

Pastor Kyle Mercer  
First in Maturity

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Series: First  
Colossians 2:6-23

**BIG IDEA – GOD WANTS YOU TO GROW UP**

Good morning, whether you're in here or down in Lexington. I want you to know that today is Promotion Sunday, which means in our kids' ministry, all of the second graders moved up to third grade and third graders to fourth grade. That's in light of heading into the fall. That also means we have all of the sixth graders with us today. Let's give them a warm welcome. Welcome to middle school.

Guys, pray for these sixth graders, partly because they're in sixth grade, but also because last week they were eating Goldfish and now they have to learn how to listen to me for 45 minutes. A lot of you are like, "I'm an adult and I still struggle with that." Anyway, moms and dads of middle schoolers or high schoolers, can I talk to you for a second? This will be really quick. I want to let you know about our student ministry. Let me show you a couple of pictures.

Most Wednesday nights, for two or three hours, down at our Northwest Boulevard Campus (also down in Lexington; you'll find out about all this down there as well)... Starting next week, we are relaunching our student ministry for the fall. Moms and dads of middle schoolers or high schoolers who don't have your kids in our student ministry, don't make me beg. Okay? I don't want to get weird here.

I am begging you to get your kids into these incredible environments that we have in the church, because your kids need two things. I know they think they need an iPad and an iPhone. Those are not the two things they need. Let me tell you the two things middle schoolers and high schoolers need. They need friends, and they need mentors. They need Christian friends, because your friends determine the quality and direction of your life, and they need Christian mentors. Our student ministry offers both.

By the way, mark your calendar, moms and dads of middle schoolers or high schoolers, because on September 29, we're bringing to you a Parent Equip night. By the way, we only do these once or twice a year. We're bringing the best people. This year, we're bringing in Drew Hill. He's going to talk about how to deeply connect and disciple your kids in the digital age. You don't want to miss that.

Also, to everybody who's new... There have to be a lot of people who are new, because we've grown by around 500 people this summer, which means a lot of you are new. Yeah, we're excited about that. It's great. We have 120 people for our Weekender coming up, which is great, but there are still a lot of you who need to take the next step.

Here's what I want to tell you. If you're the kind of person who shows up and just comes to our services, and that's it...you've never come to a Weekender, you wear a ball cap, you put glasses on, and you want to come in late and leave early...I want to tell you something: you're only experiencing half our church.

Some of you are like, "I love this building. I love the preaching. I love the worship. Those videos were really cool. I love dropping our kids off at kids' ministry." I'm just telling you there's a good number of you who are experiencing, at best, half of what our church has to offer.

I want to invite you to the Weekender, because you have to go through our Weekender to get into our Community Groups, and until you get into a Community Group (no one likes this when I say this), you're not really in our church. We can't care for you and disciple you, you're not going to build the friendships you need to, you're not going to be honest about your life, and you're not going to work out the sermon. All of those things happen.

I'm telling you that because... We have 120-plus people this next Weekender. You just need to sign up. I've prayed about it for you. You don't need to pray about it. Just sign up. You need to sign up. You need to come. You need to get connected. You need to move from the crowd to the committed and all that kind of stuff.

Here's the reason, guys. We're launching 10 new Community Groups next week, and we only do this three times a year. This is a great time. You can't get into a Community Group unless you go through the Weekender, so sign up. This is the last day to sign up. I'll be there. Our staff will be there. It's going to be a great opportunity for you to get to know more about us and us to get to know more about you. Let's pray.

Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. We pray for the sixth graders. We welcome them here, Lord. We pray that, just like Jesus Christ, our sixth graders would grow, as Luke 2:52 says, in "wisdom, stature, and favor with God and with man." We pray for every parent to

invest in their kids as the primary discipler but also help their kids find other friends and mentors.

Lord, I pray for any families in here where there might be division on this issue, where the wife or the husband really values getting the kids connected to the church and the other spouse doesn't. We pray for people who need to take their next step. Lord, oftentimes, the most time wasted is the time getting started. Lord, I pray that this would not be a church where people can sit in these seats and make excuses but it would be a place where people sit in the seats and make progress by the grace of God. We pray this in your name, amen.

All right. Has anyone ever said to you, "Grow up"? You've had it said to you. If you've ever had somebody just go, "You need to grow up," it's embarrassing, it's hard to hear, but if I can just tell you something, it's unbelievably hopeful and unbelievably helpful. I think the problem today is we say to a lot of young people, "You're great just how you are."

You know what? They know they're not great how they are. They're like, "I'm stressed. I'm depressed. I'm anxious. I don't have a skill set. I need a boyfriend. I'm not okay how I am." When you say to somebody, "You know what? You're immature," it can be a very hopeful thing, because here's what you're saying to them: "You're not all that you could be by the grace of God."

