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HCC Sermon
Col 2:4-15

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: When the student added legs to the snake, it was no longer a snake.
2. Need: An addition of something changes its identity.
3. Subject: What do we do when people say we need more than just faith in Jesus?
4. Text: Col 2:4-15
5. Preview: We'll look at a deception, truth, and defense.

BODY

- I. **Deception:** Believing in Jesus is not enough (2:4; 8).
 - A. Paul warns the Colossians to avoid false teaching (2:4)
 - B. Believing in Jesus is not enough because following rules is more important (2:8).
 - a. The false teachers taught people to follow the Jewish laws (2:8a)
 - b. The false teachers taught people to follow the natural law (2:8b)
 - C. Rule following highlights your inability to keep them.
- II. **Truth:** Believing in Jesus is enough (2:9-15).
 - A. Paul reminds the Colossians that what Jesus accomplished is enough (2:9-15)
 1. Jesus accomplished indwelling (2:9-10)
 2. Jesus accomplished salvation (2:11-12)
 3. Jesus accomplished regeneration (2:13)
 4. Jesus accomplished reconciliation (2:14)
 5. Jesus accomplished victory (2:15)
 - B. Jesus accomplished more than we could ever hope to do on our own.
- III. **Defense:** Believe that Jesus is enough (2:5-7).
 - A. Believe that Jesus is enough by inviting accountability (2:5).
 - B. Believe that Jesus is enough by memorizing God's truth (2:6-7).
 1. Memorize a Creed
 2. Memorize God's word

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Believing in Jesus is not enough. Believing in Jesus is enough. Cultivate your belief that Jesus is enough.
2. Closing Image: A well-known Christian writer NT Wright had a friend who went home as a teenager to announce to his mother that he had become a Christian

MANUSCRIPT

The story behind a Chinese idiom as I remember went something like this. A teacher gives her students an assignment. Whoever finishes the task first receives a prize. I don't remember exactly the prize. It could have been a candy bar, movie tickets, or a gift certificate. Use your imagination. The teacher instructed her students: "Draw a snake. Whoever finishes first will get a prize".

Now there was a particular student that stood out - Flash. You know the type. Whenever the teacher asks a question, Flash raises his hand first. "What is five plus four?" His hand shoots up. "Me! Me! Me!" The teacher asks another student: "Jane, who is the third president of the United States?" He whispers: "Thomas Jefferson". Flash the class know it all.

When Flash hears the teacher's instruction: "Draw a snake", his pencil begins to fly. He begins to sketch. He adds scales and a forked tongue for good measure. Satisfied with his sketch, he looks up to see that all his other students still drawing.

Since Flash still has time, he thinks: "I'm so fast. Everyone is still working. You know what would make this snake even better. Legs." He decides to add legs to his sketch. When he finishes, he sees Jane get up to bring her drawing to the teacher. He rushes to cut her off. He puts the drawing down at same time as Jane.

The teacher looks at both drawings and renders the verdict: "I'm sorry Flash. But the prize goes to Jane because snakes don't have legs." **When the student added legs to the snake, it was no longer a snake.**

The meaning is this. **An addition of something changes its identity.** If you add a wheel to a bicycle, then it's no longer a bicycle. It becomes a tricycle. If you add a side to a square, then it is no longer a square. It becomes a pentagon. When you add an extra person to a couple on a date, then it becomes third wheeling. **An addition of something changes its identity.**

When you add something to the gospel, it longer is the gospel. If you add works of any kind to "earn" salvation, then salvation is no longer in Christ alone through faith alone. It is through Christ plus works through works. This is not true Christianity. When people say you must add an extra book to the Bible in order to receive the revelation of God, then that means the Bible is no longer sufficient. This is not true Christianity.

What do we do when people say we need more than just faith in Jesus? How do we respond when people share with us that we faith in Jesus plus something else? What should we believe? What should we do?

In the first century, a believer named Epaphras arrived in Rome looking for his mentor, the apostle Paul – who was under house arrest. Epaphras needed his mentor's help to address some false teaching that had entered the church. This false teaching taught that one must not only believe in Christ but also follow the Jewish law. To respond to this false teaching, Paul writes the letter we know as Colossians. We'll be turning our attention to the middle of the letter, which was just read for us. Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2. We'll be in Colossians, chapter 2.

