

# Colossians 2:16-23

## Religion and Legalism

Image Church // Living Beyond Sunday: Week 5

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### Intro

Good morning Image fam... Got to show you something incredible from back in *Image Kids* that I got to see this week that I wanted to share with you... *Take a look at this!!*

- Put your hands together and celebrate...

When I was young, my dad taught me how to shoot a basketball... He was a phenomenal shooter, in college he shot **53% from outside and 92% from the free-throw line**... he went on to play professionally for a little while... but he could flat-out shoot... One day I *personally* rebounded for him, and he made over **250 Free Throws** in a row... No lie!

I say that because there's not a lot I bring to the world of basketball, but the one thing I can do is shoot a basketball, **it may not go in**, I *didn't say I know how to make it, I said I know how to shoot it!*

- There's a difference...

**Boy-hidies ... You miss though- no dessert**... dead serious...

- I can tell you one thing, in my family everybody didn't get a trophy, there was a winner and a loser...

Every year there was always that one guy who took the whole coaching thing way too seriously...

- Wearing the skin-tight **Black "Bike" Shorts** (that were not for riding your bike) and the **Nike Air Command Forces** (Huge high-tops) and a reebok Tee that says "**COACH**" on the back...

- That guy would want to give their **2 cents** on my shooting from the minute I miss my first shot... *Honey, I really coached 'em up tonight!*
- **Oh, ok- Yes Sir Coach** ... and then, do the exact form you have always done...
  - Like magic "coach" would say perfect! That's it, good job buddy, exactly what I was talking about!

Year after year, and coach after coach... There were always these competing voices against what I knew to be true...

That's a lot like what Paul's addressing here in the second part of Colossians 2... *Paul is about to address the competing voices of religiosity and legalism that are pressing on the church as a means for spiritual growth and spiritual fullness...*

*And what we're going to see is that **it's not about the activities that you hold up, but a person that you look at. True Spiritual growth is found in Christ not your performance...***

### Colossians 2:16-23

**16 Therefore,**

Remember in Colossae you have a church that's doing well that Paul affirms, but they're in a city with a build-a-bear theology going on... And this *hoge-podge* of beliefs were being imposed on the church as the means for truly being saved and spiritual...

And Paul's coming off of highlighting Christ in **verses 9-15** pointing to the reality that the fulness of the spiritual experience is found in Christ alone...

Tucked in there was **verse 8** *Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ.*

Well, what he's about to do now in **verses 16-23** is press more specifically into the false teaching/philosophy that's being imposed on the church...

**Here we go, verse 16...**

don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. **17** These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ.

*You say what is this? New moon, I've only heard of Blue Moon...*

Well, these are some of the **human traditions** that Paul was talking about...

Now, these traditions were not bad things in and of themselves, in fact, they are **OT** things... But they served a specific purpose in the **OT** and that is, they pointed to Christ...

- Paul says we are a **shadow of what was to come**, but the **substance is Christ**...

And since Christ has come, these things are no longer necessary...

Listen as Christians then, and as Christians now the way that we read the OT is through the lens of Christ...

- When we read about the day of **atonement**, we understand that it pointed to Christ and what He would do...
- When we read **Exodus**, we think about a greater exodus that we experience through Christ...
- When we read about the **inheritance** in the OT we know that it points to the ultimate inheritance that we have in Christ...
- When we read about the **Temple** where God's presence is... We see that it points to the reality that through Christ we have the presence of God...
- When we read about **Circumsision** we know that it points to the spiritual circumsision of our hearts...<sup>1</sup>

These are all shadows that point to the substance... They are all signs that point to Christ... They served their purpose...

To continue to hold onto them in addition to Christ was just implementing human traditions... This is what was happening in Colossae...

And this way of thinking is detrimental, because what it does is create an opportunity for judgment through these human traditions...

- And what this does is **it takes our eyes off of the identity Jesus has established and puts it on the religious activities that we practice**...

This is so important because for so long the church has been holding up things that, though they meant well, were not things that were necessary and they were given so much weight and so much emphasis that it became more about the religious activities and the way we practiced them than it did about Christ...

For so long traditions have taken precedence over Jesus... He's mentioned, but people are more concerned with your adherence to tradition rather than the transformation Jesus brings...

- What we wear...
- How we worship...
- What we do in the service...
- God and country...

And you won't find any of those things prescribed for the church in the bible...

The reality is that these things just **distract and derail**... This is what's going on in Colossae...

This is huge because I think there are a lot of people who have rejected a thing that's not actually Christianity... **What they've rejected is a bunch of man-made traditions**...