Here's what I want you to understand. There's a word that came into the English language in 2016. It's the word *adulthood*. Here's what happened. Here's what young people started to do. They started to use it as a hashtag. They would put on Twitter or Instagram or whatever they used... They would say things like, "Doing laundry on a Saturday. #adulthood." "Paid my rent for the first time. #adulthood." "Taking one of my two weeks of vacation. #adulthood."

Here's what somebody who's much smarter than me observed. It's so true. Young people don't know how to be an adult. It's a game they play. They're so unfamiliar with growing up, taking on responsibility, being mature, that when they do it they can't believe they're doing it, and they have to tell other people about it. It's almost an act they play, a role they put on, and they can't wait to take it off and go back to being immature.

Well, here's the big idea for today: *God wants you to grow up*. It makes sense. If you're a Christian, God wants you to grow up because God is a dad and you're his kid. Every dad loves his kids, but every dad is like, "Get out of the house. Grow up. Become all that you could be."

By the way, I didn't know this. I know this now. There are so many of you who are in your 50s... If you meet people in their 50s and 60s, there's nothing that upsets them more than where their kids are. It's very sad. You meet people in their 50s and 60s, and they're disappointed about at least one or two of their kids.

In large part, it's that their kid did not maximize their potential. It's like, "When is my son going to get married? Is he going to try to live in Boston with six roommates for the rest of his life?" Guys, there's nothing cool about being the oldest guy at the frat party. Everybody there knows. Even *that* guy knows. "What am I doing here?"

If you turn with me to Colossians 2:6, God is going to say "Grow up" through Paul. **"Therefore..."** What is that there for? Paul just said, at the end of chapter 1, "My goal is to win as many people as possible to Jesus Christ and bring them to full maturity." Verses 6 and 7 are the key verses for our study today. We'll go all the way through chapter 2. We'll spend the majority of our time on these first two verses.

**"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord..."** Now, let me ask each of you: Have you received Jesus Christ as Lord? I'm not asking, "Did you grow up going to church?" I'm not asking, "Are you a good person?" I'm not asking, "Are your parents Christians?" I'm not asking if you're spiritual but not religious. I'm asking whether you have received Jesus Christ the Lord, because here's what it says. The rest of the verse doesn't make sense otherwise.

**"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord..."** So, if you haven't done that, you need to do that first. We'll talk about that. **"...so [now that you've done that] walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."**

Okay. Here's the first big thing we're going to talk about. So, the big idea is *God wants you to grow up*. Then you might ask, "Well, how do I grow up?" Here's what Paul says: the same way you grow in the Christian faith is the way you came to Christ. So, a couple of things.

First, the end goal of your Christian faith is not to become a Christian. I feel like in America today... It's youth group culture. It's camp culture. It's retreat culture. It's like we think the whole goal is "Let's just get them to the Billy Graham crusade, get them to the Young Life camp, get them to the retreat, get them baptized." Praise God for all that, but that's just the beginning of the Christian life.

It's like, "Oh, yeah. You became a Christian at 14, but then what did you do?" You have your ticket to heaven, you put your ticket in your back pocket, and you live like the Devil

and hope God will forgive you when you die. What does it mean to "receive Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him"? The way you grow is the way you came to Christ.

So, let me give you three things. How do we grow? How do we come to Christ, because that's how we grow? Okay. We came to Christ through repentance. We grow through repentance. *Repentance* is not a word a lot of us like. I'll give you two different pictures of repentance.

Here's the modern phrase for repentance: *paradigm shift*. When someone says, "I had a paradigm shift," they mean, "I see money differently. I see sex differently. I see marriage differently. I see forgiveness differently. I see my enemies differently. I see work differently." When I have this paradigm shift, I think differently; therefore, I live differently. That's one idea of repentance.

*Repentance* also means... The natural condition of man is his face is toward sin and his back is toward God. *Repent* is a military term, which means to turn 180 degrees so that now my back is toward sin and my face is toward God. Martin Luther, the great monk who started the Protestant Reformation, which even the secular historians say is one of the most important events in all of human history...

He started the Reformation by nailing a document to the door of Wittenberg in Germany. On it, the first statement of his 95 Theses basically said, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ commanded us to repent, he desired the entire Christian life to be one of repentance." Let me ask you this question. Don't answer it out loud. You don't even have to tell your spouse or your parents or whatever. Are you repenting of anything?

I won't put you on the spot, because that wouldn't be fair, but if this week in Community Group they say, "Hey, guys, we'll give you a big window. In the last six months, what have you repented of?" are you going to go, "I hope they don't call on me"? Guys, if we really are serious about this, our lives should be about repentance, which means it shouldn't be strange that we're admitting we're sinners.

