

Good morning Three Lakes EFC – once again we are meeting together over the internet

So, welcome to church.

As we consider these unprecedented days, I encourage us to remember that suspending our services on Sunday morning:

Is a very practical way we can love one another – don't infect one another

Is a way to demonstrate love for our community and show support for our civil leaders.

Even though there may be some area for discussion, social distancing is the loving and godly response of God's people to this pandemic.

Our Board and some of our leaders are meeting this evening to discuss plans for moving forward in April – look for an announcement early in the week.

We all recognize that this circumstance has created lots of difficulties for many in our church.

Some are laid off work

Some lost their job

Retirement accounts have lost value

The stay at home mandate is very challenging

Parents and kids – probably really appreciating teachers and school about now.

Many are isolated

Some may be running out of needed goods. (Ian and I are making calls)

One significant challenge is fear. It is so easy to let our minds run away with us.

Here is some advice from one of our EFC pastors, Andrew Schwenk

- 1. Use this time like never before to open up God's Word and take your time listening to the living Word as it comforts your heart (2Thess. 2:16-17)**
- 2. Call 2-3 people a day and spend a little time (5-10 minutes total) letting them know you miss them, their families, by encouraging them--the sound of a human voice is powerful, provides warmth, and enhances our desire for community--even from a distance**

3. Pray often, lift up the Name of Jesus, let God know how you trust him in all things, and ask him specifically for opportunities comfort others as He comforts you (2Cor. 2:3-4)

This is not the first time America has faced a crisis like this – and it probably won't be the last.

We have made it through before

We will get through it again.

As we enter into a time of prayer – hear the words of the Apostle Paul from Romans Chapter 8.

Read Romans 8:31-39 and then pray

For our nation and world – *Remember mercy*

For parents and students and teachers

For health care providers and first responders

For all in our church family who are at high risk.

This is normally the time when we receive our offerings and love gifts.

I know some of you are in financial difficulties.

But others of us are still in pretty good shape. Would you consider making an over and above gift to help us through the month of April?

Faye and I have been praying...

- **Online Giving:** Go to <http://tlefc.org/> go under give and create an account. You may do a one time offering or set up a recurring offering.
- **Text To Give:** You may text the number 715-600-5820, type in “give” and it will take you to our easy tithe app.
- **Mail:** You may mail your check to 1614 Hwy 32, Three Lakes, WI 54562.

As we contemplate God's provision, I suggest that you pause this web cast and google YouTube to a great song based on Isaiah 40:28-31

By Lincoln Brewster – *The Everlasting God*

Strength will raise as we wait upon the Lord.

COLOSSIANS
The Christian Life In A Culture of Religious Pluralism
A Christian Error: False Philosophy
Col 2:8-15

Colossians is a letter from Paul to a church that was dealing with a culture much like our own culture.

We are bombarded with a host of messages that are intended to give us meaning, fulfillment, purpose and emotional and spiritual, security.

In the area of faith – America insists that there are many valid avenues that take us to a right relationship with God.

A recent Pew Study suggest an interesting spectrum

Those who accept the NT as historical and authoritative – salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ

The spiritual group

On the nominal Christian side – Joel Osteen and his message of basking in God's favor by a grace with no accountability, or Rob Bell with his doctrine free biblicalism.

Other side – Oprah and her promotion of all things spiritual with a heavy lean toward New Age theology (mix of Spiritism and watered down Hinduism)

Secular group – Those who reject the idea of a personal God

“Nones” – those who are simply disinterested and apathetic

Simple secular humanists. All thins scientific and man centered.

Evangelistic atheists – New Atheists – Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris mode.

This Pew study than allows for gray areas – everywhere in between these groups

The point is – in America – all of these approaches to faith are deemed equally acceptable and valid.

Any voice to elevate one over the other not only offensive but needs to be silenced.

We tolerate anything except a claim to divine truth..

The same is true of the culture in which the Colossian church existed.

