

Growing to Maturity:

The Message of Colossians" #7

"Deception Protection"

Col. 2:8-15

--CEFC 8/30/20

Topic: Guarding the Truth

So here we are in the sixth month of our battle against an enemy we cannot see—
a microscopic virus than can invade a body surreptitiously,
and, for some people, it can take that body captive
and shut it down.

This pandemic has everyone's attention,
and it has put the whole world on high alert.

We are warned by the powers that be to be ever vigilant,
and not to let our guard down,
lest the numbers spike once again.

But the Bible tells us that we face another kind of virus--
a virus that doesn't get covered by CNN or the Washington Post,
for, in fact, they can be carriers.

It presents a danger that we ourselves may not ever be aware of—
it can quietly invade our hearts
and take over our minds,
and we may not even realize what's happened
until it's too late.

It's a danger whose consequences extend far beyond the boundaries of nations

or even of generations--

for they extend into eternity.

The Bible speaks of an on-going spiritual danger--

a different kind of infection, one that takes the form of a virus of ideas--

ideas that can contaminate our minds, our hearts, and our souls.

Dr. Fauci may not warn you about it,

but as your pastor, I will, and I must,

because the Bible does--

and quite sternly.

Listen again to the Apostle Paul's words--

Col. 2:8--"**See to it that no one takes you captive**

through hollow and deceptive philosophy,

which depends on human tradition

and the elemental spiritual forces of this world

rather than on Christ."

Many commentators believe that this verse provides

the core of Paul's concern for these Christians in Colossae.

These young believers were under threat by purveyors of ideas

that could undermine their faith and put them in spiritual jeopardy.

These false teachers were looking for hostages, prisoners,

unsuspecting believers

to take captive by means of what Paul calls

their "**hollow and deceptive philosophy.**"

Paul was fearful that these Colossians might fall victim to their ploys--

he feared they might be deceived by a lie that might hold them in its grip,
and rob them of their present joy
and destroy their future destiny
as followers of Christ.

These opponents were carriers of a deadly disease. /

What did their "**hollow and deceptive philosophy**" look like?

What did it teach?

We can't be sure.

This could be a general warning, true in any age.

But Paul seems to have had something more specific in mind.

As to what that might be we can only guess

based on the subtle clues Paul gives us in the letter.

We can assume it has some Jewish elements,

based on Paul's reference to circumcision here,

and to the observance of Sabbath days later in the chapter--

which, of course, were key defining features of Judaism.

And Jewish writers did describe their religion as a "**philosophy**" on occasion,

especially in dialogue with Gentiles.

Perhaps there were Jews who thought that

Paul's preaching of the gospel of faith in Jesus Christ

was insufficient without the additional requirement to obey the law of Moses.

That was very clearly the case

with some of the false teachers among the Galatians. /

But there could be other aspects of the false teaching that was circulating in Colossae--
for the term "philosophy" could be used of a wide variety
of ideas and movements--
religious and otherwise--
mystery religions, gnosticism, magic, pagan practices of all kinds,
as well as philosophical schools like the Stoics and Epicureans.

They all held a certain attraction in their day--
and whatever philosophy Paul had in mind here
probably *seemed* to be compatible with Christian teaching,
at least in the minds of these young believers.

In fact, the philosophy probably insisted on personal holiness
with lots of rules and restrictions thrown in.

It may have emphasized family values and responsible citizenship,
and, who knows, maybe a passion for social justice and inclusion.

And its leaders may have been very sincere in their beliefs
and devout in their behavior.

It may have *appeared* to be godly and true.

Its attractive face
may have disguised its subtle subversion of gospel truth.

That's why Paul calls it "**hollow and deceptive**"--

But as they say, the first casualty of war is truth,
and in this case, Paul declares,
the real character of this philosophy didn't match its outward facade. /

"And what was wrong with it?" we might ask.

Paul says its problem, quite simply,
is that it depends on human tradition
the elemental spiritual forces this world,
rather than on Christ.

It may look good,
but it's still based on the wisdom of this world,
and not the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

"hollow and deceptive philosophies"—
In our day, I think of all sorts of things that might fall under this description.