A *religious* environment is an environment where everybody is acting like they have it all together all the time and no one is a mess. A *repenting* environment is where you come to Community Group and go, "Look. I really need to work on my anger with my family. Help me, guys. By the grace of God, I'm going to try to turn toward my unrighteous anger, and I need you to help me."

If you have a gospel-centered church, everyone doesn't gasp. Everyone goes, "Yeah, there are about five things in *my* life I need to work on too. Thanks for sharing that, because now I can tell you." By the way, when you realize you're a sinner, and you realize repentance is the whole Christian life, then you're not shocked when someone sins.

When somebody sins, I'm like, "Guys, we have a whole theology for this. Calm down." By the way, parents, when your kids sin, you need to calm down. You have a theology for this. I want you to give them the grace of God. Take sin seriously, because you're a massive sinner too, and we're going to begin to teach and talk about repentance.

The second thing is faith. Faith is the eyesight of the soul. Faith is how we relate to God. How do we feed our faith? You came to Christ...how? Turning from your sin and trusting. You will grow by doing two things: turning from your sin and trusting. Where do you need faith? Which means, where do you need to know what God's Word says? If you're growing as a Christian, here's what this means: you're becoming more guided, guarded, and governed by God's Word.

Here's what some of you need to do. You need to open your Bible tonight and go, "What does it say about anxiety? God, tell me. What does it say about the issues in my life?" If you're entering a new season of life, you'd better be searching God's Word. You're dating, and you're like, "What does the Bible say about it? What does it say about going from being a single person to a spouse? I need to know everything it says."

There's a third area. What I'm about to talk to you about is going to make you uncomfortable. I just did this last service, and it wore me out because I could feel the resistance in the room. Because *this* service is a service where we normally have even more guests, my guess is there is going to be even more resistance. So, put your helmet on. Here we go together. We're going to think through this.

I want to talk to you about where he says, "...received Christ Jesus the Lord." Jesus Christ is received as Lord of our lives, not just as Savior. We don't want to just be forgiven of our sin. If that's what you want, you may not be a Christian. Guess why? Everybody wants to be forgiven of their sin. Hitler would like to be forgiven of his sin. Everybody wants to be forgiven of their sin.

The Christian wants to be saved *from* his or her sin. The Christian wants to be saved *out* of their sin. When you receive Jesus Christ, you receive him as the Lord. In fact, what you'll see is I don't... I mean, I may slip up, but you'll never catch me saying, "Make Jesus Lord," because it's theologically inaccurate. We actually recognize the lordship of Christ that's already in our lives.

Jesus Christ is Lord of every person. Everyone talks about, "You need a personal relationship with Jesus." Everybody has a personal relationship with Jesus. You need to recognize the lordship of Christ. Now, here's the part that kind of... Get ready, especially for part two of this.

There are two areas where people struggle to recognize Jesus as Lord. One is with something they do; one is with something they *don't* do. And this isn't modern people. A lot of times, I get up here and am like, "You modern people!" And I'm modern too. I'm like, "You Westerners" and "It's 2025," and blah, blah, blah. This is not that. Since the time of Adam and Eve, we've struggled in these two areas.

All right. What is the first area where somebody struggles to recognize the lordship of Jesus Christ if they're a Christian? You know it: sexuality. I have to talk about it. Why did God give circumcision as the sign in the Old Testament? By the way, welcome, sixth graders. We're glad you're here. (We needed to laugh for a moment.) I'll be age-appropriate, but listen.

You know, you go to seminary, and they're like, "Oh, it's an outward sign of an inward reality. It's the sign of the people of God. We're not sure why it happened." Well, I know why it happened. There are many reasons. First, God says, "I will be close to you and in the most sensitive areas of your life. I'll be a part of the things you don't want me to talk about." Secondly, "This is a generational blessing, so I'm going to put it on the place where the next generation comes from."

Thirdly, why was circumcision on the male reproductive organ? Because in circumcision, God is communicating this: "If this part of a man is committed to me, the entire man is committed to me, and if this part of the man *isn't* committed to me...let's be honest...he's just playing games."

Guys, here's what I've found. Think about this with me for a second. The number one cultural issue and the number one pastoral issue are sexual. What are the top cultural issues? I mean, we could name a lot of cultural issues, but guess what comes to the top: the LGBTQIA agenda with its emphasis on transgenderism and abortion. All that's sexual, guys. It's all sexual.

Then, guess what the number one pastoral issue is. I mean, one of the reasons I can't get up here on a Sunday, even though I'd like to... I would never want to embarrass anyone. Just know that. That's my heart. I would never do anything up here to embarrass any of you.

