

Colossians 2:18-23

11/07/2020

Open your Bibles to Colossians 2, I will read from verse 16 through 23.

**Let No One Disqualify You**

<sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup>**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, <sup>19</sup>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.

<sup>20</sup>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— <sup>21</sup>“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup>(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to **human precepts and teachings?** <sup>23</sup>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.

Some of you have made mention to me that this passage is speaking to you, just like it has and continues to speak to me....And, I just want to remind you that the back drop for what Paul is saying.... As he moves from instructing us on what we need to know to admonishing us on what we need to do..... the backdrop for all of this is everything he has already said in verse 9-15.

I put it in your bulletin again, just as a reminder.

The word therefore in verse 16 is the transition Paul uses so we will apply what he has so clearly explained to us about what happened at salvation..... So, everything from verse 16 and following is on account of what God had done for us in Christ....

Remember.....all that has happened to you? Take a look at your bulletin..... or follow along in your Bible.....

1. Verse 10 - We were filled with the Holy Spirit
2. Verse 11 - Our fleshly desires were cut off by Christ
3. Verse 12 -13 - We were buried and raised to new life by God the Father
4. Verse 13 - All of our sins were forgiven

5. Verse 14 - All of the record of our sins were placed on Christ
  6. Verse 14 - Christ was nailed to the cross by the Father for our sins
  7. Verse 15 - God triumphed over Satan and His demonic forces.
  8. Verse 14-15 Through the cross, Victory has been won, as we are waiting for Christ's return
- And, it is on account of all these benefits that Paul is then giving us to admonitions.....  
first in verse 16, which we looked at last week...

“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.<sup>1</sup>”

and the other admonition is in verse 18,

“Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions<sup>2</sup>”

I won't go backwards and say too much about last Sunday's sermon.....the emphasis in verse 16 and 17 was not to allow these false teachers to put you under the bondage of obeying their legalistic rules and laws that have no biblical basis for you to obey them.....

They are trying to bind your conscience, and stealing your joy..... by having you follow their unbiblical lists about what to eat or not to eat... and what ceremonies to keep..... and they have missed the whole point that the OT laws and ceremonies were just shadows that pointed to Christ..... and now that we have Christ, there is no need to go back and live in the shadows.....

Jesus is here, he has fulfilled the law, He has kept the law, and it is our faith in Him that saves us that sanctifies..... we have no need to follow their man made, legalistic traditions.... Instead, continue to seek Christ, love Christ, as he has been revealed to us in His Word....

This morning, as we move on to verse 18, Paul's admonition is that they not be disqualified is taking us back to chapter 1 verse 12, when he told the Colossians that they were now qualified to share in the inheritance in the saints in light.....

In and through Christ, they went from darkness to light, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ, and they went from being unqualified to be in His presence to being

---

1 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 2:16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

2 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Col 2:18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

qualified.....not because of their works; not because of their merit, not because of their goodness.... But because of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection

and what he is saying as he commands them not let anyone disqualify them is not talking about losing their salvation.....

Rather, he is warning them to not let anyone rob them of the joy and the relationship they have to God through Christ....

The word disqualify is an athletic term used when the umpire disqualifies the contestant because he has not obeyed the rules.....and what Paul is literally saying is, "don't let them disqualify you, don't let them condemn you, don't let them judge you or declare you unworthy of a prize. Don't be called out." .Paul is telling these Colossian believers that if you follow their teaching, you will be disqualified.....you will be sidelined..... not in the game..... sat on the bench.....ineffective .....

And, without over thinking this passage, the simplest way to see how you would be disqualified is by following what I have labeled as their Mystical teaching..... instead of holding fast to Christ.... That is the contrast here, and you will see that as we walk through the passage....

Let's begin by looking at a few words and phrases that need to be explained or defined....

.....The reference to asceticism has the idea of voluntary "self abasement" "The word denotes practices employed to combat vices and develop virtues and the renunciation of some aspects of social life and comfort; or it also means the adoption of painful conditions for religious reasons."<sup>3</sup>

We saw this last week, when I talked about the gnostic heresy that said the body is bad, only the spirit is good, so you need to deny yourself food, drink and many of God's good gifts in order to live a more holy life...

