

**“The Supremacy of Christ in the Face of Legalism”**  
**Colossians 2:16-23**

**The Point: Because of you have been filled in Christ, walk in freedom from legalism.**

**I. Drop the Shadows because Jesus is enough (16-17)    Read text.**

**The Problem in Colossae: Legalistic Teaching**

- “Therefore,” Context: Paul picks up where he left off in verse 8-10... In our passage this morning, he exposes some of the empty philosophy of the false teachers, and he continues to hammer the implications of the fullness of Christ for Christians. Why? Because the false teachers in Colossae were proposing an alternative path toward spiritual fullness.

**Legalism = Jesus Plus Theology**

- They were espousing a Jesus plus theology. Legalists supplement the work of Jesus with their own work.
- “Legalism is seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and justification before God through obedience to God.” – C. J. Mahaney
- Legalism is performing our way to God’s approval.
- Legalists love to set up a higher standard for people to attain.
  - They take a person’s spiritual checklist, evaluate it, and then add several more boxes to the list. Then, they love to come along and point out: “All of the boxes on your spiritual checklist are not filled out!”
  - Do you base God’s love and acceptance of you on your ability to hammer out your spiritual checklist?
  - Make no mistake: there is a huge difference between delightful discipline and legalistic performance. We should “discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7).

**Jesus fulfills all the shadows (Christ-centered!!)**

- All of these practices under the old covenant were pointing forward to the ultimate fulfillment in Christ. They foreshadowed what was going to be fulfilled in Christ. The priesthood and the prophets and the sacrifices and the temple all anticipated Jesus who is as the true and better prophet, the true and better priest, the true and better king, the true and better “once for all” sacrifice, and our true and better Sabbath rest.

**II. Drop the mysticism because Jesus is enough (18-19).    Read text.**

- Paul then goes on to address another set of legalistic prescriptions. This time they deal with spiritual experience. There is definitely a presence of mysticism here: “the pursuit of a deeper or higher subjective religious experience.” MacArthur
- Mysticism becomes more of a pursuit of an experience than a pursuit of Christ.

**Spiritual Experiences advocated by False Teachers**

- Asceticism involves the practice of rigorous self-denial in order to become more spiritual.
- Worship of angels: At minimum, this probably involved invoking angels... Worst case, it involved worshipping angels themselves.
- Visions
- Let’s be clear: Christianity is not devoid of experience. Our conversion is a mysterious experience (2 Cor. 4:5-6), but it’s based on an objective reality.

### **The Root of the Problem**

- We discover the root of the legalists' problem at the end of verse 18: pride. Paul says "they were puffed up without reason."
- Legalists look down on those who have not achieved their level of "righteousness." Legalists (Pharisees) carry a sense of confident superiority.
- The Pharisee and Tax Collector: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get. BUT the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!'" (Luke 18:10-13)
- "Legalism has its origin in self-worship. If people are justified through their obedience to the law, then they merit praise, honor, and glory." - Tom Schreiner

### **III. Drop the man made rules because Jesus is enough (20-23).      Read text.**

- "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits..." Paul says, "You died to the dictates of the law. Why would you submit yourself again to its regulations?"
- We tend to focus on the externals. We often want to reduce Christianity to behavior modification. Do this. Don't do that. Because if you do this and not that, then you will be a "good little Christian."
- "We change what God intends as a means of *experiencing* grace into a means of *earning* grace." – Mahaney

### **Corinthian Principles on Freedom and Responsibility**

- 1) Will this action edify me? (1 Cor. 6:12)
- 2) Will this action enslave me? (1 Cor. 6:12)
- 3) Will this action encourage other believers? (1 Cor. 8:13)
  - a. Is this a potential stumbling block to someone else? (We all have strong and weak areas)
  - b. Love limits liberty: He said in 1 Cor. 8:13, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."
- 4) Will this action shed light on the gospel? (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 10:32-33)
- 5) Will this action emulate Jesus? (1 Cor 11:1) Is this something I could see Jesus doing?
- 6) Will this action glorify God? (1 Cor. 6:13; 1 Cor. 10:31)

**In the recipe of your spiritual life, what are you adding to Christ? Jesus is enough.**