What I'd like to do every once in a while is to say, "Hey, guys, if you're struggling with some sin...maybe it has been a secret sin...I want you to come forward at the end of the service, and our elders will be here. If you're struggling with a secret sin, I want you to come forward." Do you know why I can't do that? Because you all will think it's sexual, because we know that's the number one thing people struggle with.

You're not going to see some guy walk down there and go, "I bet he needs to forgive his dad." You're going to start thinking, "I bet that guy has some sexual problems." That's because it is the number one cultural issue, and it's the number one pastoral issue. Your Christianity will get a lot more real if you'll ask Jesus Christ to be the Lord over the lust of your heart. Say, "Lord, I've got a problem. We've been playing games. I go to Community Group, but my fantasy life is absolutely out of control."

Some of you married men are messing with some stuff you should not be. You're going to stop comparing your wife to every other person and every Instagram [*this*], and you're going to say, "Lord Jesus, it's about time for this to get real, and I need you to be the Lord over my life." Some of you need to say, "I've got same-sex lust I'm dealing with." For others, "I've got opposite-sex lust, Lord. I need you to be the Lord over my life."

Believe it or not, that's the easier one to talk about. If the first one is about what we *do*... We transgress sexually. *Transgress* means to cross the line. The second one is usually more about what we *don't* do. At first, the second one doesn't seem like it's that hard to talk about, but it is. Is Jesus Christ Lord not just over your sexuality but over your money and finances?

I've been in full-time ministry for 20 years, and for the first five years, I had this job where I had to go raise my own support. What that meant was I went to these people's homes. I would go meet with them, and I'd say, "I'm going to Duke" or "I'm going to the UNCG campus, and would you..." I'm in their house, you know, and I'm like, "Would you and your wife" or "Would you and your husband consider coming on my support team for..." I don't know. Back then, it was like \$100 a month.

The weirdest thing about that was I would see people's personality totally change as soon as I talked about money. Some people have a sub-personality. They're very, very normal until you talk to them about money. There are Christians who have recognized Jesus as Lord over certain areas of their life, but for some reason, money is the one area they haven't.

There are some of you who say you trust Jesus with your salvation, but if you're honest, you don't even trust him with your salary and your savings. You're playing games. Oh, yeah, you trust Jesus with your eternal security, but you don't tithe. We're trying to figure this out because... Okay. Hear me say this gracious part. You know, my job is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, and there are a lot of different people in here.

We have a very generous church. I'm talking about this because it's an issue of lordship. We're doing great financially. Our budget is going to be up again. This has nothing to do

with any of that. This has to do with a discipleship and lordship issue in some of your hearts. I'll tell you what happens. I'm going to give you an awkward "inside our church" story.

We've helped to plant 10 churches. Whenever we plant a church, a guy gets up here and preaches. We always say every time, "Hey, guys, go with him," and we always tell him, "Take whoever you want from our church wherever you're going." What happens is these different guys will often come back to us. He'll be like, "This couple is going with us." Usually, we're like, "That's so awesome! They're the best."

But I'll tell you what often happens too. He'll be like, "Oh, you'll never believe who came up to talk to me afterward. It was [so-and-so] and [so-and-so]." Then we have to break it to him. We say, "Get over here. They give nothing to our church." This is, like, the first pastoral moment of leadership in this young man's life. He goes, "No, no. They were wearing Kids shirts when they came up."

"I know. It's confusing, isn't it?"

"No, no. They said how much they love this church, and they were talking about how their kids are in Students and flourishing. They said they've been here since Goler." I go, "I know. It's so confusing."

There is a group of you who need to embrace Jesus Christ as first in your finances. I don't care if you give to Two Cities. You can give somewhere else. But there are just some of you... Some of you men need to have a conversation with your wives about putting Christ first in your finances *today*.

Honestly, I oftentimes am like... It's so confusing to me. I think both spouses don't know. I believe that. I usually think it's a bunch of godly women who have no idea how irresponsible their husbands are. They think, "Oh, he takes care of it," and they are completely naive to what's actually happening. I want to challenge you to recognize the lordship of Christ in the two areas you're most tempted not to: sex and money.

Now, he gives a couple of images. I don't have a lot of time to get into this. **"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him..."** Look. I'll just hit these really quickly. He gives four main images. He says, first of all, you need to *walk in him*.

Basically, he says you're a pilgrim, that you are not a tourist. The American mindset tells you "You are a tourist in this life. You need to see all you can see and experience all you can see." The Bible says you are passing through, and the main thing is you're headed somewhere else and you need to make progress.

Secondly, he gives you the image of a tree. He says *rooted*. Here's the thing about your roots. We can only see your fruits; we can't see your roots. My concern with some of you is you have no roots, but you know how to fake fruits. This is the hardest thing. It's so hard.

