

5/24/26

The Marks Of False Spirituality
Col. 2:16-23

Paul the apostle continued to warn the Colossians against the heresy that had entered into Colosse.

He has pointed out that their teaching was based on philosophy, the love of wisdom that is sourced in the traditions of men and the basic principles of the world, not after Christ.

These teachings seem to always desire to add to the work and person of Christ, which in itself is a contradiction, for the believer is complete in Him, due to the fact that in Him dwells all the sum total of deity and He is the head of all principalities and power.

It is in Christ that dead people are made alive, sinners are made saints and the guilty are acquitted by the work of the cross.

* But despite of the clear teaching on the sufficiency of Christ to save man, there are always those who attempt to add to the work of Christ.

These methods and practices are based on human efforts for spirituality and often are used to judge other individual's spirituality or the lack of it, and as an effort to demonstrate their own righteousness by

what they do or not do, rather than to accept the righteousness of Christ, even as Israel. Rom. 10:3

A pastor discovered one Sunday morning the roads were blocked and the only way he could reach church was to skate on the river, which he did. When he arrived the elders of the church were horrified that their preacher should skate on the Sabbath. After service they had a meeting and he explained that it was either to skate or not to be there. Finally one asked: "Did you enjoy it?" When the young man said no, they decided it was all right." #3042

Paul gives a three-fold proclamation to the Colossians in order that they not be taken in by false spirituality, that was declared necessary to complete their salvation to add to the work of Christ. Col. 2:16-23

- I. Don't give in to legalism. vs. 16-17
- II. Don't give in to mysticism. vs. 18-19
- III. Don't give in to asceticism. vs. 20-23

I. Don't give in to legalism. vs. 16-17

- A. Legalism is a judgment against the finished work of Christ as insufficient. vs. 16a
 - 1. The conclusion, "So let no one" this is a concluding statement based on all that has been said about the sufficiency of the person of Jesus Christ. vs. 9-15

1. In Christ dwells the sum total of deity, the divine power and attributes of the Godhead bodily. vs. 9
 - a. Christ is the visible form of the invisible God, conveying resemblance, representation and revelation. Col. 1:15
 - b. Christ was the Creator of all things, visible and invisible. Col. 1:16
 - c. Christ was the One who was holding all things together. Col. 1:17
 - d. Christ was the head of the church, through the resurrection, having the preeminence.
* They were not to give up that knowledge!
2. In Christ they were complete. Col. 2:10a
 - a. In him they were circumcised without hand, of the heart. Col. 2:11
 - b. In Him they were buried and raised. Col. 2:12
 - c. In Him they were regenerated by forgiveness. Col. 2:13
 - d. In His cross all the past accusations were removed. Col. 2:14
 - e. In Him they were free from the power of Satan or any spirits. Col. 2:15
3. In Christ they acknowledged He was the head of all, the pre-eminent one over all principalities and power. Col. 2:10b
 - a. He is the creator of all things. Col. 1:16
 - b. He is the head of the church. Col. 1:18

- c. He is the Father's delight. Col. 1:19
 - c. He is the head of all authorities and power. Col. 2:10
 - e. He has triumphed over all authorities and powers by disarming them. Col. 2:15
 - f. He is sitting at the right hand of God. Col. 3:1
 - 1) In view of these facts about the person of Christ, our position in Him and His victory over the kingdom of darkness, let us not feel inferior by any human demands.
 - 2) The retaining of all this knowledge was their protection against false doctrine that would try and add to the work of Christ for salvation.
- B. Legalism is a judgment based on the need of the sufficiency of works. vs. 16a-b**
1. The prohibition was against allowing these false teachers to judge them regarding food and special day.
 - a. Literally, "Stop letting anyone judge you".
 - b. The word judge "krino" refers to critical judgment.
 - 1) Jesus used the same word when He said, Judge not lest you be judged for with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged by others. Matt. 7:1-2

