



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Don't Fall Into the Trap (Colossians 2:16-23)

MAY 4 & 5, 2010

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, May 4, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, May 4, 8:30 PM in Room #134**
- **Wednesday, May 5, 7am in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul labored diligently so that he may present every person complete in Christ. He did this by teaching, preaching, rebuking, and reminding (Colossians 1:28-29). He also presented his goals for the church in Colossae (2:1-7). In this, he wrote, *I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument* (2:4). Paul picked up the “persuasive argument” thought again in verse eight as he warned them not to be taken captive by the philosophies and traditions of men which are empty and deceptive.

Paul then reminds them of the great doctrine of Jesus Christ and His sufficient, glorious work on their behalf (2:11-15). In Christ, the believer has been given a new heart, brought back to spiritual life, forgiven and given victory over those who desire to keep them enslaved to sin and the fear of death.

And with these great truths in mind, Paul again cautioned the readers to beware of those who want to burden them down with the idea that the great work of Jesus is not quite sufficient. These false teachers promote the thought that there is something more needed in a believer's life to please God and be in a genuine, deeper, more fulfilling life with Him. Paul addressed these issues in the first century, and not much has changed twenty centuries later. Many of these same false ideas are still being circulated in today's church. In Colossians 2:16-23, Paul confronted these heresies which are rooted in legalism, mysticism and asceticism.

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—¹⁷things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship

of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. ²⁰If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"²² (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

LEGALISM (2:16-17)

Legalism is the enslaving false teaching that one must keep a list of rules and the performance of rituals to make it to the next level. In other words, it is a religion of achievement. In the “Christian” realm, it would be taught that one needs to conform to a set of man-made rules so that they may be please God and be accepted by Him. And implied is that those who do not keep the rules cannot belong to God.

Paul warned the church to watch out for these types of teachers. He wrote, “...no one is to act as your judge” (2:16). He then lays out various legalistic burdens the false teachers place upon believers: prohibitions concerning drink and food, honoring one day over another and holding to aspects of the Jewish law. These types of rules and rituals do nothing but lay a burden on people. They cannot save. They do not promote holiness. They do not draw one closer to God.

Legalism is the very thing Jesus condemned in His interactions with the Jewish religious leaders, especially, the Pharisees. In Mark 7, the Pharisees asked why the disciples of Jesus did not wash their hands before they ate (it was a ceremonial washing and had nothing to do with cleanliness). Jesus replied to them by calling them hypocrites for they set aside the true commands of God and follow after these man-made traditions (Mark 7:1-13). He later labeled them as blind guides, vipers and again, hypocrites (Matthew 23:1-39). Their fastidious obedience to their own rules, which they believed made them right before God, actually kept them from God; and kept those whom they taught from God, as well.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #134

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: WEDNESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, BROADWAY BUILDING 3RD FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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Legalism is useless. It cannot make one right before God (Romans 4). It does nothing to restrain the flesh. It can be quite deceptive for anyone can keep a set of rules and rituals without having a change of heart (if one finds that he or she cannot keep the rules, one can just lower them to their level).

And legalism is but a mere shadow when compared to Christ. Even the dietary laws, Sabbath-keeping and observances of certain days in the Old Testament law were not the real substance; they all pointed to Jesus. They were merely the signs which pointed to the destination. Thus, when one arrives at the destination, it would be fruitless to go back to the signs.

The Apostle simply says don't allow someone to convince you to go back to the yoke of legalism, continue to embrace Jesus Christ, in whom one has freedom and life.

MYSTICISM (2:18-19)

The second heresy Paul addressed is the realm of "mysticism". John MacArthur defines it as "the pursuit of a deeper or higher subjective religious experience...It looks for truth internally, weighing feelings, intuition and other internal sensations more heavily than objective, observable, external data."¹ Authority for the mystic ultimately comes from within one's own heart, thoughts and feelings.

Paul said not to allow these false teachers to "defraud" the believer of their "prize." The word picture Paul painted is similar to an umpire or referee in a sporting event making a negative call on a participant. It would be like calling a batter "out" in baseball or throwing a "penalty flag" in football or calling a foul in a basketball game. In essence, Paul says "Don't let them keep throwing a penalty flag on you so that you cannot win." The false teachers were "calling fouls" because the believers were not abiding by their rules and following their special experiences.

Three characteristics are typical of these mystic teachers. First of all, they took pride in their humility, or as Paul put it, "delighting in self-abasement" (Colossians 2:18). Secondly, these teachers worshipped angels; an act forbidden by Scripture (Matthew 4:10; Revelation 19:10; cf. Revelation 22:9). And third, they were teachers not attached to "the head" (Colossians 2:19)--which Paul had just wrote was Jesus Christ (1:18). These mystic teachers were not being guided nor taught by Jesus, they were going about with teachings from their own inflated mind and experiences.

