Read: Colossians 2:6-19

As you read look for the following:
- In/with language
- What tenses are being used

Colossians 2:6-7

These verses sum up the theme of the letter. Here they serve as a bridge between the introduction to the letter and the guts of the letter.

Three ideas are mentioned here:

Godly living

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, (2 Colossians 2:6 NIV)

> by 'receiving Christ Jesus as Lord' Paul here refers to the Colossian Christians' acceptance of the proclamation of Jesus the Lord, to their consequent confession of faith, and to their new status as members of Christ's body (see 2:19). …
> Those who have (in this technical sense) 'received Christ Jesus as Lord' must *continue to live in him*: niv thus brings out well the continuous force of the present imperative.[1]

You may have heard the call for people to 'receive Jesus' at church services or outreach meetings. What does the phrase usually mean in these settings? How is that different to the way Paul uses it in these verses?

Spiritual growth

rooted and built up in him (2 Colossians 2:7a NIV)

> It is particularly worth noting that, whereas 'rooted' is an aorist, [form of verb] indicating a once-for-all planting of the Christian 'in' Christ, 'built up' is in the present, suggesting continual growth—an important theme in this letter to a very young church.[2]

The Colossians were already firmly planted in Christ; they needed to continue growing in him.

Christian understanding

strengthened in the faith as you were taught (2 Colossians 2:7b NIV)

---

[1] N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: an introduction and commentary,* TNTC Vol. 12 (Nottingham: IVP Academic, 1986), 103-104.
[2] Wright, 104.

Most likely this refers to their grasp of 'the faith', that is Christianity as a whole, as the reference to teaching shows.

In the great commandment, we are taught 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Mark 12:30 NRSV). Do you think that we too often emphasize heart, soul and strength, but neglect to love God with all our mind? What are some of the ways we can love God with our mind?

The section of Colossians 2:8-19 consists of three warnings:
1. Don't let anyone kidnap (capture) you! (verse 8).
2. Don't let anyone condemn you! (verse 16).
3. Don't let anyone disqualify you! (verse 18).[3]

We will focus only on the first section, verses 8-15.

Colossians 2:8-15

As we said in our introduction to the letter, we don't know exactly what the false teachers were peddling, as we only hear Paul's side of the conversation. Scholars have made educated guesses but even they don't all agree. Because it is not clear, we should not tie our interpretation of the letter too much to one theory.

There are a couple of tricky bits in this passage, that you can read more about in the 'Tricky Stuff' section (if you want).
- What do the 'elemental spiritual forces of this world' (NIV) refer to in verse 9?
- What is the 'charge of our legal indebtedness' (NIV) in verse 14?

We summarised the issue or the false teaching that was confusing the Colossians by saying Paul appears to be arguing against the idea that the Colossian believers needed something more, some practice or some special knowledge, in addition to Christ. The false teachers appear to be emphasizing adherence to special days and special practices, maybe based on the Jewish Law or a mix.[4] Whatever it is, the Colossians are being told they need something more, than faith in Christ.

Paul describes it as follows:
- According to human tradition
- According to the elemental spirits of the universe

[3] R. C. Lucas, *Fullness & freedom: the message of Colossians & Philemon* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 96.
[4] Bird describes it as a mystic Judaism in a Hellenistic Philosophical garb. M.F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), 72.

- Not according to Christ

In verse 4 Paul describes these arguments as plausible, but they will in fact lead you away from Christ.
What are some of today's "plausible words" which can deceive Christians?

What ideas or practices have you encountered that suggest we need to add something to our faith besides Jesus to make us "true" or "total" Christians?

Whatever new idea someone comes up with, Paul says, this is the acid test: Is it "in line with the king" (v. 2:8)? Does it have Jesus, the Messiah, the Lord, as its center and focus? If not, beware. What practical steps can a Christian take to "watch out" (v. 2:8) and not be captured by false ideas?[5]

How can we discern between divine wisdom and human philosophy in our everyday life?

What ways of thinking have the potential to 'take you captive'?

