

Colossians 2:16-23

Announcements:

- Remind people about fellowship food truck and potluck tonight (*koinonia*) - **get to know people!**
- **Super highlight Jay!** Pump it up! Youth age and up for sure (*no childcare*)
- Baby Dedication (*2nd service*) - Zach & Liliana Winfield - Luciano (almost 2 yrs old)
- Veterans among us? We thank you! (*pray*)

Please open your bibles to **Colossians Chapter 2** (*Need a Bible? ...*)

- Last time: **Transformed and Triumphant**
 - **Transformed** (*cutting away: circumcized without hands: death, burial, resurrection*)
 - **Triumphant** (*forgiven, debt: wiped out, nailed to cross, disarmed, public shame, victory!*)
- This time: **Colossian Church Pressures**: syncretism, elitism (*a spiritual buffet/smoothie!*)
 - **Mystics, Astrologists, Greek gnostics, Jewish legalists.** (*rules & measuring rods*)

Message Title: **Calm Down, Bro!**

- **Religious Legalism** (*verses 16-17*)
- **Deceptive Mysticism** (*verses 18-19*)
- **Worldly Asceticism** (*verses 20-21*)

Religious rules... secret experiences... extreme self denial... = Anxiety soup! (*cult-like!*)

Of course, Paul's response to each of these is going to be to show that **Christ is sufficient**...

- **You are complete in Him (v. 10) Christ already fulfilled it all. REST in HIM!**
- (*stop striving and stop adding to what Christ has already completed*)

Religious Legalism (*verses 16-17*)

In this first section, we're looking at **legalism** in the church. **Legalism is lame!** (*overly critical spirit*)

- No one can measure up to your standard. Always trying to earn or merit God's approval.
- Systems of rules. There's no grace. **Christianity becomes a checklist.** (*all externals*)

V. 16 - So (therefore)

- **Ties back to last week:**
- Based on the forgiveness/freedom we have in Christ's Triumph!

V. 16 - Let no one judge you

- Here is the issue. People were **"passing judgment"**
 - A **spirit of condemnation**, not correction. (*there's a difference!*)
 - **Krino** = legal terminology - pronouncing verdicts on others as their **judges**...
 - Critics putting everyone under **heavy scrutiny** regarding who is **"spiritual"**
 - **Present tense** = ongoing in this church. People were falling prey...
 - Paul is speaking to the oppressed... (*don't let them keep judging you...*)

The issue here is regarding rules with **Jewish Law.** (*Food & Feasts. Diets & Days*)

- And, to be clear - Paul is not saying you can't or shouldn't follow the Law (**Christian freedom!**)

- **Nor**, is he saying that the *OT Law is bad or wrong in any way*.
- **1 Tim 1:8, NLT** - "We know that **the law is good when used correctly**."
- **Gal. 3:13, NIV** - "**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law** by becoming a curse for us"
 - Christ has **BLOTTED OUT the IOU** that was against us! *Is Christ's work complete?*
- **James 2:10, NIV** - "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is **guilty of breaking all of it**."
 - If the law of God is your **measuring rod** for a healthy church - *we're all condemned*.
 - **Paul opposed Peter** for *forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews (Galatians 2)*
- **Hebrew Roots Movement** (church has *veered... need to get back to original*)

Two areas in our text: **Diets and Days**

V. 16 - In **food or in drink**

- **Let's get a couple things out of the way up front...**
- This is **not a fun debate**: *is a hotdog a taco/sandwich? Is cereal, soup? Does cilantro taste like soap? Pineapple on pizza? How do you pronounce pecan? Dessert first? (gluten heathens!)*
- Nor is Paul commenting on **healthy lifestyles**. *Too many twinkies; addictions: caffeine/alcohol.*
- **1 Cor. 6:12, ESV** - "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything." (**Freedom**: but helpful? Or addicting?)
- But **even all that is not what Paul is dealing with** here...

Paul is dealing with **Judaizers in the church** making **kosher diet a requirement** for Christians

- Very much like **Mormonism** today: *alcohol, coffee, tea... (forbidden)*
- **Torah** categorized some foods as **clean vs unclean (Leviticus 11)**
- **Jesus fulfilled the Law** and made it clear that **food was neutral** for Christians...
- **1 Cor. 8:8, NIV** - "Food does not bring us near to God; we are **no worse if we do not eat, and no better off if we do**." (it's **not** a matter of **gospel salvation** or **spiritual nearness** to God)

So, stop making **food and drink** a **measuring rod** for someone's faith:

Romans 14:3-4, NLT - "Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? **Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall**. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval..." = **Calm down, bro!**

- **Christian liberty** is a matter of **conscience before the Lord**. *We each will stand account!*
- **Romans 14:17** - "**The Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**"

But, the issue was not just **diets**, but also **days**...

