

Colossians
Dangerous Distortions
Colossians 2:16-23

September 18, 2022

HDBC

There is in the city of Krakow, Poland in the center square St. Mary's Church with its massive spires. From the great steeple a bugle has been sounded every day for the last 700 years. The last note on the bugle is always muted and broken, as if some disaster has happened to the bugler. This 700-year commemoration is in memory of the heroic bugler trumpeter who summoned the people to defend their city against the invading Tartars. As he was sounding the last blast on his trumpet, an arrow from one of the Tartars struck and killed him. So there was a muffled note at the end. The citizens have never forgotten that heroic warning.

In Colossians 2:16-23 Paul sounds an important warning not only to the Colossians but to believers of all generations. It is a warning to resist those who would distort what it means to follow Christ. In this passage we can see some examples of the kinds of distortions to avoid and the effects they cause.

1. The Examples

Paul offers some examples of the kinds of things going on in his day and in that context. We may not have these exact same situations, but they help us understand what he is writing about.

A. Ceremonial legalism (16-17)

Two illustrations: Diets and Days

1) Food and Drink

OT laws contained dietary regulations. Taught discipline & obedience and probably better for them. But when Jesus came, those laws were abolished. We are not bound by them. Shrimp, catfish, pork.

2) Sacred Days

Sabbaths and festivals. Weekly, Monthly, Yearly.

We take Sunday - Jesus said it doesn't matter, so long as you take a day. Need balance here. Sunday's should not be a sacred cow, but should be special, different.

B. Mystical experiences (18-19)

The claim that you need to experience that which is mystical, sensational, out of the ordinary. Visions, dreams, etc. **Those today who follow the sightings of "Mary" in clouds, paintings of Jesus that cry, etc.** Typically it involves an appeal to the emotions more than to the mind.

If it agrees with Bible, fine, but if it does not, then throw it out. The idea here is that to be spiritual you must have some mystical or sensational experience. Also included in this would be those who believe it is imperative to go deeper in their understanding. They reject the simple and believe to be really spiritually you have to go deep. Their focus is not on growing deeper in their relationship with Jesus, but in their theological intellect. Paul addresses this in verse 19. This approach ignores a focus on Jesus and focuses more on the intellect of the person.

C. Personal punishment (18-23)

Depriving self or harming self for religious purposes.

1) Self-abasement (18)

Putting yourself down.

2) Self-denial (20-22)

Denying yourself of things that are not inherently wrong, simply because someone else has determined that you should.

2) Self-abuse (23)

Whipping themselves as act of service. Abusing the body as a way to punish the flesh or discipline the body.

All three of these are founded in law, not grace. They bring with them some inherent problems and questions. Let me share a few . . .

1- Who gets to make the list?

Problem is not in seeing that I need to obey the Scripture but that each of us tend to have a different view of what should be on the list. And we want to hold everyone else to our list, even if we don't hold ourselves to it.

There have always been those who thought it their duty to tell others how to please God, be spiritual, act mature. Concoct their own formulas for spiritual greatness. To really be spiritual you must:

Have a one hour quiet time every morning
Perfect attendance at Sunday School and worship
Stop listening to rock music
Use only a King James Version Bible
Never watch an R-rated movie
Be able to find book of Zephaniah without looking at table of contents

2- Grace is better than law

There are commandments and clear directives in the Bible. These are things we are expected to obey. But compliance with someone's list of do's and don'ts is not the cornerstone of Christianity. A relationship with Christ is. And that relationship is not based on keeping the law but on receiving his grace and living in it. ***Grace is a better motivator for right living than the law.*** Better to be motivated by grace than to be coerced by the law.

2. The Effects (What Happens?) No less than four things:

A. Judgmentalism (16-17)

Krineto - To separate, distinguish (apples from oranges), select. But it also has the idea of thinking for another. Some people want to form **your** opinions for you. Don't let them. Think for yourself! But also, don't feel a need to dictate to others what they must do or how they must think.

This does not mean we are restricted from giving counsel, advice, and even make bold statements of truth. But you must weigh them against God's Word. ***When I tell you not to commit adultery, not judging you. I am simply and lovingly telling you what God has said. If I tell you that it is wrong for you to watch the Disney channel or to eat at a restaurant that serves alcoholic beverages I am being judgmental.***

If I tell you that only those who wear green suits with red dots to church on Sunday are spiritual, then I'm setting myself up as god and you need to fire me and get a new pastor.