Here, it is going a step further and not just denying yourself.... But adding self affliction.... Or harming yourself... purposefully causing yourself to suffer physical harm...to aid you in your walk with God...

---

3 Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 114). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

If you have read anything about Martin Luther or seen any of the many movies about his life, he put himself under what could be called physical torture as he desired to seek God through his ascetic lifestyle....

in early church history it is reported that, "some ascetics practised extreme forms of fasting and self-deprivation. In the popular mind there seems to have been an association between the abandonment of human comforts and the acquisition of miraculous powers."<sup>4</sup>

The general thought was that the more you deny yourself, the more power you will receive..... or the closer to God you will become

I remember when I was in Bible College that an audio tape circulated that was teaching people how to pray for a solid hour, **and the purpose behind** it was that a full hour of prayer a day will give you some sort of mystical power..... you will see a difference in your prayer answers, in your victory over sin, in the conversion of the lost, a greater love and commitment to Christ..... it was a denial of self and a greater focus on God for that hour a day that would in fact lead to greater things for Christ.....

Now, I am not saying we should not pray, nor would I ever discourage someone from praying daily or praying for an hour a day..... Of course if anyone knew you were praying for an hour, you would immediately lose your reward because Jesus told us that when we pray, we should pray in secret .... our prayer habits are not to be broadcast to the world...

but, remember, Rick mentioned this last week at the end of the service, how wrong it is that we come to God with the idea that there is a cause and effect to our self denial.... He mentioned that it is easy to begin thinking that if he denied himself hunting on opening day, that maybe God would give him a big buck later in hunting season...

It is the mystic or superstitious idea that that when you do this, God is obligated to give you that..... if I deny this, then God will bless me with that..... this is just wrong thinking....and it is classic mysticism

but it is so easy to get caught in the trap isn't it? You read your Bible in the morning and you pray.... And you are thinking God will bless your day..... you do not take the time to read your bible and you don't pray..... and when your day goes poorly, you think you it is because you did not have your quiet time.....

---

<sup>4</sup> Cross, F. L., & Livingstone, E. A. (Eds.). (2005). In *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd ed. rev., p. 114). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

This is not how God operates..... Our good days and bad days are not tied to our performance... if they were, then Jesus would have never suffered.... He obeyed perfectly and suffered and died for sin.... The apostle Paul suffered throughout his life.... Believers have suffered, lost family, their reputation, jobs, and all manner of things, even though they “performed faithfully.”

But that does not stop us from thinking this way... we have good days and bad days for a variety of reasons, we need not tie them to any religious exercises.....

Years ago, I remember a guy telling me how busy his life was going to be over the next several weeks and his answer to his busyness was to “double up” on his devotions....

He actually thought that by doing twice as much as he normally does in regards to prayer and Bible reading that that would help him in the days and weeks ahead when his work load increased dramatically.

Again, we not ever want to discourage anyone from seeking God, reading their Bible, and being faithful..... and, we all need what we used to call “Holy habits.” I don’t hear that phrase very often any more, but we need to bring it back...

Holy Habits coincide with what we refer to the normal means of grace..... Church attendance, being underneath the authority of God’s Word, corporate Worship, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, Bible reading, meditating, prayer, study, fellowship .....all of these should be the normal natural part of our lives as Christians...

but we participate in these because of our love for God....because of all that happened to us that is spelled out in verses 9-15..... Because we want to know Christ and continue to learn and understand all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge regarding Him...

but we don’t live this way to add a mystical reward to whatever it is you are doing... You seek Him, desire to know Him, want to fellowship with Him because of all He has done for you already, not for some other reward in this life.....

As our text goes on to say that these false teachers were advocating the worship of angels, They were teaching that God was so far beyond us, we needed to reach him through a series of mediators.....angels being one of them..... so it was not a denial of worshipping God, rather, it

was through angels we are able to gain access to God.....and ultimately a denial of Christ as our sole mediator.....

