

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:8-10

# CHRISTLESS CHRISTIANITY



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**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Problem

These are dangerous days. Our health is in danger. Our economy is in danger. Our jobs are in danger. Our mental health is in danger.

But the biggest danger we are facing today is Christless Christianity. It always has been, is, and always will be.

Why is Christless Christianity so dangerous?

## Dangers

- Concerns your most valuable asset – your soul.
- It's a constant threat – can't let guard down
- It's so common – easy to get sucked in.
- Consequences are so bad – hell.
- All at risk – we're all in the vulnerable group.

## Solution?

Just as we need to take steps to protect ourselves from the coronavirus and its effects upon our lives, so we need to take steps to secure our spiritual safety. What should we do? Let's turn to Colossians 2:8-10 to hear how Paul directed the Colossians towards spiritual safety when they were facing similar danger.

# CONTEXT

## Background

Before we look at these verses in detail, let's have a brief look at the background:

**Colossians 1:1-2:5** Introduction to the rest of the letter.

**Colossians 2:6.** Theme verse of Colossians. "As you welcomed Christ, so walk in Christ."

**Colossians 2:7.** Here's **how** to walk in Christ.

**Colossians 2:8-10.** Here's **why** you should walk in Christ: the danger if you don't and the safety if you do.

## Warning

None of us like warnings. They upset our lives. They imply weakness and vulnerability. They call us to be vigilant, to be on the lookout for danger. They make us fearful and nervous. Can't we just be positive? Can't we just proclaim Christ?

No, Paul says, part of proclaiming Christ is warning against what may undermine Christ. Therefore, after introducing the theme verse of Colossians (2:6-7), he sounds three warnings (2:8, 16, 18). Let's look at the first one.



What is Paul's first warning?  
Christless Christianity is empty and dangerous.



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# 1. CHRISTLESS CHRISTIANITY IS EMPTY & DANGEROUS (8)

***(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.***

Let's take the last words of this verse first of all: **"...not according to Christ."** Paul has just described what is according to Christ – walking in him as we welcomed him. But now he contrasts this with its opposite, religion which is not about Christ, Christless Christianity, Christianity without Christ, which is no Christianity at all. He warns against Christless Christianity in four ways.

## Christless Christianity is a snare

***(8) Beware lest anyone cheat you [ESV: take you captive]***

The word for "cheat" literally means "kidnapped." Paul is warning about spiritual predators, soul-traffickers, who want to catch you and carry you off. "This is very dangerous, therefore, be on your guard, don't let yourself be kidnapped." If your religion does not have Christ in first and central place, you've been kidnapped and you are in extreme danger.

## Christless Christianity is empty

***(8)...through philosophy and empty deceit [NIV: hollow and deceptive philosophy]***

The Gnostics (Know-it-alls) claimed to be philosophers (lovers of knowledge) who had "fullness" of knowledge. They boasted that they were spiritual elites with special extra knowledge through special techniques and rituals.

"No, says, Paul, you're utterly empty. You don't have Christ in first and central place. So you have nothing. This is a fraud not fullness, this is empty not full. This has no true or valuable content. It's a hollow sham."

This is not a critique of philosophy itself, but of false and empty philosophy. As even philosopher Jean Paul Sartre put it, "Life is an empty bubble on the sea of nothingness." What a contrast to Christ's glorious riches (1:27), Christ's fullness of wisdom and knowledge (2:3), and the treasures of Christ (2:3).

## Christless Christianity is humanistic

***(8) ...according to the tradition of men [NIV: which depends on human tradition]***

Paul now traces the source of this false philosophy, this deceitful teaching. It did not come from above, as these elitists claimed, but from below; not from God but from mere human minds. It may be old, it may have been handed down through the centuries, but if Christ is not first and most, it's been fabricated in human minds.

Just as Paul was not condemning all philosophy (only false philosophy), so he's not condemning all tradition but only that which is not according to Christ. It's any system of thought that does not recognize the supremacy of Christ, it doesn't give Christ first or central place. It doesn't matter how old it is,

**ALMOST EVERY RELIGIOUS SYSTEM TODAY GIVES CHRIST AN EMINENT PLACE, BUT ONLY TRUE BIBLE CHRISTIANITY GIVES HIM THE PREEMINENT PLACE.  
WARREN WIERSBE.**



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# Christless Christianity is demonic

***(8)...according to the basic principles of this world [ESV: the elemental spirits of the world]***

Paul now goes further back in tracing the source. This was constructed not just in human minds but in the devil's mind. He sees demonic activity behind the human fraud. The Greek phrase here behind the English translations comes from the world of astrology, the idea that certain spirits influenced and even controlled the world. Rather than it being advanced elite ideas, they were the basics of this world, it was as primitive as children learning their ABC's. They may claim to be professors but they and their ideas were just pre-K.

