

# The Sole Sufficiency Of Jesus

Colossians 2:6–15

This section of Colossians is polemical; it opposes and disputes the false teaching at Colosse. By contrast, the previous portion of the epistle is doctrinal, and the subsequent portion is practical. This passage issues a strong warning against error and constitutes the heart of the epistle.

## The sole sufficiency of Jesus

*(6) As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: (7) rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (8) Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (9) For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (10) And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (11) 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: (12) 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. (13) And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; (14) blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; (15) and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

Verse 6 speaks of the Christian life as a journey on a path. The only way to victory and eternal salvation is for us to continue walking (living) in Jesus Christ in the same way that we began in Him, namely, by faith and through the power of His Spirit.

Verse 7 first compares the Christian to a plant. We are to be “rooted” in Jesus Christ. The Greek uses the perfect participle, which indicates that our rooting is to be permanent, abiding, once for all.

We are to be “built up” in Jesus Christ. The Greek uses the present participle, which indicates that our building up is to be continual, progressive, day to day.

We are to be “stablished”—established, confirmed, strengthened—in the faith.

Finally, we are to abound, or overflow, with thanks giving. A key to spiritual victory is to maintain an attitude of thankfulness under all circumstances.

Verse 8. After verses 6-7 describe the way to live victoriously as a Christian, verse 8 issues a warning and a call to vigilance, opening with “beware.” The danger is that someone would “spoil you.” The verb means to take captive, carry off as spoil, rob, cheat. Here are the means by which such an event could take place.

- “Philosophy.” The word simply means love of wisdom, but this verse couples it with “vain deceit,” giving it a negative connotation. Hence it means false human wisdom as opposed to true spiritual wisdom.
- “Vain deceit,” or empty deception.
- “The tradition of men.” There is an implied contrast here to the commandments of God. (See Mark 7:6-9; Colossians 2:22.)
- “The rudiments of the world.” The same Greek phrase appears in verse 20 and in Galatians 4:3. The Greek word translated “rudiments” is *stoicheia*, which means “fundamental principles, basic principles, first lessons, rudimentary instruction, elements.”

We must not base our doctrine of Christ upon human philosophy. Unfortunately, the terms and concepts that characterize traditional trinitarianism were borrowed from secular philosophy of the ancient world, and they lead to a distortion of the true doctrine of God. Instead of appealing to tradition, creeds, philosophies, and man-made doctrines, we should adhere to the text, teaching, and thought of Scripture itself.

Verse 9 presents the doctrine of Jesus Christ in contrast to false teachings. It is a magnificent description of the Incarnation, for it emphasizes both the true deity and true humanity of Jesus Christ. Let us examine each major word of the verse.

- “Him.” The antecedent is “Christ” (verse 8), or more fully, “Christ Jesus the Lord” (verse 6).
- “Dwelleth,” or lives. The word is in the present tense, meaning that the fullness of God continues to dwell in Jesus Christ. The union of deity and humanity in Christ is permanent.
- “Godhead” (*theotes*): the Deity. The word refers to the state of being God, to the sum total of God’s nature.
- “Fulness” (*pleroma*): plenitude, totality. To be as clear as possible, the verse says “the fulness” of the Godhead dwells in Jesus, although the Godhead can never be less than complete and absolute.
- “All.” To underscore the deity of Christ even further, the verse says “all” the fullness, although by definition anything less than all would not be fullness. Thus verse 9 uses three words to declare the absolute deity of Jesus in the strongest of terms, although one would have been sufficient to express the point.
- “Bodily” (*somatikos*): “bodily-wise, corporeally, assuming a bodily form, becoming incarnate, with a bodily manifestation.” In Christ, God has joined Himself to humanity and has come into this world as a human being.

The main theme of Colossians is the lordship of Jesus. In particular, Colossians 1-2 proclaims His authority, preeminence, omniscience, omnipotence, and deity. The specific words used in Colossians 2:9 express that He is God incarnate. Thus the verse strongly affirms the absolute deity of Jesus Christ.

Verse 10 is the practical application of verse 9. The deity of Jesus Christ is not merely an abstract theological concept; it has profound implications for our daily lives. Since Jesus is the fullness of God in flesh, we are “complete,”—filled, completed—in Him.

In short, we have everything we need in Jesus. If all we know is Jesus, we know enough to be saved, healed, delivered, protected, and preserved, for when we have Him we have everything that God is.

*Verse 11* explains that our completion or fullness in Christ includes the new birth and new life. Circumcision, the means by which a Jewish male entered into covenant with God and identified with God's people in the Old Testament, is a type or foreshadowing of our initiation into the new covenant, which occurs by "the circumcision of Christ." In Christ we have been circumcised, not physically but spiritually, not by a man but by God. New Testament circumcision does not cut away physical skin, but it puts off (literally, strips off) "the body of the sins of the flesh." (The critical text omits "of the sins.")