Guys, you don't understand. I didn't grow up in the church, so when I came to Christ, I didn't know how to talk. I didn't know what to say. I was handed a little Bible. I thought it said "New Testament and Palms," because I couldn't read "Psalms." I didn't know the *P* was silent. I didn't know anything.

Some of you grow up, and you're going to be in... Welcome again, sixth graders. Here's the temptation: You're going to learn how to talk about things. You're going to learn how to talk about struggling with sin when, really, you're just giving in to it. You're going to learn how to show up and just attend environments and not really be transformed. He says you need roots.

Then he says you're *built up*. That's the idea of a building. Paul is mixing metaphors. He's like, "All right. If you're growing, you're walking. You're making progress. But you're deeply rooted, but you're building up." This is what the church does. We edify one another. This is why one of the things I love to do when everybody is singing is to look around, because I'm so encouraged.

I'm like, "Look at that single mom up there. She's just worshiping the Lord, trusting God in the midst of that. Look at that young couple going through cancer. Look at that other young couple that just got married. Look at the couple that was infertile, and now they're celebrating their baby." Everybody is worshiping, and I'm so encouraged.

Finally, he says, **"...established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."** He ends by talking about the need to be taught, the image of a school. Look here. If we go on to verse 8, he gives a warning. **"See to it that no one takes you captive..."** He's basically like, "Guys, you will grow unless you get kidnapped." That's literally the word *captive*.

He's like, "You're going to grow. If you stay connected to Christ, and you recognize his lordship, and you repent and believe, you're going to grow so fast you can't even handle it." He says, "But here's what could happen." Verse 8: **"See to it that no one takes you captive..."** Do people take you captive? No, philosophies take you captive.

**"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."** He says, "Don't get kidnapped." By the way, what's the number one way not to get kidnapped? Never travel alone. Women know this stuff more than men. Right? Men

don't ever think about this. They're like, "Ah, I just go do what I want and get a piece of pizza in the middle of the night." Women would never do that.

They would never do that because they don't want to get kidnapped or they don't want something to happen to them or they don't want someone to take advantage of them. So, the number one thing you do is travel together. By the way, this is why we keep talking about community.

Guys, we cannot see ourselves *by ourselves*. You need somebody else to go, "Dude, how much Joe Rogan are you going to listen to? You listen to Joe Rogan and Jocko Willink and Jordan Peterson more than Jesus." You know, you need someone, every once in a while, to get into your life and go, "What are you doing?"

Here's what happens. He says we get captured by philosophy. Now, here's the thing. I don't have time to get into it. There was what's called the *Colossian heresy*. Nobody even believes it anymore. We don't even know for sure what it was, what they were believing back then. It was like gnosticism and a bunch of human... You know, it's a bunch of stuff I'm not even going to get into. But here's what I want to tell you. I want to tell you the philosophies of our day that take us away from Christ. Really quickly, I'm going to give them to you.

The number one philosophy that takes you away from Christ is *secular humanism*. Now, I know no one says, "I'm a secular humanist." No one goes to a secular humanist church. I'm just telling you, the average professor on the college campus and the average 30-year-old in Austin, Texas, are secular humanists whether they know it or not.

Humanism basically says, "Man is at the center, and man can solve his own problems." If you're not careful, you'll believe that. You'll wake up one day and go, "I'm at the center of the world, and I can solve my own problems." Paul goes, "Guys, that's the opposite of the gospel. The gospel is Jesus Christ is at the center, and *he* solves our problems."

The second big thing (and this is what everybody believes in, especially everybody on Instagram) is *expressive individualism*. Expressive individualism says, "You need to find out who you are and share that with other people"...by the filter you put on, the comment section you make, how you "like" it, what reel you put out there...whatever all that is. Guys, life is about finding out who *Christ* is and telling other people.

Then there's *moral relativism*. Moral relativism basically says, "Who cares? Let everybody do whatever they want to do, because all perspectives, all lifestyles, all belief systems, and all ideologies are the exact same." Paul goes, "No, there's one way to heaven: the Lord Jesus Christ." So, he warns of these philosophies that capture you. In fact, in verses 9 and 10, he goes, "Guys, you have everything you need in Christ." Verse 9:

***"For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 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..."***

I know; a lot on circumcision today, but listen. Again, age appropriate. In circumcision, you cut off the old flesh and throw it away. We think (we don't know this for sure) a lot of the false teaching in the New Testament basically told people, "You have to be circumcised to become a Christian." Now, if that were true, we'd have no one coming to our Weekenders. Our baptisms would go down immediately.

Here's the question people were asking back then: "Do I need to be Jewish to become a Christian?" Paul says, "No." Let me say it this way. Circumcision, as you read your Old Testament (which I would encourage you to do), moves from the external to the internal very quickly. Circumcision was introduced in Genesis 17. By the end of the book of Deuteronomy, God says, "Let me circumcise your heart."