Some commentators think that the false teaching was a requirement to follow Jewish laws and rules. Whether this is the issue for the Colossians or not, the early Church had to deal with this question. Christianity was originally a Jewish sect. As Gentiles were incorporated into the Church, the leaders had to determine what to expect of Gentile converts. In Judaism there were God-fearers, who believed in the Jewish God but had not taken the next step of circumcision and adherence to the law, for example Cornelius (Acts 10:2). The Jerusalem council of Acts 15 determined that Gentiles did not need to follow the law, but they set some rules which would enable table fellowship between Jewish and non-Jewish believers.

As Gentile believers, why do we not need to follow the Jewish Law? If someone told you that to be fully part of God's family, we needed to follow the Jewish law, how would you answer?

Paul's answer is to tell the Colossians that they already have all they need in Christ. We can break up this paragraph as follows:

Colossians 2:9-10	Fullness in Christ
Colossians 2:11-12	Fellowship with Christ
Colossians 2:13–15	Freedom through Christ[6]

[5] Some questions are taken from T. Wright, D. Larsen, & S. Larsen, *Colossians & Philemon: 8 Studies for Individuals or Groups* (London: SPCK , 2009), 28.
[6] Lucas, 99.

Colossians 2:9-10 Fullness in Christ

Note the mention of 'bodily', which makes the incarnation crucial, that is, Jesus being fully human and fully God.

> 'This text declares Christ to be the embodiment of the entire completeness of the Godhead. He is in no sense a lower-level deity. All that makes God God, resides fully in Christ.'[7]

Jesus is not just another intermediary, but the self-revelation of God. [8]
Note also the past tense ' you have come to fullness in him'. This is not something for the future, rather the Colossians have already come to it.[9]

Colossians 2:11-12 Fellowship with Christ

Note the past tense used in these verses. Some of these are understandably past tense, like circumcised and buried with him. But here is one of the few times Paul uses the past tense for believers having been raised with Christ. This may be to emphasize that the believers already have all they need in Christ.

See 'For further reading / thought' at the end for the different ways we have been raised with Christ.

What difference does it make, or could make, in your life to see yourself as already raised with Christ, instead of a purely a future hope?

The key to understanding 'spiritual circumcision' is the phrase 'putting off the body of the flesh'. This is a complete break with their past life, turning from paganism to God.

> If, … the "circumcision of Christ" is the circumcision which he effects, the inward cleansing brought about by his death, resurrection, and indwelling presence in those who are united to him by faith, then the "stripping off of the body of flesh" refers to the believer's baptismal experience (described in Rom. 6:6 as the crucifixion of "our old self" and the destruction of "the sinful body"). It involves the reckoning of one's former self with its desires and propensities to be dead, as a necessary prelude to putting on the new nature—putting on Christ himself in his resurrection life. What the believer puts off is "the whole personality organized for, and geared into rebellion against God[10]

[7] E. D. Martin, Colossians, Philemon (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press,1993), 110.
[8] Bird, 77.
[9] Lucas, 99.
[10] F. F. Bruce, The *Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians (*Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans , 1984), 104.

Colossians 2:13–15 Freedom through Christ

Paul notes two barriers to entry to God's people. First, there is the written code (NRSV says the bond which was outstanding against us with its legal demands). The second is the powers and authorities. God has cancelled the former and disarmed the latter – the picture of a victorious general leading his captives through Rome being used.

In Colossians 2:15, Christ supposedly disarmed spiritual rulers; why does evil persist if these powers were defeated?

Reflecting on verses 9-15, what in these verses do you find most helpful in avoiding the dangers mentioned in verse 8?

For further reading / thought

The cross therefore becomes the source of hope for all who had been held captive under their rule, enslaved in fear and mutual suspicion. Christ breaks the last hold that the 'powers' had over his people, by dying on their behalf. He now welcomes them into a new family in which the ways of the old world—its behaviour, its distinctions of race and class and sex, its blind obedience to the 'forces' of politics, economics, prejudice and superstition—have become quite simply out of date, a ragged and defeated rabble.[11]

[11] Wright, TNTC, 121.

For further reading / thought

Arnold summarises Cranfields four different ways we are raised with Christ as follows:

In a largely overlooked and important essay, C. E. B. Cranfield expands on the comments in his ICC commentary on Rom 6:1–14 by clarifying four different senses in which believers can be said to be raised with Christ.

