

11-13-22

Colossians 2:11-23.

Ahh legalism...it sneaks in sometimes so innocently. But we must be careful that we are not falling into it.

The New Testament books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews also lampoon legalism. We must be taught over and over that everything is by grace. We're saved by grace, and we grow by grace. Paul reminds us of two truths:

- ❖ Remember where you came from (Legal standing).
- ❖ Resist the comparison game, thinking you are more spiritual than someone else (Legalism)

I. Remember where you came from (Legal standing). Colossians 2:9-15.

John 8:36, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." ESV

At conversion, God issues four rulings, or decrees.

1. We are complete.

- **Read verses 9-11.**
- Not only does all the fullness of God dwell in Christ, but all believers are also filled with the fullness of Christ. The tense of this verb in Greek indicates that this fullness is a permanent experience. If you have put your faith in Christ for forgiveness of sins, then there is nothing lacking in your relationship with God. There's not some extra blessing or another experience you need to have.
- You have everything you need if you have Christ because the fullness of God comes into your life when you receive Jesus. You and I do not need anything more than you already have! You merely need to understand and appropriate that which you've already been given.

2. We are alive (11-13a).

- **Read 11-13.**
- God initiated circumcision in the Old Testament as part of His covenant with His people to set them apart and identify them as true followers. One of the problems at Colosse was that some legalists were demanding that Christians submit to circumcision and obey the Old Testament Law. These false teachers were a bit different than those Paul refuted in Galatians. In that context, they were insisting that circumcision was necessary for salvation. In the church at Colosse, the false teachers were suggesting that obedience to Old Testament regulations would help them become more spiritual.
- When we put our faith in Christ, Jesus spiritually circumcises, or cuts away, our sinful nature to prove that we belong to Him. Since we are alive, and no longer dead in our sins, Paul next uses the illustration of baptism.
- It's important to keep in mind that just as the physical act of circumcision did nothing to change someone's heart, so too, the waters of baptism itself do not save anyone.

- Water baptism is a wonderful picture of an inner reality. When we go under the water, we are symbolizing our burial with Christ, and when we come up, we become a picture of what it means to be raised with Christ.
- Baptism vividly portrays the death and burial of the believer's sinful way of life. When Christ died, our old nature died with Him. That's our spiritual circumcision. When we come up out of the water in baptism, we symbolize that just as Christ was raised from the dead, so too, we will be raised to resurrection life.
- Remembering that our old sinful nature is dead and buried with Christ gives us a powerful motive to resist sin. We can keep sinful desires from controlling us by treating them as if they are dead.

Romans 6:11-14, So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

3. Our sins are canceled.

- **Read 13b-14.**
- Notice that Jesus forgave **“all”** of our sins. That means every single one, even those that you have a hard time forgiving yourself for. The **“handwriting of requirements”** is the Law. Jesus not only took our sins to the cross, He also took the Law and nailed it there, forever out of the way. The Law was against us and stood opposed to us because all it could ever do was point out our sinfulness.
- Paul is saying that our sins have been wiped away. Our rap sheet has been canceled. All of God's legal requirements have been taken away once they were nailed to the cross. No regulations or man-made rituals have power over us.

4. We are on the winning side.

- **Read verse 15.**
- The powers and authorities of this evil world stripped Christ of his clothing and popularity, made a public spectacle of him on the cross, and thought they had triumphed over him by putting Him to death. Little did they know that the victory belonged to Jesus.
- Evil no longer has any power over you because Christ has stripped Satan's weapons from him. He is disarmed. The only power he has is what we give him when we allow him to deceive us and create fear in our lives.
- Jesus has turned his captors into captives, displaying them in His victory celebration. The Colossians had participated in that victory, and so have we. We don't have to follow false teachers and we don't have to succumb to sin or fear Satan. Jesus is the victor, and He has triumphed at the cross.

II. **Resist the comparison game, thinking you are more spiritual than someone else (Legalism)**
Colossians 2:16-21.

Colossians 2:16-23 gives us three warnings so that we can avoid being idiotic. We must be vigilant or we'll lean toward legalism on a daily basis.

1. Refuse judging by the externals.

- **Read verses 16-17.**
- Paul draws a conclusion based upon what he has just written previously. Since Jesus has done what was necessary for our salvation, don't let other people evaluate your spiritual life by their external standards.
- Since Christ has now come, special diets and obligatory days are no longer necessary because every Old Testament feast looks forward to Christ. They were just shadows of the reality that is fulfilled in Jesus. **Hebrews 10:1** puts it succinctly: **"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the realities themselves."**
- It's relatively easy to judge by externals. If there's something you're not supposed to eat and you avoid it, then everything was good. If you attend when you're supposed to attend, then you must be doing OK. If you kneel when you pray, then you must be close to God. We must be careful to make sure we're not evaluating what we're doing, or what others are doing, according to external standards.
- We have all witnessed people appearing to be pleasing to God.

2. Reject false teachers/teaching.

- **Read verses 18-19.**
- Do not let someone cheat you...do not let anyone try and still your reward or try and tell you that you are unworthy of your prize.
- Through **"false humility."** They might present themselves as humble and holy but, they are filled with spiritual pride and superiority.
- Through **"worship of angels."** Their focus is on other spiritual beings or things rather than on Christ.
- Through false revelations/visions, **"intruding into those things which he has not seen."** They love to give people the "latest word from the Lord."
- Through **"vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."** Their "inner secrets" gave them big heads but not burning hearts. Their "knowledge" leads them astray. Their heart has deceived them.
- We must make sure we are not seeking experiences that do not correlate with Christ. Even though there is a fascination with "religious mysticism," our focus is to be on Jesus.

3. Resist religious dos and don'ts.

- **Read verses 20-23.**
- False teachers focus on personal denial as the way to curb their appetites. This sounds good on the surface because we all agree that we need discipline in our lives. But they were teaching that these disciplines were necessary for fellowship with God.

- Paul tells us that we don't belong to the world anymore. We don't get to heaven by following a list of dos and don'ts. And we don't live the Christian life that way either. We cannot earn God's favor. All we can do is receive it.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit."

- **Verse 23** states very clearly that regulations, though they may look and sound good, **"Are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."**
- Rules don't abolish the appetite because they feed the flesh. Why is that? Because no matter how hard we work we can't force sin out of our lives through devotion to man-made dictates. We need God's power working within us. It's His grace, not a regimen of rules and activities that affect real life change.
- We must teach grace before commitment, because once grace is understood and embraced, it will lead to commitment. But, required commitment and rule keeping always leads to legalism.

Titus 2:11-12, "That is the way we should live, because God's grace has come. That grace can save everyone. 12 It teaches us not to live against God and not to do the bad things the world wants to do. It teaches us to live on earth now in a wise and right way—a way that shows true devotion to God."
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Conclusion

As we close this morning, let me ask you, "What is your Christianity like?"

Is it focused on yourself or on Christ?

Are you a list-keeper, or a grace-giver?

Is your faith anchored to personal experiences or on the Word of God?

Has it set you free or tied you up?