## APPLICATION

♥ Obviously there aren't many Gnostics in our area. So what are the biggest dangers for us? What are some of the ways we can be kidnapped by the demonic forces of Christless Christianity? Here are the biggest dangers I see:

- Christian tradition
- Christian service
- Christian church (local or denominational), Christian education
- Christian books
- Christian worship
- Christian experience
- Christian fellowship
- Christian family,
- Christian movements and causes

**CHRISTLESS CHRISTIANITY IS THE DEVIL'S CHRISTIANITY**



**If Christless Christianity is so dangerous, how can I stay safe?  
Christfull Christianity**



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# CHRIST IS FULL AND FULFILLING (9-10)

## Christ is full of God

***(9) For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.***

If you want to talk about fulness, here's real fulness. You want to talk about becoming gods, here's one who is God.

- **The fullness of deity:** God is not in everything, but everything of God is in him.
- **The whole deity:** God is not divided up among people, but is undivided in Christ.
- **The totality of deity:** God is not scattered in multiple deities, but his totality is in Christ.
- **The permanent deity:** Christ did not begin to be God, but always was and will be God.
- **The bodily deity:** Christ is not a more disembodied spirit, but an embodied God, fully God, and fully man.

Imagine going to Lake Michigan with a little jar and trying to fill the jar with the entire lake. That's impossible, you say. But God filled the jar of a human body with his whole Godhead. With us, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

## Christ fills his people

***(10) and you are complete in him***

"In him" or "in Christ" are perhaps the two most important words in all of Paul's writing. Its importance can be seen in how many times he uses it in just a few verses (2:3,5,6,9,10,11). Here's Paul's logic: **God is completely in Christ > You are completely in Christ > Therefore you are complete in Christ.**

Why was this so important for Paul to emphasize? Because all the Colossians were hearing from the Gnostics was, "Christ is not enough. You need more." It's still a temptation for many Christians today. We ask, "Is there something more. Am I missing something? Am I a complete Christian?" Paul answers, "If you have Christ, you have all you need. If you have Christ, you have God. If you have Christ you have the fullness of God and you cannot lose it."

But you might have a question about what this actually means. In the previous sermon about walking in Christ, we talked about how to progress and grow in the Christian life. If we are to grow and progress as Christians, how can Paul say we are complete? Surely the call to grow and progress means we are not complete, we are not full. So what does "complete in Christ" mean?

It means you are fully justified. In Christ, you are completely right with God. It means you are fully equipped for sanctification. You have in Christ all the spiritual resources you need to grow and progress in holiness.

WHEN A PERSON IS BORN AGAIN INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD, HE IS BORN COMPLETE IN CHRIST. HIS SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS NOT BY ADDITION, BUT BY NUTRITION. HE GROWS FROM THE INSIDE OUT. NOTHING NEEDS TO BE ADDED TO CHRIST BECAUSE HE ALREADY IS THE VERY FULLNESS OF GOD. AS THE BELIEVER DRAWS ON CHRIST'S FULLNESS, HE IS "FILLED UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD" (EPH. 3:19). WHAT MORE DOES HE NEED?

WARREN WIERSBE



# Christ is full of power

**(10) "...who is the head of all principality and power.**

The Gnostics believed that deity was distributed between a hierarchy of spirits and that people could climb up to God by ascending the ladder of these various divine intermediaries. Here Paul says, "Don't talk to me about your principalities and powers. Let me talk to you about the head of all principalities and powers."

## APPLICATION

♥ Worship Christ who is full of Godhead and manhood. As Paul said elsewhere, "Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:15). No wonder the angels burst out of heaven into uncontained and unrestrained worship when Jesus was born.

♥ If someone asks us in these days, "How are you?" how about answering, "Complete in Christ!" Most of us are going to suffer financial

loss as a result of the Coronavirus. But when your bank account is empty, remember, in Christ you are full with the fullness of God.

♥ There is no caste system in Christianity. Every single Christian is equally and fully complete in Christ. No supplements required. Christ is enough. He is more than enough.

♥ Christ is over all - including coronavirus. Therefore pray for his healing hand.