(1) The first is a *juridical* sense and relates to the status of believers before God. He explains that "God wills to see them as having died in Christ's death and having been raised in his resurrection." Although in Rom 6 Paul does not expressly state that believers have been raised with Christ, Cranfield finds vv. 11 ("consider yourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus") and 13 ("present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life") to point strongly in this direction. He concludes, and I think rightly, "I cannot accept the contention (though it is quite often stated very confidently) that there is a substantial disagreement between this passage and Col 3:1."

(2) The second is *baptismal*. Cranfield contends that "it is surely implied" that believers have been raised with Christ in baptism, especially since Christ's death would have "no saving efficacy apart from its sequel in his resurrection."

(3) The third is the *moral* or ethical sense. Paul's injunction to "walk in newness of life" at Rom 6:4, as well as at the end of the passage where he exhorts them to "present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness" (Rom 6:13), suggests a form of inner reflection on the implications of the Christ event that naturally leads to ethical living.

(4) The final sense is the *eschatological*, and in particular that believers will be physically raised in the final resurrection. Cranfield notes that this is present as a secondary reference in Rom 6:8b ("we believe that we will also live with him") and probably also in v. 5b ("we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his"). But Cranfield asserts that this is also present in Col 3:4.
He concludes his essay by declaring that "the fact that Christ himself has already been raised from the dead has a significant bearing on our present life."[12]

[12] C. E. Arnold, *Colossians* Second Edition, Vol. 44A, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan *Academic , 2025), 522–523.*

Tricky Stuff

Arnold lists the main views of the 'elemental spiritual forces of this world' (NIV) στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου - stoicheia tou kosmou) – my summary below:

1. *Basic Instruction.* That is 'guiding principles in the world'
2. *Non-Christian Religions.*
3. *The Domain of Flesh, Sin, and Death.* Pauline categories of evil influence expressed by the terms "flesh," "sin," and "death."
4. *Created Things.* The most common use of the term refers to the four physical elements, (earth, air, fire, and water) so the phrase could be translated, "components of the world" and understood to be "created things."

5a. *Spirits (Those Governing the Physical Elements or Stars).* in BDAG: "transcendent powers that are in control over events in this world, *elements, elemental spirits*."

5b. *Spirits (Demonic Powers).* A slight variation of the previous view would be that the expression is simply an equivalent to the Pauline expression, ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι, "principalities and powers."[13]

Arnold argues for 5b. Wright, is similar, arguing that the correct meaning is 'local presiding deities, the national 'gods' supposed to rule over the different areas and races of the world'[14]

Brown summarises the main views of the 'charge of our legal indebtedness' (NIV)) (χειρόγραφον - *cheirographon*) as follows:

In the Graeco-Roman world, a "record of debt" (*cheirographon*) was a well-documented written certificate of indebtedness (but compare Hendriksen 1964, 120–21). As Arnold points out, these "records of debt" appear in ancient papyri as well as Jewish literature (*T. Job* 11:11). According to Barth and Blanke (1994, 370), a debtor could draw up a "record of debt" on their own volition as "a legal instrument of default." Although the term *cheirographon* does not occur in Phlm 18, it is possible that Paul drew up such a list on behalf of Philemon's slave Onesimus. The main question in Col 2:14 is to what the term *cheirographon* ("record of debt") refers. There are two broad interpretations of this issue (see Wright [1986, 116] for a third possible interpretation). Many commentators, such as Wright (1986, 115–17), associate *cheirographon* in Col 2:11 with the law of Moses. This position tends to understand the words following *tois dogmasin* as alluding to "the regulations" of the Mosaic law. Others, such as O'Brien (1998, 125), argue that *cheirographon* should be understood as a metaphorical "record of debt" signed by believers. According to this view, the *cheirographon* functions as an IOU of an individual's sin before God.[15]

[13] Arnold, 476–477.

[14] Wright, 106.

[15] D. R. Brown, *Colossians* (Lexham Press,2013). (D. Mangum, Ed.; Col 1:24–2:23). Lexham Press.