

Text: Colossians 2:16-23

Title: False Religions Added to Christianity

Truth: Refuse any additions to Christ or the Bible. Such are not good news.

Date/Location: October 18, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

After an amazing sequence of verses on the preeminence of Christ and the work He has done for us in salvation, Paul turns his attention to exhortations to protect against the man-made traditions that were flooding Colossae.

I. Do Not Permit Judgment Based on Jewish Rituals, v. 16-17

- A. Do not permit judgment about rituals. Do not allow this sort of thing to trip you up or cause you to accept the religious rituals as effective in producing salvation or sanctification. See Acts 15.
- B. This is addressed to “you plural.” This is a corporate issue, not an individual one. The decision and volition is to be exercised corporately, together, with one mind. This protects the whole body and keeps an individual from going off the rails on their own.
- C. Five Jewish Rituals
 - 1. Food. Prohibitions against certain kinds of food are the most well-known of the Old Testament laws. Lev. 11:4 prohibited eating of the camel, rock badger, rabbit, and pig. Mark 7:18-19 made clear that it is not the intake of these foods that causes uncleanness, but what comes out of a man’s already-defiled heart that is the problem. A case can be made, as by Kent in his commentary *Treasures of Wisdom*, that it was not the pork, for instance, that defiled, but the disobedience to God’s command that did. Now that God does not make that same requirement of us, we can eat the pork and not have any defilement. God had to specially reveal to Peter that the food and the people who eat the food are not unclean in the present dispensation (Acts 10:15, 28).
 - 2. Drink. These laws are less well-known today. See Lev. 10:9, 11:34, 36; Num. 6:3. The prohibition against mixing milk and meat in Jewish kosher law is based on a very questionable interpretation about boiling a kid goat in its mother’s milk (Exodus 23:19, 34:26, Deut. 14:21).

3. Festival. Gal. 4:10. These were the Jewish religious feasts such as Passover, Pentecost, and Booths.
4. New Moon. Monthly there were official recognitions of the lunar cycle. See Numbers 29:6, 1 Samuel 20:5, 1 Chronicles 23:31, Neh. 10:33. Note that this celebration had to avoid the sinful human tendency to worship the moon (Deut. 4:19) and other heavenly bodies, which has plagued humanity since near the beginning of creation.
5. Sabbath. The Sabbath law is given in great detail in Exodus 20:8-11, prohibiting work to be done from Friday evening to Saturday evening. But in the present age of grace, the Christian is not at all bound to keep the Sabbath, nor to treat Sunday as the Sabbath.

D. Why?

1. Suppose someone comes up to you and says, “Why don’t you worship on Saturday? How can you eat pork? Why don’t you keep the Jewish holidays?” You may read this passage to them, and tell them that all Biblical Christians reject such implied condemnation because it is out of accord with the gospel. You cannot elevate a day or a prohibition above Christ. And why is that?
2. It is because the Old Testament Jewish regulations were like a shadow compared to the thing that makes the shadow. The shadow is two-dimensional and black-and-white. The object that makes the shadow is three-dimensional, textured, and in full color. The Bible is clear in Heb. 9:10 and surrounding context that a massive change in God’s requirements was made around the cross of Jesus Christ. His life and work on the cross are the reality; they cast a long shadow that was seen in the Old Testament in terms of sacrifices and rituals that pointed forward to Him. The shadow cannot elevate itself above the object that makes the shadow.

E. So what? The application, besides not let anyone judging you in these matters, is that you do not need any religious rituals to become or stay a Christian. The gospel teaches that Christ saves fully, apart from *any* additions to His work.

II. Do Not Be Disqualified by Angel Worship, v. 18-19

A. Do not be disqualified – This could mean not to allow someone to come and pass judgment (as in verses 16-17), or it could mean not to permit them to take away that good thing you have in the gospel by getting you to follow their belief system.

B. The false belief system in Colossae included a several key features.

1. False humility – perhaps, they say, we cannot approach God directly, because He is so high, so we have to go through some other intermediary.
2. So they advocate worship of angels. They might convince themselves that this is good because the angels are “good angels.” It matters not—it is still *idolatry*. It is worshipping something other than God, and it is rebellion against God’s instruction (Exodus 20:3-5).
3. Their humility is false because the text says they are “vainly puffed up.” They claim to have seen visions of spiritual things and this gives them great pride with their “insider information.”

C. So what? This same attitude works out in the selection of human intermediaries such as dead saints or living priests and popes. Even those not in the Catholic religious system will talk about dead relatives as if they have special powers of intercession with God now that they are “in heaven.” This is not the gospel. Christ has **the** access to God. And we need not pretend that we are “humble” by worshipping other than God and Christ, because they have told us to worship God alone.

D. This false religion that came to the church in Colossae was a decapitated form of Christianity which therefore was not CHRISTian at all. It could not expect to grow like real Christianity because it is has no control center from which to grow properly. The only kind of growth there might be is cancerous growth.

III. Do Not Submit to Ascetic Regulations, v. 20-23

To be ascetic is not merely self-discipline but rather severe self deprivation and abstinence from things that are pleasurable, motivated by religion.

A. Example regulations/obligations/rules (v. 20b-21)

1. Do not touch. Same verb in 1 Cor. 7:1 regarding celibacy.
2. Do not taste. This has to do with food and drink.
3. Do not handle. See Exodus 19:12 about not touching the mountain.

These are all “living in the world” kinds of things. They have nothing to do with the Christian message.

B. These things appear to be wise because they (v. 23a):

1. Are self-imposed religion. When the much of humanity shows no restraint in their choices, subscribers to ascetic practices like monks

and nuns may appear to be spiritual. But theirs is not a spirituality from God.

2. Show a kind of humility. Here again humility comes up, but it is a self-centered humility, which is not humble at all!
3. Neglect the body and treat it harshly. The idea is that the body itself is evil and needs to be subjected. This idea is false because it is not the humanity of the body or the material of the body that is bad; it is the sinfulness of it carried in the mind and soul of the person that is bad.

C. Why these things are not wise

1. No help against the flesh (v. 23b). You still carry the flesh with you wherever you go, whether it is indulged or beaten down or hidden away in a monastery. You cannot escape yourself nor your sinfulness. You need Christ to help you control your fleshly desires.
2. Concern things that perish with using (v. 22a). The things that you would not touch/taste/handle are worldly objects like food that once you eat them they are literally GONE. They are no more. Temporal.
3. Commandments and teachings of men (v. 22b). You won't find in the New Testament teachings of Jesus or the apostles the detailed traditions and dogmas that men have developed. A huge percentage of many religions derive from sources other than God's word. Just ask yourself, "Is this in the Bible?" That will save you from a lot of foolishness.
4. You have died with Christ from all such false religion (v. 20a). This is the big point. In identifying with Him, you have become disconnected or separated from worldly things.

Conclusion

The passage concerns not things permitted out of the whole of everything you might wish to do, but it concerns things prohibited by wrong application of the Law of Moses. In other words, you cannot say, "I want to smoke/drink/do drugs, therefore you cannot judge me regarding what I put into my body." The Law of Moses never prohibited those things as part of the Jewish religious system. This passage instead talks about things that were previously prohibited by the Law of Moses that can now be done in Christ without affecting one's salvation or ceremonial cleanliness. It does not give a free pass to do whatever you want and then allow you to rebuff judgment if another Christian calls you to account for it.

In other words, do not use this passage as cover for worldliness.

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