

Colossians 2:20-23

Announcement: Israel Live

READ: Colossians 2:20-23

Context of Paul's encouragement:

Colossians 2:4-6

4 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive arguments. 5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. 6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

Paul's goal, his desired outcome of this instruction, is that he could rejoice...

- **in their good discipline, or good order, rightly ordered lives.**
- **and the stability, or assurance, of their faith in Christ.**
 - **Faith built on a firm foundation, not wavering from place to place.**
- Paul is concerned that these Christ followers are being convinced of things that will ultimately distract them from what really matters.
 - This means two things for us to be aware of in our own walk:
 - **1. This warning is for Christians,** we have to be ever diligent on what we give our attention to, nothing is neutral, Satan will use anything at his disposal to captivate us and lead us into unfruitfulness.
 - Echos back to the garden. The serpent convinces us it is good.
 - **2. The Christian life isn't a passive endeavor.** It is to be "walked" out.
 - Also echoing back to the garden, be fruitful, take dominion, rightly order it, and make it flourish.
 - Our new life in Christ comes with certain responsibilities.
 - Just like a child who is freely and graciously adopted into a new family, they are now expected to live as part of this family.
- **Paul here is helping us understand how we are to see our Christian faith.**
 - **He does this by using Citizenship Language.**
 - "As you have received Christ Jesus as Lord", so walk in Him.
 - When someone immigrates to a new country they are renouncing the citizenship of their old country and they pledged their allegiance to their new country.
 - Their citizenship transfers from one country to another. And they now submit themselves to the laws and customs and practices of their new country.

- This is what Paul is doing when he says that Jesus is Lord. Caesar is no longer Lord, but Christ Jesus is Lord.
 - This is now where our allegiance lies.
 - This is why so many of us are frustrated with the current state of our immigration enforcement, and the lack of border security. A nation can't remain a nation without citizens who are bound together by a common commitment to a particular set of standards, laws, beliefs and customs.
 - The same goes for the Kingdom of God. Many want to receive the benefits of the Kingdom without submission to the King.
 - We want the benefits of Christ's Kingdom, but to not actually live as subjects of Christ's Kingdom.
- **Paul wants to make sure that we are marked by the right things...**
 - Which are the works of the Spirit of God in us, as opposed to the works of the flesh.

Paul is teaching us what it looks like to live in this world as those marked by Christ.

- While Jesus said that His Kingdom is not of this world.
- He did command us to pray that His Kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- So, as His Body, we are to be the ambassadors of His Kingdom to this world.
 - And that means we need to make sure we are pointing at Christ, and not something else.
 - That we are marked by the Spirit of Christ in us.

Colossians 2:20-23

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

- It appears that Paul here is warning them of the dangers of concerning themselves with things that do not lead to truly righteous living.
 - Meaning, they were being convinced that certain practices, whether ideas of returning to the Jewish ceremonial laws, which had been fulfilled by Christ, or to Worldly, man made ideologies that promised spiritual enlightenment.
 - The direction of the error isn't what's important, it's that such practices don't render us more Christ-like.
- **This is the danger of Pietistic Legalism.**
 - **Which looks to prove one's favor with God, by outward acts of holiness.**

- **This was a common theme among the rebuke of the Old Testament prophets:**
 - Hosea 6:6 NASB95 - 6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
 - Hebrews 10:4-10 NASB95 - 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, (Psalm 40) "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'" 8 After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
- What God desires is our hearts, not just our obedience. Because God knows that if he truly has our hearts He will also have our obedience. Obedience is important, but not for obediences sake. It must be for Christ's sake that obedience comes.

Colossians 2:16-17

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- Paul is pointing out our tendency to make the things that are supposed to point to Christ, become the thing that we are now aiming at.
- Rather than Christ-likeness being our goal, we can actually look to these practices and acts as ways of self-salvation. Things that we can now look to, to show God how good, and important, and spiritual we are.
- And in this we begin to twist the focus from Christ's righteousness, to our own righteousness.
- **Remember, this isn't saying there isn't a way of being in the Kingdom, he is just reminding us that we need to be marked by the right things:**
 - Some have falsely interpreted Paul's words to say that God doesn't care about our actions, or character, or influence.
 - The grace of God always points to a standard. A way of being.
 - Without a standard there would be no need for grace.

