



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 2:11-15

"Union with Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] It's nice to have Merrill Weaver on the platform. He's a little bit different from Howard Prier. He sings the part up here, and his voice with my voice makes a lovely duet which, unfortunately, you are unable to hear out there except when we sing different verses as we were doing just a moment ago. [Laughter] But I appreciate Merrill, your singing. Not that I don't appreciate Howard's, but he doesn't sing the part, and so we don't sound quite as nice as we do when I sing with you. Next time I'm going to keep quiet, and we'll even sing even better. [Laughter]

For our Scripture reading this morning we are turning to Colossians chapter 2, verse 11 through verse 15. If I may, I would like to say something before we read the Scripture about the right of circumcision. Many of us, of course, are acquainted with the right of circumcision. And, of course, so far as the physical right is concerned most of us are acquainted with that. But in this passage the apostle uses that particular right for its spiritual and New Testament significance. Perhaps, we may have forgotten the fact that when God made his covenant with Abraham, the sign of belonging to the Abrahamic Covenant was determined by God to be the right of circumcision. So all who belong to the Abrahamic Covenant, the males, were circumcised on the eighth day, and on the basis of this Israel came to be known as the circumcision. That is, that was the thing that

marked them out from Gentiles. And so when a young son was born and he was circumcised, that was an invitation outwardly and positionally of belonging to the covenant people of God.

Now circumcision as a national right was accomplished at Gilgal, and when the children of Israel went into the land, you may remember that in Joshua chapter 5 the whole nation was circumcised. They became the covenantal people by the use of that sign objectively, positionally. And if you read the Old Testament much you'll notice that they will occasionally come back to Gilgal. It was a landmark experience for them. What it signified was not spelled out and detailed in the Old Testament, although one may have gained some indication of what it meant. What it meant was the cutting away of the flesh, the putting off of the flesh of the natural man. It signified a change of position. It signified according to New Testament language, something like Paul's meaning when he speaks about the fact that our old man has been crucified with him. It signified a dedication to the Lord God. It signified a new relationship to him.

So when we think about Colossians 2, verse 11, particularly, we should think about that in the background, because that is what Paul is talking about. Now Paul recognized, of course, that that a person might be physically circumcised but not have a proper spiritual relationship to the Lord. And so in the Old Testament in the books of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel you will find expressed references to circumcision of the heart and not simply of the body. So it signified a relationship to the Lord and a cutting away of the old life, a belonging to the Lord as a result of what we now know the Redeemer would accomplish when he came.

So with that as a background, let's now turn to Colossians 2:11 through 15 as our Scripture reading. Now I must say, it was not Mrs. Rays' fault that our Scripture listing in our bulletin is 2:11 and 12 that was my fault. We are going to read verses 11 through 15 as our Scripture reading and that is our text for today. Paul has just said that "in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" and that we have been filled full in him.

Now he says, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." For those of you who have the Authorized Version, the words "the sins of" are not genuine, so we are reading it as the original text had it and has it,

"In putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

Notice simply this that in verse 12 and the mention of baptism, there is no indication in our text of water.

Now, of course, we know that every believer, every believing Christian in Paul's day that when the term baptism was used, would have thought in his mind of his water baptism by which he signified his movement from the old life into the new. But that signified a spiritual reality, and it is the spiritual reality that Paul is speaking about here when he says, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you," notice those words.

"Being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

Now we may render that last expression in the original text permits either one of these renders as either "in it" in which case the reference is to the cross or "in him" in

which case the reference is to Christ himself. We're taking it as "in it," that is, in the cross. May the Lord bless this reading of his words, and may we bow now for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God, and we're thankful to Thee for the way in which the Holy Spirit has taken of the things of Christ and has shown them to us. For our minds were, as Paul said, "dead in trespasses and sins." And we thank Thee for the enlightenment that the Holy Spirit has brought bringing us by regeneration to faith in Christ. How wonderful it is to have come to know him who to know is life eternal and to know the things that really matter in our society. We thank Thee, Lord, for the encouragement of the word of God, for the admonition of the word of God, for the warnings addressed to us for we are weak, still weak, still needy people who need the ministry of the Holy Spirit constantly. We give Thee thanks for the forgiveness of sins.