**WHEN YOU SAY I'M NOT ENOUGH, I SAY,  
IN CHRIST I'M MORE THAN ENOUGH**

**Cornerstone**

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly trust in Jesus' name

Christ alone; cornerstone  
Weak made strong in the Savior's love  
Through the storm,  
He is Lord, Lord of all  
He is Lord, Lord of all

When Darkness seems to hide His face  
I rest on His unchanging grace  
In every high and stormy gale  
My anchor holds within the veil  
My anchor holds within the veil

When He shall come with trumpet sound  
Oh, may I then in Him be found  
Dressed in His righteousness alone  
Faultless stand before the throne

**You Say**

I keep fighting voices in my mind  
that say I'm not enough  
Every single lie that tells me  
I will never measure up  
Am I more than just the sum  
of every high and every low?  
Remind me once again just who I am,  
because I need to know

You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing  
You say I am strong when I think I am weak  
You say I am held when I am falling short  
When I don't belong, You say that I am Yours  
And I believe, oh I believe  
What You say of me I believe

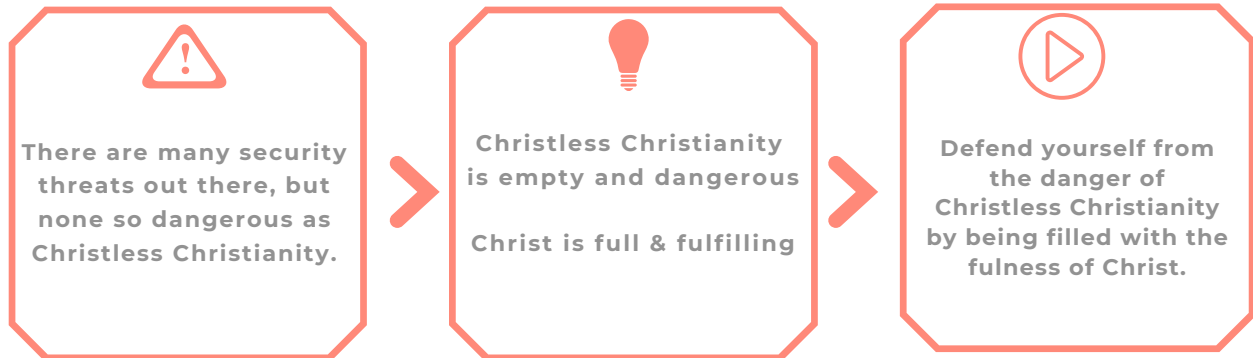
The only thing that matters  
now is everything You think of me  
In You I find my worth,  
in You I find my identity



**Let's review the danger and the defense.**



# CONCLUSION



## FURTHER STUDY

### Online Articles

- [Ligonier's Statement on Christology](#).
- [Why don't people buy books about Jesus any more?](#) by Tim Chester
- [What does it mean to find your identity in Christ](#) by Gavin Ortlund

### Books

- [Christless Christianity](#) by Michael Horton
- [Complete in Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel](#) by Michael Barrett

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is Christless Christianity so dangerous?
2. Why do we resent warnings? What does that tell us about ourselves?
3. In what ways are you most at risk from Christless Christianity? What are you most likely to put in place of Christ?
4. How can we be complete in Christ and yet also called to spiritual growth?
5. What truths in this sermon make you worship Christ more?
6. How are you?
7. In what ways does the Devil tell you that you are not enough? How will you defeat that lie?

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## Christless Christianity is our greatest danger

- Valuable asset
- Constant threat
- Terrible consequences
- All at risk

### Biblical answer?



## Christless Christianity is empty and dangerous

- Ensnaring
- Empty
- Humanistic
- Demonic

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How can I stay safe?

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WARREN WIERSEBE



Defend yourself from the danger of Christless Christianity by being filled with the fullness of Christ.



## Christ is full and fulfilling

- Christ is full of God
- Christ fills his people
- Christ is full of power

WHEN YOU SAY I'M NOT ENOUGH, I SAY "IN CHRIST I'M MORE THAN ENOUGH."

Action?



**Cornerstone**

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly trust in Jesus' name

Christ alone; cornerstone  
Weak made strong in the Savior's love  
Through the storm,  
He is Lord, Lord of all  
He is Lord, Lord of all

When Darkness seems to hide His face  
I rest on His unchanging grace  
In every high and stormy gale  
My anchor holds within the veil  
My anchor holds within the veil

When He shall come with trumpet sound  
Oh, may I then in Him be found  
Dressed in His righteousness alone  
Faultless stand before the throne