

Text: Colossians 2:16-23

Title: False Additions to Christianity, Part 2

Truth: No additions to Christ or the Bible for salvation are good news.

Date/Location: October 25, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

Through the first two chapters of Colossians, the Bible has taught us about the absolute preeminence of Jesus Christ as the fullness of deity, the creator, the head of all things including the church, and the reconciler of all things to God. This truth creates some serious responsibilities:

- For people, to be reconciled through Christ and to continue steadfast in the faith.
- For the human author, the apostle Paul, to minister the good news about Christ so that all know of the truth of Jesus Christ.
- For believers, to avoid false teaching because of the Christian's completeness in Christ. Paul calls out false teachings generally in 2:8, and then details them more in 2:16-23 as follows.

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

- A. We learned last time that we are not to submit ourselves to various Jewish religious rituals as a way of salvation or sanctification (Acts 15).
- B. There were five Jewish rituals mentioned: food laws, drink laws, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths.
- D. Why? These rituals cannot save; they cannot cleanse your heart from sin; they cannot bring you closer to God; doing them does not make God happier with you. In fact, today they are effectively nothing, having as much substance as a shadow. The shadow-casting body is Christ, so we go to Him, the reality, instead of an outdated shadow.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.
- F. The implication of this is that we should reject *legalism*. What is that?
 1. The Biblical usage. The definition of legalism in the Bible is the belief that one's good works will ingratiate oneself to God. Basically, it is the doctrine that keeping laws or standards of conduct will earn forgiveness, salvation or ensure sanctification. It is salvation or sanctification by works instead of by grace through faith. This idea is at the heart of what the Reformation was all about. The Reformation was a 16th-century movement in the context of Roman Catholicism that rejected Catholic doctrines of religious authority and salvation by works (legalism) and resulted in the creation of reformed and protestant churches.

2. Many people have been accused of legalism because their opponents don't like the strictures put on them by any requirement for obedience. But many people accused this way most emphatically do *not* believe in legalism-for-salvation because they reject the idea that righteousness or holiness is achieved by legal means. They rather believe a Spirit-wrought inner desire will be found in the believer and that is evidenced by the eschewing of worldly behavior and the making of every effort to have Christ-like character in their lives. This is done by mortifying sin and cultivating righteousness, not to gain favor with God, but on the basis of God's favor, because God hates sin and loves righteousness, and so does the believer.
3. This leads us to the contemporary religious usage. Unfortunately, a second usage of *legalism* has become popular and is used to decry any and all standards of conduct as *legalistic*. It alleges that such "standards" are an attempt to impose a law upon others as if the standard can sanctify or make us better. So in telling people they should not smoke or drink, I could be charged with legalism, not meaning that I believe you have to stop those things in order to earn saving favor with God, but that I am trying to impose a requirement on you that God does not impose to make you a better Christian, *and the person making the accusation of legalism doesn't like that requirement*. The contemporary version of legalism says more about the accuser than the accused! Now if I were "making up" laws that would certainly be a problem. But the kind of standards I'm talking about are seen in Scripture directly to be normal, natural aspects of Christian character (being like Christ) or easily derived from the teaching of Scripture. You may disagree that a certain standard is taught in Scripture. You would have to carefully consider what the Bible says and come to a God-honoring position on it in your life. But as a pastor I am required to help you understand *and apply* Scripture. If you find that I generally say things that are backed up by Scripture, you should be cautious about blowing it off just because you don't like what I've said or it runs counter to your current practice. Recognize I'm trying to help you apply God's word so you can avoid sin and live righteously.

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 several more 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—like, an angel, or a priest, or something else.
 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." That's often how cults start, with some "privileged" person receiving new information that cannot be checked by others. It could be a vision of heaven or something claiming some new knowledge about a way to God.

C. So what? This same attitude is seen in the elevation of supposed 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 God has told us to worship God alone through Christ (John 14:6, 1 Timothy 2:5).

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 or helpful, motivated by the religious idea that such deprivation can help produce holiness.

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 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 it in the Bible?" That will save you a lot of trouble.
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. What has happened to you when you became a believer is far more that what mere asceticism could ever hope to accomplish. All asceticism does is deprive you or beat you up in some way; in Christ, you *died!*

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 did not mention those things as part of the Jewish religious system, so they are not under consideration here. This passage 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 (Romans 13:14, 1 Peter 2:16).

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