We thank Thee too, Lord, for the privilege of representing the Lord Jesus Christ in our day. A day in which surely the name of Christ is needed in the full significance of all that his is and has done. We live Lord in such a society in which the values are so far different from the word of God that there hardly seems any relationship at times to the things that really count. We pray that in our society we may as the Lord Jesus has desired of us be in measure salt.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and we pray Thy blessing upon every gathering of believers in Christ where the word of God is lifted up, where Christ is exalted in this city, in this state, in this country, and in the countries over the face of this globe. We pray that the Holy Spirit today may built up the saints through the word of God and enlarge the body of Christ in accordance with Thy will.

We pray for our country, for our President. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon all of the outreach of Believers Chapel, its elders, its deacons, its members, its friends, the visitors here today. And the problems and trials of our lives, we lay them before Thee.

We thank Thee that we have a God in heaven who shepherds our spirits and souls. We pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon the radio ministry, the publications, upon the Bible classes, upon the written ministry that is carried on constantly, and especially Lord, do we pray Thy blessing upon the Daily Vacation Bible School.

We thank Thee for those who have self-sacrificially given themselves to preparation. Bless the teachers as they teach the children. May they learn things that will be part of their lives as long as they are upon this earth. May the Holy Spirit move young lives to true conversion, and also, Lord, true dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ and the things of God. We pray for the teachers, bless their preparation. Enable them to communicate in a way that will honor Thy name. We give Thee thanks, and praise, and we pray that this may be a marvelous week for those who attend the school.

We pray, especially too, for those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. For those who have problems, and trials, and difficulties as we all do, Lord minister to them, strengthen them, and encourage them, comfort and console them. Give wisdom to those who minister to them. Give healing in accordance with Thy will. We pray especially for some whose problems and trials we're acquainted with. We ask that Thy wilt glorify Thy name and exalt the Lord Jesus in their lives.

Father, as our meeting continues, bless the singing of the hymn and the ministry of the word. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today in the exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians is "Union with Christ." The importance of the doctrine of union with Christ for Christianity is acknowledged by all sound theologians and sound preachers. Upon it we know hangs our salvation. As our head, the Lord Jesus has stood for us before the divine holiness and justice, and we have as the apostle puts it in other places, "acceptance in him." If you turn back just a few pages in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 1, verse 6 and verse 7, you can see the use to which Paul puts the doctrine of union with Christ. He

speaks about having been elected, having been predestinated, and then in the 6th verse of Ephesians 1, he says, "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

And so our relationship to the Lord Jesus is really the key and the clue to understanding the things that happen to us in our salvation. Adolph Deissmann on one of the great students of New Testament Greek a generation or so ago said that in a book called, *In Christ*, that that term "in Christ" occurred about one hundred sixty-four times in the New Testament. Primarily, of course, in Paul's writings, and furthermore, if we added expressions like "in him," "in whom," we had two hundred more. So in other words, almost four hundred times we have references to the relationship that we have in Christ. It's striking that the apostle never used the expression, "in Jesus," and perhaps, the reason for that is that he wanted to lay stress by saying, "in Christ," upon the risen Lord.

So the relationship that we have to the Lord Jesus by union is of great importance. Men frequently ask themselves the question, among Bible students, at least; what is the central idea of Pauline thought? And many different answers or at least several significant answers have been given to that. Some have suggested that it is the doctrine of justification by faith. That's quite common. Others think that the term salvation itself is more reflective and a broader treatment of what Paul writes about. I personally think that the central idea of Paul's thought is probably salvation. But many do think that justification by faith is the great contribution of the Apostle Paul.

I'd like to suggest otherwise. I do not in any way deny the importance of justification by faith. Paul writes about that and writes about it quite a bit, but if you look at Paul's writings and you go through them and you look for the verb, to justify, you'll find that strikingly it only occurs in what scholars who like to use German words instead of words that we English speaking people more easily understand say that this expression,

"to justify," is found only in *Hauptbriefe*, that is the chief epistles of Paul: Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and then one other place in 1 Timothy.

