

It is my pleasure to be able to teach this morning. Jim came caught something that was going around so he is not able to be here today. Please open up to Colossians Chapter 2. Each time I have the opportunity to teach we have been studying the book of Colossians.

Paul is writing this letter to believers and is warning them not to accept what is being taught by the false teachers that have come into the church. Most of chapter 1 is dedicated to discussing who Christ is. The false teachers were spreading lies about Christ, and Paul goes into great detail to show who Christ truly is.

Paul is not being mean spirited as he corrects this false teaching but his desire is that the Colossian believers would grow up in their faith. His wants them to mature.

Colossians 1:28 ESV

(28) Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**

This is his goal. Having the Colossian believers know the truth to combat the false teaching is not his ultimate goal his ultimate goal is that they would mature in Christ. This involves knowing the truth but the stopping point isn't knowledge it is maturity.

He then spends chapter 2 correcting other false teaching that the Colossians are being taught.

Colossians 2:4 ESV

(4) I say this in order that no one may delude you with **plausible arguments.**

The false teachers wanted the believers to take their eyes off of Christ and instead listen to man-made arguments that at first hearing sound correct.

Paul wanted them to keep their eyes on Christ.

Colossians 2:6-7 ESV

(6) **Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,**

(7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Paul reminds them that the Christian walk continues and is strengthened the same way it started .We are saved by His Grace, and we grow and continue to walk by His grace. We should never take our eyes off of Him and His power.

Colossians 2:8 ESV

(8) See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

These false teachers were trying to change the Worldview of the Colossians. The term World view is a fairly new term but it has gained great popularity. After the last time I taught I had a few people ask me to define a worldview. A world view describes your entire outlook on life.

A Worldview has to answer 4 basic questions:

- Origin –Where did we come from?
- Meaning- What is the purpose of life?
- Morality- How do we know what right and wrong are?
- Destiny- Where are we headed?

These false teachers were answering these questions using human tradition and with the basic principles of the world.

Paul wants the believers to see that their Worldview, their answers to these questions must be based on Christ. He is the real truth. As believers we have an incredible truth at our finger tips, it based on Christ and what he has done for us.

Colossians 2:13-15 ESV

- (12) having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
- (13) **And you, who were dead** in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him**, having forgiven us all our trespasses,
- (14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. **This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**
- (15) He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Paul describes what Christ has done for us in His death. We were dead in our sins but God made us alive, Christ cancelled the debt that stood against us by nailing it to the cross.

It is light of this truth, our real identity as believers, being baptized into Christ death and also being resurrected to new life in Him, that Paul continues to direct the Colossians.

Colossians 2:16-23 ESV NP

Colossians 2:16-23 ESV

- (16) Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.
- (17) These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.
- (18) Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,
- (19) and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.
- (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—
- (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"
- (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?
- (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Paul wants us to see how different our thinking should be once we realize the truth of what Christ has done for us. Starting in verse 16 we see that the false teachers were judging the Colossians for some of their actions.

Colossians 2:16 ESV

- (16) **Therefore let no one pass judgment on you** in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

The false teachers had fallen into legalism, and throughout this passage they are judging the Colossian believers for not practicing the same "holy practices" that they were.

The false teachers were trying to hold the Colossians to some of the Old Testament laws, about which foods to eat and special ceremonial days to celebrate. And they were even adding to these laws.

Paul encourages the Colossian believers to not let any judge them for these things because they have been made new in Christ. **This is why the therefore is there. Paul is trying to get them to see that they have been made free and should not be judged according to the law and these legalistic practices.** In the early church this was an ongoing issue. Paul addresses it also in Romans 14:1-3.

Romans 14:1-3 ESV NP

Romans 14:1-3 ESV

- (1) As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.
- (2) One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.
- (3) Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

Paul teaches that mature believers who do not feel burdened by legalistic rules should not despise the believer who hasn't found their freedom. He is to show grace to the weaker brother.

Likewise the weaker brother should not judge the strong believer for their actions.

He goes on to tell the weaker believer:

Romans 14:4-6 ESV

- (4) Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.
- (5) One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.**
- (6) The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

It is not for us to judge each other based on convictional issues

These are issues where scripture might not be 100% clear, or issues where a person is still struggles to shed a legalistic background.

The key to do all things to honor God and in thanksgiving to God

I want to make two things clear before we move on. The first is that there are issues where we are called to lovingly correct, or judge each other as believers.

Galatians 6:1

- (1) Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

We are to evaluate when a fellow believer is in clear cut chapter verse sin issues and gently seek to restore that person. But according to Romans 14 we are not to Judge each other on convictional issues.

