

Col 2: 16-23

Specific Errors of the False Philosophy

Legalism / Ritualism (2:16-17)

OT ceremonial laws and regulations

- Food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day
- Not a complete list, just examples of some of the rules and regulations of the Mosaic ceremonial law.
- Appears to even go beyond the Mosaic law by including “drink”
 - Restrictions on drinking were only given to priest who entered the temple and was part of the Nazarite vow.
- Circumcision, a major part of the Mosaic law that applied to everyone, Paul already referred to in verse 11-13
 - Was the main OT law that Judaizers pushed on NT Gentile converts
 - Context of vs. 11-13 not directly about it not being required
 - But it is implied – you were already circumcised with an internal spiritual circumcision – this implies they don’t need the external physical one
- Verses 16-17 Paul directly refers to the ceremonial law as not required anymore
- Shadows of what is to come
 - When you see a shadow of someone you know that person is not far behind – anticipation.
 - OT ceremonial law - pointed to Christ, his person, his work, and eternal life as a result of his work – created anticipation of his advent
 - Examples of what they point to...?
 - Sacrifices, priestly garments, temple, incense, festival days

Don't let anyone judge you in regard to these things

- Doesn't say don't them at all
- Just don't let someone bind your conscience if you do or don't participate in them
 - Not sin to do them, not sin to not do them
 - Book of Acts – Paul still participated in some of the religious festivals
 - Paul is saying its ok if you use them devotionally, but not as a way to be right with God, or feel they are still required to worship God
- Transition period?
 - Official transitional period in God's eye? i.e. it really was ok either way?
 - Practically there was a transitional period - took awhile for Jew's to transition their way of thinking - to adjust to the idea that all of these OT ceremonial laws were actually not required anymore because they were all completely fulfill in Christ.
 - Those Jews, who had the hardest time transitioning and consequently still hung on to them, were the ones who probably tried to force them on the Gentile converts, who for the first time in history were coming into the people of God in large numbers.
- Paul's point - OT religious rituals, ceremonies, ordinances, holy days don't make you right with God – Christ does. They are not required forms of worship

Application today – Man-made forms of worship, ordinances, rituals, and holy days

- Don't make you right with God – Christ does (If the God ordain ceremonies didn't do this, the surely man-made ceremonies will not!)
- Are not required forms of worship (other than biblically ordained means)
 - Don't let anyone bind your conscience (make you feel guilty) nor say you are sinning nor convince you are not a Christian if you don't participate in any ordinance of worship that is not specifically commanded in Scripture.
 - Examples of traditions involving worship the church in history has developed that can wrongly bind men's consciences?

A Sabbath day

- Not referring to the NT Lord's Day – two possibilities
 - Other OT Sabbaths other than the weekly Sabbath commanded by the Ten Commandments
 - The OT Sabbath of Saturday verses the NT Lord's Day of Sunday
 - Assuming one is still required to observe the Saturday Sabbath

Mysticism (2:18-19)

The Colossian heresy was essentially Jewish

- It focused on rituals, ceremonies, laws and regulations.
- But as we discussed during the introduction, it went beyond straightforward Judaizing legalism.
- There was a mysticism included in its philosophy - the search for higher knowledge through mystical experiences.
- We also discussed several sects within Judaism that had this same element: Jewish Dionysus, Jewish Essenes, and Jewish Merkabah Mysticism.
- So it is very probable that some of these ideas within the Jewish community influenced Jewish converts to Christianity (held on to them) who in turn felt a need to press these ideas upon Gentile converts.

Christianity does contain a mystical element

- There are many things hard for the human mind to understand and therefore very mystical to us: the eternal nature of God, the Trinity, creating all things out of nothing, the incarnation, and our mystical union with Christ.
- Paul early in the letter said that Christ is the mystery of God because in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- The true knowledge and wisdom of God is hidden from the lost (it's a mystery to them) but are revealed to the saved in the person of Jesus Christ.

This however is not the type of mysticism the false teachers were promoting

- They claimed to have supernatural visions and revelations that were not available to the average Christian. They claimed to communicate with unseen spirits: angels.
- They were very proud of these things. They seemed to have taunted those who didn't attain to their level by making them feel inferior.

Let no keep defrauding you of your prize

- Let no one disqualify you – Let no one rob you of your prize
- Not that they were actually being robbed or disqualified of anything
- They were just being made to feel that way by thinking they were missing something – missing what the “spiritual elite” had – made to feel inferior

Delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels

- False humility – voluntary and self-conscious humility is not actual humility
- To them it seemed too presumptuous to worship God directly, so they voluntarily humbled themselves to worship God indirectly through some lower being.
- But in fact their refusal to approach God through his appointed way – through Christ – was really presumptuous pride. They thought that they knew better.
 - That is really at the core of most sins and heresies – we think we know better than what God has clearly revealed in his Word as best and right and good.