So here is a word actually does not occur all that often in Paul's writings. Of course, there are nouns that we must think about like righteousness and so on. We're not trying to deny that justification by faith is not important for Paul, it was important for Paul. In fact, in the Epistle to the Romans it has to do with the theme of that epistle. But strictly speaking, if we were looking for something that is characteristic of Paul in a broader sense, we would think of union with Christ, because for every time, as my old teacher at the University of Edinburgh has often said, Professor Stewart use to say, "For every time that justification by faith is mentioned, union with Christ is mentioned ten times." I've never carried that out by actually testing it to see if Professor Stewart was right, but I'm sure so far as numbers of times of usage is concerned, union with Christ is found much more often than justification by faith. Both are important and significant doctrines, but union with Christ has, I think, probably an even greater significance.

Thomas Goodwin, the old Puritan, use to like to say, "There are but two men standing before God, Adam and Christ. And these two men have all other men hanging at their girdles."

Now we don't use that expression anymore. I almost feel like I ought to go out and buy a girdle, so I can say I wear a girdle, so I can use that expression that Mr. Goodwin has been speaking about. But some of the sexes do wear girdles, so we understand what a girdle means. But that is true, Mr. Goodwin was right. All men hang on Adam's girdle, and when Adam fell, all men fell in Adam. And then there are those who hang on Christ's girdle, the people of God. And what Jesus Christ did, he did for the people of God.

Now it is true that Mr. Goodwin is right. There are two men standing before God, Adam and Christ, and they have all men hanging at their girdles. Augustine said the same thing. And many other students of the Apostle Paul had pointed out that as well. So all

of us have fallen in Adam, and those who have believed in Christ and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ have the experiences that he had. So union with Christ then, as you can see, is a tremendously significant doctrine. The apostle has been warning the Colossians against Gnostic Judaism.

Now we've tried to say, I know that occasionally some scholars listen to the tapes and they sometimes write me letters and tell me that I've missed a little point here or there, or they think I've missed a little point here or there. So I want to be rather careful. I'm not sure that we can absolutely say that this was Gnostic Judaism, but there are certain aspects of the heresy there that reflect late Gnosticism and certainly, as we shall see even probably in our next study next week, certain aspects of Judaism that were part of this heresy; the Judaism of that day, not the Judaism of the Scriptures.

So we'll say Gnostic Judaism and Paul has been warning the Colossians against this particular heresy. He has pointed them to Christ as the one in whom they have been filled full. As we pointed out in verse 9 and 10 of this chapter, the apostle said that "for in him," that is in Christ, "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form or bodily wise." All of the fullness of the Godhead in bodily expression. And then he says, "And ye have been filled full in him." And I just made reference to the fact that the term, fullness, is the Greek term, pleroma, and that filled full is a verb built upon that.

So we have in him is the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and we have been filled full in him. And I use the expression because I think my old theology teacher used it, pleromatized. That is, he made up that verb, and I've used it. We've been pleromatized in him.

Now I had to go into that word of explanation because this morning there was a young lawyer who grew up in this church, and incidentally, went to the University of Texas and took Greek, but he is now a lawyer practicing in another city. He was here this morning with his family, and he walked down the aisle after the meeting this morning and said, "I enjoyed the message very much, but what is pleromatized?" And when I told

him he was very embarrassed because he had taken Greek, he said, "I've got to go back and study my forms a little more and my words a little more, I guess." But when we use the word pleromatized, we just made it up. We have been filled full in him.

So Paul has been trying to say to the Colossians, why do you run after this false teaching when you have everything necessary in the Lord Jesus Christ? Pleromatized, isn't that marvelous? We have been filled full in him. May be I can illustrate it in this simple way. Let's suppose that you went over to America's most historic city in order to visit. And in Charleston, you decided you would walk up and down the streets of the city. When I was a young boy growing up in Charleston, of course, I naturally became acquainted with the half-houses there. For those of you who may not be acquainted with a half-house, a half-house was a house in which actually the houses were turned around and they were built in such a way that they would catch the breeze that came off of the Atlantic Ocean.