- * Taking a person to task and sit in judgment with a censorious spirit.
- 2) This words of Jesus are so often used to condemn any form of judging right from wrong, but they are out of context.
- c. The Scriptures are clear that we are to judge all things by the standard of the Scriptures. Acts. 17:11; 2Tim. 3:16-17
 - * Paul told the Corinthians, “I have judged already”. 1Cor. 5:3
- 2. The specific judgment was over five things mentioned.
 - a. This is a sure way to distinguish a religious system from Christianity.
 - 1) The entire list mentioned most likely indicates Jewish origin, though could include pagan asceticism dealing with vegetables and meats. Lev. 10:9; Num. 6:3
 - 2) These were not so much between lawful or unlawful as the Levitical law, but pure prohibition and observations to obtain spiritual completeness.
 - b. The false teachers were judging the Colossians about certain “food”.
 - 1) The Levitical law was for health purposes for the most part, though there were some aspects of ceremony.

- 2) The abstinence of certain foods by the false teachers were to emphasize spiritual cleansing to become holier, in order to ascend to completeness.
- c. The false teachers were judging the Colossians about certain “drink”.
 - 1) The Levitical law again did have some drink restrictions, like for the Nazarite and certain offerings.
 - 2) The false teachers demands were again to obtain completeness.
- d. The false teachers were judging the Colossians about festivals or certain feast days., “regarding a festival.”
 - 1) The Levitical law commanded every male to appear three times a year before the Lord, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacle. Deut. 16:16
 - 2) The deceivers were demanding the days as superstitious observance for spiritual enlightenment and progress.
- e. The false teachers were judging the Colossians about “a new moon”.
 - 1) In the Law the New moons were the beginning of a month, blowing trumpets with offerings and sacrifices. Num. 10:10
 - 2) The deceivers were demanding them again for a badge of righteousness.
- f. The false teachers were judging the Colossians about “Sabbaths”.

- 1) The Law declared the Sabbath to be holy, for God rested on the seventh day of creation and there was a possibility of there being three Sabbaths in one week on special holidays. Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:11
 - 2) The deceivers were using them as evidence of their righteousness.
 - 3) And the Sabbath was an eternal covenant with Israel, not the church.
3. The entire list of these prohibitions and commands were attempts to categorize people into groups.
- a. The word regarding “meros” has the idea of divisions or categories, spiritual or not spiritual.
 - b. It is a man-made system to evaluate the heart of man, which he cannot know!
- C. Legalism is based on ignoring the fulfillment of all things in Christ. vs. 17
1. All the things mentioned were “shadow of things to come.”
 - a. At this point Paul identified them very clearly with the Old Testament Law.
 - b. The reference to shadow “skia” means types or resemblance of something in the future.
 - c. The shadow is cast by the reality of the genuine thing.

2. All the things mentioned were fulfilled in Christ, “but the substance is of Christ.”
 - a. The word substance “soma” means body.
 - b. The context does not refer to the physical body of Jesus but to the fact of His physical presence as the arrived fulfillment of all prophesied in the Old Testament.
 - 1) In the volume of the book, it is written of Me, to do Your will, Oh Lord. Heb. 10:7
 - 2) For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Rev. 19:10f
 - 3) The Old Testament was a system God did away with in Christ, being types and figures to come. Heb. 10:1

Illustration

One day a woman came up to Mr. Moody after he had finished preaching and said, “Mr. Moody that tie is entirely too long, it distracted me all the time you were preaching”. Mr. Moody responded, “Madame, here are some scissors, cut the tie at the length you think it should be”. Doing so, Jr. Moody turned and asked for the scissors and declared to the woman, “Now Madame, your tongue is quite long and has offended me, would you mind sticking it out so I can trim it?”

* She was so legalistic and self-righteous about the tie and so ignorant about her tongue, like the Pharisees, they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel!

