

"Fully Cross Referenced"

Text: Colossians 2:6-15

May the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ lead you to contemplate and appreciate the priceless gift that was thereby earned for you – the forgiveness of your sins and Eternal Life. And may you never be afraid or ashamed to announce to the world your association with and belief in that Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Someone once asked Albert Einstein his telephone number. He couldn't remember it. When the person that asked expressed his amazement that someone like the world-renowned physicist couldn't remember such a simple thing, Einstein was said to have replied, "Never memorize something that you can look up." Sadly, I cannot recall even one of my teachers who embraced that timeless wisdom.

Not to be outdone by the West, an ancient Chinese proverb put it this way: *The most faded ink is better than the best memory.* A relative of mine proved the wisdom of this general maxim every time he tried to dial a telephone number from memory. He would routinely get five or six of the seven numbers right, and then guess at the rest. Or he'd get all of the numbers right, but make an educated guess at the order. Funny thing about those phone numbers – they don't do compromise and they're very unforgiving.

It's also interesting how our minds have to also learn to work backwards today. Years ago you just had to struggle to remember the phone number – everybody remembered the name. Now, unless someone is in your address book, your phone just shows the number of the person that's calling and you have to try to work backwards from the number to the name.

The solution to all of this, of course, is cross referencing – printed lists of names (listed alphabetically or by category) followed by the harder to remember information like phone numbers, email addresses, birthdays, anniversaries, and the like. The idea is to make it easy to find the things you can remember, so you can then find a permanent record of the things you forgot, or about which you are uncertain.

This morning, guided by the Word of God, we are going to talk more about cross referencing, only in a much more vital context – the eternal future of our very souls.

The text that will so instruct us this morning is found in Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the 2nd Chapter:

^{ESV} **Colossians 2:6-15** *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 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. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² 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. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

These are the words of our God. Fully confident that the Source of these words is infinitely wiser and more powerful than anything our human minds can grasp, and confident that that same power will keep his promise to work powerfully through these words in our hearts also this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

The general concept behind cross referencing is to start with what you obviously know, and then to point you to an authoritative source where you can find additional information. It should be self-evident therefore that we also therefore begin the process of *Biblical* cross referencing with what we know, and what we know the best is our own sin. Our text put it this way: "**And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh...**"

It amazes me, by the way, whenever I hear Christians described by non-Christians as those who believe that they "are better than everyone else" because they believe they never sin. I've not met a single Christian who believes that. There may *be* some, but I've not met them. The Christians I know are those who are well aware of their own sins, failures, and inconsistencies. This is especially true because

Christians know both the full extent of God's demands on them and their utter failure to live up to God's holy standards.

That's why we begin with what we know so well – our own personal, individual sin.

We need to pause here, because we probably need to be reminded of our responsibilities when it comes to something like hearing or reading a sermon. Our job is not simply to shift into mental neutral and to accept as true whatever the pastor tells us on a Sunday morning. Listening the right way actually takes work. In fact it often calls for *significant* effort if we are to do it right. Man's words need to be challenged; they need to be evaluated for authenticity and, when thus verified, they need to be personally and individually applied. That takes effort.

So, what part of what we've talked about so far should have raised a flag in your mind; what part should have been challenged? The idea that we always and fully recognize and acknowledge our own personal sin. We don't. In fact most often we don't even come close. We subconsciously set an artificial and ridiculously low bar for ourselves, and then imagine that if we at least get close to that silly man-made standard we can feel pretty good about ourselves. Ask yourself: Can you feel yourself starting to get comfortable with sin, sometimes to the point that you actually lose track of just what *God* thinks about the things that you are saying, doing, or thinking? In other words, do you find yourself getting to the point where you imagine that *God* has learned to accept the way you are (your thoughts, words, and actions) just because you've been that way for a long time now?

That's the part that should have raised a flag for you – the idea that we naturally and effortlessly know the full extent of our own sinfulness. We really don't. We therefore need to start the cross-referencing process back a step from that. What we really have no trouble identifying are those things that we do, the words we speak, and the thoughts that fill our minds. These we experience for ourselves, and therefore these we can rightly, accurately identify. These we can know. It is then God himself who adds the necessary cross-references, and you and I then need to take the time and expend the effort to actually look up those cross references. It's as if God himself, after every single one of our thoughts, words, and actions makes this note: (For God's view on this, see: Bible, The Holy.) In fact the only way to avoid becoming comfortable with our own sinfulness is to follow God's own cross reference back to his perfect standard – our Bibles – and there to discover just what *God* thinks about each of our day-to-day activities.

Unfortunately, this is becoming increasingly necessary. Necessary, because we live in a society that has absolutely severed all ties to any sort of divine order or divine authority. The obvious result is that our society no longer has the faintest idea what is good and acceptable and what is evil and reprehensible – *to God*.

The fact is when we actually take the time to follow God's own cross references to everything we think, say, and do, *that's* when we really can start to wrap our minds around our own personal sinfulness – what Paul described in our text as ***"the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands."*** That's where we can begin to grasp the significance of his simple statement of fact in our text: ***"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh..."*** That was our natural condition. That's the condition into which we were born: ***dead in our trespasses***. In fact it's probably true that if we don't experience a certain sense of terror and panic when we rightly contemplate this truth, we're probably not getting the full and accurate picture, and we can't really then fully appreciate the next set of cross references that God the Holy Spirit reveals to us in this morning's text.