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<sup>1</sup> Examples from the PT from Tony Merida, *Avoid Bootleg Religion*

And Paul's saying that you shouldn't feel judged and rejected based on traditions made into law...

Here's how it works here: We want to be faithful to what He calls His church to and give freedom where there is freedom...

We don't want to make it hard for people to come to faith by holding up things that Jesus doesn't hold up...

**Example: Acts 15** - Jerusalem Counsel... People are saying that unless you're circumcised you cannot be saved... They were creating law where there was freedom...

- **Peter** says in **Acts 15:10-11** Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? **11** On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus
- **James** concludes by saying in **verse 19**: we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God...

We don't want to cause any difficulty among people who are turning to God...

Some of you, some of your friends have experienced the oppression of religious traditions- you never felt like you understood or measured up... Coming to faith has been made difficult...

- *Appeal*

**Family listen**, we don't want to make it hard for people to come to know Jesus because we're so tied up in traditions... We can't create traditions and hold them up as law when Jesus doesn't ever point to them

Or worse yet, create a culture where people feel like they are judged based on traditional rules that are not from God!

We want people to see **that it's not about religious activity but it's about a relationship with the person of Jesus!**

*Paul continues in verse 18:* **18** Let no one condemn you by delighting in ascetic practices and the worship of angels, claiming access to a visionary realm. Such people are inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind.

Here Paul gets at the **Elements of this world...**

- **Ascetic practice:** Extreme self-denial...
- **Worship of Angels...**

People who practice these things are inflated by empty notions and have an unspiritual mind... *Then he says this in verse 19...*

**19** He doesn't hold on to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with growth from God.

*Ok, so all of these things that Paul's been holding up are specific things that people practiced in order to try and experience some sort of spiritual growth spiritual high...*

But what Paul shows us here is this: **Spiritual growth doesn't come from looking beyond Christ, spiritual growth comes by looking to Christ as the means and motivation for this life**

Paul comes back to his main point that Christ is enough and He's all that you need...

Listen, spiritual growth and spiritual fulfillment don't come through **special practices**... they come through the **person of Jesus**.

Now I want you to see this: Paul says that **Christ** is the **head that holds the body together, nourishes the body, and grows the body...**

When Paul refers to **the body** what's he referring to? **The church!**

Love this because it shows us that **Christianity isn't something that isn't just individual, but it's also corporate...**

Let me show you what I mean...

- We grow as Christians by holding onto Christ, by looking to Christ...
- As we each **individually** hold onto Jesus, not only do we grow **individually**, but we grow **corporately**!
- As each person in the body holds onto Jesus we grow collectively as the body of Christ!

This is why we can't see the church as an event, and why we have to see it as a group of people that are holding onto Christ, that in turn make up the body of Christ... Putting Jesus on display to the World!

**But here's Paul's main point here:** our ultimate source of growth is **Jesus!**

That's why **everything we do here is designed to point to Him and flow from Him...**

- If it doesn't do that we don't do it... *Sorry, not sorry...*

The Christian life is **not** about **conformity** to religious practices or rules it's about **being transformed** by Jesus...

Watch how Paul drives this home here in **verse 20...**

**20** If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?

**IOW:** If you have surrendered to Christ, you have been saved by grace through faith and set free from the ways of this world... Why would you go back and live according to the standards that the world has set?

Why do you submit to regulations: **21** "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch"? **22** All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines.

Paul's getting at the heart of where so many people are today... And it's oppressive and life draining...

People think that being a Christian means following a set of rules... Have you ever had that before?!? That the bible is just a rule book?!?

This is called **legalism** or **moralism**... Where did that come from?!?  
It came from human-imposed rules that were prioritized above everything else, and so **distorting** and **diminishing** what God's called us to...

**Let me show you how this plays out:**

- Pharisees added on their own rules on top of what God has called them to... They hedged it and then cared more about the hedge than what God had called them to...
  - And what this hedge did was take their eyes off of the purpose of what God had given their own works...
  - They praised God on the street corner, and gave money but neglected justice and compassion...
- The greatest crime in history- Jesus' murder- was carried out with strict attention to legalism...<sup>2</sup>
- Hitler was praised for cleaning up society- nothing about his slaughter...
- Whites in churches had a lot to say about what you wear to church, your hair, and what you listen to, but nothing to say about racism...
- Churches declare war on culture in the name of Christian values but neglect the pursuit of Christ... End up as disgruntled nationalists rather than spirit-filled servants...
- Alcohol/tobacco/tattoos/dancing...

**Why is this the reality? Why is it that are we prone to legalism?**

- it's something that we can *conform* to and *feel good* about ourselves...
- It makes us *feel morally superior*...
- We can use it as a *scale to grade ourselves over others*...
- We can *hide* behind it...