Now, to some of you, that sounds strange..... but if you have a Catholic background it isn't strange at all..... part of the reason why Catholics pray to Mary is because they are trying to get to God through the back door.....You see God is too great, too angry, too full of wrath and He requires way too much..... and Christ is not that approachable either..... so Instead of praying to God through Christ, just talk to Mary, cry out and pray to Jesus' mom..... and like all good mom's she will talk to her son, Jesus, on your behalf.....she will mediate for you.....

I mentioned Luther earlier and this whole idea of ascetism and angel worship is right up his alley.....when he felt he was going to die in a severe lightening storm, He cried out, "St. Anne, help me. i will become a Monk." he was saved from the storm and he kept his promise.... He felt St. Anne helped Him.... Luther, apparently, up to that time in his life had never prayed to God, only to God through saints.....So this concept of angelic mediation is something that has continued in different forms throughout the ages.....

Beloved, aren't you grateful that we can follow the encouragement of the hymn writer, "Oh, Come to the Father through Jesus the Son, and give Him the glory, great things He hath done!"

He is our wonderful, merciful, Savior.....precious redeemer and friend.....

Christ is both the perfect Mediator and the only Mediator between God and man.....As man he identifies with us, understands, and comforts us..... as God he has the power to save and help us.....

We have already established that He is head over all rulers and authorities..... there is no need to go angels He created..... we can come straight to Him through His Son.....

Now, notice, they are not only are they encouraging self abasement and angel worship.... They are also touting that they need to pursue visions or experiences..... I think I can safely say that this idea probably made Paul laugh to himself.....

Paul as an apostle had true visions from God.....we know that Paul had seen Jesus..... we know in II Corinthians 12 that Paul told the Corinthians about a vision he had when God took him up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven, "he heard things that cannot be told which man should not utter....."

After this particular vision, God, then gave him a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble.....

If a person did in fact have a credible Vision, it shouldn't produce pride, it should produce humility.... Yet, these men puffed up without reason by their own fleshly or carnal mind or unspiritual mind.... The word sensuous in this context has more to do with being worldly or godless than sexual... These visions they claimed that they had, that others should seek had nothing to do with God, they just bolstered their own egos....

In nearly every time period through out history, there are people in the church who want a word from God.... They want God to speak to them audibly, directly..... they want some sort of spiritual or divine experience..... they want visions..... They are not looking for direction from God's word, rather, they want something supernatural.....

For some of you this might be something you have never encountered.... In he late 70's and 80's the charasmatic movement fostered this idea of seeking visions and dreams..... it was a real misinterpretation of many passages from the book of Acts.....and though it may not be as prevelant today as it was in the past in the United States, it is the prevailing thought in churches in other countries, especially in Africa....

One of the main goals of the organization I went to Ethiopia with called Training Leaders International is to teach pastors and leaders that they do not need a vision from God... they have everything they need in God's Word..... they do not need to pray and ask God to give them something to say.... They do not need to create sermons out of their own imaginations and visions.... They have God's Word.

One pastor looked at one of the leaders I was traveling with and said, "You mean I have to study in order to preach?" Gil said, "Yes, you need to study what God has already revealed to us to preach." By the end of the week, the pastor told Gil, "You know this is a lot easier to preach from the Bible, instead of making things up from my own mind." or come through visions.

I think what this does more than anything else in the context of the church in Colossae is it undermines apostolic authority, and therefore undermines the authority of the Word of God.....visions and experiences are subjective.... And if someone claims they have seen a vision, and that God told them to do or say something in that vision.... Who are you question it?

Visions ultimately create an environment where the authority of God's Word is challenged, and the person with the vision or the experience is the final authority...not the Scriptures

and I find one of the most convincing passages in the Epistles that place the Scriptures above visions is in II Peter 1, go ahead and turn there.....

I am going to read from verse 16..... You will know right away that Peter is referencing the time when He and James and John went up the mountain and Jesus was transfigured before them.... They got a glimpse of His glory and they also saw Moses and Elijah, and they heard God the Father speak audibly from heaven..... quite a spectacular experience.....

But notice as I read Peter talking about it how he down plays the vision and demonstrates that our hope and trust and confidence should always be in God's inspired, inerrant word.....

