

Complete in Christ

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16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: Colossians 2, Genesis 4:9; Colossians 2:8-23; Revelation 2:20; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 2:4; Revelation 3:15-16; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 23:34; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Isaiah 53:11; Romans 3:22-23; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 3:2; Romans 6:1-2; Psalm 32:1-2; Psalm 51:17; Romans 5:1; 2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 2:6

Now that our mouths are warmed up and we can enunciate very well—unless you're me and sort of slur them all together and then you mispronounce the last four letters of "Christian," especially when Jonathan's playing so fast; I don't know that my mind even goes that fast—so we're happy to be with you this morning. Let's open our Bibles to Colossians chapter 2.

We Are Our Brother's Keeper

In Colossians chapter 2, there is a necessity in our lives to have some teaching, and we understand that we need one another in our lives. And we need one another in our lives not only for encouragement, but we also need one another in our lives for help, for warning, for caution.

And one of the things that Paul would do as he cared for the saints in Colossae is that even though he had never been with them personally—he never sat down to eat a meal with them, he never took them out for a bagel or Turkish delight, I guess that might be what they eat in what is now known as Turkey—he had this care for their souls.

One of the very first sins—it isn't the first sin, but one of the very first sins in the Bible—is we would read that Abel was a keeper and a caretaker of sheep, right? And then Cain in his wickedness says, "Am I my brother's shepherd? Am I my brother's keeper?" It's the exact same word. And he was crossing his little arms and turning his little back and giving his shoulders to God: "I'm not watching over anybody. They can do what they want to do. They can say what they want to say. They can believe what they want to believe."

And, beloved, that's how the devil would have us to think. The Bible says we are our brother's keeper. The Bible says we need to watch out for one another. The Bible says that we are a body full of different members. And because we're a body, different parts of the body take care of other parts of the body.

Has anybody ever eaten? I sometimes ask this question: what's the most important part of your body when you're going to eat? And most people say your mouth. And I say, in my best Mexican, "No way, José." It's because when I was growing up—and we played outside in those days—I would hear this voice shout from the door: "Trevor! Stuart! Bruce! It's time for dinner! It's time for dinner!" And that was my ears. If I didn't hear my mother shouting at us, I would not have eaten; I would have continued on playing. And then after my ear would hear my mother's voice, then my legs and feet would take over and I would run home, because if I didn't have legs and feet, I would have never made it. And then I had to have hands, because I couldn't turn on the faucet to wash my hands without hands. And then I would need my hands to get the food to my mouth.

And then finally get to your mouth, but is your mouth the complete story? Do you need not lips so your food doesn't fall out of your mouth? Have you ever tried to feed people that don't have good control of their mouth, and you sort of have to tip their head back—but not too far back, because then it goes down the wrong pipe—and you let them eat, and you have to sort of push their chin up so that their mouth closes, and then you can pull the spoon away? What about if you eat a carrot? Do you need teeth, or a knife and a fork, or a blender to grind it up for you? Do you need a tongue that helps you swallow? Do you need salivary glands to make it moist to go down your throat? Do you need a stomach? Do you need intestines? Do you need all those parts to be able to eat well? And the answer is yes.

And we're a body, says the Lord in His word. And we need one another to walk the Christian walk with dignity, with grace, and with an honesty that we are dependent on one another and we are dependent on God. And sometimes we do silly things because nobody's around to watch us.

When I was two years old, I thought it was cool to crawl up onto the countertop, apparently. I don't remember. I do remember the burn of the scald I had, starting at my chest and going all the way down my stomach as I crawled up and I pulled the kettle over me. Because, well, "boys will be boys," they say, and that's what boys do. They climb on countertops because that's where the cookies are. To put the cookies at a lower level, it would be much easier and you wouldn't have to climb onto countertops. But parents like to put them out of reach, so you have to climb. And sometimes you don't know what you're climbing on and you get burned because nobody's watching you, and nobody was there to say no, and nobody was there to warn.

And in the spiritual life, beloved, we also need people to watch us. We need to be the keeper of one another. And we need to be able to warn one another when danger is coming, and

when we can see down the road—because sometimes we don't see very far, and others can see further down the road than we are.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:8-23

And so we're going to start in verse 8, and Paul giving a warning. He says:

[Colossians 2:8-23 NKJV] - ⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. ¹¹ In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

And the Lord will bless the reading of His word.

Philosophy and Human Traditions vs. Christ

Don't let anybody—beware—don't let anybody spoil you or ruin you through philosophies. That's how he starts out this section. They're according to the traditions of men and the traditions of the world. Don't let anybody spoil you with enticing words: "This is the way it is. And if only you could experience it this way, if you studied your Bible this way, if you went on this retreat, this is what you need to really make your mark spiritually in this world. This is how you're going to be satisfied with Christ, is if you take this course and you take that course, and you do these things and you do the other things. This is how you really get to experience God."