I think, for example, of self-help religion--
the kind that exists simply to help you be happy.

The religion of “your best life now”—
religion designed to give you a better marriage
or to increase your wealth,
or to help you find inner peace and fulfillment.

The bookstores have shelves full of that stuff.

It's sometimes called Oprah-religion,
or "spirituality-without-religion" religion--
it's all over the place.

You could call it therapeutic religion—
its purpose is to make you feel good,
rather than to reconcile sinners to a holy and awesome God.

It's everywhere today.

It looks very attractive,

it appeals to all our "felt needs,"
but it depends on human tradition
and the elemental spiritual forces of this world,
rather than on Christ.

Or I think of the more mundane philosophies that are vying for your allegiance--
the philosophies of materialism,
or of hedonism,
or of careerism--
all of which can capture our hearts and minds
and hold us captive.

All this is part of that never-ending search
for more possessions, more pleasure, and more power.

For many in our post-Christian world, politics has now become their religion—
re-shaping the world according to their conception of justice
is what now gives their life meaning.

I could go on--

But all of these are all hollow and deceptive philosophies--
in the end, leaving you empty and hopeless.

They depend on "**the elemental spiritual forces of this world,**"
that is, the primal cosmic forces,
the gods of this world,
at work in the principalities and powers of human existence

that seem to hold us captive.

All of these things take our eyes off the one true and living God

and focus our eyes solely on created things, rather than the Creator.

The Bible calls that idolatry.

For at its core, the conflict we are talking about here

is ultimately a conflict with the devil himself--

who, as Peter says, is prowling around like a roaring lion,

looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

He is the father of lies,

and he will use any means necessary to get us to believe any of them.

Don't do it, Paul says.

Stay on the alert—this stuff is very contagious,

you can easily become infected.

Watch out for these subtle seductions,

for they all have one fundamental flaw, Paul says:

they do not depend on Christ.

And this points us to Paul's response to this threat.

It's not something that can be dealt with

by wearing a mask and keeping physically distant.

We can never completely insulate ourselves from its presence.

But Paul offers us all the protection we need

For in our passage Paul provides a vaccine that can overcome a possible infection

from this spiritual disease—

and that vaccine is the truth—the gospel truth—

the truth found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"See to it that no one takes you captive

through hollow and deceptive philosophy, . . . "

it is hollow and deceptive because it does not depend on Christ.

"For," he says in v. 9, "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

and you have been given fullness in Christ,

who is the head over every power and authority."

This is all we need to know, according to Paul.

This is what will keep us spiritually healthy—a focus on Christ.

Notice that this inoculation requires a double dose-- two shots, two injections--

The first shot that Paul gives us

is simply a strong statement of **the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ--**

"in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,"

he **"is the head over every power and authority."**

Jesus Christ is unique, and he is supreme.

You see, the most attractive and deceptive philosophies

are those that try to incorporate Jesus in some way,

but which, in the process, bring him along as just one aspect of a larger program.

It is Christ ***and*** this or that.

Jesus may be respected as a great teacher or as a gifted prophet,

and even as a manifestation of the divine,

but in those systems

he alone is not enough--you need more.

Jesus *and* the book of Mormon,

Jesus *and* Mohammed,

Jesus *and* "our top ten secrets for success,"

Jesus *and* some political philosophy.

But Paul will have none of it.

"in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,"

Here Paul is just summarizing all that he has already said about him in chap. 1.

Jesus is not just one among many--

he is in a class entirely by himself.

Jesus is unique.

He is the image of the invisible God--the firstborn over all creation.

All things were created through him and for him—

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

In every way, he must have the supremacy.

Moses and the prophets pointed others to God,

and said, "Listen to his words."

Jesus pointed to himself and said, "**Truly, truly I say to you . . .**"

Buddha said the existence of God was of no consequence--

you must seek the enlightenment within.

Jesus said, "**I am the light of the world.**"

Muslims says that Allah is God and Mohammed is his prophet.

Christians say "**Jesus is Lord.**"

"Instinctively," wrote Carnegie Simpson,

"we do not class Him with others.