Paul warned his readers about *elemental spiritual forces of this world*

And he exhorts us to protect ourselves from them.

Read 2:8-15

Earlier in Colossians – Paul commends his readers to continue to build and strengthen what already exists as they live the Christian life.

He commended them for their faith in Jesus Christ and for their love for one another – all based on their hope of eternal life. In Christ

I think he would do the same for us.

He prayed for them – that they would continue to walk in the knowledge of God’s will through spiritual wisdom, resulting in a lifestyle worthy of their confession of Christ.

That’s what he would pray for us.

He reminded them of the pre-eminence of Jesus – our Christian champion, who is pre-eminent over the entire universe, which was created by him and for him and in whom all things hold together.

We need that reminder as we consider all the things competing for our worship.

And he reinforced the truth of the Gospel – which is the story of how God reconciled us to himself through the cross and imparted unto us the treasure of Christ, in whom are hidden all the riches of the Christian life.

That’s what we are to do

Then he challenged them to stand firm in their faith in the midst of their culture, and to continue to nurture *Christian life* by

receiving Christ as Lord

renewing their commitment to Christ

Paul did not need to write to them about how to begin the Christian life.

Rather - knowing the challenges presented by their culture, he wrote to them about maintaining the Christian life and

about growing and prospering in the Christian life already established.

Now with Verses 8-15 of chapter 2, he changes his focus. Now he warns us about spiritual enemies.



Last spring and summer I did some work on our lawn. (This is not a picture of our lawn – just a picture to get us thinking about lawns.)

Our neighborhood is known for neighbors who notice each other's lawn

So – my own desire for a nice lawn is compounded by a subtle expectation from our neighbors.



So, we have a landscape company apply fertilizer

Had the lawn rolled to level it out

Every couple of years we put fresh bark under our back tree line

Faye applies her green thumb to flowers and shrubs



Last season, we had our lawn in pretty good shape.

This year – protection mode.

And that includes protecting it from invasive weeds.



Particularly - Weeds and crabgrass

The interesting thing about crabgrass and weeds – they don't just grow - they multiply and spread.



If they get a small hold

And get to seed – look out

They have to be eliminated before they go to seed and multiply.



We have to safeguard against the enemies of a good healthy lawn.

Our passage today makes a transition from preserving and strengthening what was already established to the protection and elimination of the enemies of their faith.

It is a warning

The main subject of this paragraph is found in **Vs. 8** – *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and vein philosophy which depends on human tradition... (Col 2:8 NIV)...*

I don't think Paul has anything against learning how to think logically

I don't think he is warning us not to study the history of ideas – Acts 17

Rather Paul is admonishing his readers to protect themselves against their enemies - to be on guard against *captivating* ideas or dangerous philosophy that dilutes the effectiveness of the Gospel. Like weeds that ruin a good lawn.

Hollow

Pure speculation

Lacking intellectual, moral or spiritual value

Vein – (Deceptive)

Wealth – Matt 13:22

Desire – Eph 4:22

Sin – Heb 3:13

Wisdom of this world – Ecc 2

Be especially careful of:

Human tradition (Camp here for a few moments)

First - The ethics of our culture

Beauty

Intelligence – degrees

Money

Influence or power – who gets to make the policies, in control

Sports, music, some other form of being the center of attention

The thought is – the more of these things we have, the better off we are and the better we feel about ourselves.

Problem – we meet someone who has more of these than we do or who is better than we are or someone who convinces us we don't have enough of these things.

So we try to measure up to these standards – these human traditions

Of course – we can't measure up – feel terrible

Paul warns us – if we spend our effort, time, resources trying to measure up – feel terrible.

Second – our own personal ethics. There is one idea that is especially dangerous.

Dali Lama book where he separates religion and ethics - *Beyond Religion*

His thesis is that faith in God is not at all necessary in order to experience those qualities of life that we all seek – kindness, compassion, acceptance, love, mutual respect and personal significance.