Let me sum it up the way we'd say it today. Paul is going, "You don't need a physical surgery to have a relationship with God; you need a spiritual surgery. You need God to come into your life, to give you a new heart, to take away the old man, and give you new life in Christ."

He said he did that by the circumcision of Christ, which sounds crazy, but it's Paul's way to say, "On the cross, Jesus was cut off and thrown away that you might be accepted." In fact, he goes on to talk about baptism. He goes from circumcision to baptism.

***"...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. 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..."***

So, he talks about baptism. I only talk about this when it comes up, but some of you in this room... I know. Here's the sermon of "We all need to do something today." Okay? Get ready. Some of you need to get baptized. Baptism is so normal that he talks about it in the same breath as becoming a Christian.

Baptism is the outward sign of an inward reality. There are some of you that every time we do a Baptism Sunday... I don't know if it's your conscience. I don't know if it's the Holy Spirit. You know that you know that you know you need to be baptized. Baptism is a picture of going underneath the judgment of God, because water in the Bible is judgment.

When God wanted to flood the world, what did he do? He used water. He judged the world through water. What about when he wanted to get rid of the Egyptians when they were chasing the Israelites out of Egypt? Oh, the Red Sea...water. What about when Jonah was being all rebellious? Oh, yeah, the water. It's a picture of going underneath the judgment of God. It's a picture of cleansing.

Here's what baptism is: it's symbolically stating what has happened in your soul, it's publicly identifying with Jesus Christ, and it's also an issue of obedience. Listen. I only tell you this because next month we're going to have a Baptism Sunday. If you've not been baptized, there are only three reasons.

First, you didn't know you need to. Well, now you do. I was a Christian for three years without being baptized, so I'm not judging you. I didn't know. I grew up as a nominal Catholic. I thought I *was* baptized...all that kind of stuff. The second reason you may not be baptized is you're not a believer. Well, you can receive Jesus Christ as Lord today and get baptized next month.

The third reason is you might go, "I was baptized as a baby." I want to say this as respectfully as I can as somebody who was baptized as a baby. We do not believe that was a biblical baptism. Baptism is always after conversion by immersion. Belief, then baptism. If your parents had you baptized as a baby, that's a picture of *their* faith. We believe it's time for you to take a step forward as a picture of *your* faith.

Now, we're going to skip verses 14-15. Don't worry; I'm coming back to them. That's where we're going to end. I want to go down to verse 16, because Paul keeps warning them. Look at this. He's like, "You're so free in Christ." ***"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you..."***

He goes, "Basically, here's what's going to happen. There are going to be all of these religious people. They're going to come into churches." You've met some of these people. You've left churches because of some of these people. He says, "They're angry." ***"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink..."***

He says, "They're going to come in, and they're going to tell you what you can drink. They're going to have all of these rules about alcohol." They're going to tell you you can't have your pumpkin spice chai latte, or whatever you drink this coming up season. "They're just going to try to tell you food and drink laws."

Here's the thing. Paul is basically going to go, "Hey, the whole kosher eating system..." By the way, when I was in Israel, I saw this up front. Basically, in Jewish culture in Israel, it's a very uppity-up thing to be kosher. All of the really nice restaurants are kosher.

So, we're in one of these restaurants, and this young, sweet girl in our group... She was just a young, sweet girl. She brings a coffee with a little bit of milk in it. There were, like, six staff who came to her. They had to get her out of there immediately because they were serving meat. You can't serve meat and milk in the same place in kosher culture.

In fact, Jewish families... You don't even have to be wealthy to have this. All Jewish families that are kosher have two dishwashers, because one is where all of the plates that had milk on it are, and one is where all of the plates that had meat on it are. You can't combine those two. Every morning at breakfast, they alternated. One day was a dairy day; one day was a meat day. I'm like, "Why can't every day just be meat day?" But this is what happened.

He goes, "Guys, all that's over. If you want to eat kosher, eat kosher. If you want to eat bacon, eat bacon." Amen. Then he talks about all of the days. He goes, **"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink..."** That's diet. Next he gets into days. **"...or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."** Some of you are like, "What's a new moon?" You've heard of *blue* moon. You haven't heard of *new* moon.

He's basically going to say, "Look. All of the calendar, all of the festivals, all of the Sabbaths, all of the Passovers were pointing to Christ." The most exciting and, actually, the truest way to read the Scriptures is to read the Old Testament as everything is preparing for and pointing to Christ.

In fact, you can't say it any more clearly than verse 17. **"These are a shadow..."** What are "these"? The diets, the days, the disciplines. **"These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."** Here's the way to think about it. He goes, "Guys, all of the Old Testament laws, rules, and rituals were pictures, but now we have the person."