And so the houses, the doors were on the side of the house rather than on the front of the house. And of course, land was very difficult to get hold of in Charleston, so the houses were built right on the sidewalk. You can go over there today and see it all. So in order to have an entrance on the street, after you came out of the door, which usually faced the garden, down the piazza they would construct the door so that you would go out of the door of the house, but it really was the door onto the porch. And then the central door would be the real door into the house. Well, as you can see that would mean that one of the rooms of the house or perhaps two depending upon whether it was a single house or double house, one of the rooms would be right on the sidewalk.

So as young people, we would walk down the street and we could look in the living room or the dining room of the homes. Everything was nice in those days, everyone wasn't a Christian mind you, but things were a little different. We didn't even lock our doors, and so we did care. We were well known to almost every body in that

part of Charleston, the older part of the city, so we walked down and we'd look in. We frequently walked up the street, and we'd stop and look in.

Let's just imagine you were someone very needy and you were walking up one of those streets. You haven't had any food. Your clothing was in very bad condition. You were desperately hungry, and as you walked down the street you happened to look in and there you saw a lovely dining room with a table beautifully set, a butler serving the people at the table, and you stood and you put your face over against the window and just looked in and hoped and thought, perhaps, someday I can have enough to enjoy life like that. And the master of the house should happen to look over and see your face against the window, and he would recognize that here is a needy person, and he signaled to the butler to go out and have a word with you. You started to walk away fast because you thought maybe they were going to retain you for some reason, but the butler called after you and said, "Sir, the master would like to have you come in and sit at the table." Well, it was overwhelming, for your great need is now met by the fullness of the table.

Well you see that is only a simple illustration of what it means to be pleromatized in Christ. All of our need has been met in the fullness of the table of the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a marvelous thing it is to know that "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and we have been filled full in him." Amazing, isn't it? That's what Paul is saying. So why should you run off after the things of the Gnostic Judaizers? Why should you want to worship a god, a unitarian god who has no real redemption to offer to men? Why should you want to put Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, very God of very God, among the eons, among the angelic beings who are less than God when all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwells in him? Why should you want to worship a god who doesn't have any redemptive power whatsoever rather than the God who has made it possible for men to enjoy the forgiveness of sins, freedom from the law, and the triumph of Christ over all the forces of evil?

You know, we live in a day in which materialism has become one of the predominant sins of America. We have literally seen one of the greatest tragedies in sports this past week that you could ever possibly imagine. A young man, evidentially, a fine young man, a young man who had a magnificent future speaking materialistically, life snuffed out because, evidentially, though we're not certain yet of drugs. Can you imagine it? He said he was living a dream within a dream. He had grown up with the Celtics, knew them, now chosen by them second in the draft, obviously to be paid a million dollars a year, had already signed one contract for a million dollars for some kind of sports shoe. I've forgotten the name of it now. It is not Adidas. That's all I remember. Had a million dollar life insurance policy already paid for, and then one night of celebration. Our society is really a society under the judgment of God. It's too bad. I feel so sorry for the family, and particularly, if it is true as we have heard that he was a young Christian. I'm glad he was a Christian boy, but such sadness.

So how can we possibly not fail to see the importance of putting first things first? Martha and I were reading in our regular Bible reading the Book of Luke, and a few days ago this week we were reading Luke chapter 12 where we have our Lord's story of the rich man. And in the course of the account with which I'm sure you're familiar, the Lord said, "But God said unto him thou fool this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then who shall those things be which Thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." That expression has been ringing through my mind for about a week. I guess it was maybe last week. "Rich toward God," that's what our society needs to be rich toward God. And when it comes to the believing family of God, how much more ought this to be true of us? "Rich toward God." Now we are, but our life is so often unreflective of our position.

Now as I say the theme of incorporation is important. The apostle has laid stress upon it. Now he is going to spell out the details, and I want to talk about three things: united with Christ in his death, united with Christ in his burial, united with Christ in his

resurrection. They're very simple. It's all set forth in these words that we have here. And I hope that as we look at them, we will see what it really means to have Christ as our Savior.