Verse 16

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

Honestly, what could be better? They were eyewitnesses of the majesty of Christ..... they saw Jesus receive glory from God the Father..... and they heard the Father's voice talk about how pleased He was with the Son..... and he confirms, “We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven....” Could there have been a more spectacular and convincing experience?

But notice verse 19

<sup>19</sup> And **we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed,**” Do you see? He is putting God's word over and above seeing Christ and His glory..... He is putting God's Word above his experiences...

Peter goes on..... “to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. <sup>5</sup>”

The prophetic Word, the Bible is more fully confirmed than one of the most spectacular experiences anyone could have ever seen.... and because all prophecy of Scripture, or all of the Word of God, was not produced by the will of man, rather men spoke from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along.... Because of this, no one can ever make a claim to any private interpretation..... no private interpretations from the Scriptures, and no private visions, as well....

And, this is all the more reason why these false teachers should not be listened to at all.....They are not taking you toward Christ, they are taking you away..... They are not following apostolic teaching from the Word of God, they are their own authorities....

By the time you come to this part of the passage, you realize that they have created a Christless, counterfeit religion... where they are the final authorities... there is a complete disconnect between what they are saying and what Paul is saying by the authority of God through the Holy Spirit.....

but, it looks so good.... It looks so spiritual.... It sounds so right..... Look at them deny themselves food and some forms of pleasure.... And watch them keep some of the High and Holy days..... And they fast for days on end, and, I know it's angels, but they seem so sincere when they worship..... they have their hands raised and everything.....and the visions they receive..... they seem so convincing....

But, there is a huge problem, isn't there? Paul states in verse 19 that they are 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."<sup>6</sup>

Beloved, there is no reference to Christ in any of their instruction.....In verse 23, Paul states that they are "promoting self made religion." It is dripping with that isn't it? They have made up their own rules, their own legalistic demands, their own ways to worship, and they are the ultimate authorities.....

They are not holding fast to Christ, who is the Head of the body, the church.....

There is a corporate aspect to standing against false teaching that we need to take notice of.....I know I sound like a broken record.....but the reason I say this over and over and over is the Bible says it over and over and over...everything in here is communicating the absolute

---

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Col 2:18–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

necessity of Church life, of body life..... of us being bound together by Christ as a body of believers in order for us to grow.....There is no room for Christian individualism.....

The moment you were saved.... The moment you experienced all the benefits of verses 9-15, at that moment, you became part of the body of Christ, the church of Christ..... and from that point on, you need the church, you need the body, and the body needs you.....

A Christian life that is not connected to faithful, faithful.... Faithful means not sporadic.....A Christian life that is not connected to faithful attendance and participation in a local, Bible believing, Christ centered church is an oxymoron..... there is no room in the Word of God for isolated, loner Christians....

That is basically what these false teachers were attempting to do..... to get people away from the church into their instruction....

If anything, verse 19 is telling us that those who are not connected and not taking part in a local body are going to be susceptible to the false teachers.....

when Paul mentions the whole body, he is saying that every believer in the Colossian church should not be disqualified by these individuals...

He wants the whole body to hold on to Christ and if they do, they will experience at least 3 things:

they will be nourished, or well fed, or well cared for.... Or this could mean they will be guarded and protected....this word means they will have all their spiritual needs supplied....

This is our deepest desire, every time you come.... We want you to be well fed..... we receive all our marching orders from the head, who has revealed everything we need to know in His Word..... so we do not seek visions, we seek Christ through His Word.....

So, when we gather, we want to read the Bible, Pray the Bible, Preach the Bible, and Sing the Bible..... so that you can be nourished and cared for in Christ.....

2ndly, when the whole body holds on to Christ, they will be knit together or joined together.....this word means they will come together as a unit or they will be combined..... and the metaphor of the body's joints and ligaments shows even further the connectedness we are to have as believers..... You and I as believers represent the joints and ligaments..... and the

only way we can every move together is we are listening carefully to one head, the Lord Jesus Christ, who instructs us by His Word....

As a church, we are to be listening to one voice, one head, and function as a body should function as the joints and ligaments move in unison together.....

