

2007-08-05 Colossians ch2 v16-17 (Ignite UK)

Paul continues to teach as he battles the false-teachers. He attacks heretical doctrine by refuting it with the truth as revealed in Christ. He has established the absolute sufficiency of Christ to make the believer complete before God. That is why, because we are complete in Christ, we can say that we are “justified” before God, that there is now “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) The whole doctrine of “justification by faith” was under assault by these false teachers! If they were not complete in Christ, then they were not justified before God and left in a most horrific state! How then were they to be found just in God’s eyes? Paul repeatedly refutes the argument that the believer need to add anything other than faith in Christ. He does not just deal with this argument here, but in other letters, he has made the case that faith in Christ is the lone requirement to attain eternal life. He alone is sufficient to save and to justify.

However, even after Paul has attacked these teachings head-on and established the doctrine of justification by faith alone, men have sought to add to the gospel message ever since. Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Puritans, and men of the past, along with men of today like John MacArthur, Alistair Begg, Mark Dever, C.J Mahaney, Al Mohler and John Piper....all have contended that the Bible has taught that men are saved by “grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.” It is the great cry of the Reformers, who echoed the teachings of Scripture. And today you still will find many who want to put stipulations on those who profess to be believers.

One of the most common that I know of is that you must be baptized to be saved. That not only must you put your faith in Christ but you must also follow Him in baptism. Your baptism some how makes you complete, as while you may have put your faith in Christ today you are not “completely” complete until you have been immersed into water. That is directly opposed to everything Paul has been battling here. The believer is complete in Christ...nothing need to be added. We are justified through faith as Paul has said in the letter to the Romans. The whole of chapter 14 in the book of Romans is dedicated to making sure to establish to the church at Rome, who had fallen under no direct apostolic teaching, that they were completely reconciled to God based on their faith in the Lord Jesus and nothing else. Baptism is an act of obedience, the public profession that we have given our lives to Jesus. It has zero saving value!!

You have to be baptized, you must be part of a specific denomination, you must be confirmed, do good works, have Christ plus someone else. The list can go on and on when you get into studying the different religious movements in the world that want to call you to submission to something other than God through Christ. And, as we have seen, that is what the false teachers were trying to do to the believers in Colossae. Call them to submit to some rule, regulation, or other legalistic philosophy. And any time you rely on something other than the free grace of God that comes through faith you turn grace into something other than grace, it becomes something you deserve or have earned. But Paul again in verses 16-17 shows them the futility of that ideology. That salvation

comes by God's sovereign grace and we contribute nothing...even our faith is gift from God.

Paul wants to the church to see the:

1. Error of Legalism.

“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.” (vs. 16)

“Therefore” again builds upon the preceding exhortation that Paul has made. He has made a strong argument for the completeness of the believer in Christ. And here he calls them, in view of that truth, not to let anyone make a “judgment” on their standing before God based on participation or nonparticipation in some ritual.

Curtis Vaughn, a New Testament commentator says it like this:

“In light of what Christ did, the Colossians were to let no one “judge” their standing before God on the basis of their observance or nonobservance of the regulations of the Mosaic law.”

Remember how we had said that the Jewish leaders had placed so many rituals and traditions alongside of Scripture that it was hard to distinguish between the two? Here Paul encourages the believers in Colossae to exercise their freedom in Christ. That these things had no value any longer.

Now we must note that freedom in Christ did not mean they should live however, they wanted to live. In some cases, we are told we should NOT exercise our liberty as to not make others stumble. In our context that is how I view the issue of alcohol. For me to take a drink within the context of Southern Baptist church life, the state of Kentucky and so on, would do nothing but stir up trouble, cause others to judge, or ruin my witness with those outside and those inside. So it is not an issue to for me to order water or a coke! If that is what will set me in a position to glorify God then so be it. But here in Colossae the issue was making our liberty in Christ known, since the false teachers wanted to take away that liberty. Therefore, Paul calls them to exercise it. Because all these things were simply things that pointed towards Christ.