We'll look at a deception, truth, and defense. We'll look at what is the deception that people want us to believe. Then we'll look at the truth we should believe. Lastly, we'll look at how we can defend ourselves against such deception. Deception. Truth. Defense.

What is the deception? **Believing in Jesus is not enough.** What Jesus did on the cross is insufficient. We need more than just believing in Jesus. Jesus's death and resurrection fails to restore us unto a relationship with God unless we do something. **Believing in Jesus is not enough.**

Paul warns the Colossians to avoid such deceptions. He writes in verse 4: *“I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.”* The NIV uses the word: deceive. This phrase: “plausible arguments” refers to something that sounds reasonable. For instance, A equals B. B equals C. A then equals C. It makes logical sense.

When people hear the gospel, some think it’s too good to be true. If you believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins and rose from the dead to give you a new life, then it’s too good to be true. This could mean that a believer can do whatever he or she wants and get away with it. No... Faith in Jesus only enables you now to follow the rules. Depending on how you follow the rules set out by other people will determine whether or not you God will show favor upon you. This sounds “logical”.

Believing in Jesus is not enough because you need to follow the rules. Look with me at verse 8: *“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”*

Be wary when someone says you need to follow rules in addition to believing in Jesus. Paul uses the phrase: *“Take you captive.”* The idea behind this phrase is being carried off as plunder. It’s as though these false teachers have stolen the Colossian’s identity. They have not only taken their credit card information and social security number, but they have taken their hearts and minds. They have kidnapped their identity and their person.

The word: philosophy could refer to any system of thought. For instance, Judaism was considered a philosophy. Christianity could be considered a philosophy. Paul doesn’t condemn philosophy which asks deep questions concerning life. He condemns the system of thought that you need to follow the laws in addition to believing in Jesus. Let’s look a little bit more specifically at what these false teachers taught concerning rule following.

The false teachers taught people need to follow the Jewish laws. Look with me again at the first half of verse 8: *“according to human tradition.”* To what human tradition does Paul refer? He alludes to the Old Testament laws, which these false teachers encourage believers to follow. No bacon. No pulled pork. You had to celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday. You not only had to abstain from your occupation, but you have to follow the regulations associated with the Sabbath such as not picking up stuff and moving it around. You had to celebrate the various festivals: Passover, festival of booths, festival of trumpets, and so forth. If you became a Christian, then you would also need to be circumcised. Our Jewish forefathers passed these traditions down to us, so any new believer must observe them too.

The false teachers taught people to follow the natural law. You have to follow the natural order of things. These are the principles that govern the world. Look with me at the latter half of verse 8: *“according to the elemental spirits of the world.”* The Greek doesn’t not have the word: spirit. If you read it, then it would be elemental of the world. What elemental is Paul talking about? The phrase: elemental could be rendered elemental principles. The NIV and NASB take this particular rendering referring to the basics of the world. It’s the ABCs or 123. For the ancient Greeks, they believed that the elementary principles of life referred to elements such as water, earth, fire, and air. Those elements should sound familiar to the fans of the Avatar: The Last Air Bender.

What are the elementary principles that govern our world? If I think about the basics that governed my former work place, then it would be money, power, and relationship. There could be of course others. But let’s think about these three laws.

Many believe that money make the world go around. If you don't have money, then you're in trouble. It means no food, no shelter, no transportation. You need money, so you do your best to continue amassing wealth because no one wants to become broke.

Many also believe what you need is power. Another word could be influence. In order for people to listen to you, you have to dress a certain way. You have to own certain possessions: the newest smart phone, the hottest sports car, or the newest fashion. You have to strive to be up to date in all current trends so that you can speak intelligently into a variety of contexts.

Then there's relationship. People believe that you must experience relational intimacy. You want to be desirable. To date someone means that you're desirable to another person. That's why so much conversation is spent on talking about dating from high school onward. We're bound by these social laws to follow and fulfill them.

But Paul writes that these laws: Jewish or natural are not according to Christ. In other words, they do not align with what Jesus has taught. Paul writes in verse 8: *"and not according to Christ."* Why?

