

## Week 5 – Colossians 2:16-23

### **It's not what we do, it's about who we are following that counts**

#### **Recap from last week**

It's always good to just be clear of where we are at when we come to a text. When Paul was in Rome he was under house arrest so he was able to receive visitors. And one such visitor was a man called Epaphras. It was through his discussions with Paul that the letter was written to the Church in Colossae. Due to its importance as a main trading route, the mixed population of Colossae had many different religions. Today it would be called a pluralistic society, where no one faith is dominant.

The environment of a multi-cultural Colossae meant that wrong teaching was affecting the Church. Paul is arguing against all the ideologies of the culture. The main points of Paul's letter is to emphasise the supremacy of God, and the all-sufficiency of God.

As a recognition of that all-sufficiency, last week we considered the importance of being rooted in Christ. When we root ourselves in Jesus and His gospel message, we are able to discern when people and spiritual authorities try to deceive us.

Jesus has overthrown these powers—He triumphed over them through the cross. We've received the fullness of salvation through His finished work. Nothing can undo the work Jesus has done to save us.

There is great liberty in what we have just read last week - that is, that we have been forgiven of all our sins, released from our indebtedness to the strict letter of God's law, and given a complete victory over all the accusations and allegations that the devil could ever throw at us. Jesus has won a complete victory for us; and He Himself is fully sufficient for us.

Here's what we took away as possible actions for the last week.

**Praying:** Praying that God would deepen our foundation in Him and the gospel, refreshing the gospel message in us.

**Giving Thanks:** Writing down things we are thankful for every day and praising God for how He's moved in our lives.

**Studying:** Deepening our understanding of the gospel by studying the first eight chapters of Romans.

**Creating:** Making something that reflects the truth that we've been brought from death to life.

**Memorizing:** Memorize Colossians 2:6–7, writing it down and placing it somewhere we would see it throughout our day.

*'Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness'.*

So today we are going to continue where we left off, looking at verses 16-23 of Chapter 2.

Remember that each of you can access the participant's guide via our website. Also my transcript of this bible study will be available on the website for you to download. If you go into Latest News, you will see a Category for the Colossians Bible Study.

Straight after the study, before you do anything else, it would be great if you could take 10 mins to stop and using the reflection space to consider how it has impacted you today. And then into this week ahead to do something about it, so the final section called 'Live it out' gives you ideas on how you can live out the passage we have studied.

## **Introduction**

Today we are considering that if our sinful nature is buried and has died with Christ, this then frees us. It frees us from rules that others would try to influence on us in order that in some way we have to do these to attain more. But instead we walk in the will, the direction and the way of the Holy Spirit. Through his direction in our lives we avoid falling back into the patterns of the world.

So it's my hope today that this study will help to change how we think about things, and how we respond to things from this.

**Head Change:** That we know and establish in our minds that the foundation of our faith is not based on what we do, but more importantly

on who we follow. Through that focus on Jesus, our actions will be influenced.

**Heart Change:** We should feel joy in the freedom from human standards.

**Life Change:** We leave behind the idea of following human formed religious rules and return to Jesus, the foundation of our faith, in all we do, say, and think.

**Opening question – when you were a child, what were you like a following rules? Were you compliant or were you a rebel?**

**Can you think of rules / instructions today in church life that seem to be a bit archaic or pointless ?**

- Ministers must wear their robes at all services
- The priest is the only person who can preside at Communion
- No one can preach from the pulpit unless they are licenced
- The perception that Communion is only for those who have been confirmed.

In today's reading, Paul is raising the issue with the Colossians about man-made rules, and how in themselves they are insufficient for salvation.

Read Colossians 2:16-23

Watch the Video (from 00:29)

### **Going Deeper**

So, the first verse in the section we're studying today begins with "therefore,". So when you see words such as this it signifies that you need to look back at the previous verses. Which is why I started today with a complete recap. We talked about supremacy, we talked about sufficiency. We talked about a new beginning with Christ. We talked about being firmly rooted as Christ is IN us.

Read verses 16 and 17.

Paul is saying that these practices are a shadow. The reality is found however in Christ alone.

Food restrictions, special diets, observance of special ceremonies all arose out of Jewish practices. God gave the people many of these ceremonies in the Old Testament as shadows, pictures. The problem was that people were performing these rituals mechanically, simply going through the motions. That, Paul says, can destroy the true vitality of faith. For example, in this past week I was leading the morning Advent Service for the Diocese, and I was very conscious that on that day it was St Andrew's Day. I immediately panicked because I realised that people would be asking questions if I didn't include the Collect for the Feast of St Andrew.

Paul says that we're not to let anyone "judge" us—that is, to examine us and condemn us with respect to our acceptance in God's eyes—on the basis of these things (see Romans 14:3-6, 12-13 *Verse 3 - The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.*).

Jesus sets us free from these things; and so we should neither judge one another in them, nor allow ourselves to be intimidated by the judgment of others with respect to them. To do so is to place our backs, once again, under the burdensome yoke of spiritual bondage.