It sounds really good, doesn't it? Who wouldn't want to experience God? Who wouldn't want to have this real encounter with Him? But you see, these philosophies are men's ideas, and they're not according to Christ. They're after the traditions of men and the rudiments of the world. These are things that—they're elementary things, the basic things that people say, "This is how you're going to find your fulfillment."

There's things like that happen today, aren't there? It's not a new thing. Well, there was a church in Thyatira in the book of Revelation, it's mentioned. How did Jezebel teach the people that they would find true satisfaction in Jesus Christ? "Have sex outside of marriage. I'm going to teach you how to fornicate," she said, "and this is going to help you feel satisfied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ." Is that how you do it? Paul would write, "Flee fornication." "Some of you used to be fornicators, but you're not anymore," he would write to the Corinthians. That's not where you get satisfaction from.

Some of you think you're going to find satisfaction by obeying rules. He's going to say a little later, "Taste not, touch not, handle not. You just don't do these things. You don't smoke, you don't dance, you don't go with the people who do, you don't drink, and you're going to be a satisfied Christian." Is that what it does? It isn't, is it?

And John writes to the Ephesian church and he says, "You know all the doctrines, you've got them all figured out, you hate what I hate, but I've got this against you: you left your first love." You see, it's based on love; it's not based on rules. It's based on a love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, not on rules. It's based on a love relationship with Jesus Christ, not with whoever and whenever, like Jezebel would say. It's based on that.

How do you feel about God? Who here is 100% on fire for God? Who here is 100% cold and doesn't want anything to do with God? See, those were trick questions because nobody

raised their hand. So if you're not hot and you're not cold, you're lukewarm. And, beloved, that's the worst place to be. That's what Jesus would vomit out of His mouth: "I would that you were either hot or cold, that you were on fire for the Lord, that you're white hot." But you're not.

So now what do you do? What do we do? We have these things, and the traditions of men are there. We don't want anyone to ruin us.

Complete in Him: Position vs. Condition

You see, verse 9 says: "For in Him, in Jesus, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."

You see, this is where we fell short: we didn't love God with all of our heart, and with all of our soul, and with all of our mind, and with all of our strength. That was the greatest commandment. Isn't that what Jesus said? Isn't that what He confirmed? What's the greatest commandment? "The Lord your God is one, and you're going to love Him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength." Isn't that the greatest commandment? Well, what happens when you don't obey the greatest commandment? Isn't that the worst possible thing you could ever do?

You see, sometimes we look through human eyes and we see humanly, and we think, "No, no, being a drug addict and a prostitute and good for nothing on the streets without a home, that's the worst possible condition to be in." That's how we think living on the west side of Vancouver, isn't it? We don't want to live on the Downtown Eastside; that's a horrible neighborhood. Is that how God sees it? Are people that live in Point Grey—are they ever—is everybody that lives in Point Grey going to heaven? They're not going to heaven, all of them. Is everybody in the Downtown Eastside—are they going to hell? No? Why? Why?

Because when God looks down, He sees that there is no difference. He looks with tears in His eyes. We were thinking about this morning in the Lord's Supper, in one of the songs in verse 2, it had the line that—I can't remember exactly how it goes, but—we are rejoicing in the benefits of the tears You shed, or something like that. You see, Jesus sowed the seed of the gospel with tears, didn't He? He cried over Jerusalem. He cried with Lazarus. No doubt when the widow from Nain, her son was being carried out, no doubt He wept with her.

What do you think He sounded like when He said, "Father, forgive them"? Was it just sort of like a happenstance? This is just the way? "Father, just forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." If they had known what they were doing, they would have never crucified the King of Glory. He's the one full of grace and truth. He would have never used that

opportunity to make fun of people. He would look upon the travail of His soul and be satisfied and rejoice, just like the woman who labored—we were reading about this morning too, weren't we? And when the birth is given, all that travail and all the labor pains disappear from her mind. That's why some families have more than one baby: for the joy of having that child's presence.

So we really need to take to heart that when He looked on us and He saw that there is no difference, and all have sinned—whether you live in Point Grey or the Downtown Eastside, or you live in Kitsilano or Kerrisdale, it just doesn't matter. We've all sinned, and we've all fallen short of the glory of God. And we see those words, and we listen to them from the Lord's mouth Himself, being overwhelmed with sadness.

But when you look at Him, who was He? "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him." There's nothing you need to add. What do you need to add to your salvation if you're complete?