Rule following highlights your inability to keep them. No matter what kind of rules that you set for yourself, you realize that you can't follow them. This refers both to the Jewish laws and the social law of our day. When you think about the pursuit of money, when will it ever stop. You could get promoted every year and a zero is added to your annual paycheck. But it will never be enough. You could always use an extra zero at the end of your account balance. You think about how you desire to accrue influence. You may be influential now because of what you know. But there is always new information coming out. You'll never be able to keep up. Think about dating relationships. When you pursue a relationship, it is exciting the first twelve to twenty-four months. Then it loses its excitement. What was once easy, now becomes work. The laws or principles that we set believing that we can achieve significance reveals their futility.

Think about how we instruct children. We teach our kids this. When we give them a snack, we ask what do you say? The well learned child responds: "Thank you." Yet as adults when we receive something from someone do we say: "Thank You" every time. We teach our kids, don't call your sister: "stupid". As we drive to work and someone drives dangerously, we mutter: "stupid driver." When we ask our child, did you have a piece of Halloween candy before dinner. The child replies: "No" But you know that he's lying because there's chocolate all over his face. You teach them: "Don't lie. I know you had some candy." Yet do you always tell the truth?

If we are unable to keep these rules, then what makes us think that we can please God by following them. Rules seem to highlight our inability to please God through our actions. If anyone teaches you that you need to believe and Jesus and do x, y, and z for God to be pleased with you. It's a lie. It's a deception. We can't ever do enough to earn God's favor.

What is the truth? What is the fact? **Believing in Jesus is enough.** If you believe in Jesus and what he has done for you on the cross and his resurrection, then you don't need to do anything to ear God's favor. God looks favorably upon you because of what Jesus has done. **Believing in Jesus is enough.**

Why is believing in Jesus enough? What is God pleased when we place our faith in Jesus's saving work? **Paul reminds the Colossians that what Jesus accomplished is enough.** Paul reviews what Jesus accomplished through the cross.

Jesus accomplished indwelling. Indwelling describes the idea of God dwelling in us. That God not only exists in the heavenly places but also that he resides within us via the Holy Spirit. It highlights

a great degree of intimacy. Look with me at verse 9: *“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”*

Notice the word: dwell. God dwelt with man in different ways. The Spirit of God dwelt with Adam in the Garden of Eden. God then dwelt in the tabernacle constructed in the wilderness. Later, he dwelt in the temple at Jerusalem. He also dwelt in people for certain periods such as Samson or Saul. God dwelt fully in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. When the disciples saw Jesus, they saw God. This is what Paul means by *“For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”* referring to Jesus.

When we believe in the saving work of Jesus, God also dwells in believers via the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit does its work in us to conform us to be more like Christ, our intimacy with God grows. It’s as though we understand God’s will better with the passing of each day.

The only metaphor I could think of to describe this intimacy is marriage. After a husband and wife get married, they become one flesh. But the intimacy extends beyond physical intimacy. The husband takes on the traits of his wife. The wife takes on the traits of her husband. For example, Josephine enjoys modern art. Before getting married, I had no exposure to modern art. I never actually chose to go on my own to an art museum. As Josephine has shared her love of art with me, I have also begun enjoying to go to art museum. We begin to think like the other does. What would Henry think in this situation? What would Josephine think in this situation?

When we increase in our intimacy with God, we begin to ask ourselves: *“What would God think in this situation?”* For one day, the intimacy will be so close that when people see you in your resurrected self, they will also see Christ because his name will be written on your forehead.

Jesus accomplished salvation (2:11-12). How did Jesus save us? Let’s look at verses 11 thru 12: *“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, but the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”*

We see the word circumcision repeated multiple times in the text. What is circumcision? Jewish baby boys would receive the cutting off of their foreskins. This is a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. If this is a covenant between God and Israel, then why does Paul write about circumcision here? If you recall, the false teachers believed that as a believer you would have to be circumcised. But Paul is saying: You don’t need to be physically circumcised because you have already been spiritually circumcised. This is why he says: *“circumcision made without hands”*.

How have we been spiritually circumcised? It’s through the circumcision of Christ. A believer receives the circumcision of Christ when he or she identifies with Jesus’s death and resurrection through faith. When you believed that Jesus served as your proxy, you received the circumcision of Christ.