Similarly none of these practices bring about Salvation. Hebrews 10:1-4 *'The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup> But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. <sup>4</sup> It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins'.*

So back to Colossians, Paul is reminding them their religious practices aren't the point of being a Christian—the point is to follow Christ and allow Him to reign supreme over your life

And so the point is this; do you really think God is fooled by our religious performances? What a low view of God we would have, to think that if we run through some religious list of actions that he is going to be pleased with us! There must be a dozen passages in the Old Testament where God tells us what he thinks of that kind of thing.

For example Isaiah 1:13-15 *'When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths and the calling of assemblies I cannot endure any longer'.*

Also note, that when we follow a practice, our worship becomes dull and lifeless. Our times of worship should be tremendously exciting. We should feel stimulated by the Holy Spirit, we should feel reawakened for his service, And then because you follow a practice that does not offer any stimulus, people wander off to find something else that the world can offer.

Let's read verses 18 & 19

In Colossae there was an ancient teaching (later called "gnosticism," meaning knowledge) which held that there is a hierarchy of angels between all human beings and God which must be acknowledged, and that a person's knowledge increased with this contact until at last one entered into the fullness of understanding of the Oneness of all things. Today we would associate this with the New Age Movement.

Paul refers to it here as a "false humility". It claims to move you beyond self, but in actual practice, if you examine teachings like this, you discover that they focus on self; that the real goal is to develop all your self powers. It's the idea that everything is already there inside of you, and all you need to do is bring it out and develop your possibilities and full potential.

Remember what Paul says in Chapter 2 verse 8, *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ"*.

**Why do you think we can sometimes follow teachers like the ones described in verse 19? What about them is appealing? Why are they harmful?**

Paul describes these ‘defrauders’ as “having lost connection with the head”—that is, to Jesus Christ. It’s from Jesus—the only Head of “the body”, which is His church (Colossians 1:18)—that the rest of the body of Christ gets its nourishment, growth and purpose. It’s only through a vital connection to Jesus that God gives any sort of spiritual life or nourishment or growth. Cling to Him—and Him only—as your all-sufficient Saviour, and trust completely in his teaching and that alone.

1 Corinthians 12:12 <sup>12</sup> *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.* <sup>14</sup> *Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

<sup>27</sup> *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

<sup>28</sup> *And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.* <sup>29</sup> *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?* <sup>30</sup> *Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?* <sup>31</sup> *Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*

### **How has God designed His body? Why does He give everyone different gifts?**

God is the one who gives us spiritual gifts for the good of the body. He’s also the source of our growth and unity. God designed the Church to rely on Him entirely—it’s by His grace alone that we are able to love each other and carry Christ to the world.

So let’s now read again the final verses of today’s reading (verses 20-23)

### **So from these verses, in the context of our worship and our faith, should we follow man-made rules?**

Paul here is describing an over-developed dedication that goes far beyond true Christian discipline and seeks to please God by extreme forms of self-denial. Dedication and discipline are a proper part of the Christian life. We all often will need to discipline our human nature to do what God wants us to do, simply because we love him. That is the proper motive for it. And Paul has already commended the Colossians

because they led disciplined, well-ordered lives. But the danger is that some people can make a god of discipline.

In the church this becomes what we call "legalism," which is to pursue holiness by self-effort, instead of accepting the holiness that God freely gives, by faith

Paul also goes on to say that whatever benefit these things may gain it is only temporary, it all ends at death: (verse 22) "These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings."

Finally Paul declares these things are of no value in keeping control of the indulgence of the flesh. People may outwardly appear dedicated and disciplined, but inwardly sin is dominating.

All of these errors have one thing in common---they lose Christ! If you fall into any, you lose the vitality of your Christian walk. Life becomes dull and often desperate. Many Christians discover this has happened to them. What we need to do is to return to Jesus. When these things take over, and even if that means at a more corporate level across a Church congregation, then we must return to Him. We must take care that every day we are in touch with our loving Lord and walking in fellowship with Him.

Paul's main criticism of the false teachers was they weren't connected with the Head, or Christ. **What could you do this week to remain connected to Jesus?**

### **Living it Out**

So finally, let's look at ways in which we can ensure our lives are not dominated by rules that actually strangle us in our relationship with Christ which is all about freedom.

**Pray:** Pray for God to reveal the ways you've been submitting to the rules of this world rather than to Christ this week. As He shows you, confess sin and pray for Him to teach you to remain connected to Jesus.

**List:** Make a list of all the things you think are necessary for being a "good Christian." Take some time to investigate Scripture to see what's

true about your list (Ephesians is a good place to start) and pray God renews your perception of salvation.

**Confess:** Sit down with a trusted Christian friend this week. Reread this section of Colossians and confess how you've been submitting to the rules of the world rather than to Christ. Pray for each other.

**Reflect:** Choose a worship song that talks about the gospel story. Listen to it this week to remind yourself to remain connected to Christ.

**Connect:** Set aside time this week to connect with Jesus. Fill your time with Him with prayer, Scripture reading, and reflection.