Has anybody ever built a puzzle? Has anybody ever built a puzzle they bought at the second-hand store? We did this puzzle once, and the picture was complete, but we still had like three pieces. So somebody was missing three pieces from their puzzle. And whoever gave the puzzle to the second-hand store, they had some puzzles with pieces missing that they would never be complete. But if the puzzle's complete, where do I put those extra three pieces? Where are they going to fit? Do they have any use? They're of no value whatsoever, are they? The puzzle is complete; all the parts are there.

And if you've trusted in Jesus as your Savior, you are complete in Jesus. Why? Because the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. There's nothing else that can be added. That's why you're saved by grace through faith. It's not of works; it's a gift of God. There's nothing you can do to please God; there is no boasting: "I did this and I did that."

If there was a boaster in heaven, he would make heaven a hell for everybody else. Did you know that? You ever listen to some of those sports guys talk about themselves? Some of you are saying no; it's because you would never put up with that. Imagine somebody in heaven: "Oh, I contributed to the stained glass fund! I bought the Bibles! I did this and I did that and I did this and I did that." The only thing you can say in heaven is, "Jesus died for me on the cross, and in Him is all my boasting. He did it all. I'm doing absolutely nothing but trusting in Jesus as my Savior."

Because in Him, the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. And because of that, I am complete in Jesus Christ. You know, there's no other thing you can do. There's no other thing you can experience. Oh, you can be more intimate with God, you can have a better

relationship with God, but you are in a position where nothing can be improved upon—positionally in Christ.

This is where some Bible teachers mess up a few things: they confuse what we call justification with sanctification. They confuse what we are in Jesus Christ and our position with what we do in our lives and how we act and what we say. Those two are different things. We are complete in Christ.

Can you grow closer with Christ? Yes. Can you read your Bible more and know more about Him and hear from Him in His word? Yes. Can you pray with Him more? Yes. Can you sing about Him more? Yes. Can you write songs about Him? Yes. Can you fall more in love with Him? Yes. Does that change who you are in Christ? Basically, no. It affects how much you enjoy Him.

I had this friend—well, I guess she's still my friend; she's a sister of a friend of mine—and when she had this baby, Adri, something like that, Eardry. Eardry was like one and eating spaghetti, and I happened to be over there and her dad was home. And it was the days when we had video cameras, and he had this video camera. And when we watched the video later, it was going like this the whole time, because Eardry did everything with that spaghetti except for putting it in her mouth! She had the best time eating spaghetti: it was in her hair, on her face, everywhere. She had the best time eating spaghetti, and she enjoyed it immensely.

Now, I made spaghetti the other night. I didn't put any of it in my hair. I didn't have any of it in my ears. There was none up my nose. There was none on my shoulders. I don't think there was any on the floor—you can ask my wife about that. But I enjoyed the spaghetti a whole lot, just like little Eardry enjoyed her spaghetti. Is there a big difference in our enjoyment? Yes. Why? Because there's a maturity.

I saw Eardry two or three years ago, and there she was—well, we weren't eating spaghetti, we were eating potato salad—and she didn't have any of it in her hair. There was none of it on her blouse. There was none of it up her nose. There was none of it in her hair. And she enjoyed the potato salad. That comes with maturity. Did we both enjoy the spaghetti? Yes. But one of them enjoys it in a much more intimate and purposeful manner, don't we?

You see, we can be more intimate with God. We can have a closer fellowship with Him. We can love Him more as we grow more in love with Him, as we read His word, as we pray with Him and fellowship with Him and communicate with Him and just enjoy His presence.

Some of you remember Joe Wasavian. Now, I don't think I ever heard Joe preach. Barb says she doesn't remember either; that means my memory isn't so bad. But I remember—do you

remember him preaching, Eric? Or Brian? I don't either. But you remember when they messed up his hip operation and they pinched his nerve in the bone, and he had that floppy foot? And he's in the hospital, and he says, "You know, sometimes in the hospital, the only way you can look is up. The only thing you can do is have fellowship with God. And even in the circumstances of life, though they hurt and things aren't working the way they're supposed to be working, I can still look up at God."

That's what I remember about Joe. That was probably the biggest lesson he ever taught me. And, boy, when Allison was in the hospital with her brain aneurysm, those words came down: sometimes the only way you can look is up. And even when it's the only desperation you have, you can still enjoy it because you're looking up.

He would say, "Set your minds on things which are above." He would say, "Set your affection on things above" in chapter 3. He's talking about this, and it's all because we are complete in Him. He's the head of all principalities. He's the head of all power. In Christ alone and in nothing else, we're complete. He's the only begotten of the Father, half full of grace and half full of truth—is that what it says? No, He's full of grace; He's full of truth. What else do you need? Should we continue in sin that grace might abound? No! You're complete in Him. This is the grace you need; this is all you need to help you.