Self discipline is impressive, but it won't truly change any one...

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Yancy, *What's So Amazing about Grace*

This is why Jesus came so hard at the Pharisees in **Luke 11** and **Matthew 23**...

- All they cared about was their outward activity but inside they were a trainwreck...
- And yet they were holding up all of this activity and using it to judge other people...

**That's not how Christianity works...**

- The gospel is not be better, or conform to a set of rules... It's not clean yourself up... If that were the case there would be no reason for Jesus to come and die and raise from the dead, He just would have come and said here's more rules, no go and do...
- Instead Jesus came and said it is Finished...
- Jesus spent His time showing that we could never live up to the rules, and conforming to the rules is not what God is after, what God is after is your heart...

Jesus showed how **breaking** or even **keeping** rules really points to the reality of our broken dead hearts...

- The gospel is that you could never conform to God's standards, the gospel is that you could never be good enough, that you could never

**Albert Mohler says this:** *In our own context, one of the most seductive false gospels is moralism. This false gospel can take many forms and can emerge from any number of political and cultural impulses. Nevertheless, the basic structure of moralism comes down to this — the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior. In other words, we communicate to lost persons the message that what God desires for them and demands of them is to get their lives straight. Moralism produces sinners who are (potentially) better behaved. The Gospel of Christ transforms sinners into the adopted sons and daughters of God.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup><https://albertmohler.com/2009/09/03/why-moralism-is-not-the-gospel-and-why-so-many-christians-think-it-is/>

***This is why it's so important that we don't lead with the law...***

- Stop sleeping together...
- Stop cussing...

It is looking to Jesus... See Him for who He is and allow Him to shape your heart...

- When you see and receive His grace it changes everything... You live differently in light of who Jesus is... He begins to characterize your life...

***Example:*** *when you buy a house... previous owners characterized the house... Gradually over time after you've moved in the house began to look like and characterize you...*

The same is true in the Christian life... As Jesus becomes the center of your life you begin to live in light of who He is and the grace that you have received...

- You don't pick up a rule book, you pick up the Word of God and you see it as a source of life... You see the beauty of who God is and what's been extended to you through Christ...

You start to adopt the ways of Christ... And it's not religious practices, it's responding to the grace you have received... And this looks very different than religion because it's not just your doing things, but responding to a relationship...

● **Examples:**

- Forgiveness...
- Justice...
- Love...
- Generosity...
- Service...

These things are an overflow of Christ in you...

Here's what this means practically for us as a church- **rather than holding onto rules, we want to hold onto Jesus**...

Here's the thing for many of you, Christianity isn't life giving its life draining... It feels like drudgery, instead of being delightful... And the reason is that your focus is on what you can't do... You've made it about rules and not about a relationship...

**Example:** Think about it, in a relationship, in any relationship, marriage, friendship whatever- you don't want around and think about what you can't do...

- That would be miserable... If you knew that **Stacy** had a bunch of rules you had to adhere to in order to be friends with her you're out!

Here's where Paul concludes when it comes to religious practices...

**Verse 23...**

**23** Although these have a reputation for wisdom by promoting self-made religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence.

**Paul says religion and legalism:**

- Gives the appearance of wisdom: It's **FAKE**
- It's self-made: Because of that it's **BROKEN**
- It is of no value: Which means that it **WON'T LAST**

***I know some of you are like I'm not a legalist... I'm not a moralist...***

When you sin, what's the first thing that comes to mind- what would people think, or what would God think?

- Do you measure your maturity by your behavior or your beholding??
- Do you try to make up for the wrongs that you do? Pay God back?
- Does your view of how God views you change based on how well you've performed?
- Do you not do things because you're afraid that God might not do something for you?
- Do you see others based on their actions or Christ atoning work?

## Conclusion [VAMP]

Some of you have been plagued by religion and legalism... Some of you are plagued by that now... You have a very unhealthy view of God- very unhealthy guilt that you carry...

Some of you are unable to enjoy the things of Christ because you're bound by the chains of legalism...

Some of you wonder why you don't grow, why you're stagnant, or why you can't find any joy in the Christian life... You've made it about odds and don'ts and not about a relationship with the God that made you!

Instead of allowing Christ to transform you from the inside out, you're working from the outside in...

Others of you thought Christianity was about rules that you follow and not a person that you hold on to... You have gone through the motions but you've never opened up your heart...

Some of you are not walking in the freedom of the gospel, you feel bound by rules... You feel subdued in guilt... You feel Judged by others or you're holding yourself to things that are not from God...

You need to walk in freedom... You need to see Jesus for who He is and embrace the joy of the Christian life...

**Pray**