell Ephesians and Colossians were written about at the same time.

[22 : 59] Put on the full armor of God looking like those soldiers so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

So you've heard me quote Jordan Peterson before. I'm going to quote him again. I heard an interview that he did with Bishop Robert Barron a few years ago. Barron is a really good guy. He's leading a renewal movement in the Catholic Church calling Catholics to get back to the Bible. But he was talking to Peterson about evil. And Peterson wasn't talking about evil as a thing. He kept referring to evil as a being, as a personality with conscious thought. And finally, Bishop Barron stopped him and said, Jordan, I don't know if you're aware of it, but you're not talking about evil as a thing.

You're talking about it as a person. This is a man who, especially at that time, probably was not a believer in Christ.

[24 : 14] But as he had studied the existence of evil in the world, what he came up against was that you cannot get away from the fact that it's not the, it's not evil, generic, just happens.

No, it's the evil. It is someone who is diabolical, who is committed to destroying the image of God in any way, shape, or form, and especially in us because we are made in the image of God.

The devil is real. We need to remember that. So what are the tools that they use? Often it's philosophy and empty deception. That's back to verse 8. So we're going to touch on this very briefly.

I don't have time to go over it in detail and the details don't matter. But there's three heresies that came to mind as I was studying this week. The first one, we've talked about, the Colossian heresy.

It was probably based in what's called Merkaba mysticism, which was a Jewish belief. It was an attempt to get back to, to allow someone to have the type of vision that Ezekiel had when he got his prophetic call. If you've read Ezekiel, it's a hard to understand passage. [25 : 22] Ezekiel has his vision. It sounds like something from a science fiction novel of the chariot of God and Ezekiel receives his call from God within the chariot.

And so the Merkaba mystics were trying to get to that point. They wanted to do that. And they thought the way to do that was they had to keep the law, of course, but then they had to do extra stuff.

We've talked about asceticism. They also believed that God was purely spirit, didn't like the physical world and was separated and so there had to be angels as a go-between between humanity and God.

And that as you went through this ascetic life, as you subjected yourself to these angels, the few and the proud, the truly elite spiritual greats would have these visions.

And for the rest of you, you just have to grab one of those gurus and ride their coattails. That was the Colossian heresy because we know that we have free access to God.

[26 : 25] Come boldly before the throne of grace. It says in Hebrews. In Romans 8, the comparison that Paul uses, our relationship with God is like a child with their daddy.

I don't know if you saw because we were focused on Tom, I hope, but during breaking of bread, I had Jonah and Sonny laying in my lap. Don't think I'm trivializing.

You can lay in God's lap. You can have that type of a contact with your heavenly father. So the Colossian heresy created separation.

So in contemporary times, there's another heresy. I like it because it's got a fancy name. It's called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. There's going to be a test later, so you need to remember that. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

It's all over the church. Huge problem. Basically what it believes is that God does exist, so there were deists, people who ascribe to this, and a lot of them go to church.

[27 : 31] If I'm making you squirm as I read through this, good. Because it's thoroughly, it's a corruption of the gospel. So we believe that God exists, but God just wants you to be good.

He wants you to be nice. Be fair. And just, you know, there's principles that are true in the Bible, in the Koran, in the Hebrew texts, in Hinduism.

Just find those common things and be a nice man or woman. That's it. God just wants you to be nice. The real God's goal, because He loves you, is that you be happy.

Yep, that's it. Just be happy. Nice and simple. And really, God doesn't mess with your life. You know, He doesn't want to inconvenience you. So God is distant, but unless you have a need, then you can call on God and He might show up.

But generally, God is removed. It's a corruption of the gospel. And the last piece is that good people go to heaven when they die.

[28 : 40] Great. So, why did we have the cross? Don't know. Because it's basically, you're good, I'm good. You're nice, I'm nice.

God's here to help us when we're sick or when we're tied on money. Otherwise, He leaves us alone. The third heresy is deconstruction.

And I know that you know people who have gone through this process. It's based in French philosophy that was originally applied to literature and then people started applying it to the Bible.

And it's basically what it boils down to is I am the final judge of meaning in anything that I read, including the Bible. I decide. It doesn't matter what the author intended.

How do I interpret it? Well, that's bad enough if we're talking just about literature, human literature. But when you apply that to the Bible, you become Thomas Jefferson.

[29 : 42] Thomas Jefferson famously cut apart his Bible and took out all the stuff he didn't like. We don't have that luxury because of stuff that we don't like. is probably what we need the most.

We had a friend who used to make these nasty tasting supplements when we lived in Colorado. I mean, her little thing for colds was just awful.

But it killed a cold. I mean, it was awesome. It was great. I don't know if it was in it. We've lost touch with her, sadly. But it tasted terrible. Well, parts of the Bible are like that. If you cut those parts out, you're in trouble.