Application

1. The liberty over meats and drinks is a matter of responsible conscious, acting out of love. Acts 15; Rom. 14:1-15:13; 1Cor. 8-10; 1Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:14; Heb. 9:10; 13:9-10; Gal. 4:9-11; 5:1

- a. "If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed." Jn. 8:36
- b. Jesus said it is not what goes in a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out. Matt. 15:11
- c. Jesus said, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:20

2. The observance of certain day is irrelevant.

- a. Each person must be fully persuaded in their own mind, for the observance is unto the Lord. Rom. 14:5-6
* Jesus constantly did works on the Sabbath, which angered the Pharisees!
- b. No one is to judge another regarding the day and other religious observances that are mechanical and ritualistic are nauseating to God. Is. 1:13; Col. 2:16
- c. The Sabbath, God gave to Israel as an eternal covenant, yet it spoke of Christ, He is our rest and Lord of the Sabbath. Ex. 20:11; Matt. 11:28-29; Mk. 2:27-28; Heb. 4:3, 8
* The early church always met on the first day of the week, the day Christ rose from the

dead, being the eighth, new beginning. Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 16:1

3. Many Pentecostal churches hold to a self-righteous legalism foreign to the Bible taken out of context.

- a. That a women cannot wear pants, taking the Old Testament prohibition about a woman attempting to impersonate a man out of context.
* "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God." Deut. 22:5

- b. That jewelry, make-up is a sin, often using the golden calf by the gold ear-rings given, again out of context. Ex. 32

- c. That long hair for men is a sin, again out of context. 1Cor. 11:14

4. Works result in bondage; we are to stand fast in the liberty, which Christ has made us free. Gal. 4:9, 5:1

- a. Don't let anyone make you feel inferior or condemn you.
- b. Legalism is man's attempt to establish one's own righteousness.
- c. Legalism is an addition to the work of Christ.
- d. Legalism sets itself as a critical judge.

Don't give in to legalism!

II. Don't give in to mysticism. vs. 18-19

A. Mysticism is cheating a person of their reward.
vs. 18a

* Again many of these phrases are most likely direct quotes from the false teachers.

1. This is a present imperative command, “Let no one cheat you of your reward.”
 - a. Literally, “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize”.
 - b. The word cheat “katabrabeueto” means to rob you, umpire against you as an athlete.
 - c. The word in this form appears only this time in the New Testament.
 - d. The reason the false teachers were declaring the Colossians disqualified, was due that they were not living according to their unscriptural rules.
2. Their reward they were attempting to rob them of was their completeness in Christ.
 - a. Jesus is head of the church by the authority of the resurrection, making Him the preeminent One. Col. 1:18
 - b. In Jesus dwells all the sum total of deity in human form, making you complete. Col. 2:9-10
 - c. Jesus created and has defeated all principalities and powers publicly. Col. 1:16; 2:15
 - d. In other words, do not keep on allowing anyone to deny your claim to be a Christian or declare you disqualified in

relation to Christ who has prized you with Himself and salvation, making you complete in Him. 1Cor. 9:24; 2Tim. 4:7

B. Mysticism is based on human pride. vs. 18b-d

1. The false teachers proudly admired their own humility, “taking delight in false humility.” vs. 18a
 - a. The idea is of voluntary or of human origin, not of God.
 - b. The practice is identified by the word delight, meaning devoting oneself.
 - c. It is the kind of religious humility that says, “I am proud that I am humble”.
2. The false teachers were devoted to angel worship, “and worship of angels.” vs. 18b
 - a. They were into the worship of angels based on the false humility, not thinking themselves worthy to come to God through the sufficiency of Christ.
 - b. The false teachers remember were teaching the need of intermediary, aeons and emanations for special knowledge.

