

## **Intro**

How we continue in the Christian faith matters. How we go about pursuing maturity matters. How we go about fighting sin matters.

Let's be black and white. We're either doing it right or we're doing it wrong. Yeah there might be some ways we're going about the Christian life correctly while, at the same time, we're going about things the wrong way. Paul's concern is believers trying to live out the Christian life the wrong way. We might say Paul has a problem with wrong methodology.

When I was trained at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in inspecting metal (welds primarily to start), they were very particular about the how. They didn't give me the tools and leave it up to me to determine how to use them.

They gave explicit, step by step, instructions on how to carry out an inspection. They would have been troubled. I would have been fired. If I took it upon myself to devise my own method of inspecting welds. Methodology matters.

Jesus doesn't save us and then leave it to us to devise our own spirituality.

Let's see what we can learn from Paul's concerns about bad methodology.

## **READ PASSAGE (2:16-23)**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

Colossians is all about continuing in Christ. All about pressing on to maturity, completeness. Building on the foundation. Leaving no area of life untouched by God's word.

There's a right way to build on the foundation. There's many bad ways to build on the foundation.

### **Think bad methodology.**

If the manual writer doesn't understand framing we'll be in trouble. If we use warped wood we'll suffer. If we use treated lumber and don't use nails compatible with treated lumber the nails will actually dissolve. Not a good thing. In order to build on a home's foundation, we need the right methods. Same with building on our spiritual foundation.

Paul had a problem because bad methods were being encouraged.

### ***“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (2:21)***

Exactly what behaviors were being encouraged? Taste = eating and drinking = food was being forbidden. Handle and touch = don't make contact with certain items. *“things that perish as they are used”* = don't eat or make contact with certain earthly items that can be used up.

### ***asceticism and severity to the body (2:23)***

asceticism = humbling oneself; here it's negative so something like self-abasement by subjecting oneself to "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch."

Asceticism means severe self-denial, self-discipline that rejects self-indulgence.

"*severity to the body*" = severe self-control over the body that is in fact harsh and severe mistreatment of the body.

This manifested itself in church history in the monks that practiced voluntary poverty (selling one's property and possessions to give to the poor), living as hermits isolated from society or in ascetic communities (even living on pillars), celibacy, giving up bathing, giving up food (whether fasting for periods of time or giving up certain foods altogether), giving up sleep.

In other words, giving up good gifts God provided for our enjoyment. This isn't a good thing:

*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. – 1 Timothy 4:3*

### **Conclusions**

- 1) This asceticism isn't good.
- 2) This asceticism has Jewish elements (Sabbath – 2:16).
- 3) This asceticism involves food (taste).
- 4) This asceticism involves ritual uncleanness (you can't touch certain things).
- 5) Jewish dietary laws are likely involved.
- 6) This asceticism goes beyond Jewish practices (worship of angels, bodily harm wasn't commended in the Law of Moses).

### **Religion**

I don't use the word religion in a negative way. Like people say, "Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship." Better to say Christianity is a religion that's relational. Religion can be a good thing or a bad thing (see James 1:26-27). It depends on the source.

When I use the term religion, I'm speaking about a set of beliefs and practices God has proscribed to us in the Bible. These are good things! Paul has a problem with religious belief and practice that doesn't come from God.

So this morning we'll have three reasons why we should reject manmade religion.

### **Point 1: Reject manmade religion because it conflicts with Christ (2:20)**

*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 – 2:20*

There's something that doesn't fit. Submitting to "*Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch*" doesn't fit with dying with Christ.

With Christ we "*died to the elemental spirits of the world*" when we experienced the new birth and came to faith. We became alive with Christ (2:13) meaning newness of life. No longer ruled by sin. Heart circumcision. "*delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred...to the kingdom of*" (1:13) Christ.

It was a good thing to die *the elemental spirits of the world.*" Elemental spirits suggests demonic forces. The rulers and authorities Jesus triumphed over at the cross and resurrection (2:15). Demonic forces associated with the world. The world being an evil system where sin is normalized and righteousness is seen as odd or even reprehensible.

We were rescued from the world and its way of doing life. Why would we submit to what we're rescued from?

### **Wrong masters**

The problem is submitting to the wrong master(s). We're no longer following Jesus when we submit to other masters. We're no longer living by faith and repentance.

### **Illustration**

The way God has ordered things is that God instructs parents on how to raise their children. And then parents instruct their children to fear God and keep his commandments. Thus the fifth commandment:

*"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."* – Exodus 20:12

Over time children hear competing voices.

- 1) The peer who says, "throw sand at that kid...spit on that kid...hit that kid...steal that candy."
- 2) The movie that says, "there's no right, no wrong, and no rules to which I'm bound." In other words, there's no God and no moral law to which we're bound and will give an account. There's no right way to do life. There's no path of wisdom that leads to flourishing. There's no path of folly that leads to self-inflicted consequences.
- 3) The rock star that says, "life is all about having a good time. There's no crime in that." Meaning sexual immorality, drunkenness, drugs is what we should be after.

Children have to ask themselves, who am I going to submit to? Whose commands, whose way of doing life, am I going to follow? Whose counsel will I trust? Will I honor my father and mother who teach me God's word, or will I submit to other voices?

What voices are your children, your grandchildren submitting to?

Everyone submits to something. Everyone follows somebody. Everyone has a worldview. Everyone has an idea of what the good life is. Everyone has an idea of what you do to get that good life. Who or what are you submitting to?

### **Christ isn't sufficient?**

Here's what we're saying when we submit to other masters. We're saying Jesus isn't sufficient. We're saying I need something else to complete my spiritual development.