Mystic teachings are still quite prevalent today. People claim to have gone to heaven and have seen great things, and they write a book. Others claim that God or Jesus has come down to talk with them and so they proclaim this new "revelation." Still others believe they have received a "word from the Lord" and will follow after that "word" even if it contradicts the "Word" of the Lord found in Scripture.

These mystic teachers can be daunting as they proclaim their great revelations and visions. They can seem to be on a higher spiritual plane than others. They believe they should be listened to and their "revelations" from God should be followed.

But Scripture is quite plain concerning "new revelations. First of all, Hebrews 1:1-2a states, *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...* After speaking through His Son, there is no need for extra-biblical revelations. And second, the Apostle John warned, *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book* (Revelation 22:18). It makes sense that if God has miraculously revealed something new through someone, then that revelation should be added to the back of the Bible. But God is not a God of contradiction and does not go against His own warning.

IN ESSENCE, PAUL SAYS "DON'T LET THEM KEEP THROWING A PENALTY FLAG ON YOU SO THAT YOU CANNOT WIN." THE FALSE TEACHERS WERE "CALLING FOULS" BECAUSE THE BELIEVERS WERE NOT ABIDING BY THEIR RULES AND FOLLOWING THEIR SPECIAL EXPERIENCES.

The reality is that these false teachers are a "sham." They are not humble. They pursue wrong things. Their visions are not from God for they are not even following after His Son. They are not seeking objective truth but rather are guided by their own subjective ideas and experiences.

So, Paul encouraged the believers not to be intimidated by those who require these types of experiences, rather than a growing knowledge and submission to Jesus Christ, as a requirement for spiritual maturity.

ASCETISIM (2:20-23)

The third heresy Paul warned about is the practice of "asceticism." An ascetic is one who lives a very rigid life of self-denial; attempting to gain holiness by denying oneself of the things in this world. This has been

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done throughout the centuries in various ways. One man, Simeon, lived on a platform on a 50-foot pole for 36 years exposing himself to the elements (some of his followers lived on poles much longer). Anthony went out to live alone in the desert and never washed his vest nor his feet. In many of the monastic orders, there were vows of silence, total separation from anything in the world, eating small amounts of certain foods and certain bodily disciplinary actions if one "sinned." In fact, Martin Luther, before coming to the truth of grace, wrecked his own health due to the ascetic practices while being a monk.

It is true that followers of Jesus are called to deny themselves, and to be separate from the world and sin. It is true that some missionaries have had to live what may be labeled as an "ascetic" life, but this is due to necessity of their situation. But, one crosses the line when these denials and disciplines are attempts to gain spirituality.

In fact, the Apostle Paul asked the question to the believers that if you have died with Christ to these things in the world, why are you going back to laws, rituals and decrees? These ascetic disciplines have three major problems according to Paul in Colossians 2:22-23. The first is that they deal with temporal items--food, drink and things you can touch. He sarcastically says that these things will not be around for long, so why is one so concerned about them. The second problem is that the disciplines reflect teaching from men and not from God. These denials have not come from the Word of God but from the mind of people.

The third problem is that they actually do nothing for one's spiritual condition. These actions can make one appear to be serious about God and holiness. Discipline looks like a good thing. Humility looks like a good thing. Revelations from God look like a good thing. Strict obedience to the law looks like a good thing. But all have one thing in common: they do nothing against the desires of the flesh.

In medieval times, many monks considered women to be a source of temptation so they completely withdrew from them. But then sex became an obsession on their minds. One wood carving picture of the era shows a monk (with a woman lurking behind him), burning his fingers to get rid of the temptation. The irony of the picture is this: he only had two fingers left. The separation and discipline could not take away the temptation. It cannot expel the evil that lurks inside each person.

Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?

The truth is that these rules and disciplines only seem to draw out the evil that already resides in a person's heart (Romans 7:7-11).

CONCLUSION

While these man-made philosophies look good on the surface, there is much deception, pride and emptiness underneath. Legalism, mysticism and asceticism have been around for many, many years and they have not drawn anyone closer to God. The Apostle tells his readers then, and his readers today, not to be intimidated by them. Instead, the child of God is to cling and hold fast to Jesus Christ. For it is in Him that one is made complete (Colossians 2:10). And He is the One who has the substance, not the mere shadow, of righteousness (Colossians 2:17).

Friend, you will not find righteousness or salvation in any type of man-made discipline, religion or dedication. You cannot make yourself right before God. BUT, through Christ, God can truly forgive all your sins--are you interested?

¹ John MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 120.