Taking his stand on visions he has seen

- Those involved in occult sciences always believe they have seen and experienced things that others haven’t – hallucinations brought on by self-deception or by demonic forces.
- It also the natural tendency of man to put more stock in his own personal experiences than what the Word says is true.

Inflated without cause by his fleshly mind

- Paul had already said that they take delight in their supposed humble act of voluntarily worshipping angels instead of presuming to approach God thru Christ.
- But at the same time they claimed to be superior spiritually and intellectually – they have been able to journey up through the heavens and gain knowledge of God that others don’t have.
- Actually they are just thinking in a fleshly or worldly way.
- They had no real reason for being proud

Not holding fast to the Head

- Instead of depending upon Christ for a complete salvation from sin and looking to Christ to be filled with the knowledge of God, they were depending upon their observance of ceremonies and their mystical experiences for these things.
- The only way to experience a deeper spiritual insight and a more vigorous spiritual life is by hold fast to Christ the Head of the body.
- Holding fast to Christ results in two things:
 - Spiritual life, strength & growth – “being supplied” with life from Christ who is the Head of the body – Christ the Head supplies all that the Body needs
 - Unity – “being held together” by Christ the head of the body – As individual Christians make Christ the center of their lives more and more they are drawn closer and closer together in love by their common Head, Christ.

- The Colossian heretics on the other hand with their claim of gaining greater spirituality through ceremonies and greater knowledge through mystical experiences were in fact:
 - Becoming spiritually weak – depending upon something other than Christ
 - Distancing themselves from the body of Christ – because of their pride

Asceticism (2:20-23)

Uses again the phrase “**elementary** principles of the world” (vs. 8)

- The phrase “according to the **traditions of men**” – expanded to “in accordance with the **commandments** and teachings of men”

Remember, in verse 16 Paul exposed the false teachers’ error of relying on the observance of ceremonial laws to make them right with God.

- That is a worldly way of thinking about them.
 - It is philosophy that took the **elementary** teachings of the OT Law and misinterpreted their meaning and use
- Fallen man always looks at ceremonials, ritual, rules, and regulations as a list of external things they can do to make God accept them – they create a religion of “Do’s”.
 - This way of thinking is **man’s tradition**, and they go so far as to teach this way of thinking as authoritative **commandments** to others.
 - Justification by works
- But ceremonial laws were never meant to eternally make us right with God.
 - Instead they were meant to teach at an “elementary level” (OT age) what it takes to make us right with God. (We in NT times can also look back at these ceremonials and learn from them as they teach us in graphic form about our Savior)
 - And they pointed to the One who would one day come and do all the things these ceremonies and rituals represented.

Paul combines these thoughts with the idea of dying with Christ from vs.12

- If– not the idea of uncertainty, but the idea of “since you died with Christ...”
- When through faith you were united to Christ, you not only died to sin but also to the world’s fallen way of thinking about a relationship with God. You know better now.
- So why would listen to these false teachers anymore who are still looking at things from a fallen worldly point of view?

The false teachers added on more worldly ideas - a religion of external “Do’s” (vs.16) was not enough. They add to it a bunch of “Don’ts” (vs. 21).

- Do not handle this, do not taste that, and definitely do not touch that!”
- Man-made list of restrictions – went beyond the Mosaic Law (which they misused)
- Asceticism – restricting oneself more than normal or more than required, rigid abstinence, self-abasement, severe treatment of the body
- What was their goal? Why had they come up with this list of “Don’ts”?
 - Thought it as a way to restrict their sinful fleshly desires – to keep them from giving in to their sinful desires and sin (vs. 23b)

- Again ... instead of looking to Christ as their complete Savior for this, they were looking elsewhere.

If relying on observance of God's ceremonial laws as a means to be justified fails, then how much more will you fail in relying on a set of man-made rules and regulations to keep you from sinning?!

- Jesus said that what you eat and drink – take into your body – can not effect you spiritually – it is just used by the body and then discarded in the toilet (vs. 22)
 - What is in the heart leads you to sin or do what is right (Matt 15:17)
- Appear to wise – “If I can just make a set of rules that will keep me away from any temptation toward my besetting sins, then I’ll be ok.”
 - But they have no power against fleshly indulgence
 - If you can’t obey perfectly God’s rules, how will have any success at obeying an additional man-made set of rules? (your own rules!)
- They are nothing but a self-made religion – self-imposed religion
 - Will-worship – a worship of man’s will power
 - But God definitely did not ordain this as a way to fight the sinful flesh.
 - So if God did not ordain it then it will fail – our will power alone is weak against the flesh