- We just have a tendency to focus on the “shadow” rather than the real thing.
- There is a reason that Christianity was originally called “The Way”
- It is a way of life to be certain, and Paul is warning them no to be deceived about what actually matters in the Kingdom of God.

- **Illustration:** This happens all the time in relationships.
 - **Take a Marriage for example.** Many times in a marriage there can be, while well-intentioned, misguided actions. We tend to do the things that make us feel loved, or make us feel good, rather than asking how we can be a gift to our spouse. Asking what actually brings glory to God in our marriage.

 - **The same thing often goes for perceived acts of charity.**
 - We often do what makes us feel good rather than what is actually good.
 - Because often doing the right, and good, and Godly thing is perceived as unloving by the world.
 - God’s word actually tells us that it is sin to rob people of their dignity and liberty, by doing for them what God has called them to do for themselves.

 - **This is also the downfall of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion agenda.**
 - For all our efforts we have just made things worse, because we are focusing on the wrong things.
 - This was epitomized by the “Jesus Gets Us” commercial during the Super Bowl
 - Yes Jesus gets us, but he also wants to save us from our sin
 - not just make us comfortable on the road to destruction.

 - The point is that if it doesn’t change us or the world around us in the direction of Christ-likeness, we are just gratifying the flesh.

 - It makes us feel good but isn’t fruitful.

- **We are drawn to the things that make us feel spiritual, and, even in the church, if we aren’t careful we can find ourselves focusing on the thing that was supposed to point to Christ.**
 - Altercalls, overly emotional worship services, ecstatic prayer meetings.

 - They can become about my personal experience rather than the point being participating in the Body of Christ.

- This is actually the basis of the whole consumer centric church movement.
 - Is it the teaching I want, is it the music I like, what’s in it for me!
 - Rather then, does this glorify Christ.

- The very definition of a pagan religion is...what do I get out of this relationship? If I do this, the god has to respond in this way.
 - Paganism is focused on how we can manage god, while Christianity is surrendering to Christ's management of our lives.
 - The Bible is filled with stories about people who tried to manipulate God and treat Him like a pagan deity.
 - And it didn't end so well for them. Go read the story of Balaam.

And to all this, Paul says...

Colossians 2:23

23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- **Two things that appear to us like wisdom, but are actually useless for our Christ-likeness:**
 - **Self-made religion - Worship of the will.**
 - **Severe treatment of the body - False humility.**
- **Both of these things masquerade as wisdom, and yet have no value in helping us put off the flesh and put on Christ.**
 - Paul is saying don't waste your time, don't spend your energy on these types of things.
 - We have a tendency to relegate the Lordship of Christ to a hand selected set of religious practices, that we have decided make us look holy...
 - Rather than letting Christ reign over every nook and cranny of our day to day lives.
 - This is why Jesus said so often, when it comes to spiritual disciplines, do it in private.
- Remember: Paul's goal for their life is to rejoice in their good discipline, or good order, and their stability or assurance of their faith in Christ.
 - Jesus wants us to live fruitful lives.

Why then is this so important to Paul?

- **Because, if we are ever to rightly order our loves then Christ must be our first love.**

- Functionally, we have segmented the gospel, and in doing so relegated it to our “spiritual lives” and at the same time ignored its claims on our “everyday lives”.

Francis Schaefer once said, “We tend to think in bits and pieces and not in wholes.”

- Meaning we tend to compartmentalize our lives.
- All the bits and pieces of life are right in front of us, but we haven’t sorted them out.
- We haven’t rightly ordered them.
- And we haven’t taken the time to think through where each thing fits into the overall whole.
- And because of this it’s hard to rank order them. To give each part its appropriate due.
- Christian virtue, as Augustine put it, is the process of rightly ordering our love.

- Our current culture has done its best to smash together all our loves into a goo of self-gratification, rather than a rightly ordered life of godly gratitude.

- There is not a single square inch of our human existence over which Christ does not cry mine.

- Jesus **is** the sovereign Lord of the Universe and his desire is for us to order our lives in light of that reality.

Matthew 6:33

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