* The same goes for Mary or any saint in the Catholic Church!
3. The false teachers were dealing and teaching things that were not genuine, “intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.” vs. 18c-d

- a. The word intruding “embateuo” means to enter, investigate or search into these appearances or vision. vs. 18c
 - 1) Literally to set foot into the inner shrine.
 - 2) The word “not” is questionable, but it is not needed for what follows clearly reveals that they in fact did not see what they professed.
 - b. The worship of these angels the false teachers were devoutly giving themselves over to was the product of the figment of their own imaginations. vs. 18d
 - 1) The word puffed up “phudioo” means simply to inflate.
 - 2) Their exaltation was of their own and it was mere hot air that fills bellow.
 - 3) The origin is clear; their fleshly mind were carnal in nature void of God and in fact an enemy of God. Rom. 8:7
- C. Mysticism is the outcome of not depending on Christ. vs. 19
- 1. They were “and not holding fast the head”, which is Christ. vs. 19a
 - a. Jesus is the head of the church. Col. 1:18
 - b. Jesus is the head of all principalities and power, referring to the spirits and angels. 2:10
 - c. Jesus is the head of the body. Col. 2:19

- 2. They were not part of all the body of Christ, “from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.” vs. 19b-d
 - a. First the false Gnostic teachers were not part of the body of Christ by not acknowledging the head Who gives the commands without contradiction.
 - b. Second they were not part of the body of Christ by not being nourished by Christ the Head, but mal-nourished by their own heads of nonsense .
 - c. They were not being knit together by joint and ligaments, but rather by imaginary revelations.
 - d. They were not growing with the increase from God but, rather from the vain pride.
 - 1) The entire picture in this verse has the idea of a living organism, the body of Christ, the church that is intimately joined and dependent on Christ to function according to His will. Eph. 4:16
 - 2) Such are Paul’s descriptions of this heresy in Colosse.

Illustration

Our friend Steve Trulson, “I have the word in my heart”.

Application

1. People who are involved in mysticism attempt to impress those around them by their mystical experiences and communicate that they are more spiritual than others by their dedication to God.
* Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 1Cor. 8:1
 - a. The late John Wymber and the Vineyard movement taught that they could see people's orahs around their person and angels all around.
 - b. They practiced a mystical form of healing, encouraging people to use "imagery" to see their healing as Jesus touched them or the like.
2. People who are into mysticism use their experience to judge the standard of spirituality and elitism.
3. People who are into mysticism that contradicts Scripture are dominated by their depraved and sinful natures or demons. 1Jn. 4:1-3
4. Mystics who worship angels or any other medium rather than Christ, Who is the only mediator are cursed. Acts 4:12; Gal. 1:8; 1Tim. 2:5
 - a. Angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. Heb. 1:14
 - b. The angel said to John, don't worship me, worship God: I am your fellow servant." Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9
 - c. Christ has made a new and living way, through the veil, his flesh. Heb. 10:20

Don't give in to mysticism!

III. Don't give in to asceticism. vs. 20-23

- A. Asceticism is based on human regulations, so why would anyone want to subject themselves to it? vs. 20
 1. The plead is in view of their relationship to Christ, "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world." vs. 20a-20a-b
 - a. The conclusion to all that has preceded is by stated by the word "therefore". vs. 20a
 - b. The word "If" is better translated "since" in the affirmative, there is no doubt about their having died with Christ to the basic principles of the world. Col. 2:12; 3:3
 - c. The verse is preparatory to address asceticism, but at the same time was of summary statement including legalism and mysticism already mentioned.
 2. The question posed is based on their past conversion, why, as though living in the world, do they subject yourselves to regulations?" vs. 20d-e
 - a. The statement is a mild rebuke to any person who would do so.
 - 1) The apostle Paul identified these legalistic and mystical practices of pagan origin "basic principles", sacred days, years, etc. of their pagan calendar, which was "philosophy and empty deceit" and without any doubt were syncretized into a Jewish a

background, which were shadow of things to come.