Now in verse 11, the apostle speaks of united with Christ in his death. "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Now, of course, he's not talking about the fact about Jesus as an infant before being circumcised. Circumcision here, the cutting off of the body of the flesh, is a reference to our Lord's death, and so he is speaking about his death. And he's thinking about the figure of the Old Testament and how the right of circumcision marked Israel's objective distinction from the nations. They were the covenant people of God; set apart for God. The reality is present now in the church of Christ. We have experienced union with Christ in this death. In his death, the figure of circumcision, we have died, and therefore, legal judgment has been passed upon the old life in the flesh. The New Testament meaning then is simply that we have died with Christ and while the flesh is still with us, it has been spoiled and stripped of its power, and we no longer are in bondage to sin. We have been delivered from the dominion of sin.

Now Paul is very careful not to say that we have been delivered from sin, but we have been delivered from the dominion of sin; that is, we still have the sin principle dwelling within our bodies. We still fall into sin, but so far as the serving of sin is concerned, the power of sin has been broken in the lives of believers. And so we have been with Christ, circumcised. We have been in his death, we have died. And as a result we are set free from the dominion of sin. The flesh then still with us has been spoiled and stripped of its legal power over us, and we have deliverance in him. Involved, of course, is justification by faith. Paul makes that point in this connection in Romans chapter 4. Involved, also, is liberty from the Law of Moses. For if we have died with Christ, we do not live in the sphere of the Mosaic law any longer.

Now you remember when Paul talked about the gospel, he spoke about the gospel as being that Christ has died, that he has been buried, and that he has been raised again. The same flow of thought follows here. So he says in the 12<sup>th</sup> verse, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." So Paul says we have been united with him in his burial. Circumcision took place and that was his death, and now we have been buried with him in baptism.

Now when we think about baptism, as I mentioned earlier, you will notice that no water is mentioned here. The apostle is thinking about the reality of which baptism and water is simply a figure. So he is talking about the reality. We have been truly involved in his death, and we have been laid in his grave. We're not saying that we have died like Christ died. We're not saying that we died as Christ died. We're saying that we died with Christ; that is, he was our representative. Judicially and positionally, we have died in him. Same point that the apostle makes in Romans chapter 6 and verse 3 through about verse 5 or 6.

We don't deny that in the back of the mind of the apostle there would also be included the fact of water baptism, but the reality here is the reality of the relationship with Christ as our representative. You can see that this, I think, is not water baptism by the reference to circumcision. He says, "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands." In other words, it's not the physical thing. It's not the visible thing. It's the circumcision made without hands. Likewise, the baptism that he refers to is a baptism made without hands. If you look at that expression through the Bible, incidentally, "made without hands," and "without hands," a reference almost always is to something that God did that men did not do.

So here, buried with him in baptism that is, we died when Christ died. We were truly laid in his grave. Paul is laying stress upon the fact that we have died to the old life.

So believers do not die like he died nor are they buried as he was, they have died with him.

Now you can see one other indication of the fact that he is not talking about the figure or the symbol of baptism when he says in verse 12, "through faith in the operation of God who raised him from the dead." The movement of death to life is not by some baptismal magic as some particular organizations like to put it. We are talking about a believer's position in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now with verse 13 through verse 15 the apostle turns to the positive side, and he says we've been united with Christ in his resurrection. When he says here in verse 12, "Ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God," he's talking again about his representative work. And as you look at this passage you will notice the apostle is speaking almost entirely of things that have happened in the past; that is, he looks at them as having all ready occurred. But they have an application to us, and so look at how verse 13 begins, "And you."

So the apostle is going to apply the text as it has to do with the Colossians and, of course, with us. He says, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." We have been made alive in Christ. We have moved from death to life. That my Christian friend and my non-Christian friend, that is the heart of Christianity, the experience that is absolutely unique; the movement from spiritual death to spiritual life.

