

Living by Faith in Christ

Col. 2:20-23

INTRODUCTION:

During the past few weeks, we have been considering the supremacy and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would like to begin this morning before we get into the message by reading the last four verses in Colossians 2.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Colossians 2:20-23 (NASB)

²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Prayer

ILLUSTRATION

Think of a person who wants something very badly. Not necessarily a bad thing. Just something that someone may REALLY, REALLY, want! Like...

- buying a house or a car.
- having children. Either of their own or through adoption.
- wanting a certain job or a promotion in their current job.

There are all kinds of things that a person **could WANT -- REALLY BAD**. But, for whatever reason, it just doesn't happen. It is common for that person to become discouraged. His Christian friends may suggest that he needs to pray because the Bible is full of promises like "Ask and you will receive", "Seek and you will find", and "Knock and it will be opened to you" etc.

So the person says I REALLY DO want this house or car or whatever the case may be. So he decides that he will pray and pray and pray. **And yet it doesn't happen**. So he goes back to his Christian friend and says I have prayed and prayed and prayed and it still hasn't happened. I just don't know how much more I can pray! What else can I do?

Sometimes people will suggest that "you really need to show God that you are serious. You need to do MORE than pray. I think that you need to FAST! Deny yourself food! Because

if you REALLY want to get God's attention, you need to show Him that you mean business. Not just prayer, prayer is good, but you need to go the next step! You need to show God that you are REALLY, REALLY, serious about this. By denying yourself food, you will show God that you are REALLY serious!"

So the person thinks to himself, "**I WILL fast** because I really do want this thing." Maybe by denying myself, I can find favor with God and get Him to listen to my request.

My guess is that right now each of you are having different thoughts in your minds. Some of you perhaps are thinking "Yeah, that is EXACTLY what people do". Some of you may be thinking "What? Why would anyone do this". And some are wondering, "Where is Wayne going with this?"

Well, what I would like to do is to have you push this illustration to the back of your minds and Lord willing, I will return to it at the end of the message this morning.

As we complete the 2nd chapter of Colossians this morning, we will cover the message that Paul was trying to make to the Colossians.

In the church of Colossae (as today) there were false teachers. These false teachers were trying to take the Colossians captive (as we saw in verse 8) away from the simple truth in Christ. They weren't denying Christ, they were simply saying "**Come on guys, you have got to do better than this! You have Christ, that is good, but you need something else.**"

What else did they say they needed? Well, as we have reviewed in the last couple of weeks,

- Some Gnostics were saying that they also needed philosophy (v. 8)
- also needed to worship angels (v. 18)
- also needed to react to visions that had been seen (v. 18)
- Some Christian Jews were saying they also needed to observe LEGALISM. Such as...
 - avoiding certain foods and drink (v. 16)
 - observing Jewish festivals (v. 16)
 - resting on the Sabbath (v. 16)
 - being circumcised

But Paul says **NO!** Do not listen to them.

Colossians 2:6-10a (NASB)

⁶Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. ⁹For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Him you have been made complete,

Paul told them to hold fast to their faith. The key to knowing what teachings to avoid is by identifying them as man-made rules that are above and beyond to what they were originally

taught. Paul reminded them that they were complete in Christ and needed nothing more. They needed to stay firm in their faith in Christ.

So let's turn to today's passage from Col. 2:20-23 and learn from Paul how we are to "Walk in Christ" as he emphatically states in **verse 6**.

BODY:

I. Die with Christ.

Paul reminds the Christians that they have "died to Christ". This was their first step to begin walking in Christ. Paul starts out in verse 20 by saying

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees,

Notice the word "If" in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and many other translations. Paul was writing this letter to the Christians. He is not saying that some of them died to Christ and some did not. A better translation that reflects the Greek meaning is found in the New International Bible (NIV). It reads "**Since you died with Christ**".

What does he mean that they died with Christ?

Note that death is a separation of two things.

We know of three deaths that everyone may experience.