Isn't Jesus enough?

We don't come to Jesus to escape the world and then submit to manmade rules to progress in the faith. This isn't how we move to completeness.

### **Non-Christian**

You're visiting with us and you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian. We're glad you're here. Ask yourselves, who is your master? What voices are you submitting to?

I suggest you submit to Christ where you can experience forgiveness of sins and the new birth. Real rescue from the power of sin.

Jesus is sufficient to deal with our sin problem.

### **Point 2: Reject manmade religion because it's not from God (2:20-23)**

Paul drives this point home.

- 1) Submitting to the world's regulations (2:20) = the source I'm looking to is the world.
- 2) "*according to human precepts and teachings*" – 2:22 = the source I'm looking to is manmade rules, methods, thinking.
- 3) "*self-made religion*" – 2:23 = the source I'm looking to is myself.

What all three have in common is God isn't in the picture.

### **The world**

What's wrong with the world? It's opposed to God. Again, the world is that mindset, worldview where sin is normalized and righteousness is seen as odd or even reprehensible.

This evil world system manifests its opposition, often indifference, to God in its public policy, the messages in its movies, the lyrics in its songs, its social media posts, narratives it spins in its headlines. In everything, God is irrelevant to human life.

Why would we turn to worldviews where God is absent?

### **Manmade rules**

The problem is threefold:

- 1) We're obeying manmade rules instead of God's word = we're doing the wrong things.
- 2) We're trusting in manmade rules instead of God's word = we're trusting the wrong things.

Trusting in the wrong things to save us? Trusting in the wrong things to be acceptable to God? Trusting in the wrong things to bring us to maturity?

### **Illustration**

Imagine the poor, deluded soul who trusts in nail polish to clean their carpet.

- 3) We're equating manmade rules with God's rules = giving manmade rules the same authority as Scripture.

## Self-made religion

This is our day. God is whoever I want him to be. My god would never punish people in hell. Meaning God doesn't really care about sin. I think God just wants us to care about others. All we need to care about is the golden rule: "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12). Meaning we can ignore everything else the Bible says. I think I have the power within to fix myself. Meaning I don't need the new birth. I'm not broken. I'm good as is. I don't need the local church to be a faithful Christian. Meaning we're free to reject God's design for church life we see in the New Testament.

Just note this only works if we're infallible. If our intuitions about ourselves and God are infallible. This is horrific if we're fallen. If we're ignorant and confused. If our desires are flawed.

## Non-Christian

God knows the human condition. He designed us. He knows how we're supposed to function. He knows what the flourishing life is. He knows we're fallen in Adam. He knows our flaws. He knows our ignorance. He knows our brokenness.

He's acted to fix us in Christ. Yes we need to be fixed!

### Point 3: Reject manmade religion because it can't tame the flesh (2:23)

*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. – 2:23*

Why doesn't it work?

## Legalism

The problem goes something like this. The way we become acceptable to God is by keeping this set of rules we've devised. In Colossians, no touching or tasting meat or wine, treating our body poorly, keeping Jewish days. In legalism, manmade rules are a measurable criteria upon which we can determine that we're right with God.

For us it could be something like if we don't drink wine, if men don't wear hats, if women only wear dresses, if we fast every Wednesday, then we can be sure we're right with God.

Manmade rules give us a measureable standard. But with it comes of lot of pain and frustration. A while back I said, **legalism is like painting over mold instead of removing it and starting with new sheetrock.**

In legalism, sin's guilt and the sinful nature is dealt with by covering it over with manmade regulations instead of turning to Christ for forgiveness of sins and a new heart to fight sin.

When we trust in manmade rules to be in good standing with God several problems emerge:

- 1) We begin to judge others who don't conform to our extra-biblical opinions = spiritual pride and broken relationships.
- 2) We begin to think we've arrived when we keep our extra-biblical rules = no need for letting God's word touch more areas of my life.
- 3) We become frustrated when we ban ourselves from doing things that God allows.

▪ We go against our design when we reject God's good gifts. We're supposed to enjoy them with thanksgiving!

4) Fourth, we experience frustration when we can't keep our self-imposed rules. Because the Spirit doesn't empower us to obey our manmade regulations.

For example, the Spirit isn't empowering me to give up meat. What happens when I try to give up meat in my own power? The desire remains and I lust more and more for meat. I become angry I can't have it. Or I give up meat and become prideful in my spiritual "success." What futility! Striving to do what we don't have to do in the power of our own strength. What futility! Giving up things God has given for my enjoyment. What futility! Thinking Christian maturity is refraining from eating meat. What futility! I'm satisfied with my spiritual state because I don't eat meat when so many areas of my life are untouched by God's word.

Trying to fix ourselves with manmade rules is like...

### **Illustrations**

- using nail polish to clean the carpet → manmade rules don't fix my sin problem
- using a hammer to brush your teeth → manmade rules don't fix my sin problem

### **Non-Christian**

Jesus is sufficient to fix our sin problem. Jesus' death is sufficient to remove our guilt and rescue us from God's wrath. Jesus' death is sufficient to reconcile our broken relationship with God. Jesus' death is sufficient to purchase our new birth and change our disordered hearts.

Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world such that whoever believes will be forgiven of sin and given eternal life.

Turn to Jesus in faith and repentance. Turn from rebellion to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection.

### **Conclusion**

How we go about continuing in the Christian life matters. Paul has given us three reasons to reject manmade religion:

**Because it conflicts with Christ.**

**Because it's not from God.**

**Because it can't tame the flesh.**