

"Complete"

Text: Colossians 2:6-15

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in the secure knowledge that your sins are one and all forgiven because of what Christ Jesus has done for you, and that you are absolutely complete in him, lacking nothing. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: there are certain seemingly insignificant little phrases that appear so positively inconsequential, until you put them into context. They are really no big deal, *until* you plug them into day-to-day reality. Consider the simple little phrase: *"Faith must always have an object."* Doesn't it just sound so unimportant, so petty in the larger scheme of things? Yet when you plug that simple phrase into life, when you actually put it to the test, you find it is anything but trivial or unimportant.

Suppose a friend is trying to talk you into investing your life's savings as venture capital in his new startup company. You question him on the particulars, and although he gives you a few specifics, his primary sales pitch is, *"You just have to have faith."* But faith in *what*? What is the *object* of that faith he is asking of you? In that context, "faith" means to have some sort of blind confidence that everything will work out the way you want it to. In other words, the faith he's asking of you is based on pixie dust.

On the other hand, when mountain climbers attempt to scale those impossible-looking cliffs or mountains, they have to have faith in their equipment. Yet the object or foundation of their faith is not some blind hope that their equipment will all work the way it is supposed to, it is the careful, rigorous testing that went into every single component. They have faith in it only because they've personally verified that it does what it is supposed to. In that case, the object or basis of their faith is more or less that the laws of physics won't suddenly cease to govern what happens here on earth. A rope or carabiner that held 1000 pounds yesterday will hold it again today.

Christians can also fall into the foolishness of imagining that there can be any sort of substance to a faith that has no object. For the child of God, the object or basis of our faith must always be a promise from our God. We can have faith that our God will work everything in life out for the ultimate good of his children (those who believe in him) but only because he has given us a specific promise that he will do exactly what he promised. We can have faith that he will provide for all our earthly needs when we put him first in our lives because he has specifically promised that he would. We can have faith that Jesus paid for our sins not based on a whimsical

hope that he actually did, but on his sure clear promise that he already has.

To the world, "faith" and "belief" are essentially the same thing, and each therefore carries the same problem. The Godless believe in the sort of faith where the individual gets to manufacture the object for himself. They have come to believe that "faith" and "belief" can create reality. In other words, if they want something badly enough, and then have faith that their desire will come true, that faith itself carries the power to make their wish come true. Pixie dust.

With this as our introduction, we are prepared to hear the words of our text for today, foundational words of promise from our God on which faith can rest securely. That text is found in Paul's Letter to the Colossians, the Second 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.*

This is God's Word. Acknowledging that these are the words of God and not of men, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"*** Amen.

A prominent evolutionist named Matthew Cartmill, a professor first at Duke and then at Boston University, wrote in an article on evolution: *"The broad outlines of the story of human evolution are known beyond a reasonable doubt. However, science hasn't yet found satisfying, law-*

based natural explanations for most of the details of that story..." Think about that for just a minute. What he is saying is that "everyone who is smart believes in evolution, even though there is not yet one shred of scientific evidence to prove it." Professor Cartmill is not some fringe evolutionary lunatic. He is one of the elite who recently received the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award. What he is saying is what every evolutionist says, "You need to have faith that human beings evolved."

Remember that seemingly inconsequential phrase we began with – *"Faith must have an object"*? Ask yourself, just what is the object or basis for the faith that men like Professor Cartmill are demanding? The obvious answer is that they are expecting everyone to have faith in a theory that they themselves created, and which they themselves admit has absolutely no scientific basis.

Let me give you another example to illustrate the greater problem. *At its closest point, what is the distance from the earth to the sun?* I want you to take a moment and formulate a number in your mind, in miles, of just how close the earth comes to the sun at the closest part of its orbit. Got a number in mind? Make a mental note of that number, and then ask yourself just exactly what influence that number has on the actual distance. The answer is that the number that you picked has absolutely no bearing on how far it is from the earth to the sun. None whatsoever, no matter how much *faith* you have in that number. No matter what number you picked, the actual distance is and remains 81,402,560 miles. (Remember that number, 81,402,560. We are going to come back to it in a moment.)

Our text offers us this warning: ***"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."*** We find it way too easy to skim over, or dismiss altogether, this sort of warning, especially when we are comfortable with life and things tend to be going rather well. We need to take this seriously. The danger it warns against has eternal consequences.

First of all, take a good hard look at the word translated ***"deceit"*** in the passage above. The same word can also be translated as *"pleasure"* or *"pleasantness."* That's part of the problem. The philosophies of men more often than not *seem* good and pleasant. They appeal to our natural sense of "right" because they appeal to the basic principles of this world – to the things all around us and how those things operate. Because they are based on human understanding, they seem to make sense to us. The

problem, of course, is that they are not based on God's Word, and the truth God alone can establish.

Our text goes on to warn of others ***"taking us captive"*** by these pleasant, reasonable-sounding ideas and philosophies. The words translated ***"take you captive"*** are military words. Literally, Paul is telling us to be careful that no one *"takes us as war spoils."* Understand and acknowledge the reality of the threat. There is a battle raging both *within* you and *for* you. Your soul is the prize, the war plunder. Satan will not rest until he has carried off every last one of us as war plunder.

How will he attempt to accomplish this? Any way he can, of course, but our text identifies one of his most successful programs: he seeks to alter your concept of truth through lies that seem to make sense, through lies that sound true and reasonable. Understand that every single soul hearing or reading these words can be mesmerized by such worldly wisdom. All of us will be tempted to believe whatever the wise of this world tell us, in part because much of it will make sense to our sinful reason and our sinful pride, and in part because these men and women are often regarded as experts in their fields. Don't underestimate either the appeal of rebellious thought or the ease with which damning error can enter the unprotected heart.