1. Physical death. If we die before the Lord comes again, we will experience a physical death. At this time our soul will be separated from our body.
2. Spiritual death. When Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Good and Evil, all humans experienced a spiritual death. We were separated from God through sin.
3. Death to Sin. When we were baptized, our old self was crucified with Christ in order that our body of sin inherited from the fall of man through Adam and Eve was done away with and we started walking in a newness of life. This is the "**death with Christ**" that Paul was talking about in verse 20.. So our body was separated from our sin.

Although Paul explains this in verses 11-14, he best describes it in

Romans 6:1-6 (NASB)

6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

We died to sin when we were baptized into Christ's death. This separated our sins from our body and they were nailed to the cross.

1 Peter 3:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Back to verse 20 in our passage.

²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world

Paul says when you were saved, you died with Christ **to** (or from) the elementary principles of the world (or worldly ways). We are now living a new life in Christ.

why, as if you were living in the world, Wait a minute, aren't we still living in the world? We didn't die physically, we died to sin through Christ.

Philippians 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Although we are citizens in heaven, we are not residents there yet. It is as if we are living in a foreign land with our citizenship somewhere else.

It reminds me of the song.

"This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Paul says, since we have started living a new life in Christ, why would we want to go back to worldly ways? When you died to Christ, you were separated from worldly ways. So he tells them to Avoid Man-Made Rules! Christ is all you need! His salvation is complete.

II. Avoid Man-Made Rules

Paul continues..

²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

The NASB uses the word self-abasement. The NIV uses false Humility. The ESV uses the name we would more likely use today. It is asceticism.

Asceticism is simply outward works that is actually a form of self-righteousness.

The false teachers were saying that "if you really wanted to get close to God then you needed to deny yourself of things that would give you pleasure. You must deny yourself. So if it is something pleasurable, don't do it!"

"If you just turn your back on things that you really, really, like and then add that to Christ, then you will really grow in Christ."

But Paul says, when they say "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" and it is not as you were originally instructed (or for us it is not in God's word) do not listen to them. It is of no value.

What these people are actually promoting is self-righteousness. They (maybe unknowingly) are suggesting that Christ is not enough and you must do other things to make you righteous before God.

We see this even today. Consider the Catholics. They don't eat meat on Fridays. They will eat spaghetti and meatballs all through the week, but no meatballs on Friday.

The Bible tells us that this will continue to happen in "later times".

1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NASB)

4 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; ⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

So what is the solution to avoiding asceticism? LIVE BY FAITH.

III. Live By Faith

That sounds like a good idea doesn't it? But how exactly do you do that?

To live by faith means to accept God's word (the Bible) as the final authority on how to live for Christ. His will is revealed in His word, His instruction manual and love letter to us; we must get to know it!

Remember the illustration at the start of the sermon?

So the person thinks to himself, "**I WILL fast** because I really do want this thing." Maybe by denying myself, I can find favor with God and get Him to listen to my request.

Consider the following:

- Your body was created by God.
- It is the habitation of the soul.
- It was purchased by Christ from sin.
- It is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- It will be raised a glorious body at the last day.

Should it be neglected and dishonored?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

I am NOT saying that fasting is wrong. But fasting for the purpose of trying to get God's attention is for the wrong reason. You do not have to deny your body in order to get God's attention. He hears your every prayer.

Christianity is not a religion with a set of rules that you must do. It is a **relationship** with Christ. Trust His word and live by FAITH!

CONCLUSION:

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, do it today. Don't wait until you have cleaned up your life. **You don't clean yourself up to come to the Christ; you surrender yourself to Christ, to let Him clean you up!**

So we offer His invitation, realizing that there may be someone here who has never accepted Christ as their Savior. We plead with you. We appeal to you not to let this moment escape nor to let this window of opportunity pass you by.

If you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, then come now, confess that you believe in Him, be faithful to Him in Christian baptism, arise to walk in the newness of life. God's invitation is offered to you. Will you come as we stand and as we sing?

He Is Lord!

He is Lord, He is Lord. He has risen from the dead and He is Lord.
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, That Jesus Christ is Lord.