If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, you like to have a picture of them on your phone, if you don't live near them or don't see them a lot, so you can have the picture when you don't have the person. You know, those of you who go to work, at your work or at your office you have a picture of your family, because your family is not at work, so you have the picture when they're not there.

What he's saying is you don't need the picture when you have the person. Those were just shadows. He's confronting legalism. Legalism says, "If I keep the rules, I will be more godly." Legalism is all about external conformity.

Let me tell you a little secret about religious culture, which happens a lot in Winston-Salem. Religious people make rules they can keep so they can feel good about themselves. Some of you don't need to ever drink alcohol again. You have a problem with

alcohol. You've been getting drunk. You need to repent. But there's freedom in the use of alcohol.

What has happened for a long time in very religious churches... The pastor would preach on not drinking alcohol, and he *didn't* drink alcohol, I guess, but he would say, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Don't drink alcohol." At the same time, it looked like his temple had multiple additions put on it. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

Oh, it's funny. The very heavyset pastor felt very good about calling out alcohol because he didn't do it. He never called out overeating, did he? Because religious people don't talk about the sins they struggle with. They talk about the sins *other* people struggle with, and they put rules in place so they can obey them so they can feel good about themselves so they can look down on other people. Paul says, "Forget *that*. That's not Christ."

Verse 18: "**Let no one disqualify you...**" He says some are going to try legalism, but others are going to try asceticism. *Legalism* is usually about what I *do*; *asceticism* is usually about what I *don't* do.

***"Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.***

***If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?"***

Here's what asceticism is. *Asceticism* is "I will be holier if my life is harder." You see this. Go Google the desert monks. For 2,000 years, Christians have wrongly thought that just by... You know, John Paul II slept on the floor. I mean, you can be free in Christ to sleep on the floor, but you don't need to make your life harder to be holier. There are modern forms of asceticism where people feel good about themselves for all of the things they don't do.

I don't talk about this a lot. It's not a huge part of my life. Please don't ask me a lot of questions about it afterward. I do intermittent fasting. I've been doing it for longer and longer periods recently. The other day, I was at this place, and I didn't have breakfast. I never have breakfast. That's fine. But I also this day decided not to have lunch.

I'm at this event, and it's a buffet. I'm not even hungry, but I'm watching all of these other people, and I have to be honest...I started judging all of them. I'm like, "Do they know nothing about insulin resistance?" I'm watching people go up for second and third servings. Then I'm thinking, "No one knows I'm not even eating. No one has even noticed this. If they did, they wouldn't also notice that I didn't have breakfast this morning." I'm like, "What is wrong with my heart?"

Here's what Paul is getting at. I want you to see verse 23. This is so important. He's diagnosing religion. Here's what he says. **"These have indeed an appearance of wisdom..."** When somebody is very disciplined, it looks very wise. Right? There are versions of this, like, in San Francisco and in the liberal culture as well. "I ride my bike everywhere. I reduce, reuse, recycle. I minimize my carbon footprint. Look at me." I mean, there are different versions. I'm serious. This is everywhere. "Please watch me. This is how I'm a good person."

Here's what he says. **"These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion..."** Or literally, *worship*. It's a great way to worship yourself. Asceticism is a great way to worship you. **"...and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."**

Here's what Paul says. Guys, when you make all of the rules, guess who's at the center of that? *You*. When you make your life about all of the things you don't do... "I don't drink, smoke, or chew or hang with girls who do," or whatever. Whenever you do all that, guess what that's about? That's about *you*. You have to ask the question, "Is my Christianity about exalting me or exalting Christ?" Because it can be very subtle.

That is why we have to end with verses 14-15, going back to what Christ did. He's like, "Leave goofy legalism, leave asceticism, leave these bad philosophies, because here's what Christ did." **"...by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."**

He says, "Here's what Jesus did at the cross." I want to say this at the end because I just want to focus. I want our attention to be on the gospel and on the person and work of Jesus as we close. At the center of Christianity is Jesus Christ canceling our record of debt. Do you know what a *record of debt* was? In Roman culture, it was what you had to bring before your judge before he punished you.

Here's the thing. Because we didn't have the Internet and AI, and because there wasn't even... You know, you had scrolls, but everything was expensive. Paper wasn't cheap.

There wasn't even paper yet. There were scrolls. How about this? Everybody had to write down their own record of wrongs.

I'm not going to do this, but I thought if we had created 10 or 15 minutes at the end of the service and given everybody a piece of paper and said, "No one else is going to see this, but I want you to write down your record of wrongs over the last two weeks; just write them all down..." It's humiliating. We all have a different record of wrongs, but we all have to write down our record of wrongs.

