

**Spiritual Intimidation (Part 1)**  
**Colossians 2:16-23**  
**March 18, 2012**

**Colossians 2:16-23** *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. <sup>18</sup>Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. <sup>19</sup>He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. <sup>20</sup>Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup>“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? <sup>22</sup>These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

## Introduction

Paul starts this section (which is the heart of the letter) with a “therefore”. He is referring back to **verse 10**, where he says that we are complete in Christ. In other words we are filled full in Christ. This is an important doctrine for all believers in Christ to know because the Colossian church was under spiritual intimidation by the false teachers. They were in effect saying that those who were Christians were not “Christian enough” or “spiritually enough” and needed more than what they had to have a higher spiritual experience. **They were, in effect, telling the Christian that Jesus alone was not enough.** This is likened to today where people say that we need a second blessing from God in order to be really spiritual. Paul says that this is false...this is something that we do not need to fall into their trap. He says three different times that we should not let anyone “judge us,” “disqualify us,” or convince us to submit to their rules. Here Paul explains the complete freedom we have in Christ and the true spiritual nature of the children of God. We can thusly sum up...Christ plus nothing, only Christ!

## I. Freedom from Legalism (16-17)

*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

**Note:** These false teachers were intimidating the Christians by imposing legalistic rules in order to appear spiritual.

- What is legalism?
  - Rules that either help or safeguards spirituality
  - Rules are always external of the person

**Examples:** Wearing suits or dressing nice on Sundays, dietary habits (eating healthy foods as opposed to eating junk food).

- If you want to attain “higher” spirituality, then you need to do those things (man-made rules)
- Legalism in Colossians church
  - Judging the Christians on the observances of certain diet / drink habits
  - Days of observances (Feast days, New Moon, Sabbaths)
- Dangers and problems of legalism
  - Easy to make rules to prevent people from doing things
  - Creates false measurement of spirituality of each person
- Legalism questions
  - Can you tell if a person is spiritual by their eating habits?
  - Can you tell if a person is spiritual based on their clothes?

- Can you tell if a person is spiritual if they have a tattoo(s) on their body?
- Can you tell if a person is spiritual if they smoke cigarettes?
- Reality in Christ
  - All those questions: they have all been taken care of in Christ

*These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

**Note:** All the law was a shadow that is fulfilled in Christ. All the law points to Christ and His perfection.

- Dietary habits

**Romans 14:17** *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

**Mark 7:14-19** *Again Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, "Listen to Me, everyone, and understand this. <sup>15</sup>Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" <sup>17</sup>After He had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples asked Him about this parable. <sup>18</sup>"Are you so dull?" He asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? <sup>19</sup>For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")*

**Note:** Paul says that we are not identified as part of the kingdom of God by our diet or drinking habits, but we are identified through the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

- Feast / Sabbath days

**Galatians 4:9-11** *But now that you know God-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? <sup>10</sup>You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup>I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

**Romans 14:5-6** *One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup>He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

**Note:** What legalism never shows is what happens in the heart. The heart is the one that needs to be changed, not our behavior. Jesus' point that all evil comes from the heart—all our behavior comes from the heart. Legalism is like a band-aid on a life-threatening wound. It has an appearance of doing its job, overlooking the fact that blood is still pouring out of the wound, around the band-aid. Paul says that as Christians we are complete in Christ—there are no rules in addition to Christ that makes us spiritual...we are full...nothing more can be added to our spiritual state.

## II. Freedom from Mysticism (18-19)

<sup>18</sup>*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. <sup>19</sup>He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

**Note:** The false teachers were intimidating the Christians by resorting to mystic visions they had and describing it in great details. Paul says don't let anyone disqualify you (or as a referee, throw you out of the game) by saying that you are not spiritual.

- What is mysticism?
  - Search of a higher or deeper religious experiences.
  - It is always based on what goes on inside a person
  - It cannot be proven—must be “experienced”

**Examples:** 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing—tongue speaking; hearing and talking to God, visions; All these happen in the charismatic movement—all promote a higher spirituality...they have something “better”

- Mysticism in the Colossian church
  - Worship of angels
  - Explaining visions they have had
- Dangers and problems of mysticism
  - You are the measure of truth—mystics choose experience over Scripture
  - Creates 2<sup>nd</sup> class (or 3<sup>rd</sup> class) of Christians
  - False humility
  - Lost connection with the Head—no growth—no life

**Note:** This is a scary verse because there are many teachers out on TV or internet that claim to have visions of God and that people need to know what that is. Paul is blunt in saying that they have no connection with Jesus...no life (**John 15:1-6**).

- False teachers vs Paul

**2 Corinthians 12:1-7** *It is doubtless\* not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven. <sup>3</sup>And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--<sup>4</sup>how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. <sup>5</sup>Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. <sup>6</sup>For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. <sup>7</sup>And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*

- False humility vs humility (lest I should be exalted above measure)
- Go into great detail about what he has seen vs ? What did Paul say? Not lawful for a man to saw
- Reality in Christ
  - God has given us everything right now in Christ

**2 Peter 1:3** *as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.*

- Christ is the final revelation of God to man, we cannot add anything more to His revelation

**Hebrews 1:1-2** *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup>in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

**Revelation 22:18** *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.*

**Note:** The Bible never presents the idea of different classes of Christians. It never presents us having more spiritual qualities than others. It does however talk about growth and maturity, but never in terms of

classes...one better than another. We are all equal heirs to grace. We are all complete in Christ. We all have access to His power. He has given us all things now.

### III. Freedom from Asceticism (20-23)

<sup>20</sup>Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup>"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? <sup>22</sup>These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

**Note:** The false teachers were stressing that the Christians have to avoid certain things in order to be spiritual. They were also imposing some harsh bodily treatments in order to appear spiritual. Paul (and Scripture) always emphasizes that fighting flesh with flesh is always ineffective because they do nothing to the heart. Paul is not talking about those who fast for the Lord, but to those who promote it and require it...it is worthless.

- What is asceticism?
  - Practice of denying your body certain things (food, bathing, wealth, marriage)
  - Afflicting your body with pain to deny certain pleasures

**Examples:** vows of poverty (monks); Simeon Stylites—spent last 36 years of his life on top of 50 foot pillar.

- Asceticism in the Colossian church
  - Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch
  - Forbidding certain activities and food (we do not know what kind, Paul does not say)
  - Harsh treatments of the body
- Dangers and problems of asceticism
  - Dangerous (harsh treatment of the body)
  - No value against the fleshly appetite (sensual indulgence)
  - External changes rather than internal changes
  - Based on man's teachings
  - Will perish (become worthless)
- Reality in Christ

**Matthew 6:16-18** "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

**Note:** Jesus makes a devastating attack on those who believe asceticism is effective in promoting holiness. He says that by boasting your outer suffering, you are in effect getting what your reward today (here on earth). If that is all you get, then it is worthless.