These qualities all come from what he calls our innate human nature, which is fundamentally good.

Religion is simply one's spiritual discipline.

Ethics on the other hand rests in a totally secular – non-God – context.

Therefore – we must look within ourselves – and eventually we will find what we are looking for.

Fill yourself up with yourself.

We will feel good about ourselves because we set our own standards and we learn to live by those standards – not the standards of culture or someone else

(1) Problem – this is quick sand philosophy.

Because – often – very often – in fact most of the time - our standard is one we can't live up to – spiral out of control.

Madonna quote

My drive in life comes from fear of being mediocre. This is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will.

Madonna achieved at the highest level – fulfilled what everyone could ever expect of her. She should feel great

But her opinion of herself is that she is always mediocre.

(2) Then there is another problem – maybe even worse. We might feel we are always superior

We might be so full of pride, so full of self-confidence, grandiose opinions of ourselves – we are totally self-deceived.

People who feel they are superior and above everyone else have done immeasurable harm in this world.

Paul warns the Colossians that both of these approaches to self are dangerous deceptive and hollow.

That Paul is sensitive to this approach about life is not surprising. He deals with it in 1 Cor 4:3-4 (find this passage in your Bibles)

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. (1Co 4:3-4 NIV)

Paul begins his thought by declaring that he can't be held captive to other people's opinion. The truth is – we can't conform to that opinion anyway.

We can't live up to the standards of our culture

Like Paul, who couldn't live up to the expectations of the Corinthian church – we can't live up to the expectations of the modern church.

We can't live up to anybody else's standards someone will always have one that is out of reach.

So Paul says –“ I don't care if you or anyone else judges me. I can't live up to those standards – so I'm not going to be held captive to trying to please them.”

But then Paul takes his thought to the next level. He can't live up to his own standards either. So he says – he won't even judge himself.

Here is where Dali Lama and all the self-esteem gurus are completely wrong.

Filling ourselves up with ourselves is disaster.

Our own opinions are just as misguided as those of culture and of other people.

If you take Dali Lama's advice – look within – we will find all that is wrong with the world – feel terrible.

Solution - Paul declares that it is the Lord who judges him.

While he does his very best to serve, and love, and teach, and lead

The only standard for performance - is what God thinks

Not what culture thinks

Not what other's think

Not even what he himself thinks

Only what God thinks

Back to Colossians 2:8 – don't be caught up in these things and *not on Christ*

All philosophy apart from Christ is false philosophy.

Stated negatively – Paul warns his readers not to study anything unless we put it through the lens of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.

Stated positively – learn about the ways of the world, learn how people around you are thinking, be a student of culture

But view culture through the lens of the truth about Jesus Christ

Compare everything to the Gospel

Everything else is weeds that will ruin a good lawn.

Paul's safeguard against our enemies is Christ. Jesus is the perfect weed killer.

Don't be full of false philosophy. Instead be full of Jesus.

Paul presents Christ and his gospel as the standard for all opinions about life.

In any search for meaning in the realm of spirituality, consider Jesus and his philosophy.

Don't be full of the philosophy of the world – don't be full of yourself,

Be full of Jesus

Summary statement - The Spiritual Fullness of God that Dwells In Christ Is Ours – Vs. 9-10

⁹ *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,*
¹⁰ *and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. (Col 2:9-10 NIV)*

The fullness of God dwells in Christ - Vs. 9

The hunger for spiritual fullness that people try to satisfy by conforming to the opinions of culture, religious authorities, friends or family – or even ourselves - is found only in Christ.

All the spiritual fullness that ever existed, existed in Jesus.

Believers experience that fullness – Vs. 10

This verse says that when a person trusts Jesus – *they have been brought to fullness.*

There is nothing more to experience.

The tense of this verb is past – denoting something that has already been completed.

We have been brought to fullness

We don't need anyone else's opinion

We don't even need our own opinion

The spiritual fullness of God that dwells in Christ is ours.