When one reads His name in a list

beginning with Confucius and ending with Goethe

we feel it is an offense less against orthodoxy than against decency.

Jesus is not [one] of the group of the world's great [men].

Talk about Alexander the Great and Charles the Great if you will. . . .

Jesus is apart.

He is not the Great; He is the Only.

He is simply Jesus. Nothing could add to that. . .

There is the saying of Charles Lamb . . . that

'if Shakespeare was to come into this room we should all rise up to meet him,

but if that Person was to come into it,

we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment."¹

Any philosophy that does not have the glory of Jesus Christ as its source,

as its foundation,

as its heart,

and as its goal

is simply insufficient.

If any philosophy exalts anyone or anything to a level alongside that of Christ,

¹Cited by Stott, in *Basic Christianity*.

it has demoted Christ.

If it is dependent on anything other than Christ,

then don't depend on it.

For Christ is unique, and he is supreme.

for **"in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."**

Do you get that?

That's the first injection of Paul's gospel vaccine.

But the second thing Paul tells us here, part two of this inoculation,

is just as important--

not only is Christ unique and supreme;

Paul also wants us to see that as those who have believed in him

and have entrusted our lives to him,

we "have been given fullness in Christ."

Don't listen to those siren voices

that are telling you that faith in Christ is not enough--

who say, "No, you need this or you need that *also*."

If only you go to this seminar or read that book,

then you'll learn the real secret to success in life."

Paul's message is that if you have come to Christ,

then you don't need to go anywhere else.

In him you have all you need.

For **"in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,"**

and you **"have been given fullness in Christ."**

Paul doesn't define exactly what he means by **"fullness"** here--

perhaps it was a word that was used by his opponents in Colossae.

Perhaps they claimed that only they could give "fullness of life" or whatever.

But Paul says, "No--our *fullness*, whatever that may mean, comes in Christ
and in him alone."

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life " (John 6:35,51).

And, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

Jesus says,

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).

he says, "I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever who believes in me . . . will never die" (John 11:25-26).

"I am the way, the truth, and the life," he says.

If we have Christ, we have all we need,

and the whole of the Christian life consists in

better understanding and experiencing what we *already have* in him.

The Christian life is simply a matter of

the unfolding of the fullness that is ours in Christ.

Think of an **acorn**—

all that that acorn needs to become a great oak

is already hidden there within its tiny shell.

Just add water, soil, and sunshine,
and its fullness will unfold into a mighty tree.

The Christian life is like that—

we have all that we will ever need in Christ.

We simply let the water of the word

in the soil of the church,

under sunshine of the Spirit

have their good effect

and the fullness of Christ that we already have

will unfold in our lives,

into the beautiful life God wants for us.

We have already been given fullness in Christ.

Beware of any philosophy that denies or undermines that truth.

The rest of our passage in vv. 11-15

is simply an expansion of the point Paul has just made.

First, in vv. 11-13 Paul expounds on how we can have fullness in Christ--

and that is through our union with Christ

in his death and resurrection.

And to make his point,

he uses the imagery of the Jewish practice of circumcision

and of the Christian practice of baptism.

His basic point is clear--

it's found in v. 13--
We have been given fullness in Christ,
because **"When you were dead in your sins
and in the uncircumcision of your flesh--
that is, of your sinful nature--
God made you alive with Christ."**

These Gentile Colossians were not just spiritually sick, as slaves to sin,
before they became believers in Christ--
they were spiritual zombies--they were the walking dead.
They had no spiritual life in them--
no spiritual connection to the living God.
They were outside any covenant relationship with God.

This is the way Paul described the Ephesians--
in Eph. 2:11,12--"**remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth
and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision"
(that done in the body by the hands of men)
remember that at that time you were separate from Christ,
excluded from citizenship in Israel
and foreigners to the covenants of the promise,
without hope and without God in the world."**

You were dead in your sins in the uncircumcision of your flesh,
but God made you alive with Christ.
In him you now have the fullness of life.

And from v. 13 we can go ***backward*** in our passage to see ***how*** this has taken place.