Judgmentalism happens when I take convictions that I have which are not clearly stated in Scripture and expect you to embrace them.

Judgmentalism happens when I dictate how you must apply the Scripture in your own life.

Judgmentalism happens when your attitude and perspective are condemning rather than restorative.

John Burke (pastor of Gateway Church in Austin, Texas) assumed that he was not a judgmental person. But just in case he was wrong, he tried an experiment: for a whole week he kept track of his judgments about other people. Here's his assessment.

Judging [others] is fun! Judging others makes you feel good, and I'm not sure I've gone a single day without this sin. In any given week, I might condemn my son numerous times for a messy room; judge my daughter for being moody—which especially bothers me when I'm being moody (but I have a good reason!) even my dog gets the hammer of condemnation for his bad breath

Some of you may be thinking, "Wait, are you saying that correcting my kids for a messy room is judging?" NO! But there's correction that values with mercy and there's correction that devalues with judgment.

B. Frustration (18)

Defrauding you of your prize - To rule against (umpire or judge).

Think of Olympic competitions that are judged subjectively. Skating, gymnastics, diving, etc. Sometimes it is obvious that a person has been robbed of victory. Leads to frustration! When you try to live by a list of do's and don'ts and expect others to do the same, you will experience great frustration.

In this context Paul has more specifically in mind someone trying to hold you to an impossible standard, and thus keeping you from experiencing the abundant life promised to you by Jesus.

C. Pride (18)

Inflated without cause

Did you hear about the preacher whose congregation gave him a medal for humility and took it away when he wore it next Sunday? Pretty sure that is a made up line. But you get the point.

I can keep the stuff on my little list, and have an inflated view of myself, while holding you to a higher standard and watching you fail.

D. Misplaced Priorities (19)

Under this model, keeping the law becomes more important than your relationship with Christ. Causes a blurring of priorities. It becomes more about what you do than about who you know. You become more obsessed with checking of your accomplishments than with growing to know Jesus on a deeper level. The **head** in this verse is Jesus. Our focus should be to cling to Him, know Him, serve Him, love Him. As we do this, the right actions will follow.

E. Futility (23)

Quite frankly, it will not work. It will not enable you to overcome habits and sin and the flesh. That only comes as you yield daily to the grace of God. Paul speaks of even mistreating and abusing your own body in an attempt to overcome sin and live a righteous life. His conclusion? There is absolutely no value in those things.

3. The Remedy

How can you be liberated from this kind of bondage? Here are a few practical things to consider.

1) Establish the fact that Jesus alone is your Lord

You are not your own Lord. No one else is your Lord, either. Jesus alone dictates the course of your life. Where He has spoken in His word, be resolutely obedient. Where He has not spoken, look for principles that can guide your decisions.

2) Learn to be discerning of others

Recognize that there are some who will want to run your life, dictating how you should live. Don't let them control you. However, be aware that

God will also put other people in your life to offer counsel, advise and wisdom. You will discern the difference in two ways. First, by what they say. Does it match the Bible. Second, by their spirit or attitude toward you. Are they graciously seeking to help you, or are they more judgmental in condemning you.

3) Reject false guilt that others try to place on you

Primarily thinking here of those who want to make you follow their list of do's and don'ts and condemn you if you do not. Ignore them.

4) Enjoy your freedom

You have been set free from the penalty of sin and the bondage that comes with that penalty. Enjoy your freedom in Christ. This does not mean we are free to sin. It means we are free to live in His grace, not yoke to anybody else' list. Does that mean sin without consequences? You know better than that. It means freedom from someone else' bondage.

Several years ago Royal Robbins, a professional mountain climber wrote an article for Sports Illustrated. In it he pointed out the importance of seeing ourselves and life as we really are.

If we are keenly alert and aware of the rock and what we are doing on it, if we are honest with ourselves and our capabilities and weaknesses, if we avoid committing ourselves beyond what we know is safe, then we will climb safely. For climbing is an exercise in reality. He who sees it clearly is on safe ground, regardless of his experienced or skill. But he who sees reality as he would like it to be, may have his illusions rudely stripped from his eyes when the ground comes up fast.

The reality is this. We are saved by grace. We are to live by grace. Anything that distorts these two realities will keep us from experiencing the fulness that is offered to us in Christ.