Paul lays out his argument in Vs. 11-15

Vs. 11 begins by stating that we are *in him* – in Christ.

This is a favorite phrase for Paul

Means that when God looks upon us, he sees us not in our sinful fallen state – but he sees us as being new - as Christ has made us.

Not as others see us — not as our culture sees us – not as we see ourselves.

When we are in Christ – God looks upon us through Christ. .

Three pictures

We are circumcised by Christ – Vs. 11

¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self, ruled by the flesh, was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, (Col 2:11 NIV)

We are *circumcised* by Christ

This verse refers to the old self – *the whole self, ruled by the flesh* or human nature.

I think this refers to our identity

The old identity we had as unbelievers.

Apart from Christ we were “identified in Adam”

Now that we are in Christ – that old identity is cut away

Circumcision of the heart.

As soon as we placed our faith in Christ – God gave us a new identity.

We have been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands

We are circumcised by Christ.

We are buried, raised, and made alive with Christ - Vs. 12-13

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. (Col 2:12-13 NIV)

Paul here refers to baptism – but he not referring to our water baptism. Rather he is referring to our spiritual baptism – the event of being united with Jesus *by faith*-vs. 12

Our union with Christ is not a work – it did not happen when we were water baptized

Our union with Christ happened when we placed our faith in him

See my blog (joyfulrepentance.com) this week for elaboration from Romans 6

Water baptism is the ceremony that pictures what happens the moment we become born again, which is by faith.

When we are place under the water – symbolized that we were buried with Christ by faith.

When we emerge out of the water – symbolizes that we are raised with him by faith.

From that point on we are alive with Christ by faith.

The result is a living reality

Our legal debt before God is canceled - Vs. 14

¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Col 2:14 NIV)

When a person is in debt – there is an unpaid bill staring at us.

A statement in the mail – month after month

Every month we don't pay – interest compounds and the debt increases

Jesus referred to debtors prison

Someone who had a debt and didn't pay was thrown into prison until he could pay the debt

But if someone is in prison – can't earn money to pay

So the debt just keeps getting bigger and bigger and the one in prison gets deeper and deeper in debt – with no possible way out!!

This verse tells us that in our natural state there are legal regulations of the law that stand against us.

These legal regulations had a valid claim over us.

We were in debt and are required to pay.

However - Because we are in Christ, spiritually circumcised, buried, raised, made alive in Christ - God "canceled" the charges (aorist part)

Here is a picture from ancient parchments and ink

Ancient ink had no acid so it dried without soaking into the papyrus. Like raised printing.

If one were to take a moist cloth, he could wipe it off the parchment leaving it as if it had never been written on.

Not only that - the parchment is now perfectly clean

God forgave us - took away all charges against us (aorist part)

Not only are we forgiven something – we are given something.

A new opinion about us – pronounced by God.

A new identity, spiritual life and cancelation of all debt before God

That's the spiritual fullness of God that dwells in Christ - and it is ours.

Concl: If you are a Christian – trusted in Jesus by faith:

You have a perfect lawn



But there is a threat to your green lawn – the weeds of false philosophy that says:

Fill up on the values of culture and the standards of other people

Put yourself as the standard. Fill up on yourself.

But that just doesn't work.

That's hollow, vain, deceptive - that's a trap

That's weeds and crabgrass

If we even allow one weed to take root – go to seed and spread

Paul gives us the treatment - Fill up on Jesus.

All the fullness of deity dwells in him.

When we have him – we have spiritual fullness.

The guarantee of our protection – Vs. 15

¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.^[a]

Learn what Jesus says. Meditate on what Jesus says. Reject anything else.

As we close our time together, I have another suggestion of a song that will fill us with God's truth.

Google U-Tube gain and type in *The Lord is My Salvation* – by the Gettys.

Here is a song that declares the glory of God under every circumstance.

God bless, see you next week.