We can be made alive with Christ,

because, in v. 12b, we were raised with Christ

through our faith in the power of God,

who raised him from the dead.

The same power of the Spirit of God

that so powerfully raised Jesus from the grave on that first Easter morning

has given us new life, too.

We have been born again--

God's Spirit now lives in us,

changing our hearts so that we now desire to love God and to serve him

and to be engaged with his people in the body of Christ.

And we could be *raised* with Christ

because, going back to v. 12a, we were *buried* with Christ in baptism.

Baptism is intended to be a visible expression of an invisible reality--

the reality that by faith we are united with Christ.

A person's being lowered into the water in baptism

pictures our identification with Jesus in his death.

We are dying to our own agenda for our lives,

our own rule of our lives.

We are identifying with Jesus who died for us.

We are saying Yes to that death,

saying that the death he died was the death I deserved.

And in effect we are saying that from now on

it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

We were raised with Christ,

we were buried with Christ,

and one might expect that if we go back further we would hear Paul say

that we died with Christ--

for that is the gospel message--

as Paul says in 1Cor. 15:1--

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, . . .

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

that he was buried,

that he was raised on the third day

according to the Scriptures"

So, using that progression, some have said that v. 11 of our passage must be

a metaphorical way of speaking about the death of Jesus

using the image of circumcision--

The "**circumcision of Christ**" Paul speaks of here,

"the putting off of the body of flesh," which is literally what Paul says,

is actually a "gruesome figure for death," in the words of one commentator.²

It is in our union with Christ in his death that we receive

the circumcision done without human hands.

That's how we are joined to the covenant people of God.

I think this understanding of the passage makes sense,

²So Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p. 152. Cf. Paul's use of a very similar phrase in 1:22.

though most commentators, including the NIV translation,
take it as a comparison in some way
of Jewish circumcision
with Christian baptism.

Either way, the point of these verses is that we are united with Christ
in his death, burial and resurrection,
something which baptism symbolizes,
and for that reason, we have been given fullness in him.

By faith, we are "**in Christ**"--

we are identified with Christ such that
when God looks at us
he determines that what is true of Christ is true of us also.

He is the unique Son, God's Son by nature,

and in union with him we become sons also--

sons and daughters of God by adoption.

Being in Christ means that when God looks at us

he says, "**You are my son, my daughter, whom I love.**

In you I am well pleased."

Do you hear him say that to you?

In union with Christ we are clothed in his righteousness,

and we will share in his destiny--risen and glorified.

That's how, in v. 13, God has made us alive with Christ.

We've moved backward from that verse;
now let's move forward,
as Paul now describes just what Christ has done.

If we were dead in our sins,
but then we were made alive with Christ,
then something must have happened
to overcome the barrier created by our sin—
simply because sin is the reason for death.
Sin must be dealt with if death is to be overcome—
That's what v. 14 is about.

**"God forgave us all our sins,
having canceled the written code,
with its regulations,
that was against us and that stood opposed to us;
he took it away, nailing it to the cross."**

This is Paul's answer to how the cross solved the problem of our sin.

He gives us the image of a written document or code of some kind
with its regulations or stipulations
which somehow stood against us.

He could be referring simply to the Mosaic law itself,
which, in setting forth the righteous demands of God,
testifies to our own moral failure.

But the word used here is also used of an IOU--

a "note of indebtedness"

written by one's own hand as a proof of obligation to repay the debt--

almost like a mortgage.

This was the debt that we owed to God, left unfulfilled because of our sin.

But look at what God has done with it--

He *canceled* it--the image is of wiping the slate clean,
erasing what was written there.

Not only that,

he *took it away* , destroying the document on which it was recorded.

The mortgage has been burned up and no longer exists.

God *took it away* ,

And where did he take it?

He nailed it to the cross of Christ.

This may refer to the Roman practice of nailing on the cross

above the condemned man's head the reason for his execution.

The man's death satisfied the demands of justice--

that's how he paid his debt to society.

But here Paul says that the charge against us was nailed to Jesus' cross.

Jesus paid our debt.

And in so doing our record is wiped clean,

the charge against us is taken away.