Then, here's what you do with that record of wrongs. You have to bring it to the judge, and it has legal demands. In other words, there's judgment, punishment, and consequence for what you did. In fact, Charles Spurgeon, when he was preaching on this passage, said for every person, all 10 of the commandments cry out, "He broke me as well."

If you just walk through the Ten Commandments, at some point in your life, most likely at some point in your day, you've broken that, and it has legal demands. He says, "This he nailed to the cross." The record of debt, the record of wrongs for Jesus stood over the cross and said, "Jesus Christ, King of the Jews," but that was nothing to die for. That's not why he died. He died in our place for our sins.

When Mark Clark was here a few weeks ago, he and I were golfing, and he told me... We were laughing a lot, and he said, "Kyle, I saw the goofiest billboard I've ever seen." I wasn't going to tell this story because I thought, "Oh, for sure, he's going to tell this story."

He said, "I saw the goofiest billboard I've ever seen. I was driving in California, and there was a new law firm, and they were advertising like this." Here's what a law firm advertised. Some of you lawyers will get this. It said, "Just because you did it doesn't mean you're guilty." We were talking about how the gospel says, "Just because you're guilty doesn't mean you have to ultimately pay for it." That's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In fact, let me end with verse 15. It says, "**He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.**" So, what does that mean? It means that at the cross of Jesus Christ, it says he disarmed the rulers and the authorities. That's the demonic.

I want you to know this. If you're disarmed, it means I took away your weapon. What is the only weapon Satan is allowed to use against us? There's only one weapon, ultimately, that he can use to crush us, to kill us. Here's what it is: unforgiven sin. That's it. The only thing Satan could use to bring down a human is unforgiven sin, to go, "Look at what they did. Let's watch their whole life. Let's go watch college."

By the way, you can't cancel your own record of debt. People try that all the time. I meet guys on the golf course all the time. Do you know what they say to me? "Oh, I was terrible." As soon as they know I'm a pastor, it gets all awkward. They always stop swearing, tell me the one religious person they know, and then tell me how they've shaped their life up. Every time.

They're like, "Oh, I was crazy in college. I met my wife. She's from the South, so here I am. Now we have these three kids." I'm like, "I know what you're doing. You think you're a good person, don't you? You think you acted crazy for 30 years, met this Southern belle, and now you've been a good person for 30 years, and that matters."

Do you guys understand that in 2015, they arrested somebody for the Holocaust who was 85 years old? He didn't get to get off because he's 85 years old. He was a grandpa. He was a great-grandpa. Everyone around him was surprised. It's like, "Yeah, but your sins follow you."

Here's how I want to encourage you. Because of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, he has disarmed the Devil. Here's what that means: there is now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. If you'll close your eyes and bow your heads, I want you to think about that with me for just a moment as we close. There's no condemnation.

See, *condemnation* is not a word of hope. I never want you to feel condemned in here. I don't want you to feel condemned if you've never given. I want you to feel convicted. *Conviction* brings hope; *condemnation* brings death. Jesus Christ said, "The Son of Man did not come into the world to condemn it." We have hope in the gospel. Conviction is the Holy Spirit being a gentleman, coming into our lives, and saying, "This is an area you need to work on. I've been talking to you about this for a while."

I want to ask you in here right now: Where has God convicted you? He doesn't need to condemn you. He's not condemning you. Do not believe that you're outside the grace of God. Do not insult the cross of Jesus Christ. Do not think you did some sin that's too big. The cross is bigger than your sin. Your sin is big, but your Savior is bigger. But I want you to receive the grace of God in conviction.

Is there a sexual issue in your life you need to deal with? There *has* to be in a room this size. Right now, you just need to go, "You know what? I've been trying, but I'm a terrible boss and a worse employee. I invite you, Jesus Christ, to be Lord over the lust of my heart." Maybe you need to go tell someone. Maybe it's money for you. Maybe it's substance abuse for you. Who knows what it is? Satan is very predictable. He has been doing the same thing for thousands of years.

Others of you need to receive Jesus Christ right now. You need to welcome him into your life. All you do is rejoice in the fact that he canceled your debt on the cross, that he disarmed the Devil. You just worship him for that. You receive it. You make it the most important thing in your life. Others of you just need a commitment to grow up. That may mean coming to our Weekender. That may mean getting into a Community Group. That may mean taking your marriage more seriously or having a devotional life.

Lord, would you help us to mature? Would you help us to make the most important transition in maturity, which is first giving our lives to Christ? Would you help us, as well, to make the second big transition, which is to go from *me* to *we*, to where we're not just thinking about ourselves; we're not just thinking, "Someone should take care of me," but we begin to think, "How could I help and serve others?" Would we do this not trying to work it out, not trying to earn our salvation, but only because of what Christ has already done for us. We ask this in his name, amen.