

November 19, 2023

“Freedom from the World”

Colossians 2:16-23

Lesson 3

**Intro**

Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians, but he may not have ever been able to go there. He wrote the letter while under arrest while in Rome. He had, however, heard about the Colossian Christians from others, and wrote this letter both to encourage them and to address false teachings that were present in the church. The section that we look at today deal with both of these: correct teaching regarding false ideas, and encouragement in their relationship to Christ.

**Read Colossians 2:16-23**

1. vs. 16: Paul here addresses actions taken that some considered a sign of not being a true believer

“What you eat or drink”:

The OT Law contained several prohibitions about what was OK to eat

These Laws did not apply to 1<sup>st</sup> Century Gentile believers

Eating whatever was fine as long as it didn't cause another to sin

(See Rom. 14:20-21, 1 Corin. 8)

Alcoholic drink was common in the 1<sup>st</sup> century

Even the OT Law didn't prohibit this except in specific occasions

Some may have been judging others for doing what they thought was wrong

“Religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day”

There were several specified festivals observances in the OT

The Jewish calendar is essentially based on the lunar cycle

This means New Moon observances indicated certain festivals

The OT Law also required observing the Sabbath Day

Paul rejects all these OT requirements as seeking after the appearance of holiness

The basis of the NT law is love

Love of God, love of neighbor

Loving others asks us to seek what is best for others rather than what is preferred by us

It also allows us to limit our freedoms to avoid causing harm to others

2. vs. 17: Paul says all these “rules” are “a shadow of the things that were to come”

None of these various OT Laws will have a place in eternity

They are a shadow of the “good things that are coming”, as per Heb. 10:1)

That shadow gives way to what is real, which “is found in Christ”

Salvation in Christ alone is the greatest of the “good things to come”

He is the fulfillment of what it takes to acquire salvation

Faith in Christ produces salvation, not following rules and laws

3. vs. 18: Paul warns against two areas that could lead people away from following Christ

The first is “false humility”

What actions were done falsely isn't recorded in Paul's letter

Paul warns against any action that is being done for attention rather than from love

Jesus warned against fasting in public to gain attention/approval (Matt. 6:16)

The second is “worship of angels”

Again, the exact nature of these behaviors isn’t told in the letter

But worship of any created being is misguided worship

Christ is superior to all Creation—See Col. 1:16-17 and 2:9-10

No one needs to appeal to angels to go to Christ for them

Christ is our “great high priest”, and we can approach him directly

See Heb. 4:14-16

The “disqualify” implies being led astray by these false teachings

If one followed them, they would disqualify themselves from living life by God’s rule

This might impact any possible rewards they would get

It might potentially affect their eternal lives

Paul finishes by noting that the false teachers have “unspiritual minds”

The unspiritual mind is hostile to God and His will (see Rom. 8:3-12)

These false teachers are giving “great detail” regarding “what they have seen”

What Paul has heard about their teaching is that it is unspiritual

It is contrary to God, and to what the apostles teach

4. vs. 19: The false teachers have “lost connection” with Christ

Christ is the head of the church, notes Paul (Col. 1:15-18)

If the body (the church) gets disconnected from the head, it dies

If the church follows the false teachers, it will also get disconnected from Christ

5. vs. 20: The “elemental spiritual forces of this world” are not from God

These are those forces that have temporary authority of this world

They include demonic forces, pagan philosophies, and rules for worldly behavior

They are the forces that call people to follow “hollow and deceptive philosophy (2:8)

The Colossians, and we today, live in this world but are not to “submit to its rules”

This is the old life that we left behind when we submitted to Christ

We have been raised to a new life through Christ’s death and resurrection

6. vs. 21: Paul gives three command that come from the false teachers

Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!

The “do not taste” likely comes from the restriction of food items under the OT law

Biblical scholars feel the other two are not clear in terms of what they refer to

The general idea is that the physical world is contaminated

The spiritual world is the only pure one

In one sense, these are both true

But Christians are called to live *in* the world, just not be influenced by it

Christians are allowed by God to handle, taste, and touch the elements of this world

We are simply not to be altered away from God by them

7. vs. 22: These restrictions, says Paul, are about things which are not eternal

Human commands about them are also not eternal

Following these practices may not necessarily lead to spiritual growth

They do not reliably show what a person’s heart is toward God

8. vs. 23: Paul notes three faults with those who encourage and practice these restrictions  
His general view is that these practices appear wise, but they are human wisdom  
These things are not from God, therefore they are not showing God's wisdom  
"worship"  
Worshipping God is good  
Worshipping things he created (angels) is not Godly worship  
"false humility"  
Practicing self-denial to show one's "humility" is a false show  
True humility is seeing yourself as God sees you, and seeing others as better  
"harsh treatment of the body"  
Self-denial is a good thing when done Biblically  
Certainly, we are to "honor God with (our) bodies" as in I Cor. 6:20  
This involves self-denial at times  
But these practices aren't a sign of true spiritual maturity if done selfishly

Paul's final point here is the motivation for doing these practices  
He says "they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence"  
The false teachers were trying to control the flesh through human practices  
Even if doing these helped *some*, they don't prevent sinful desires  
Faith in Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit are needed to confront the flesh  
We have been made new in Christ, and been given His power

Application: The false teachers tried to attack the flesh's weakness through various practices. But they disconnected themselves from Christ and His power. So their efforts were going to fail. The lesson for us is that our behaviors need always to be connected to our relationship to Christ. He is all we need for salvation. With the Spirit's power and leading, we can seek divine help and divine direction in how best to deal with the world and the weakness of our flesh.

Prayer: Father God, we seek the wisdom that only comes from You. Soften our hearts so that we can be attentive to the Spirit's work in our lives. Help us to always stay connected to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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