What did the circumcision accomplish? It nullified the power of sin over you. When you read the text it says: *“putting off the body of flesh.”* When we think of the flesh, we think of one’s meat on the bones. But whenever Paul uses the term: flesh especially in Romans it refers to the presence or the body under the power of sin. Flesh has a much more sinister connotation. When you believed in Jesus’s death and resurrection, the power of sin over you has been broken. This means that you are no longer its slave. The chains of sin have now been broken. You are free for its authority. But the struggle with the presence of sin remains.

Jesus accomplished regeneration. Prior to faith in Christ, you were dead. You had no sensitivity to spiritual matters. Paul writes this in verse 13: *“And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him.”* When you believed in Jesus’s saving

work, you experience new spiritual life. I heard someone say this week that someone prior to faith is like person who is drowning and waving his hands around looking for help. But a pastor corrected him and say: "No. Prior to faith, you were drowned." This means that you were already spiritually dead. Only because of Christ's saving work revitalized your life.

Jesus accomplished reconciliation (2:13b-14). When you believed in Jesus's saving work, he reconciled you to Christ. Prior to faith, every time you committed something against the commands of God you were issued a citation. When you lied, he issued a citation. When you shouted an unkind word at your spouse or neighbor, he issued another citation. When you thought a lustful thought, he issued a citation. One citation was enough to cast you out of the presence of God. As you continued to do wrong, citations continued to be issued to your record. We see this idea in these following verses. I'll read the entirety of verse 13 again for us: "*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside nailing it to the cross.*"

That record of wrongdoing, Paul calls a record of debt. And the payment for such a debt against God required your life. But when you believed in the saving work of Jesus Christ, every single citation in that book received a stamp: "forgiven". You lied before. Forgiven. You spewed out hurtful words. Forgiven. Your lustful thoughts. Forgiven. Why? When Jesus died on the cross, he paid your citation. The penalty for your sin has been paid with not your life but the life of Christ.

Jesus accomplished victory. When Jesus died on the cross, he also established his victory over all the evil forces of the world. Look with me at verse 16: "*He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*" The Colossians believed that the only way to deal with the evil spirits assaulting them were to consult angels and mediums. But Paul says: "You don't have to worry about those spiritual forces because Jesus has conquered them." The word: disarmed depicts Jesus confiscating the evil spirits of their weapons. He took their lies, accusations, and even physical illness and rendered them inert.

He didn't do this secretly. He disarmed them in public. The phrase: "*open shame*" is used to describe a triumphal procession. Whenever the Romans defeated their enemies, they would set up a parade in Rome. The conquering general would lead the procession. Behind him, would be all the prisoners that his army had captured. When Jesus conquered these spiritual enemies and made a public spectacle of them especially as you see the apostles casting out demons and healing the sick. This demonstrated that the ruler of this world has been defeated. What does this all mean?

Jesus accomplished more than we could ever hope to do on our own. He did more than we can ever imagine. Sin which prevented God from dwelling with us has been taken away. Now God dwells in us. The power of sin, which made us follow its every whim, has been broken. Now we can follow God by his empowerment. The penalty of sin, which was death, has been paid by Christ so that we can have a relationship with God once more. The spiritual forces that holds people captive have been overcome. Could we ever do these things on our own?

Think about even rule following. Jesus followed every rule perfectly so that we would no longer have to follow the Jewish law. He has given us a new law: "Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus has dealt with the principles of the world. Money? God has made you co-heirs with Christ. You will reign with him and princes and princesses. Influence? You're looking for people to follow you. But Jesus has come to serve you, so that you are now free to serve others. You don't need to influence others so that you can be significant. God recognizes your significance so you don't need the

recognition of others. Relationship? You're looking for someone to find you desirable. God found you desirable so much so that he sent his son to redeem you. He sacrificed his life so that you may live. There is no greater act of love than sacrifice. **Jesus has accomplished more than we could ever hope to do on our own.**

How do we defend ourselves against those who say: "You need to do more than just believe in Jesus"? Let's move onto the defense. How do you protect yourself?