T. W. Manson used to say, "Christianity is either unique or superfluous." And that's true. We don't need a Christianity which is not unique. We don't need another religion. That's why we don't need any of the modern religions that have been before us now for some time. Christianity is unique. It is the only system of truth in which it is plainly stated that the work of redemption is done. Every other system of truth is a system by which we seek to justify ourselves through the things that we do. But in Christianity, it's unique. The Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished the saving work.

So we have forgiveness of sins. How wonderful that is! Forgiveness of sins; what kinds of sins? Well sins that you have committed and sins that you have omitted. Or sins, as we were taught when I was in Sunday school, sins of omission and sins of commission; forgiven all of them. Forgiven the things that have been done, forgiven for the things that we did not do that we should have done, and that's why we stand righteous before God. We have not simply been forgiven, but we have been forgiven for the things we omitted to do. Therefore, in the sight of God we are reckoned to have done them. Therefore, when Paul says we have been justified by faith, declared righteous, he means precisely what he means here when he says forgiveness of sins. We sing, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." Forgiveness of sins.

Secondly, Paul says we have freedom from the law. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Seven times in this context the apostle uses what Greek students know as the aorist tense. It points to an action undefined, but in this context past acts. But now he uses the perfect tense which lays stress upon the effects of an action. So when he says "took it out of the way," he means has taken it out of the way and it's out of the way. So, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us," and he has taken it out of the way. We have freedom from the Law of Moses.

Now we do not have freedom to break the Law of Moses for the moral law is a revelation of the character of God. The individual, who apart from the Sabbath law which I think has specifically been set aside by the apostle in this very epistle, the person who breaks the Law of Moses is by that very fact convicted of failure to observe the kind of action that is comparable to and in accordance with the moral nature of God. But we have deliverance from the law which was against us and contrary to us as the apostle sets forth.

Now I don't know if this is true, but the handwriting of ordinances may be an illusion to the custom of putting on a cross the charge that was laid against the individual who suffered there. For example, a handwriting, a kind of thing often written in wax that could be erased, and even that blotting out may suggest something like that. But the charge was nailed to the cross. Perhaps, Paul is thinking about our Lord's own crucifixion, and the sign that was put over the cross, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." That was his claim. That, of course, was the accusation that was lodged against him; that it was blasphemy so far as the Jews were concerned.

And as far as the Gentiles were concerned it was insurrection. For Gentiles and Jews united in the crucifixion of Christ. Well, the apostle may have been thinking of that, and he may have been thinking about how our Lord claimed to be that and that he was crucified for that. But actually, what was transpiring was that God had nailed the Mosaic law to the cross, and the Lord Jesus had brought it to the end by the saving work he accomplished there. Perhaps, that is why the veil of the temple was "ripped and twain from top to bottom" when the Lord Jesus Christ died.

So, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." He died as a substitute for the people of God. They thought they were putting him to death for blasphemy and insurrection. How strange is the thinking of the world!

Finally, in verse 15 the apostle speaks of the frustration of the satanic hosts. This was particularly appropriate for Colossae because they thought, evidentially, of a series of angelic mediators between God and men, and the Lord Jesus owning the highest in the string of them. So Paul said, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." This is a warmly debated verse and in three minutes we cannot detail any of the debate at all, but what is meant is that he stripped the evil hosts by disarming or degrading them.

Let me illustrate from the experience of Romans the work that the Lord Jesus Christ had done. The Roman general, an imperator, often an emperor like Caesar had the possibility of actually having a parade in his honor if he did certain things. For example, if the imperator was the actual commander in the field when a great victory was won. If he was successful in that victory, if he overcame a significant enemy, and if an accession of territory took place. If all of these things happened, then the Roman general might enjoy something like a parade in his honor. Well, the apostle may be thinking of something like that for this word, "triumphing over them in it," was used in that connection. And we can think of the Lord Jesus as the actual commander in the field. He actually was successful in his work of removing the only claim that the hosts of evil have against the children of God; their sins. He overcame the enemy, and he accomplished saving blessings in their behalf.