V. 16 - Or regarding a **festival, new moon, or sabbaths**

- **Festivals/Feasts** (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) (three "required" feasts)
- **New Moons** (monthly celebrations/ceremonies) (sacrifices, blowing trumpets, spiritual renewal)
- **Sabbaths** (weekly observances) (very strict: **mishnah added EXTRA burden** (Oral Torah))
 - **7th day adventists** still require this for their church, in order to please God (*big deal*)
- **Early church = no longer "Sabbath" (now, Sunday) - The Lord's day** ("first day of the week") (Rev. 1:10, 1 Cor. 16:2, Acts 20:7 (Troas), *all commemorating the resurrection!* (John 20))
- **Also, not that enjoying Sabbath is wrong. Rest is encouraged**, and there is **freedom in Christ!**

- Romans 14:5-6, NLT - "In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. **Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him.**"
- You hear the freedom in that, don't you!? (one is not **more spiritual** than another in this)
 - **Jehovah's witnesses** will not even celebrate birthdays... (pagan origins)
 - **Modern Struggles:** **Christmas, Easter, Halloween, National holidays** (in, not of)
 - Do we use these things to **look down** at one another? (partake or not?)

Back to the issue in our text: Old Testament **kosher diets** and **feast observances**.

- Paul makes a distinction between **shadow and substance** (*Skia and Soma*)
- **Shadows** expresses the **imperfect**
- While **substance** expresses the **solid form**

The Old Testament Law was only a shadow that pointed to the real savior to come (*a schoolmaster!*)

- Hebrews 10:1, NLT - "The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, **a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves...**"

V. 17 - **But the substance is of Christ.**

- Every lamb pointed to **THE Lamb**.
- Every priest foreshadowed **THE High Priest**.
- Every festival anticipated **THE fulfillment**.
- *Imagine if I carried around a photo of my wife. Kiss it. Ha! (Sonogram: baby. Menu: meal)*

Kidding aside, all of this was **a huge burden** on people trying to be right with God. Never measured up.

- Matthew 11:28-30, AMP - "Come to Me, all who are **weary and heavily burdened [by religious rituals that provide no peace]**, and I will give you rest... Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me [following Me as My disciple], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest... for your souls. For My yoke is easy [to bear] and My burden is light."
- **Jesus is now our Sabbath Rest!**

Legalism can appear so spiritual. It gives you something to measure/control. Check the boxes. Compare yourself to others. Feel superior. Inflate your ego. Self-righteousnesses (*Pharisees*)

- **Starts with good intentions:** "I want to please God" vs "I must do this to be accepted"
- But all that is **shadows to the real thing**. **We rest in Christ**. **We are complete in Him!**

There is **another danger** equally harmful to legalism — the close cousin of **mysticism...**

Deceptive Mysticism (*verses 18-19*)

This whole section has to do with super special secret spiritual experiences... by "some" in the church.

- **Get a couple things out of the way** - seeking an experience with God is **not a bad thing** in itself. To know God or desire to hear from Him is **wonderful & encouraged**.
- *But, do you seek God "Himself" or the "experience" of Him?* (some are **chasing experiences**...)
- *Are you using encounters as a measuring rod to burden others?* (**tongues/laughter/visions**)

That kind of stuff was going on in this **Colossian church**...

V. 18 - Let no one cheat you

- Katabrabaou = cheat or, more specifically, disqualify (judge or umpire in an Olympic game)
 - **Who's in and who's out!** (false teachers positioned themselves as having a deeper or more authentic Christian experience. If you didn't have it - you're out...) **You?**
- Verb is in the present imperative = "Stop letting those guys act as your umpire to your faith"

V. 18 - of your reward

- What reward/prize is Paul referring to here? **Three possibilities:**
- **Prize/Reward:** (1) current sufficiency; (2) eternal salvation; or (3) Bema seat rewards (crowns).
 - **All could apply** - But, the third one seems to make the most sense to me.
 - Greek olympic games - **disqualified** = lose prize at the end, but **NOT** your citizenship.
- However, I don't mean to say that there's not **a real salvation danger here** in the church. If you start trusting in something other than Christ's righteousness (becomes self-righteousness)