All Trespasses Forgiven at the Cross

Do you really believe that your sins are all forgiven? Do you really believe that you're free? Do you live your life like you're forgiven? Do you live your life like you're free?

As I travel around in Mexico and the United States and Canada, I notice an awful lot of people who would say that they're Christians, and they don't live like they're forgiven. They don't live like they're free. They would say they're forgiven, but there's—there's an anger there sometimes. There's a—coldness there. There's a seriousness that is maybe there. A lot of Christians live a life where it's more important what the Joneses say rather than what God says. It's more important what they think rather than what God thinks. And it's a slavery; it's a burden.

You see, we've been freed to follow God. That's what Romans 7 and 6 are all about, isn't it? You've been freed. You don't have the old master. You don't have to worry about what they're saying anymore. You have a new God, and you're free to follow Him. The chains have fallen off and the light has shone where there was darkness, and you've beheld the great light, the Light of the World. And now we're free to let our light shine before men.

But sometimes we worry about what people say. And that's what it goes on, verse 13: "And you, being dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, has He made alive, having forgiven you some of your trespasses?" Is that what it says? Does it say all your trespasses?

Sometimes we don't forgive people. Sometimes people don't forgive us. But He's forgiven all trespasses. And someone once said that unforgiveness is like eating poison yourself and hoping that the other person dies. And it just embitters you, and you get more angry and more angry for this and for that. And when something good happens to that person, you get angry instead of rejoicing. But God's forgiven all of our sins. It's not just some sins, but He's forgiven all of our sins: past, present, and future.

How did He do that? Verse 14: He blotted out the handwriting of the ordinances that were against us, which were contrary to us, and He took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross. And not only did He nail it to His cross, but He has spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in Him.

You see, everything that we ever did wrong, all those things were nailed to the cross. When Jesus died, if there were only one sin, He would have died for that one sin. But here it says all the ordinances that were against us, everything that was contrary to us, everything that God would ever hold against us were nailed to His cross. Not just some of them—all of them.

You remember—you might not remember, but in the Bible there's this story of a king named David. And as I was teaching about David this summer, I thought there was a point in his life where I thought he was the most evil man that ever existed. He took this woman, committed adultery with her, and then he devised this plan to have her husband killed. That's deviance. I don't know if Bathsheba ever had a choice in any of it. Sometimes they call things today harassment, and you have to have authority and power, and you can harass people that are beneath you, and if you're beneath them you can charge them with harassment. David was the king. The soldiers, the guards were just following orders. Where was Bathsheba? I don't know; doesn't say anything about it. I might be speculating wrongly. But I was thinking, he's a pretty bad fellow.

And he would write:

[Psalm 32:1-2 NKJV] - ¹ Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

He was the one that said, "A contrite and humble heart, You cannot resist," as he was broken before God and confessed his sin. How much of that sin got forgiven? All of it. There wasn't one bit of it that he was not forgiven; he was forgiven all of it. And this is what Jesus did for us.

Freedom in Christ

And so we don't have to worry about what others think. We're completed in Him, and now we're free to please God with our lives.

And so we go on—and our time ran out really fast: don't let people judge you in what you eat and what you drink, or what day of the week it is. These are the legalists. There are certain diets, certain days you need to do this and you need to do that. They're not really things that you need to worry about, because even if they were written in the Bible, they're the shadows of the reality of Jesus that was to come.

Don't let anybody condemn you because you haven't had the visions and experiences, says verse 18. Don't let them take away the reward: "You need to have this and have that." But they don't hold Christ as the head of the body. He's the one that nourishes us; He's the one that holds us together.

Verse 20 says, don't let anybody enslave you by following rules: "Don't touch, don't taste, don't taste." They're man-made ideas about personal discipline. They seem wise, but they're not, because they have no ability to help us before God.

There are those today that don't want us to be free. They don't want us to be free before God because of His grace. They don't want us to be free to walk with Him and talk with Him: "You have to do this, and you have to do that." And don't let anybody spoil you through their philosophies and their vain deceit. May the Lord help us in this world where we live to understand that we're complete only in Jesus Christ. He alone is all we need. And so don't let anybody trick you out of the simplicity that there is in Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Jesus Christ, Father, we thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You that it says that, therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with You. What a wonderful experience; it's the only way. And we would just like to tell You, we really thank You for us being able to be complete in Jesus Christ. There's nothing we can do, there's nothing we can say, there's nothing more to experience for our standing before You.

But I guess part of our prayer on this morning is that You would help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would walk more closely with You—"Nearer and nearer, my God, to Thee," we would sometimes say. So help us, we pray, to have a practice more like our position, to have what we do and what we say more and more like the reality of our standing and our being seated with Christ in heavenly places.

So we commit ourselves into Your hands, asking for Your blessing. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.