So the victory over the Satanic hosts is here a magnificent triumph for the Lord Jesus Christ. I'd like to make one other comment. When we think about the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, generally speaking and very simply, there are three kinds of theories of the atonement. One of the theories of the atonement is the anthropocentric; that is, it relates what Christ did to men. Abelard, one of the medieval theologians, is generally associated with this form of moral influence theory; that is, the Lord Jesus died on the cross as an exhibition of his love for men, and his love for men is designed to move us to love God and others. There is no payment of the penalty of sin or any thing like that, but simply moral influence.

Now there is a truth in that, but beyond that there is a far cry from New Testament teaching. Anselm, another medieval theologian, is responsible for what has been called the satisfaction theory of the atonement. Anselm worked out his particularly theory in a book called, *Coram Deo Homo*. Either, why God-man, for the Latin may mean that or why God became man. And in it he pointed out that Jesus Christ died and rendered a satisfaction to the honor of God. Well, that was an advance in the understanding of the

theory of the atonement. John Calvin went on to lay further stress on the fact that it not simply was a rendering of a sacrifice toward the honor of God, but also toward his holiness and justice and that Christ died under the penalty of human sin.

The earliest theory of the atonement, although there are other aspects of Anselm's theory that may be seen early, the earliest expression of atonement theory is what has been called the classic idea; that is, that there is a struggle between God and Satan and that the Lord Jesus came and died for sin, and thus, overcame Satan by taking from his hands the only claim that he had against men, the claim of sin.

Now that's the theory that is first mentioned in the Bible. In Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15 where Moses writes these words, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it (or he) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." That's the struggle between God and Satan, and the rest of the Bible unfolds it. That aspect of atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is referred to by Paul here. It's referred to by John in his first epistle. It's referred too, also, by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was a theory of the atonement that has a great measure of truth in it as well. No theory of the atonement encompasses all of these aspects, historically.

So, I think here, this is particularly appropriate. The Abelardian or moral influence theory is anthropocentric, directed toward men. The Anselmic theory is theocentric, and to that extent a better theory. It's directed toward God and the requirements of his holiness and justice, for man's sin must be punished. But this theory is cosmocentric; that is, it's related not simply to this world in which we live, but to the world about us, the angelic forces about us. And in that sense, it was particularly appropriate for the Colossians, for the kind of doctrine that they had was the kind of doctrine in which the cosmos about us had been involved.

So the apostle here says, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." You talk about angelic hosts, and

you talk about the eons, and you talk about all of those mediators, and you talk about the necessity of knowing them in order to know God or have an experience of God. Paul says I'll tell you about him who has overcome all of the forces of evil about us, who has overcome it all, and through whom we may have all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and the forgiveness of sins, and freedom from the law that is against us and contrary to us.

So for the sake of time, I conclude. I think of our union. I agree with Wesley as I said last week, "Thou oh Christ art all I want, more than all to Thee I find." Why should I run after any thing in this world about me? Why should I go after drugs? My young friend, what I have in Christ, all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge, all of the things that make for a happy life. Why should I go after any other kind of excitement or incitement when I have everything in Christ? How foolish to be rich toward to the world and not rich toward God.

If you are here today and you've never believed in Christ, as an ambassador of him who is very God of very God and has accomplished the atoning work by which we might be saved, I invite you to come to him, acknowledge your sin, lean upon him for time and for eternity, receive as a free gift forgiveness of sins, justification of life, and the recognition in the saving work of Christ you have been identified, and further you were hanging at his girdle. May God bring you to the acknowledgement of the Lord Jesus as your own personal Savior. Don't leave this auditorium without that decision having been made.

Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the words of Holy Scripture which are so meaningful, so significant. We think of our Lord "in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Oh, God, deliver us from seeking things in this world that are contrary to Thy word. May we truly be rich toward God. And Lord, if there are some

here who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that through God the Holy Spirit, the third person of our eternal Trinity, that they would be brought to regeneration and faith and forgiveness of sins. At this very moment, Lord, work in the hearts of any who may be here without Christ. May they by Thy grace confess their need of Thee and their dependence upon the Lord Jesus and the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of their sins. Go with us now as we part. In Jesus' name. Amen.