Let's look at **what was all this mysticism was going on** in the Colossian church: (Elitism)

- (1) False Humility
- (2) Worship of Angels
- (3) Secret visions

V. 18 - Taking delight in false humility (self abasement)

- Paul is getting at: **self-denial (asceticism)**. More on this in our final section today...
- Long story short: they were **proud of their humility**. **Ha!** It was a bogus sham display...
- They would act humble, then be spiritually proud of their humility in the church (**self-centered**)

V. 18 - Worship of angels

- In the OT/NT - **angels are highly revered**. Divine council of God. Access to His throne room!
- But to honor and worship are two different things. And, the **worship of angels is prohibited**.
- But, I think any one of us could fall into that trap if we had an angelic encounter. All over the OT!
- The Apostle John who fell short in this area as well:
 - Rev. 19:10, NLT/NIV - "I fell down at his feet to worship him [the angel], but he said, 'No, don't worship me. I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. **Worship only God.**'" (again, at another moment)
 - Rev. 22:8-9, NIV - "I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel... But he said to me, '**Don't do that!**'" (be honest - we would be tempted too)
- This was an **ancient practice** to seek the **"gods, emissaries, angels"** - pray to or through and seek their protection. (even knowing their **"names"** was a big deal)
 - Sects of Judaism. Book of Tobit
 - Roman Catholics pray to angels and saints (asking for intercession - i.e. "saint Michael")

This verse here is telling us to **be very careful** with these things. **Speaking against them**.

- 1 Tim. 2:5 - "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."
 - We enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus and come boldly to His throne!

(3) Secret Visions

V. 18 - Intruding into those things which he has not seen

- **Intruding (embateuo)** = taking a stand / claiming access / going on about details
- The language reads that it was a firm position and big deal in this Colossian church by some.
- The false teachers loved to pompously talk on and on about their "spiritual experiences"
- They went around boasting of their "visions" (things not seen) = secret knowledge.
- **A clarifier is needed again** - Visions from God are a good thing and biblical. Last days!
- But they cannot and must not be the basis for your standing with God in His church.
- And, the search for "spiritual encounters" can be taken WAY too far... (crystals, horoscopes, zodiacs, enneagrams, tarot cards...) all have no place in the church. Experientialism itself.
- Much of the spiritual world seeking can be false, and actually lead you to the demonic.
- 1 Tim. 4:1, NASB - "The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (satan is a liar, deceiver, and master counterfeit (angel of light)) - Islam, Mormonisms, J-Dubs, Christian Science.

Back to our text - in this church, there was a divide between the "ordinary" and the "enlightened"

- The result?

V. 18 - Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind

- Spiritual pride (puffed up like a spiky blow fish) on behalf of those who claimed higher level spiritual experiences (Word of faith, NAR, hyper charismatic, deliverance ministries)
- Overemphasis on signs/wonders. The text says they actually had a "fleshly/unspiritual mind"
- This is the great dichotomy/paradox here (they thought they were something; they weren't)

The issue...

V. 19 - And not holding fast to the Head

- They were focused on their own efforts and their own experiences and therefore disconnected from the Head. The head which is Christ.
- To be cut off from the head is death. (though you might appear to be alive)
- I learned that Cockroaches can live for weeks without their heads because their nervous system is decentralized and they breathe through holes in their bodies, not their mouths; they eventually die of starvation since they can't eat... (what a metaphor!)
- Don't be a cockroach! The Headship of Christ is the central theme of Colossians

V. 19 - From whom

- From Whom = Jesus Christ our Lord and no other (anything else would be idolatry or heresy)
- The Headship of Christ is the central theme of Colossians

V. 19 - all the body

- All means all. Without exception. The entire body of Christians must remain connected to their head who is Christ. (not angelic worship, not legalistic burdens) but seeking Christ Himself.

V. 19 - Nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase...

- It's all healthy, beautiful, nourishing language: Supply, strength, and growth! (Eph 4)

V. 19 - That is from God

- Okay, that's clear. Your *growth in Christ* is **NOT** from *legalism or mysticism*, but **connectedism**.
- ***Holding fast to the head which is Christ!*** Measure everything by ***Christ and His word***.

Paul has warned against *legalism and mysticism*; next he targets ***extreme asceticism...***

Worldly Asceticism (verses 20-23)

This last section deals with **extreme forms of self denial** known as **Asceticism**.

- With the goal being that of reaching a *higher level of spiritual consciousness*.