You cannot do this through visions.... You can't do this through self denial.... you can't do this through angel worship...

And, don't miss the whole idea that joints and ligaments are inter twined and inter connected..... The metaphors for the church are so rich... we are a building and each of us are stones.... We are family and we are brothers and sisters.... We are a body with various body parts that functions as one under the authority of Christ our head.....

One of the great difficulties we are having as a church is the inability to fellowship freely because of Covid.... And it really is having in impact.... Let me encourage you to pray for one another, check in on one another through a phone call, a text...

and thirdly, when we are holding fast to Christ, the head of the church, we will grow..... Through His nourishment, and through our functioning as a body, we will grow in depth..... become more Christlike..... and eventually this leads to growing in breadth.....

If we corporately together hold fast to Christ our head, we will corporately grow as a church.....and, we will not be able to miss the fact that the growth we experience will be from who? God..... God builds his church through His Son.....

So, how do we hold fast to Christ? It is not through the path of mysticism and legalism, It is through the normal means the ordinary means of grace..... it is week in week out, day in day out faithfulness..... show up for worship, pray, fellowship with one another, read and meditate on God's Word, get involved in the lives of other believers, plant seeds when you are able....be connected to and underneath the authority of a local church.....

It is not as flashy as life of self denial, or sleeping on a bed of nails, or praying for 2 hours a day or seeing visions or even worshipping angels..... but God will use your faithfulness over the course of your life in your own life and in the lives of other in the local church.....for His glory.....

Paul summarizes the this chapter in such a remarkable way..... I will just let him do it...

as he asks a piercing “why” question in verse 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— <sup>21</sup>“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?

What a rock solid conclusion.....Paul is confused..... He has proven his case that they have died to these things..... so “why? Why? Why? Are you submitting to the very regulations that you have been freed from?” These regulations, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch”

the dietary restrictions, the keeping the law, the denying yourself pleasure, and self affliction..... you know they all perish.....in other words, they have no eternal value..... so why are you following those who are teaching these things?

I am sure, if you were sitting in the church the morning this was read to the Colossians, and you had been fasting for several days, you would have felt a little shamed faced at this moment.....

And, then Paul lightens the rebuke a little by giving the answer....

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup>

They do have the appearance of wisdom..... don't they? The muslim who prays several times a day facing Mecca.....they seem so holy..... I saw that when I was at an airport in Ethiopia.... They all stopped at the right time, pulled out a man and bowed and prayed..... it looked more spiritual than I am....

But it is exactly what Paul states, self made religion.... Christless, Godless,

For some reason..... we reject the simple and want the complex..... Christ frees us, but we like bondage..... we so easily submit to a list of rules and regulations then to learn and remember all that God has done for us in Christ, and live in response to his grace, goodness, and sacrifice for us.....

We like the lists.... We like the bondage because it allows us to say, “We did it.”

---

<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Col 2:20–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Paul is speaking to everyone in this room this morning.....some of you are like me..... self righteous, phariseeical, hard to live with people who are heavily influenced by those who tell us to keep this list or this rule or this regulation and if you do you will have power, you will have victory, you will be more holy and righteous.....

Others of you are under the yoke of people like me.....you feel the bondage that comes from self-righteous man made legalism.....you feel the bondage of submitting to man made rules and regulations about how Christians should dress, what kind of house you should live in, what you should or should not eat and drink.....and you do not want to succumb to the rules and regulations, but they seem to be bearing upon you.....

The answer to both of us is Christ.....because in Him, we have new desires that have come through the Spirit living in us..... and it is these new desires that give us the desire to be free from sin; and the power over sin, so we don't have to try it through our own strength.....

That is what Paul has been saying for the better part of two full chapters of Scripture.....If we live in Him, walk in Him, love Him, Worship Him, seek Him, obey Him, Keep in step with Him, live in humble gratitude for Him, keep his commandments, pray to Him, discover the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are in Him, not through visions and asceticism, rather through the means he has provided through regular worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, and the Lord's supper.....then He will give me the grace to flee legalism..... and give you the grace to stand firm against the legalist