Our sins are forgiven.

What a glorious truth this is!

The story is told of a dream that Martin Luther once had
in which he was visited at night by Satan,
who brought him a record of his life, written in his own handwriting.
It was a lengthy self-confession of all the wickedness of Martin Luther's own heart--
all his lustful desires, all his envious thoughts,
all his evil intentions--it was all there--pages and pages of it.
Satan confronted Luther and asked,

"Is this your own writing? Is this true? Are you guilty of all this?"
He did his best to reduce Luther to the depths of doubt and despair.

Then suddenly the great Reformer turned on the tempter and said,
"Yes, it's true--every word of it,
but write across it all, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son,
cleanses us from all sin!"³ /

**"Who will bring any charge
against those whom God has chosen?" Paul asks in Rom. 8.
It is God who justifies.
Who then is the one who condemns? No one.
Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—
is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom. 8:33-34).**

That record of wrongs that condemns me
has been taken away and nailed to the cross--

³This illustration is found in Hughes, pp. 78f.

it is valid no longer.

Do you have the courage to say what Luther said when the accuser appears to you?

It's the truth!

We have been forgiven--

we have been pardoned--

the only one who now condemns us is the devil--

and he is a liar!

The following verse draws out one implication of that act of grace.

v. 15--"**And having disarmed** (or literally, "stripped") **the powers and authorities,**

he made a public spectacle of them,

triumphing over them by the cross."

The word for "**triumphing**" here⁴ really doesn't refer to the triumph at all,

but to the victory celebration that follows it.

In the ancient world, without 24-hour cable news to cover the war,

the most dramatic way of announcing the far-off victory to the folks back home

was to hold a victory parade in the center of the city

in which the spoils of war,

including the conquered prisoners,

are put on public display.

That's what this word describes--

⁴Found also in 2Cor. 2:14.

it means "to put in a triumphal procession as a conquered enemy."

Through the work of Christ on the cross,

this is what Paul says God has done to the spiritual powers and authorities.

Think about what Paul is saying here for a moment about the crucifixion of Jesus.⁵

The powers and authorities at work there--the powers of Rome and Jerusalem--

which were at the time the best government and the highest religion

that the world had ever known--

the powers of Rome and Jerusalem conspired together to condemn Jesus to death.

They considered him a threat to their authority,

and so they stripped him naked

and held him up to public ridicule and contempt,

and celebrated their triumph over him

when they saw him die on the cross.

If ever it appeared that the forces of evil had won out over the forces of good,

this was it!

All was lost.

But look at the dramatic turn of events as Paul sees it.

When Jesus died on the cross it wasn't *he* who was defeated,

but *they*.

In that death, Paul says,

God was stripping the powers and authorities of this world

of their dignity and might,

⁵ For this point, see Wright.

he was holding them up to public contempt,
exposing to the world their utter helplessness,
and he was leading them in his own public procession of triumph.⁶

The tables were turned,
and somehow in going after Jesus,
the powers of this world overreached themselves,
and they ended up losing the war,
as on the cross, Jesus conquered them,
and his victory was displayed when he rose from the dead.

The early church fathers picked up on this,
and they sometimes spoke of God using the lowliness
and apparent weakness of Christ
as a kind of trap
to lure the devil into overplaying his hand.

It's almost like what we see in the Exodus story,
which gives a very interesting example
of the Lord's unusual military tactics.
After they departed from Egypt,
the Lord told Moses exactly where he wanted the Israelites to go--
"They are to turn back and encamp by the sea," he said,
then **"Pharaoh will think,**
'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion,

⁶See especially, Wright.

hemmed in by the desert."

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue them.

But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army,
and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." (Ex. 14:2-4)

You know the story--

when Pharaoh attacked, the Lord parted the Red Sea.

The Israelites crossed on dry land,

but when Pharaoh's army tried to pursue them, the Lord closes the passage,
and the waters overwhelmed the approaching army and they were drowned.

It was a masterful plan, almost devious--

Let Pharaoh think that the enemy was his,

with his back to a wall of water,

let him come in for the kill,

and then reverse the table on him,

turn the tide, as it were,

and so demonstrate the glory of God to all.