And as I was looking at this this week, I realized that those three heresies actually represent what we're tempted by as we look at our lives, as we face the difficulty and challenge of life. On the one hand, the Colossian heresy, what that's really saying is God is so big, He's so scary, He's so distant, up on His mountain, hidden behind thunder and lightning and earthquakes and all this terrible stuff.

[30 : 56] Well, we don't want to go there because we're just sinful people. We're worms. We can't go to God. We need somebody to take us there. Or better yet, they can go on our behalf. But not Jesus.

No, just some other guru who will take us there. And we see God is so big that we can't possibly get there. We do that.

Then the other side, the, I can never remember the order, the moralistic therapeutic deism makes God very small. God does what I want.

God is, He's like a pet. You know, I pull Him out when I'm uncomfortable and I'll pet Him and He'll purr and He'll snuggle and He makes me feel warm and fuzzy. What kind of a God is that?

God, you know, but He's manageable. We can manage that and then I can do whatever I want. You know where those two paths lead?

[31 : 56] At the same time, they lead to despair. Deconstruction, tearing apart the Bible because we don't understand the circumstances of our lives, is an action of despair.

I give up, but not in a good way. I'm just going to throw it away because I'm hopeless. Now we're getting to the good part and you're going to have to fasten your seatbelts because we don't have a lot of time.

But this is good stuff. So what makes us vulnerable? I talked about we need to know the enemy. We've covered that. Now we need to know what makes us vulnerable. I'm just, you're going to relate to all this. I'm just going to read the list.

And you're going to think inside, oh yeah, yep, yep, oh, yep, been there, uh-huh, yep, yep. Personal hardship makes us vulnerable. Is God really there? Uncertainty.

That's kind of the story of our lives, isn't it? We don't know what tomorrow holds. We have hopes. We plan, but we don't know for sure. So uncertainty can rock our world.

[33 : 01] It makes us vulnerable to these deceptive philosophies. Bad things happen to good people, so it may not be us, but we look at somebody else and think that person has had such a great life.

I read just recently in a book about suffering about a couple that went to China's missionaries and they were martyred. When the Cultural Revolution happened, they were marched through the streets naked and martyred.

They were killed. We all know the story of Jim Elliott and his friends that were martyred in Ecuador back in the 50s. We think, God, where are you? These are your people. If this is what you do to your friends, you have friends like that, who needs enemies?

We're vulnerable. Persecution. We don't have much of that here. It happens. Nothing compared to other parts of the world. But persecution can cause us to be uncertain, suffering, whether it's ourselves or other people.

I'll never forget, I was in the Dominican Republic. I don't know, somewhere in the late 2000s, and this pastor that we were serving with, this is really cool, by the way, this is a picture of the gospel.

[34 : 19] The pastor, their church had two services, one in Spanish and one in Creole for Haitians. Racism is alive and well in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans do not like Haitians.

They see them as invaders, and yet, Damaris had opened the church building to her Haitian brothers and sisters, and she was housing a family, and they had twins.

I held one of those twins in my hand, in the palm of my hand. I've never held a baby that was viable, that was that small. And you think, these people are suffering, they're starving, they can barely eat. How is that possible? And then there's injustice. I heard a report about the fact that for the first time in human history, did you know there's enough food to feed every human being on earth and make sure that we all are healthy and strong?

We have the means. We have the food. We don't have the will. That's injustice. That's evil. And these things make us wonder, where is God?

[35 : 33] They make us vulnerable. people. So what's the answer? The answer is Jesus. And this isn't Sunday school, sort of, but that's not a Sunday school answer.

That's the truth. The answer is Jesus Christ himself. Let's look at what Paul reminds us about Jesus. And I want you to think back to the sermon a few weeks ago, when we were in Colossians chapter 1.

Listen to it again, about the beauty of the gospel, the beauty of Jesus. This is our reality, brothers and sisters, and we need to grab a hold of it and let it permeate every pore of our being. Our soul has to be immersed, kind of like baptism, which we'll get to in a second. So, the Colossian heresy, the moralistic therapeutic deism, deconstruction, all gives a false picture of God. It gives a false picture of who Jesus is. Paul says, nope, you need to look here at Jesus. So, in verse 9, he says, for in Jesus all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.

[36:43] He said that in chapter 1, he repeats it here. And in Christ, you have been made complete. There's nothing left that you have to do. If you're in Christ, you're complete.

You're done. Now, is there work for you to do? Oh, yeah. We're going to get to that. But it's because of what you have in Christ. It's not in order to satisfy a judgmental angry God.

That's big. So, you've been made complete in Christ. He is the head over all rule and authority. Remember the devil? The loser? Jesus is an authority over him.

And in him, you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands and the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Now, without going into gory details, circumcision was a symbol that was instituted with Abraham that was a removal of a piece of flesh from every man that was under the covenant.

And it was a symbol that a man who was circumcised and his family was in the covenant. They were in a covenant relationship with God. They were under the umbrella of the promise of blessing that was extravagant that was made to Abraham.