The second issue I want to make clear is the judging happening in Colossians is sinful. The false teachers are not weak believers that are honestly seeking after God, **they are prideful and they are not seeking after Christ.** If you struggle with legalism but are seeking after Christ please don't let the rest of this sermon beat you up. Paul just described you in Romans 14 we are to have love and Grace.

Romans 14:6 ESV

- (6) The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Notice he tells them as long as their heart is focused on the Lord then they can continue to practice the rules. The rules themselves aren't the issue. It is why are you doing them, a weaker brother is seeking God but hasn't found there freedom.

The false teachers Paul is about to respond to are not focused on Christ, but on their own effort and focusing on their own righteousness.

Colossians 2:16-17 ESV

- (16) Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.
 (17) These **are a shadow** of the things to come, **but the substance** belongs to Christ.

The law was a mere shadow, of the reality that was to come. When I was a kid there was a party place in our city that had a shadow room. You would go into this round room and stand against the wall. A timer would go off and then there would be a large flash in the middle of the room. When you turned around your shadow was left on the wall. As kids we had so much fun jumping and trying to work together to make the coolest shadows we could.

But after a few minutes the shadows would fade off the wall, they weren't permanent. This is Paul's point in calling the law a shadow. The reality, the substance is found in Christ. I want to read this verse in the King James because it captures the words best:

Colossians 2:17 KJV

- (17) Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

In the Greek it literally says body. A shadow is just a temporary image that represents the real physical body. This is how the law functioned. Listen to Hebrews 10:1

Hebrews 10:1 ESV

- (1) **For since the law has but a shadow** of the good things to come instead of **the true form of these realities**, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

The law could never offer us perfect or lasting righteousness. By design it couldn't it wasn't the true reality. The true reality the true sacrifice was in the body of Christ. Paul continues to encourage the Colossians against the false teachers in verse 18.

Colossians 2:18 ESV

- (18) **Let no one disqualify you**, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

This verse is actually pretty difficult to translate because Paul uses a lot of Words that are not used anywhere else in the New Testament. I want to read this verse out of the Young's Literal Translation because it helps emphasize the meaning.

Colossians 2:18 YLT

- (18) **let no one beguile you of your prize**, delighting in humble-mindedness and *in* worship of the messengers, intruding into the things he hath not seen, being vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh,

The word that is translated “**let no one beguile you of your prize**” or as the ESV put it “**Let no one disqualify you**” carries the idea of a umpire or referee who is against you and making an unfair decision to not give you the prize you deserve.

In our context it means that when we focus on following the law or legalism, we miss out on the rich blessings and rewards that come from a life focused on Christ.

In verse 18 we have the negative form of this word in Chapter 3 verse 15 we have the positive version of it, these two verses are the only place in scripture they are used.

Colossians 3:15

- (15) And let the peace of Christ **rule** in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Notice how they are opposite of each other. Instead of taking our eyes off of Christ and following after the law, we are to focus on the peace that is found in Christ. We are to let his peace his freedom rule in our heart.

His peace should be our referee that gives us our reward. Because we are to be focused on Him and on his strength. But if we fall into self-righteous legalism that robs us of our reward because we will be attempting to live the Christian life based on our own strength.

Isaiah 64:6

(6) We have all become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment**. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

This is what our best effort and righteousness looks like to God. We truly are tricked, and deceived when as believers we attempt to live the Christian life on our own strength.

These false had taken their eyes so far off of Christ that they had even started to worship angels.

Colossians 2:18 ESV

(18) Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and **worship of angels**, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

The false teachers were promoting the idea that it was prideful to think that sinful humans would be able to come to God directly and worship Him, **thus in the name of humility they taught angel worship**. They tried to package this false teaching as spiritual and humble they knew who they were and were not worthy of God thus we can worship His angels instead.

This may seem ridiculous to us but when we substitute rules and laws in the place of a relationship with Christ it gets goofy quickly.

I have never seen this clearer than when I visited a super legalistic Christian College. This college had a reputation for being legalistic so as a visitor I tried to be respectful of the rules in place. But in spite of my best efforts I kept breaking rules without realizing it.

-Staying on the lighted path at night

-Completing a high five with a girl in a group of friends

-Separate staircases in certain buildings but not in others (I found maps online detailing which buildings)

It is amazing what rules we can come up with when our focus is taken off Christ. This is at the heart of legalism. There is not real standard that the rules are based on. The standard should be the Word of God and on Christ.

Colossians 2:19ESV

(19) and not **holding fast to the Head**, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

These false teachers weren't being strengthened by the Head, which is Christ. It is through Christ that we grow and mature. Listen to Ephesians 4:15-16

Ephesians 4:15-16 ESV

(15) Rather, speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up** in every way **into him who is the head, into Christ**,

(16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, **makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

The only way Christians can reach maturity is by being connected to Christ. Being built up in the body of Christ. Legalism can seem correct or even spiritual but when it is really examined at its core it leads to malnourished and weak believers. This is Paul's point at the end of verse 19.