Do you remember, for example, the distance from the earth to the sun – that number I asked you to remember? The number I gave you was 81,402,560 miles – only that's not the actual distance. It is actually 91,402,560 miles. Or is it?

Get the point? You really have no way of knowing at this point which answer is true, if either. You could go and research the question, but unless you have the training and equipment to measure the distance for yourself you will always have to take someone else's word for it. The only difference is that if you are wrong about the distance to the sun you risk very little. If you are wrong about sin and grace, and the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only path to heaven, there is hell to pay.

Nor will there be an end to either the myriad of different errors you and I will hear or to the clever way that those errors are promoted. One of the most popular today is the idea that religion has evolved and that there is something bigger and better than traditional Christianity. You will hear things like, *"I am opposed to traditional Christianity because it oppresses women"* or *"Christianity has some good points, and it is fine for my parents, but I am looking for something more."* You can even

expect some to quote (or misquote) the Bible as evidence. The devil would love to have you believe that there is something bigger and better out there beyond the ancient and (to them) outdated Christian faith. Our text - *God's Word* - assures us on the contrary that **"*you have been filled (are complete) in him (in Christ), who is the head of all rule and authority.*"**

There *is* something out there other than Christianity – a whole world of human thoughts and ideas and beliefs – but there is nothing better. There are things that will sound new and exciting and seem to make perfect sense, but whenever and wherever those ideas conflict with God's Word they are lies that lead to eternal death in hell. Having created and sustained saving faith in your hearts, God the Holy Spirit has already given you the best. He has already made you complete. You have, right this very moment, all that you need to exist for all eternity in God's heaven. You lack nothing.

This is the Christian faith, but since we have agreed that "faith must always have an object," we need to be able to identify that object. In other words, to be able to have confidence that we will be accepted into God's heaven, we need to base that faith on a sure, certain promise of our God. Our text for this morning provides that very thing: **"*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.*"** Here is a grand and sublime truth that far transcends the combined total of all of man's feeble wisdom. Here is truth that is thoroughly practical, universally applicable, and utterly timeless. We can have faith that our personal sins have been forgiven because God here promises that he's already done that. When our text tells us that he **"*nailed it to the cross*"** that's his promise that he punished Jesus instead of us. Jesus paid in full for every single one of our countless sins. We now have faith that we stand holy and uncondemned in his sight not because we wish it were so, but because he has promised that it is.

This is Life itself. These are life-giving words. They are the height of wisdom and truth in a very foolish and deceitful world. Cling to them. Make them forever the cornerstone or bedrock of your life, your "words to live by." There simply *is* nothing better or deeper or more meaningful beyond this simple truth. There is nothing with any sort of eternal value beyond Christ Jesus, crucified for sinners. No human wisdom will survive the test of Judgment Day. Only the Word and wisdom of God will stand. You have that Word of Truth as your personal possession. Never trade it. Never

allow yourself to be fooled into believing that there is something bigger or better out there. The object of your faith is Jesus Christ and his words of promise. In this you are complete, and on this Rock you can stand for all eternity. When you have Christ, truly you lack nothing. Amen.

ESV(**Genesis 18:20-32**) 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."

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!"

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.

**AND YOU ARE
COMPLETE
IN HIM.**

COLOSSIANS 2:10

ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

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The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 27, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 133 (Blue Hymnal)

"Blessed Jesus, at Your Word"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. (Blue Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: The First Lesson: (Genesis 18:20-32) Our two Scripture Lessons for this morning are tied by a common theme: *The effectiveness of prayer*. In our first lesson, we are reminded of the patience and compassion of our God, who does not want even one soul to die in hell. Note here especially the patient forbearance of our God. Even when we find ourselves irritated at Abraham's persistence, God displays neither impatience nor displeasure

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Blue Hymnal Page 75)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 11:1-13) In our second reading we find not only the giving of the Lord's Prayer by Jesus himself, but we are also hereby reminded of the pure goodness of our Heavenly Father and of his promise to hear and grant the prayers of his children. As a perfect heavenly Father, we would, of course, fully expect that God will deny those requests that he knows would harm us. God is much more than a spiritual vending machine. We are simply and humbly to bring our needs and requests to God, and to have full confidence that he can be trusted to know what is best for us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Projected on Screens)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 576 (Blue Hymnal)

"Your Days and Ways to God Surrender"

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

"Complete"

The Offertory – (Blue Hymnal page 7)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 571

"I Know My Faith Is Founded"

The Prayers of the Day

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Blue Hymnal page 9)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Blue Hymnal page 14)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 562 (Stanzas 1 & 3) (Blue Hymnal)

"Lord, You I Love with All My Heart"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (24) Average (37)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Lori Ruthenbeck and Mary Albrecht have both accepted their part-time, one-year calls to St. John's of Okabena, MN. Pastor Emeritus John Schierenbeck is considering the call to serve as vacancy pastor of Peace Thru Christ Lutheran Church of Middleton, WI. Pastor Tom Naumann has returned the call to Messiah Lutheran Church of Eau Claire, WI. Teacher Kathleen Naumann has returned the call to Luther Memorial School of Fond du Lac, WI. Pastor David Ude is considering the call to St. Stephen Lutheran Church of Mountain View, CA.

Great Gifts Currently in the Pipeline – Thanks be to God for encouraging news from Immanuel College. This fall, over thirty students are expected to enroll—fifteen in the pre-theology program and eleven preparing to teach. God willing, it appears that our fellowship could see a steady stream of new pastors and teachers in the coming years. This is a vital blessing as the Lord continues to provide under-shepherds for His flock.

VBS and Picnic – Vacation Bible School is scheduled for August 4th-8th. Please let Pastor Roehl know if your child/children plan to attend. The Church Picnic is scheduled for the following Sunday, August 10th.