[38:02] And that continued on to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. It funneled down, focused on the twelve tribes of Israel. And that circumcision process became, that was the core.

A male child was circumcised on the eighth day to recognize that he was part of God's covenant people. Now we, in Christ, have received a circumcision as well.

That applies to all of us, man or woman. Anybody who's in Christ, it's the same idea, it's the removal of flesh. It's the flesh being brought under control.

It's the flesh, the power of the flesh in our lives being broken. If you're taking notes, write down Romans 7, 14-21. We're not going to turn there because of time constraints.

But Paul is talking about the fact, oh my goodness, I do what I don't want to do. I don't do what I do want to do. Who's going to deliver me from the body of this death? I'm a Christian man and I have this battle with my flesh.

[39:09] The power of sin is broken. He said a few chapters before that. And yet, I still fail. Who will deliver me? In verse 1 of Romans 8, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The power of the flesh has been broken. That's the promise. The spiritual circumcision that Jesus did for us on the cross breaks the power of the flesh.

And then he goes on, he talks about baptism. When you were, I didn't go far enough. Verse 12, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God, not the working of you, in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. So, we cancel the baptism today, but the imagery is the person who's put under the water as a symbol of dying with Christ. And when you come out of that water, it's a picture of coming to new life in Christ.

Christ, every person who has put their trust in Christ has experienced that already. Baptism is just a visible symbol of what is already true of a person who has accepted Jesus as their Savior.

[40:26] You died. Paul wrote in Galatians 2.20, therefore, having been crucified with Christ, I'm going to have to look it up. Sometimes you shouldn't do things from memory from the pulpit.

Galatians 2.20, I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ, but Christ lives in me, the life which I now live in the flesh.

I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me. That's what we have in Christ. Baptism is a picture of that. So in circumcision, that symbol, the circumcision without hands, brought us into a new covenant relationship with God.

We're his children, we're adopted as children. And the power of the flesh is broken. Baptism is a picture of what Paul is doing, he's reminding, reminding, reminding, when you see somebody

baptized, remember you have been baptized, you died with Christ, you've been raised to new life, and it's a glorious new life.

Not someday in the future, but even now. It's all about being in Jesus. And then the last piece he talks about in relation to us is having canceled out the certificate of debt, 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.

If you remember from the gospel stories, when a person was crucified, what was put above their head was the decree of why they were being crucified. Jesus was Jesus, King of the Jews.

[42:00] But if you looked at the fine print, and you looked closely enough, you would find your sin on that placard. Not on your cross, on Jesus' cross.

That sin was paid for by Jesus' death on the cross. It's no longer a problem because you have received the forgiveness of sins. 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. It's all Jesus, brothers and sisters. That's the core. When you face the vulnerabilities I mentioned, when you're tempted to think that God is too big to bother with your problems, or you're tempted to treat him like a pet, turn, focus your attention on what Jesus did for you.

And the last piece, verse 15, when Jesus had disarmed the rulers and authorities on the cross, he made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him.

In the Roman Empire, when somebody, when a general conquered, they brought the conquered enemy in this giant procession, a parade, to show off to the world, see these guys, once proud warriors, I kicked their butts.

[43:31] See all this gold? Used to be theirs. I took it. See all these animals? Used to be theirs. We took it. We win. They're losers. Jesus did that.

He proclaimed victory over the devil and his minions, and we share in that victory in Christ. Christ. It's all about Jesus and what he did.

So let's bring it home. This is easy to think. Okay, John, you said it's Jesus is the answer.

But how do I apply that? I don't understand. How does that matter? We're going to look at two verses very quickly.

The first one is Romans 12.2. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

[44:35] As we turn from the world and its answers to our vulnerabilities and turn to Christ, our mind is renewed. And as we receive our our mind, we allow it to be changed.

It permeates and works itself out through our lives. And then in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul wrote, For though we walk in the flesh, so we're still alive, we do not wage battle according to the flesh.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses, or those fortresses. We are destroying arguments and all arrogance raised against the knowledge of God, and we are taking everything thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

So how do you apply Jesus to your vulnerabilities? Think. What do I know is true?

Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I don't have to follow that path anymore. And because I've been freed of that, I can forgive the person who is cruel or mindless, and their sin affects me.

[45:45] And when the schemes of the devil come along, he's a loser. He's already lost. I'm not too afraid of him. But it's a battle of the mind.

And that comes through it, it affects our spirit, it affects our outlook on the world, it affects our actions. But that's the centerpiece. It's the work of Jesus that saved you.

It's the work of Jesus that continues. So you can thrive. So you can live the life that God intended for you to live. Let's pray together.

Father, this is another one of those messages that I just pray that your spirit will intervene.

Because words just aren't enough. And God, thank you that you do the work. Just think back to what Pete told me this week. It's your work. And so, Lord, I pray for each and every one of us that we would see this truth, see these truths especially about all that we have in Christ.

[46:57] And that we would take hold of those things and see, ask you how to live those out. I pray in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.