Believe that Jesus is enough (2:5-7). Trust that what Jesus is enough. Admit that you can't do anything to add to what Jesus has done. Have faith in Jesus's sufficiency. **Believe that Jesus is enough.**

How do we do this? **Believe that Jesus is enough by inviting accountability (2:5).** Look with me at verse 5: *"For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ."*

When you read verse 5, you may think it kind of odd. What does Paul mean by "in spirit"? Does this mean that Paul's ghostly figure floats around the Colossian church as his letter is being read? Probably not. It refers to how Paul and Colossians are united in the spirit of belief in Christ. This may be a sore note, but think about the world series. When people sported their Astro Jerseys from the West to East Coast and showed up to watch them game, they were united in one spirit. Likewise, we are united in one spirit with believers all over the world.

Even though Paul is absent, he exhorts the Colossians to remain faithful to Christ by believing that Jesus is sufficient. He is all that they need. Why does Paul do this? He hopes to see them built up. Paul uses the phrases: "good order" and "firmness" in verse 5. He adopts these words from the military. Good order refers to an idea that the military unit is able to quickly assemble itself to defend or attack. At a simple gesture, the unit is able to spit itself into to evade or flank the enemy.

The word: firm creates the image or resilience. The military unit would lock its shields and form an impenetrable wall. They work together to form a strong defense.

Paul provided spiritual accountability to the Colossians. We need to seek out such accountability. Accountability not only calls out sin, but helps one develop defense against temptation. When you're tempted to believe that you need to work harder: read your Bible more, pray more, or do more leads to God's favor, you need a brother or sister to remind you that you are loved by God. If you're tempted to withdraw from other believers because of sin, you need the help of other brother and sisters to remind you: "God created the church to remind us that we gather because of what Christ has done not because of what other people may think of us."

We need to invite this type of accountability. This means that we need to seek it out. Instead of waiting for people to ask you to serve as your accountability partners. Seek them out. Give them permission to speak this way into your life.

One accountability partner that you should take advantage of is the church. Invite our church by becoming one of your accountability partners by becoming a member here. If you have attended our church for the last six weeks or more add see this as a place you where you can grow deeper in your discipleship, then please attend our upcoming membership classes that will happen two weeks from today.

We do this not because we desire God's favor. We do this because we have God's favor and it flows out of our thankfulness to him.

Believe that Jesus is enough by memorizing the apostle's creed (2:6-7). One of the difficult things as a believer is to get truth from our heads to our hearts. We may know the truth. But we struggle to believe it. Paul writes this in verse 6: *"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord,*

so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

When people read the phrase: *“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord”*, we think about the moment a person places their faith in Christ. It’s actually more than that. It’s not just a moment of belief, but it is also a commitment to the apostolic teaching of Christ.

The second half of verse 6 says: *“walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving.”* Paul often uses the metaphor: “walk” to describe a life dedicated to Christ. There are series of key phrases here: “rooted, built up, established in the faith, as you were taught.” The first two words are linked to growth. It could be plant growth aka the word rooted. It could be the construction of a building. Hence, Paul uses the word: “built up in him”. The phrase: established in the faith describes the result of what happens when one is rooted and built up. Again, the phrase: “just as you were taught” refers to what was passed to the Colossians and to us – apostolic teaching concerning Christ.

The early church fathers summarized apostolic teaching in the form of creeds. The two most well-known creeds are the Nicene creed and the Apostle’s Creed. Since we use the apostle’s creed most often at our church, I would encourage us to commit it to memory.

The second section of the creed states: I believe in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord and goes on to describe what Jesus Christ has done. One of the things that we can do to move knowledge to believe is to memorize a creed. For in the early church, one of the ways that church leaders taught believers to identify false teachers was through the creed. If anyone taught anything contrary to it, then they would be considered unorthodox. Hence, I would encourage you to memorize the Apostle’s Creed.

We talked this morning about the deception that we may encounter. **Believing that Jesus is not enough.** We talked about the truth to counter it. **Believing that Jesus is enough.** We also talked about our defense. **Believe that Jesus is enough.**

A well-known Christian writer NT Wright had a friend who went home as a teenager to announce to his mother that he had become a Christian. Alarmed, she thought that he had joined a cult. She exclaimed: “They’ve brain washed you.” He prepared the following response: “If you’d seen what was in my brain,” he replied, “you’d realized that it needed washing.” For some of us, the world has shaped our brains into believing that Jesus is insufficient. But I hope that the Spirit would remind you this morning that Jesus is enough by washing our brains anew.