Colossians 2:19ESV

(19) and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, **grows with a growth that is from God.**

Spiritual growth is a work of God. You can have the best mentor or pastor or small group leader but none of them are able to grow you spiritually, that can only come from God.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 ESV

(5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

(6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

(7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, **but only God who gives the growth.**

This seems like such a basic point but this is legalisms biggest downfall. Legalism tries to manufacture spiritual growth and reduce maturity to a set of rules. If you follow the rules than you are mature. God is so clear that is not how it works.

This last summer our theme for High School Camp was what does it look like to Abide in Christ. Listen to John 15:4-5 describe what life looks like for a believer who is not abiding in Christ.

John 15:4-5 ESV

- (4) Abide in me, and I in you. **As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself**, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

A branch cannot bear fruit by itself

A believer cannot grow spiritually or have any eternal fruit when they are focused on worldly things, and when they are relying on their own power.

- (5) I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, **for apart from me you can do nothing.**

It is only when we are connected to the vine that we will grow and bear fruit, to put it into our terms from Colossians it is only when we are connected to the head which is Christ that we will grow.

Paul wraps up this section reminding the Colossians of their identity in Christ.

Colossians 2:20 ESV

- (20) **If with Christ you died** to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—

Paul asks them rhetorically, haven't you died with Christ?

We remember the answer is back in verse 12.

Colossians 2:12 ESV

- (12) **having been buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

The answer is a resounding yes as a believer we are in Christ death. Paul continues to make the logical argument

Colossians 2:20 ESV

- (20) **If with Christ you died** to the elemental spirits of the world, **why, as if you were still alive in the world**, do you submit to regulations—

Before Christ we were Alive to the World but Dead to God

After Christ we are Alive to God but Dead to the World

So Paul asks the convicting question, then why don't you live like it?

Why are you living according to the Worlds system, again legalism has no real power in it, it is all based on human effort and human ability to have the will power to follow the rules.

Paul asks why go back to that when we have been made alive. It is the same question he asks the Galatians.

Galatians 3:1-3 ESV

- (1) O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.
- (2) Let me ask you only this: **Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?**
- (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

If we started the Christian life by grace through faith why would it continue based on legalism and based on human effort? Paul continues.

Colossians 2:20-22 ESV

- (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—
- (21) **"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"**
- (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?

I was reading a commentator that I usually like most of the time about this verse and he made the statement about verse 21

Colossians 2:20-22 ESV

- (21) **"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"**

"Do not . . . do not . . . do not: This is a perfect description of legalistic religion, defined more by what we *don't do* than by what we *do*. Christianity is a moral religion; it does have clear moral boundaries. **But at its foundation, Christianity is a religion of *positive action*.**"

He is right in pointing out that Legalism is more focused on what not to do. The problem then is he says Christianity is focused on what we should do. What a second, this means the core of Christianity then is about my good works. That isn't the gospel.

This is how deceptive man focused teaching can be. I can hear the sermon application now instead of being legalistic and focusing on the negative what we can't do we must focus on the good things, the things we should be doing as Christians.

No, our focus must be on Christ.

Colossians 2:6 ESV

(6) **Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,**

Colossians 2:17 ESV

(17) These are a shadow of the things to come, **but the substance belongs to Christ.**

We have such a tendency to focus on our efforts, this whole Chapter Paul keeps reminding us to stay in Christ and focus on Him.

The saddest part to me about legalism is how often it is mistaken for true spirituality.

Colossians 2:23 ESV

(23) **These have indeed an appearance of wisdom** in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, **but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**

These legalistic rules can often be viewed as being wise. We can even view someone who is dedicated to their rules as being faithful. But the verse finishes with a sober warning. Legalism does not work and it has no value in stopping our sinful flesh.

This is the difference between making good choices and a spiritual walk. Legalism offers no heart change or true spiritual growth so there is a raging sin monster on the inside dying to get out. Eventually it will.

The only thing powerful enough to stop the indulgence of the flesh is a heart transformation of the Spirit working in a believer.

Galatians 5:18-19 ESV

(18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

(19) **Now the works of the flesh** are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

Notice these are works human effort

Galatians 5:22-25 ESV

(22) **But the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

This is fruit, the outpouring of abiding in Christ

- (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
- (24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
- (25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

2Timothy 3:1-5 ESV

- (1) But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.
- (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,
- (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,
- (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
- (5) **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.** Avoid such people.