So one preacher of the 4th century spoke of Christ in his weakness

as the "fishhook" that would catch the devil.

Augustine spoke of the cross as "the devil's mousetrap,"

with the devil himself getting caught.

The Lord turned the tragedy of the cross

into his greatest triumph--

For by resisting every temptation to avoid the way of the cross,

Christ became perfectly obedient,

and so became perfectly qualified
to redeem a sinful world.⁷

As one writer put it--

"As he was suspended there, bound hand and foot to the wood in apparent weakness,
they imagined they had him at their mercy,
and flung themselves upon him with hostile intent . . .
But he grappled with them and mastered them."⁸

v. 15-- **"And having disarmed the powers and authorities,
he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."**

So Paul is saying--

Don't be intimidated by those worldly powers that seem so high and mighty—
political powers, media powers, academic powers, entertainment powers—
wherever the powers of this world seem to prevail.
Don't bow down to them,
because they have been defeated.

The cross of Christ, validated powerfully by the resurrection,
marked the end of their supremacy in this world.

Jesus Christ took all that this world could give.

He didn't back down,
and he came out victorious.

The devil may still be active, spreading his lies--
evil is still at work in the world,

⁷cf.. Phil. 2:8; Rm. 5:19.

⁸ Bruce, Col., p.239.

and so we need to hear Paul's warning.

But his destiny is determined--

evil won't have the last word--you can be sure of it.

Jesus Christ is the victor.

He is king over all,

and as his faithful subjects, we will reign with him,

when he comes again in glory.

Don't let anyone deceive you into thinking that you need anything more.

All you need is Christ--

all you need is to realize your union with him,

and to hold on to him,

and to live out what is already true of you,

for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

and you have been given fullness in Christ.

Prayer--

Eph. 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches

he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people,

to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—

that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Song: *I Will Glory in My Redeemer*

Benediction—

2Ths. 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,
encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

After worship, we will **sing Happy Birthday to Hal**
and have cupcakes for everyone in his honor.

Growing to Maturity:

The Message of Colossians" #9

Aug. 30, 2020

"Deception Protection"

Col. 2:8-15

We are struggling against a deadly virus that threatens to destroy us, but the Bible tells us of another danger of which we may not even be aware—a spiritual infection of ideas competing for our hearts and minds. In our passage Paul warns the Colossians and us of a grave threat, and then he offers a sure protection--a proper understanding of the supremacy and saving work of Jesus Christ and our union with him.

I. A Stern Warning--

Beware of Deceptive Philosophy (v. 8)

II. Our Sure Defense--

A. The Uniqueness of Christ (v. 9)

B. The Fullness of the Christian (v. 10)

1. Our Union with Christ (vv. 11-13a)

*We are united with Christ
in his death, burial and resurrection,*

2. The Saving Work of Christ (vv. 13b-15)

He cancelled the written code
that stood against us

He disarmed the powers and authorities
that opposed us

Sermon Response:

"Deception Protection"

Col. 2:8-15

•What sort of "hollow and deceptive philosophies" are prevalent and persuasive to many today? Why are many taken captive by them? What makes them so attractive? How can you best defend yourself against them?

•Paul's statement in v. 10 is astounding and full of wonder: "you have been given fullness in Christ." Reflect on what that means. If that is true, what could be really lacking in your life? Praise God for the fullness and pray for an ever-increasing awareness and experience of it (cf. Eph. 3:16-19).

•In vv. 11-13 Paul affirms that we have union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Meditate on that magnificent truth. Think about your baptism as a visible presentation of that union. What does that union mean as you look at your life?

•Read v. 14. What are some of the things that were contained in that written code or certificate of debt that stood against you before God? Imagine that document being nailed to the cross and then taken away forever. Thank God for his forgiveness and the freedom you can now enjoy from the burden of sin and guilt.

•Read v. 15. Reflect on the irony, the turning of the tables, that took place on the cross--who appeared to be the winner, but who actually won? How are the "powers and authorities" disarmed? What can we learn from God's dealings with the devil on the cross of Christ?