Once a gain, a **quick disclaimer** is in order - denying self is a **Christian discipline**.

- *Denying worldly pleasures* and even *fasting* at times are good, *healthy Christian practices*.
- Paul is *getting at something else* with this church. Something **required and damaging**.

V. 20 - If you *died with Christ*

- ***If*** = **first class conditional** in the Greek = ***SINCE***.
- You're *dead now to the worlds' systems* and practices.

V. 20 - From the *basic principles of the world*

- ***Stoicheion*** = (1) *elementary principles (ABC's)*; (2) *cosmic elements (earth, water, fire, etc)*; (3) *spiritual entities (astrologies/angels)*
- ***I lean towards the first one*** in *this context* (also considering *Galatians 4:3,9* = "*enslaved to worldly (elementary) religious rules*") - you've been **set free from man-made requirements**.
- ***Principles of the world (Kosmos)*** = *ordered system (creation)* but in this usage = ***man-centered (humanistic) world***.. Self glory, self-indulgence, and self-fulfillment.

V. 20 - Why, as though living in the world, do you *subject yourselves to regulations*

- Paul's argument: ***You've died to this realm***. You've been transferred to a *new kingdom* (*Colossians 1:13*). Why are you still living like citizens of the old one? - ***SUBMARINE!***

Worldly rules in the church:

V. 21 - Do not *handle*

V. 21 - Do not *taste*

V. 21 - Do not *touch*

******These regulations build in intensity, creating an ever-tightening noose of restrictions.***

- But that is the **nature of human-made religion**—it *always demands more, never less*.
- *No dancing, no drums, no going to the movies, no coffee, no sugar...*
 - ***Noose getting tighter and tighter...***
 - ***Do not... do not... do not:*** This is a **perfect description of legalistic religion...**

V. 23 - And *neglect of the body* - **You can make a god of discipline and denial.**

- *Saints have done this throughout the ages.* **Extreme monasticism**. *Never washing feet. Living on top of a fifty foot pole, self-flagellation, sleep deprivation (standing up), sealed in small cells...*

V. 22 - Which all concern **things which perish** with the using

- **Perish** = destroy by means of *corrupting, to spoil as does milk. Decaying food...*
- This points out the **futility of asceticism**

V. 22 - According to the **commandments and doctrines of men**

- These are **human ideas**, **not God's requirements** for His church.

V. 23 - These things indeed have **an appearance of wisdom**

- Asceticism **looks impressive**. It seems spiritual.

V. 23 - In **self-imposed religion**

- **Self-imposed religion** is **man reaching to God**. A "*do it yourself*" religion.
- 1 Tim. 4:1-4, NASB - "...deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons... [explained] ...men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. **For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.**"

V. 23 - **False humility**

- Self-denial can be **merely a cover for self-promotion**.
- These "*great pretenders*" make a **show of reverence** for divine things...
- But asceticism often becomes **its own form of pride**. "*Look how much I sacrificed. Look how disciplined I am. Look how serious I am about my faith.*"

V. 23 - But are of **no value** against the **indulgence of the flesh**.

- Despite appearances, these practices *accomplish nothing (absolute negation) of eternal value*.
- Go around *doing crazy things* and being **upset with everyone else** because they don't do them and **look down at them** and it only **indulges your own flesh**...
- **Powerless (of no value)** to defeat the **old nature in Adam**
- **Jesus = Woes! Hypocrites! Outward = nice / inward = dead.**
- Isaiah 29:13 – "*These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.*"

Many Christians have this problem. They are trying to *regulate the externals* instead of walking in the *fullness of life with Christ*...

Closing:

Paul **isn't condemning legitimate spiritual disciplines** (*prayer, fasting*) nor is He **condemning legitimate spiritual encounters or visions**.... He's condemning:

- Rules not found in Scripture
- Extreme practices done to earn God's favor
- External reforms as solutions to internal sin
- Self-imposed suffering as the measure of spirituality

Paul's message could not be clearer: "**Calm down, bro!**" Stop chasing **shadows**. Stop *performing for approval*. **Do more, deny more, experience more...** No! **Jesus is enough.**

- **Calm down. Rest in Him. You have Christ. You are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10).**

Hebrews 10:8-14, NLT - "Christ said, 'You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them' (though they are required by the law of Moses). Then he said, 'Look, I have come to do your will.' **He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect. For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.** Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time... **For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.**" - **Freedom & Shalom!**

PRAY