

Colossians 2:6-15 ⁶ As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 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.

Have you ever opened up a gift and found something a little less attractive than you have hoped for? You know how it is: you hold a smile on your face and grit through your teeth a less than sincere thank you. Sure grandma meant well, but while that shirt might have been in style when she was a child, it certainly is not something that you would ever be seen in public wearing.

The picture that Paul paints for us this day in our text is also that of a gift received. In that text, Paul reminds the Colossians of what has caused them to be rooted and built up in Christ. He reminds them that they have received the gift of faith through Baptism. He goes on to encourage them to view the content of that faith which they had learned from the Scriptures as a gorgeous jewel to be guarded. It was a gift to be kept just as pure as they had received it.

After all, it was that faith that allowed them to believe all of what Paul was saying. It was that faith that allowed them to believe that in Baptism they had received the circumcision of

Christ, that circumcision which removes the sinful body of flesh. It was that faith that enabled them to know that Baptism was not only death to the sinful flesh but also new life to the new man Christ created in Baptism. Baptism gave them that faith and the Word of Christ which they gathered to hear would sustain it and inform it.

We too have received this gift. We too have received faith through Holy Baptism. And the content of that faith that we continue to learn by reading and studying God's Word with the Holy Spirit's guidance is also to be guarded by us as a precious jewel.

This gift is no doubt a wonderful, well thought out gift that God has given us. But the question is simply this today: Is that gift something that we will be seen walking around in public wearing. Will we who have received Christ as Lord also walk in Him?

Let's face it. There was a time when Christianity, its values, and its message were not only right, but quite popular as well. Rarely was anyone made fun of for wearing their faith way out of their sleeves. But the situation has changed. Christians who take the Bible at its word and who live and speak according to that Word are not exactly the accepted norm anymore. Oh sure, you can believe in God, and be very spiritual and the world will cheer. But try to make any exclusive claims about that God, His plan of salvation, or His commands and you will not be welcomed into most conversations in our culture. Indeed, when anyone faithfully tries to expound what the content of our faith is as Christians, most of the time they are silenced through whatever means possible. Try to claim that only those who believe in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, know the true God and you will be condemned as too judgmental. Maintain that no one, and we mean no one, is saved apart from grace through faith in Christ no matter how nice of a person they are and you will be declared harsh. Maintain that all other religions in the world are false ideas that lead not to God but away from Him and you will

categorized as narrow-minded. Tell others that you will wait until marriage to sleep with or move in with your girlfriend or boyfriend and you will be viewed as most strange. Proclaim that relationships, no matter how loving between members of the same sex are wrong and dishonorable to God and you will be viewed as an old-timer. Fight for unborn children against those women who claim a God-given right to slay their babies in the womb and you will be viewed as cold and calculated.

Yet, all of these things are things that we have received as true from God. They are indeed essential truths that fill up the content of the faith as we have received it in Baptism and through God's Word. But the question still remains, will we do as God encourages through Paul? Will we that have received Christ the Lord also walk in Him? Will we take the gift of faith as we have received it in Baptism out of the box and dawn it even if it sticks out in our world like bell-bottoms and polyester suits? Are we willing to be out of style with our world in order to be in fashion with God's Word?

Paul was writing to the Colossian Christians who lived in a world that was much like our own. It was world that was in love with things spiritual, but yet rejected the very basic teachings of the Christian faith. To be spiritual was very much in vogue in Colossia. But to be specific about a God who came in flesh to save all people from sin in order that He might deliver them unto a bodily resurrection was not popular at all.

Paul's call to people living in such a world was simply to live as baptized people, to walk in Christ just as they had received Him. We also have also been called to such living amidst our world.

Paul reminded the Colossians and reminds us this day that this type of baptismal living is characterized by being watchful of worldly philosophies which might sound good, but in the end

lead us away from saving faith in Christ. To hold fast to Christ is to watch for anything that might distract us from true faith.

Perhaps, the greatest such danger to true faith in our society today is what scholars call pluralism or post-modernism. This is the philosophy that all ideas, all ideologies, and religions are essentially equal. It is the idea that each person may choose their beliefs and no one has the right to question those beliefs or call them into question.

We as Christians must not fall into believing such a philosophy. For our Lord did not proclaim that he was a way to salvation, but the way. He did not claim to be a truth, be the truth, and He did not claim to be a life, but the life.

For if we buy the assumption that all beliefs are equal, we rob Christ of His glory and in so doing make a mockery of His life, His death, and His resurrection.

Oh, not too many of us Christians just wake up one day and decide to accept all truth as equal. But we must admit that at times, generally in an effort to not offend anyone or to be comforted about our loved ones, we can be talked into accepting a pluralistic ideology. We start saying things like, “Well at least they still go to church” about our friends or relatives who attend churches that we know teach things that are contrary to the Word of God. We act as if any church, no matter what they teach, is just as good as the next one. And my friends, this kind of talk is the beginning of pluralism.

For once we have accepted that all churches are equal even though they teach completely different things, how much of a leap is it to begin to believe that all religions are equal even though they teach different things. All too often anymore, even from Christians, I hear the phrase uttered, “Well as long as they believe in God, its okay.” This statement is almost always made without any reference to what God one worships. But this statement is only true if that

person believes in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, revealed in Holy Scriptures who came in the flesh to live, to die, and to rise for you and for me. Otherwise it is not okay. For no generic God will do. For only God in the flesh, only Jesus can save.

If any church no matter what they teach or if any God will do, we have no need to put on our baptismal identity. We might as well leave the content of our faith in the box, and walk around in whatever is popular, for it really doesn't matter if all truth is equal. And it is certainly much easier to just wear what's popular.

But it does matter. Any God will not do. Any teaching will not do. Only the God that took the debt of our sin and nailed it to the cross will do. Only the God that triumphed over the powers of evil on the cross will do. Only the God who makes us complete by dwelling in us through Baptism will do. And only His teaching from His word will do. For only that teaching can bring faith. Only that teaching can truly confront us with our sin, and only that teaching can truly comfort us with the Gospel.

And that is why we are willing to be out of style with our world if that is what is required to be in fashion with God's Word. For we know that our God is the only God that saved us from our sin, and the only God that delivered us through Holy Baptism unto newness of life. We know that it is only our God that can this day wash away all of our sin again. It is only Him that can take our own pluralistic thoughts and statements and nail them to his cross this day. We have received Him in purity and in truth, and this is how we walk in Him. If that makes us stick out in the crowd, so be it. We will wear our faith everywhere we go. For we wish not to be in style with our world, but in fashion with God's Word. For being in fashion with God's Word is true life indeed. Amen.