

SHIFT

TURN YOUR WAYS

SERMON
STUDY

06.30.2024

Leader Corner

The New Covenant

Colossians 2:16-23

Since the church began, believers have struggled with the simplicity of the good news. Both 2,000 years ago and today, we want to know whether there are still certain things we're supposed to *do* (or *not do*), and whether there's *more* we can *add* that might increase our piety, maturity, or allow us to access something deeper. The end of Colossians 2 indicates these ideas can involve five areas: 1) food and drink, 2) observing special days, 3) asceticism, 4) giving outsized attention to other spiritual beings, and 5) claims about visions. In this study, you'll discuss these areas and why Paul highlights them.

Main Idea: In the Christian life, don't get sidetracked by inferior practices, that are -at best- shadows pointing to Jesus, and -at worst- harmful and not valuable at all.

Main Practice: Christians must remember to keep the person and work of Jesus Christ *primary*, not just in our beliefs, but also in our practical daily decisions.

Main Teaching: Colossians 2:19. Hold fast to the Head.

Refocus

with Praise

Read, sing or meditate on the first few verses of the song, *Firm Foundation*.

Christ is my firm foundation
The rock on which I stand
When everything around me is shaken
I've never been more glad
That I put my faith in Jesus
'Cause He's never let me down
He's faithful through generations
So why would He fail now?
He won't, He won't

I've still got joy in chaos
I've got peace that makes no sense
So I won't be going under
I'm not held by my own strength
'Cause I've built my life on Jesus
He's never let me down
He's faithful in every season
So why would He fail now?

He won't, He won't
He won't fail, He won't fail
Rain came and wind blew
But my house was built on You
I'm safe with You
I'm gonna make it through

with

Prayer

Have someone in your group pray the following Scripture, and then read Colossians 2:16-23 aloud:

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Then you will defile your carved idols overlaid with silver and your gold-plated metal images. You will scatter them as unclean things. You will say to them, "Be gone!" – Isaiah 30:20-22, ESV

Previously in Colossians 2, Paul has been reminding the church that salvation was something done to them and for them by God in connection with their belief that Jesus was the Messiah (seen by the perfect passive tenses used in v.6-7: e.g. 'having been rooted,' 'being built up and established'). Then, Paul emphasized that the *reason* you can trust that your salvation *really does* hinge on the work of Jesus is because He is superior to any other heavenly power (v.9). And third, your completeness in Christ isn't supplemented by anything else. You are filled in Him, circumcised in Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, and overall made alive with Him (v.10-13). Putting it all together: because this salvation was *done for* you, and because you can trust in its sufficiency and efficacy due to *who Jesus is*, and because that salvation is *complete*, don't let others judge or disqualify you in these certain areas which Paul talks about in v.16-23.

1. Paul first highlights two sets of issues where false teachers were commonly "passing judgment" on early Christians: 1) food and drink, and 2) the observance of special religious days. There is some debate on whether Paul is referencing Old Testament Jewish laws or similar secular Gentile rules here (or both), but regardless, why do you think these two areas were favorite targets of false teachers? Why focus so much on food, drink, and observances?

2. Have you known someone with strong positions in the areas of food, drink, or daily observances? For example, they *won't* eat or drink this (or conversely, they'll *only* eat or drink that)? Or they *always* (or *never*) observe certain days on the calendar (Sundays, birthdays, holidays, etc)? Where do these strong positions come from, and how would you determine whether that behavior is biblically healthy based on what Paul says here?

3. Paul makes a huge statement in v.17 (which is expanded upon in Hebrews 8:1-7). What do you think Paul means by all this? Namely, what does it mean that 1) these things are a *shadow*, 2) that they're a shadow of *the things to come*, and 3) that the *substance* belongs to Christ. Further, why would all this be important for the Colossians to know given the previous context we discussed?

4. Verse 18 requires a little background. In the false teachings being advocated at Colossae, "elemental spirits" (v.8, 20) were grouped with angels and seen as controlling the heavenly realm, man's access to God's presence, and therefore man's ultimate destiny. One way these spirits could be satisfied, it was believed, was through asceticism (extreme self-denial of any indulgence) such as starving yourself, with the goal of producing an altered state so that you could gain visionary experiences of the heavenly dimension. Being able to access these experiences was viewed as higher, better, and achieved the *fullness* of salvation. In short, the 3 ideas in v.18 are connected (asceticism, spirit worship, and visions), and if you weren't trying to generate these sorts of experiences, your salvation was incomplete. Referencing v.19 and everything in v.8-15, why does Paul believe that's nonsense?

5. A modern secular version of the v.18 practices might include taking mind-altering drugs to "expand your mind" and access so-called "higher dimensions." But this concept exists in the church too, from monastic Catholic traditions to theatrical charismatic circles, where entire services are held to manufacture "tongues" or "drunk in the spirit" practices. The common denominator, then and now, is that the person and work of Christ isn't viewed as *enough*, and there's somehow more to be added for a *deeper, truer, realer* experience. Based on what we've read in Colossians, what do you think Paul would say to that, both to the modern practices and that motivation for doing them?

6. How does it impact the church when some factions of it believe these additional observances and practices make them "more serious" or more devout than others?

7. Colossians 2 ends with echoes of Romans 6:1-11. Read that passage and discuss how it relates to Paul's point here in Colossians 2:20-23. What does Paul mean that these practices can give the *appearance* of wisdom, but ultimately have no value?

8. Discuss this statement: understanding why you *don't* need the things in v.16 and 18 is the *real* demonstration of maturity.

9. Discuss any other key, biblically-based teaching points you recall from the weekend's sermon.

Sometimes, when topics like these are discussed, well-meaning Christians can inadvertently swing to the extremes. When this happens, it suddenly becomes a choice between (for example) *always* observing one day of rest each week vs. *never* needing to worry about it all. But we set ourselves up for error if we demand a choice between extreme legalism or extreme liberty. This week, consider what it looks like to keep the person and work of Christ primary while applying a biblical approach to the issues raised by this study.

For Further Focus

Paul speaks to these same issues in Romans 14, where he also expands in more detail. That's a great chapter to study if you want to dig deeper into the Christian position on various kinds of food, drink, and special holidays.