“food and drink, with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.” (vs.16)

These were all *“a shadow of the things to come.” (vs. 17)*

What does that mean? Remember all the rules and regulations that the Jewish leaders wanted the Colossians to submit to? These are some of them and Paul says they are nothing but shadows, pointing towards something else.

“Food and drink” probably referred to the dietary laws in the Mosaic Law. These were meant to point people to Jesus. Jesus is the one who said that He was the “real bread that came down from heaven.” (John 6:41) These false teachers were calling the Colossian believers to continue and follow the OT laws, but Christ was the realization of what that law or observances pointed to.

“Festival and New Moon” probably refers to the many different religious gatherings that had been added throughout the years. Passover would be an example. **(Explain the Passover Lamb of the OT...lintel of the doorpost etc)** But the “Passover Lamb” had come. It was the blood of Christ that covers us now. The religious ceremony that was held to point towards Christ was no longer needed after Christ had arrived. Paul has said in *Galatians 4:9-11*:

“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”

There is no point in these rituals any longer...Jesus has come!

“Sabbath”! Now here is an interesting word. You find that word used in the book of Exodus, way back in the OT. It was given to the children of Israel as a sign of the covenant between them and God. As God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, they were to work six days and rest on the seventh. As they did this they would make it known to those around them that, they belonged to the God of Creation. This was a day for them to rest...but as John MacArthur notes:

“What justification could there be for demanding that Gentiles observe the Sabbath when God has granted them eternal rest?” (Hebrews 4:1-11)

All these things pointed towards the coming of the world’s Savior! And He had come in the flesh, lived 33 perfectly sinless years, died on the cross to pay the debt of God’s elect, and was raised again on the third day. Today He sits at the right hand of God.

“Food and drink” the “festival or a new moon or a Sabbath”...all these things where to simply point to the coming of God’s Son. They were:

“a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (vs. 17)

A shadow is only a representation of the thing that is blocking the light. It is not real; you cannot pick it up and feel it, taste it or smell it. The thing blocking the light is the only thing with “substance.” It is real!

The things this world wants to put on the neck of the believer are things that do not mean anything. They can say that if your hair is long that you are not Godly.

You have a tattoo so you cannot really know Jesus. You have to work on Sunday to pay rent...surely, you are not a true follower of Jesus. All these things, and there are many more, are examples of men and women who have erred on the side of legalism and legalism points not towards the substance but towards a mere shadow...which has no substance. The believer is free in Christ because Christ is the substance.

But I want us to hear this caution!!

“an appeal for ‘Christian liberty’, as earnest...as Paul’s appeal to the Galatians ‘not to be entangled again in the yoke of bondage.’ But let us note well that the ‘liberty’ he means is the very opposite of licence and has nothing in the world akin to the miserable individualism whose highest ambition is to do just what it likes. The whole aim of St. Paul is for the fullest, deepest and most watchful holiness. He wants his Colossian converts above all things to be holy; that is, to live a life yielded all through to their Redeemer, who is also their Master.”
H.C.G. Moule.

I am convinced that when the Bible speaks of the believer being free in Christ it means that we are now free from the bondage of sin and can spend our lives living in a way that gives Him glory. It does not mean that we can study our Bibles if we want, or go to church if we like, or share our faith if we want, or sing His praises if we feel like it, or to spend time praying if we think we can fit it into our schedules. IT does not mean that we are free to choose to do or not to do these things! It does mean that we are freely justified apart from these things but more than that, freedom in Christ means we are set free from the bondage of sin to freely engage in all these commands of Christ. Nowhere in Scripture does “freedom in Christ” refer to us as having the freedom to choose to live radically for God or not! It frees us to do what we could not do before!! We are freed from keeping these rituals because Christ has come and we are freed from sin through Him to give us the ability to live this radical life called Christianity!!! Do we live it?