

Colossians 2:11-15 – In Christ, with Christ

From verses 2:6-7, the Colossians were exhorted to walk in Christ and to be rooted and built up in Christ. In 2:10, Paul said that the Colossians were filled / complete in Christ. The phrase “in Christ” is a key concept in Paul’s letters. One of the well known verses is Romans 8:1. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” ESV. Verses 2:11-15 contain “in Christ” and “with Christ” phrases. Paul had talked about the preeminence and uniqueness of Christ. He talked about his ministry to the Gentiles. Tonight’s verses focus on the Colossians’ relationship to, with and in Christ.

Read Colossians 2:11-12.

Verse 11 starts with “In him” ESV or “In whom” KJV. The reference goes back to the end of verse 8, “Christ” who is the head of all rule and authority (vs 10). The Colossians were circumcised in Christ with a circumcision made without hands. Why do you think Paul brought up circumcision here? It is interesting to note that circumcision is mentioned more in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. Galatians contains the most references per chapter (2 per chapter). Circumcision was a focal point in Galatians. It was not a focal point in Colossians, but in the early churches where there was a mix of Jews and Gentiles, the odds were that circumcision was an issue to one degree or another. It may not have been presented as a condition for salvation, but it may have been pushed as something that was spiritually beneficial. See Deuteronomy 30:6. (2:11)

Based on verse 11, why didn’t the Colossians need to be circumcised with the circumcision of Abraham / Moses? What kind of circumcision had they received? How was their circumcision superior to the circumcision of Abraham / Moses? (2:11)

With fear and trepidation I feel we need to talk about phrases like “circumcision of Christ” or “love of Christ”. These phrases can be taken two ways. 1) The circumcision which Christ received. 2) The circumcision which Christ performs (spiritually – without hands). 1) Our love for Christ. 2) Christ’s love for us. The first type has Christ as the object. The second type has Christ as the subject. If you want to know the technical term, these phrases include nouns in the genitive case. When Paul wrote “by the circumcision of Christ”, do you think he was talking about Christ being circumcised or about the Colossians being circumcised by Christ (spiritually – without hands)? What is the meaning of this verse? Why was this statement important for the Colossians to embrace? (2:11)

Verse 12 transitions to the “with Christ” phrases. Paul said that the Colossians were buried with Christ in baptism? What does it mean that they were buried with Christ? See Romans 6:1-14. Is this baptism a “baptism without hands” or is this referring to the sacrament of baptism? Explain your answer. Some say it refers to both. That seems very “political”. (2:12)

In baptism, the Colossians were also raised with Christ. What does it mean to be “raised with Christ”? Some translations rightly put “him” in italics after “risen with”. “Him”, being Christ, is implied by the context. (2:12)

The Colossians’ were raised with Christ “through faith in the powerful working of God” ESV. The KJV is a more neutral translation – “through the faith of the operation of God”. Does this phrase refer to our faith in God’s work or does it refer to faith which is the work of God? NKJV has “faith in the working of God” while KJV21 has “faith wrought by the operation of God”. The vast majority of translations have “faith in the work of God” or something similar. Which translation best fits the context? I will point out that it seems unusual to talk about faith in an act of God instead of faith in God or faith in Christ (act vs person). Ephesians 2:8 is different but deals with similar concepts. (2:12)

Read Colossians 2:13-15.

In verse 13, how did Paul describe their condition before they were in Christ? What is the significance of being described in this way versus being “wounded” or “ill”? Verse 12 talked about how the Colossians were buried with Christ and raised with Christ. What else did the Colossians experience “with Christ”? See Ephesians 2:5 for the only other NT use of the word which is translated “made alive together with”. What happened to the Colossians’ sins when they were made alive? (2:13)

In verses 14 and 15, how did God deal with our sins? What does “record of debt” refer to? Some understand the “record of debt” as an IOU. What is the significance of nailing the record of debt to the cross? (2:14-15)

Verse 2:10 stated that Christ is the head of all rule and authority. Most understand verse 15 in a Roman military context. In verse 15, ESV has “he disarmed the rulers and authorities”. A few translations have something like “he stripped the rulers and authorities”. What is the picture that this verse portrays? What was the significance of this fact to the Colossians? (2:15)

What does it mean to be “in Christ”? When is a person “in Christ”?