

Colossians: Jesus Our All In All

Colossians 2:16-23

Colossians 2:16

(KJV) Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

(NIV) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

Beloved, we do not need to be adding or subtracting from the Gospel, from the Word of God. We are complete in Jesus, and we have all that we need in the whole council of God's Word:

Revelation 22:18-19

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Biblical history tells the story of how religious men created their own gospel, their own way to reaching God, a hypocritical, futile and divisive set of rules and regulations that bore only bad fruit and overburdened its hearers:

Matthew 23:15

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

As Paul urges the Colossian believers here not to allow any man to judge them according their observance to religious laws, so no born-again believer will be judged by God according to this criteria!

Revelation 20:11-15

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Luke 10:20

Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Romans 10:13 *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

That's it! Not jumping through religious hoops, hoping to appease the wrath of God, but running to the arms of Jesus, and trusting in His completed work on the cross, that our names would be written in the book of life. Hallelujah!

God is not interested in varying degrees of religious correctness. He is not interested in our adherence to this teacher or that teacher, this doctrine or that. No. He is interested in the fruit we produce through our intimate relationship with Jesus, the Son who fulfills all righteousness for us, the Son in whom He is well pleased, and to Whom the Scriptures point.

Again, Paul here warns the Colossians believers not to allow the false teachers to judge them by what religious laws or added requirements to the Gospel they obey. For the Gnostics and their secret knowledge, the original Gospel would not only be insufficient to reach God, but impossible. Which brings us once again to Paul's grand, trumpeted message to the Colossians, also the theme of this study - Jesus is our all in all!

Colossians 2:17

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

(NIV) *These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

If religious tradition serves any purpose, that would be to simply remind us that Jesus is real. Prophetic Scripture also predicts and points to Jesus. However, historically, religious men have built altars over these prophetic pointers and reminders, stopping short of encountering the living Christ:

John 5:39

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Colossians 2:18

(KJV) *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,*

(NIV) *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind.*

Religion is exclusive, the Gospel is inclusive. Nowhere is this more evident than in our churches. For the new believer, it can be very intimidating to try and break through the religious walls that some church circles erect. Religious people are very good at pretending to care. Paul stated clearly that love must be *sincere*. (Romans 12:9) No surprise then that false humility has its deceptive roots in false character. Only Jesus, and our intimate connection to Him and our identification with Him can yield the true fruit of the Gospel:

Philippians 2:1-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here we have the polar opposite of religion, found in Jesus!

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: After meditating on the passage from Philippians above, what points of it convict you or your church's spiritual condition?

Paul exposes the false teachers in Colossians 2:18 by stating their actions and character:

False humility.

Matthew 23:27-28

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Worship of angels.

Revelation 22:8-9

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

False prophecy.

Ezekiel 13:1-8 *And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not*

spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD.

Carnal and prideful.

Ezekiel 13:2-3

Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!

A friend of mine years ago shared with me how his favourite T.V. prophet/teacher had predicted and assigned a date to a significant move of God. When that date came and went without any visible move of God, my friend felt disillusioned and disappointed by this famous prophet's false prophecy. My friend packed up all of the tapes, books, and video produced by this false prophet's ministry, and got rid of them.

Beloved, we would do well to test the spirits before we bite hook, line, and sinker into any ministry - especially ones that tickle the ear:

2Timothy 4:2-5

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Isn't it interesting that we need not add anything to make the Gospel more attractive. *This Word lives!*

Isaiah 55:10-11

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Any ministry anywhere in the world need only release the Word and let it do its work through the Holy Spirit. Dear Christian, run fast and run far from teaching that takes your focus off of God's Word.

*STUDY POINT: Search Old and New Testaments for passages where the Word of God was set aside in favour of another way of discerning God's will. What was the result?

Colossians 2:19

(KJV) *And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*

(NIV) *They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

God grows us! God grows His church, deeper and wider. But only as we stay connected to and stay filled with the love of the Head of the Church Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:17-19

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

1Corinthians 3:5-7

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Amen! God gives the increase! We need not strive to control or manipulate the Gospel. God will grow it. Let us simply be faithful with the tasks at hand and the assignments big or small God has given us to perform:

2Timothy 4:2

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

God's "strategy" for spiritual growth, be it personal or corporate, is to *stay connected* to Jesus, the Head of the Body:

John 15:5-6

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Beloved, we must practically stay connected by:

Staying connected to Jesus through prayer.

Staying connected to the Body of Christ through accountability and fellowship.

Staying connected to the Word of God through study and meditation.

This brings us to Paul's deep heart concern for the Colossian believers. False prophets always draw followers to themselves, not to Jesus. Followers of these false teachers quickly become zealously attached to their charisma, their presentation, and their strange doctrine. Paul is warning these young Christians not to disconnect from God, and not be lured away by the false prophets into the broad way where many wander and are destroyed:

Matthew 7:13

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: As much as it might bruise your flesh, can you think of any self-exalting false teachers past or present that you have to admit enjoying? What about these teachers did you find attractive. Are there any reasons why you should or shouldn't continue under their teaching?

Colossians 2:20

(KJV) Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

(NIV) Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules:

Colossians 2:21

(KJV) (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

(NIV) "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?

Here is religion! And to the Colossians Christians here is the old life that they died to. Paul is challenging them here to reject the old and accept the new:

2Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

The spirit of the world (1 John 2:15-17) is the spirit of deception, and by extension, the spirit of false teaching, false prophecy, and ultimately the lies of Satan. False teachers and religious men stand stubbornly on man-made doctrine and condemning religious tradition, disconnected from the life and freedom found in relationship with Jesus. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly!

John 3:17

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

John 10:10

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

The question can then be raised why humans would choose religion over freedom? Paul himself addresses this very question in Galatians:

Galatians 5:1-4

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Certainly cults and religion have thrived throughout the centuries because humankind, in all of its fallen nature, seems to have been attracted to falling under the control and manipulation of mere mortal men. Sad? I think so.

But we as believers now desire to be captured by the love, grace, and mercy of God through His Son Jesus. We are now slaves of righteousness!

Romans 6:17-20

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants [slaves] of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

Touch not! Taste not! Handle not! (Colossians 2:21)

Here we see the true legalistic nature of religious law and ritual, attached as it was to the old traditions of the Colossians - attached to their senses, to their flesh, and to external appearances. Relating this to our context today, there is nothing essentially wrong with the symbols that represent the bread and cup of the Lord's Communion, or formal readings of God's Word, but note well that it takes but a heartbeat for extended ritual and tradition to become dogmatic religious rhetoric that leads unsuspecting seekers to commit idolatry, and leads them away from intimate relationship with God through Jesus.

Colossians 2:22

(KJV) Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

(NIV) These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

These religious laws and rituals that Paul is referring to are *temporal*. Our relationship with Jesus, and our obedience to His Word are *eternal*. Beloved, the difference between these two ways of reaching God is the difference between *death* and *life*.

So, dear Christian, beware the broad way, the religious way, the any-way-but-Jesus way, because lack the power of God and are but mere dead works.

2Timothy 3:5

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Colossians 2:23

(KJV) Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

(NIV) Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Only the Word of God, and our obedience to it through the power of the Holy Spirit, can produce fruit that glorifies our Great Gardener God!

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

God is doing a great work in these days, stripping away layer after layer of religious insincerity, dead tradition, and false doctrine, so that all that is left is God, Jesus His Son, and His Holy Spirit in us illuminating His unchanging Word.

Beloved, surrender to God's refining work in you today.

Rediscover Jesus.

Stay in His Word.

- Reverend Darren McClelland