- 2) The false teachers were using worldly so called wisdom to measure Biblical spirituality!
- b. The phrase subject to regulations ordinances, “dogmatizo” means to permit oneself to be dominated by rules again.
 - 1) The word dogma and dogmatized come from this Greek word, they were not to be impressed nor intimidated by the false teachers.
 - 2) I am always amazed at the amount of people who embrace teachings and practices that are contrary to the Scriptures.
 - 3) The Colossians were to stand and defend their liberty in Christ.

B. Asceticism focuses on what a person can not do.
vs. 21-22

1. The false teachers philosophical and religious slogan is quoted, “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle”. vs. 21
 - a. Do not touch “haptomai”, which means to fasten one’s self to, to cling to, as a conscious effort.
 - b. Do not taste “geuomi”, means to partake and desire.
 - c. Do not handle “thiggano”, means to handle in such a way to ascertain the

quality of an object, to feel and grope after.

2. The focus was on the outward not the inward.
 - a. Their belief about matter being evil and spirit being good was the reason.
 - b. The two extremes that resulted were asceticism and licentiousness.
 - 1) The ascetics focused on physical withdrawing from the and norm of life for self-denial to be holy, which also encompasses legalism.
 - 2) The libertines focused on the benefit of both at the same time, without seeing any contradiction.
3. The identity of these things all concern things which are physical and human. vs. 22
 - a. They are things that are temporary, not eternal things, “which all concern things which perish with the using.” vs. 22a
 - * They are things that cannot make one holy or godly!
 - c. They are sourced in the knowledge of man not God’s Word, “according to the commandments and doctrines of men?” vs. 22b
 - 1) The commandments “entolai” of men, which means precepts.
 - 2) The doctrines “didaskalia” of men, which means teaching or instructions.

C. Asceticism, legalism and mysticism are all show. vs. 23

1. The commentary on these false disciplines, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom.” vs. 23a
 - a. They seem or give an appearance of genuine wisdom from God, but is false, a knock-off.
 - b. They and anyone else are not drawn from the treasury of Christ, therefore a counterfeit. Col. 2:3
2. The origin of these disciplines is stated, “in self-imposed religion, false humility.” vs. 23a-b
 - * The philosophy of man’s traditions and worldly basic principles. Col. 2:8
3. The result of these disciplines is also stated, “and neglect of the body.” vs. 23c
 - a. The disciples are not dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, but rather on severe abusive treatment of the body as an enemy. Col. 1:11
 - b. These disciplines supposedly would make them more spiritual!
4. The conclusion about the false disciplines, “but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” vs. 23d
 - a. They are impotent to make a new man and impart a new nature nor a remedy to be delivered from a life of sin. Col. 1:13; 3:5-10

- b. The fallen man cannot be reformed, improved, or made good by denying our flesh, referring to sino-nature.

Illustration

Jerome fled to the land of Israel to live in a cave nearly starving himself, yet in his sleep he dreamed of his days of ungodliness.

Illustration

1. Jesus revealed that no amount of asceticism will result in holiness for the problem is of the heart.
 - * “Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” Matt. 15:17-20
2. Those who teach asceticism for godliness, regarding the denial of foods, drinks and marriage are contradicting the Scriptures. 1Tim. 4:3-4; Rom. 14:14,17
3. The disciplines of fasting to seek God or self-denial for the glory of God or others is commendable and should not be thought of as asceticism, neither it is a means to become holier in and of itself
 - * “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men--

extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess". Lk. 18:11-12

4. The result in their fear of God often is taught by the precepts of man. Mk. 7:5-9; "Is. 29:13"

* A gentle Quaker, hearing a strange noise in his house one night, got up and discovered a burglar busily at work. So he went and got his gun, then came back and stood quietly in the doorway. "Friend," he said, "I would do thee no harm for the world, but thee standest where I am about to shoot". # 3045

Don't give in to asceticism!

Conclusion

Remember Paul's three-fold proclamation that exposed the false teaching of false spirituality to add to the work of Christ for salvation.

- I. Don't give in to legalism!
- II. Don't give in to mysticism!
- III. Don't give in to asceticism!