We have been set free from the sins of the flesh, of the fleshly body, of the sinful nature. Our new birth did not eradicate the sinful nature itself, but God wiped away our past sins and gave us power to overcome the sinful nature. (See Romans 6:6-7; 8:1-4; Galatians 5:16-18.) We must still struggle with the sinful nature, but we have received power to resist it and received a new attitude toward it (Colossians 3:5).

*Verse 12.* Our spiritual circumcision took place when we were buried with Christ and raised with Him.

Our burial with Christ occurred at our water baptism. "In baptism" means "in the act of baptism." Similarly, Romans 6:4 says, "We are buried with him [Jesus Christ] by baptism."

Although the primary purpose of this passage is not to teach the mode or formula of water baptism, its description of baptism presumes immersion in the name of Jesus. Neither Paul nor his original readers would have thought of baptism as a burial if it were performed by sprinkling or pouring; the only connection between baptism and burial is the scriptural mode of immersion. (See Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38-39.)

Colossians 2 also presumes that baptism is only for those who believe and repent. Verse 12 reveals that faith is necessary for spiritual circumcision. The concept of burial implies a previous death, to which verses 13 and 20 refer explicitly. By definition, death to sin and self-will occurs at repentance. Clearly, then, infant baptism is neither appropriate nor valid.

Some argue in favor of infant baptism on the ground that Old Testament circumcision was for infants. But they fail to understand that the new covenant is spiritual and not physical. Spiritual circumcision is for those who are coming to birth spiritually, not physically. It is a spiritual separation from sin.

Moreover, as we shall see, New Testament circumcision also includes the baptism of the Spirit; therefore, only those who are presently capable of also receiving that part of the experience are qualified for water baptism.

Our resurrection with Christ occurred through faith in the working of God, the same God who raised Jesus from the dead. God works in our lives by His Spirit, for the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us (Romans 8:11). When we repented and believed, God filled us with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit imparted new life. (See Romans 6:4; 7:6; 8:2, 10, 13.)

New spiritual life does not come automatically at the ceremony of baptism; it comes through faith, specifically through faith in the working of God. Someone may be truly baptized in water and yet not be filled with the Spirit (Acts 8:15-16). At most, then, we should understand “wherein” to indicate that baptism symbolizes new life in the Spirit. When someone is baptized, his sins are washed away, and as he rises out of the water he opens his heart to receive the Spirit. The act of rising thus symbolizes his entrance into new life, but he must actually receive the Spirit in order to truly experience the new life.

*Verse 13* reiterates the message of verses 11-12. Before our new birth, we were dead in our sins and in the uncircumcision of our flesh (the unregenerate state of our sinful nature). At the new birth, God “quickened” us, or made us alive, with Christ and forgave us of all our sins. As in verse 11, the new birth includes both the removal of sins and the impartation of new life.

*Verse 14* explains how God made provision so that we could receive the new birth. Although there is no explicit change of subject from verse 13, the words “his cross” obviously point to Christ.

This verse uses the analogy of a debt to describe God's work of forgiveness, likening sin to a debt we incurred to God. It is "a statement of debt signed by the debtor in token of his acknowledgment of his indebtedness."

When we were born again, the debt of sin in our lives was blotted out, canceled, wiped out. God wiped out the record of debts with its requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. He "canceled the written code with its regulations" (NIV). He no longer held us accountable for the broken ordinances and unpaid debts of the past, but He gave us a new start. He "has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it" (Phillips).

*Verse 15.* By the cross Christ "spoiled principalities and powers" The verb here means to disarm, strip, put off. Using the metaphor of a victor stripping his defeated enemies of clothing, armor, and arms, Colossians 2:15 announces Christ's total victory over all rulers and authorities.

Christ also "made a shew of them openly." He exposed, disgraced, or mocked them in public; He "made a public spectacle of them" (NIV).

In summary, the new birth is our spiritual circumcision (verse 11) and our identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (verses 12-13). On the cross Jesus paid the penalty for our sins (verse 14) and defeated the forces of evil (verse 15); we enjoy these benefits when we identify individually with His atoning work. In this way, we find everything we need in Him and are complete in Him (verse 10). The efficacy of His atoning work and the validity of our salvation are dependent upon His identity as the one God incarnate (verse 9). For this reason, we must not be deceived by false human doctrines and traditions (verse 8); instead, we must continue to walk by faith in Him (verse 6), being established and built up in Him alone (verse 7).