You see, God doesn't just offer us a cross reference to every single one of our thoughts, words, and actions; he also adds a cross reference after every single one of the personal sins that we can thereby identify in our lives. And that cross reference is truly a *cross* reference, because after every single one of our sins, God himself adds this note: (Cf., the cross of Jesus Christ.)

Our text worded the cross reference this way: ***"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, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."***

Just as we are not to skip lightly over our own personal sin, so it is also God's intention that we not lightly skip over, or make *impersonal*, his own cross reference appended to every single one of those sins. What that means is that every single time you identify sin in your life, then also follow up with God's own reference to what he has done with that sin. What you will find is that God's cross reference always and only leads back to the cross. Every single time. The times you've stolen something from your neighbor or from your God – nailed to the cross. God took care of that by demanding payment from his own Son. Your bad language – nailed to the cross. The precious time of grace that you've squandered – nailed to the cross. Your lust, your hatred, your

Scripture Readings

gossip, your failure to love your neighbor as you love yourself, your faithless anxiety about the future, your misguided love of the things of this world – all nailed by God to the cross of his own Son. Every single sin you've ever committed – everything you've ever done that you were commanded not to do or failed to do when God himself told you to – all cross referenced by God himself back to Calvary and the payment there offered by Jesus Christ.

In fact it is only when we come to terms with this part of our text that we can also then learn to appreciate the first part of our text. There we read: **"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."** When Paul talks about **"receiving Christ Jesus the Lord"** this is exactly what he is referring to. To **"receive Christ Jesus the Lord"** means simply to believe God's own cross references concerning each of our sins, that he has in fact placed them all on Christ Jesus. That's also why it is now right and natural for those who now trust in this same Christ Jesus to, again in Paul's words, **"abound in thanksgiving."** Note that he didn't say, **"Now do your part"** – because there is nothing left to do. No sin debt has been left unpaid. God himself has cross referenced every single one of them back to the cross of his Son. Not a single sin has been left out. Not one. There is therefore nothing left for us to do but to thank him for what he has already accomplished for us.

It is also only when we come to understand this part of our text that we can come to appreciate the next part. There God himself also tells us: **"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. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."** Not only has God himself nailed every single one of our sins to the cross of his Son, no one can nullify, cancel, or supersede what God has here decreed. The reason is simple: there is no higher power, no higher authority. What man deems to be right or correct can never pry God's nails from our sin and affix them back onto us. They are fastened forever to Christ's cross. Though it *seems* or *feels* right to man that *we* should have to "do our part" or in some way pay at least part of our own debt, the Ultimate Authority has forever decreed that the full debt has already been paid in full.

Follow then *God's* cross references, and you will never be led astray. Measure your own actions against God's holy standard, and recognize them as the utter failures that they are – each one representing a debt you could never hope to repay. But then hear and thrill to the note that God himself also appends to every single one of those debts: **"Pain in full by my Son."** Amen.

^{ESV} **Genesis 18:20-33** Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." ²² ¶ So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" ²⁶ And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷ Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." ³¹ He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

^{ESV} **Luke 11:1-13** Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² ¶ And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'" ⁵ ¶ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything?' ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

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The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – July 24, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 457 (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Genesis 18:20-33) Our two Scripture readings this morning deal not only with prayer, but more specifically with the need for *persistence* in our prayers. Note as you listen to this first account how irritating it is to hear Abraham continue to ask more and more of God. God is not irritated. Learn from this to bring all requests to God – no matter how many or how trivial or how often. God loves to hear and answer the prayers of his children.

The Second Lesson: (Luke 11:1-13) In this lesson, Jesus not only teaches his disciples (and us) the Lord's Prayer, he also teaches us something about persistent prayer. It could be argued that the reason we fail to pray as we ought is that we have come to doubt the effectiveness of prayer – especially when God does not immediately say yes to our prayers. God's message to you: "*Be patient and persistent. I hear you.*"

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 528 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be For Me"

The Sermon – Text: Colossians 2:6-15 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Fully Cross Referenced"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 306 (Verses 1, 4, 6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 528 (Verse 15) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be For Me"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (51) Ave (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Ascension Lutheran of Batavia (Chicago area). Pastor Bruce Naumann has returned the call to serve as fulltime resident (visiting) missionary. Pastor Caleb Schaller has returned the call to Faith of Markesan. That congregation has now called Pastor Luke Bernthal. St Stephen School of San Francisco has called Teacher Carly Meyer. Mt. Zion of Detroit has called Pastor Del Maas.

Organ Dedication – It now appears that we can't get the necessary people in place for an organ dedication service yet this summer. The Church Council will try to schedule it this fall. Please pass along any suggestions to a Council member.

Hecla Installation – Pastor-elect Timothy Daub is tentatively scheduled to be installed as the new pastor of Prince of Peace in Hecla in an afternoon service on August 21. More information will be forthcoming as plans are finalized.

Assisted Hearing Devices – We now have available hearing assisted devices for any who are having trouble hearing the Pastor during our worship services. If you would like to try one of the devices, please speak to the Pastor prior to this morning's service, or at your earliest convenience for use in future services.