

Freedom in Christ (Job 42:1-6 & Colossians 2:16-23) 23-Sep-2018

So we're continuing our series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the church of the Colossians. So please have your Bibles opened to Colossians chapter 2 from verse 16.

Let me ask God to help us in our understanding of this passage.

Let's pray...

Intro

Is there a rule book for Christians to follow?

Do we have a list of do's and don'ts by which we are judged?

Is God like Santa Claus, "He's making a list and checking it twice, gonna find out whose naughty or nice."

(pause)

[PowerPoint 1-Commandments and 613 rules]

According to Jewish Law and Tradition as well as the 10 commandments, there are 613 mitzvots (or commandments) - that's a lot of rules to try and keep. I have enough trouble keeping to the various speed limits from my house to church - 60, 50, 40, 80, 110, 50, 60, 40 and so on....

(pause)

There's a story of a minister who told his congregation about these 613 laws plus the 10 commandments. That same afternoon he received 46 requests for the complete list. I guess some people wanted to know which laws they had missed out on breaking! (Please no emails!)

(pause)

There's the story about a woman who married a tyrant of a man. He didn't like the way she kept house. He didn't like the way she did the washing. He didn't

like the way she ironed his clothes. He didn't like the way she dressed. He didn't like the way she conducted herself in public. He constantly criticized her for everything. Early on in their marriage he handed her a list of 25 rules for her to follow.

She hated trying to follow this list of rules. You can imagine how frustrating it was to her to have to constantly check her list to see if she was pleasing her husband - and to stay out of trouble. She usually failed and each time got a tongue lashing from him. He made her feel miserable and worthless and a failure.

Then one day, her husband died (she couldn't say she was disappointed).

Soon after, she fell in love with and married a wonderful man. They loved each other very deeply. She practically broke her neck to please him. Sometimes she would even bring him breakfast in bed!

One day she came across that old list from her first husband. As she read it, feelings of anger and inferiority returned. Then she started laughing. As she checked the list she realized that she was now doing all that was on the list for her new husband and more besides. And she was doing all this with great joy and freedom because she loved this man so much.

(pause)

Throughout the history of the church there have been "perfection police" who have inserted themselves as the rule and authority on how we are supposed to think, act and do. They determine what we can do and not do. Where we can go and not go. What we can eat and not eat. How we should dress and not dress. You've heard it before: "Christians never drink, don't smoke, never go to movies, don't play cards, don't read novels, women don't wear pants (and certainly not

shorts), women don't wear too much jewellery or make-up, and men don't wear any jewellery besides a wedding ring. On and on it goes. Ministers must always wear a suit and tie (but nothing loud); wear black suits to funerals. He must drive a nice but conservative car. A convertible or even a Jeep would not be suitable for a "man of God."

Did Jesus really die so we have to keep a whole bunch of rules?

Or do we have a bit more freedom than that?

In this passage from Colossians 2:16-23

The Apostle Paul explains the freedom we have in Christ and gives us **3 steps to freedom**

First - Paul tells us to - Lose Legalism (vv16-18)

I. LOSE LEGALISM (vv16-18a)

[PowerPoint 2-Legalism]

We'd better define legalism: *Overly strict or rigid adherence to the law or to a religious or moral code.*

Paul is talking about diets and days (here in v16). The religion for some in Colosse - was hung up on calendars and calories. Food had to be Kosher, especially on certain days (new moons or monthly observances, and weekly on the Sabbath).

What about us, we're not Jewish or first century Christians?

Do we remember when people always ate fish on Fridays?

Why? Catholic tradition? Or to boost the fish industry?

Or, do we remember our mums fixing a certain meal on Sundays.

How about observing Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter.

We give up pleasurable activities that we think will improve our relationship with God.

It used to be that devout Christians would not travel very far or do much on Sundays as a carry-over from the Jewish Sabbath.

Remember the movie, "Chariots of Fire?" Scottish 100 meter runner Eric Liddle would not compete on Sundays

Jesus (and His disciples) were judged by the Pharisees for working on the Sabbath - this 'so called work' was picking some grain tops to eat (Mark 2) and healing a sick man on the Sabbath (Mark 3)?

Jesus (and His disciples) were also judged by Pharisees for not fasting (in Mark 7)

Jesus answered their judging by saying:

¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."

²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

The Apostle Paul agrees in v16 - He says "Don't let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink!" (v16)

[PowerPoint 3-Legalism heading]

What's wrong with legalism anyway?

A. *It Focuses on the Wrong Person (see v17)*

OT rules and sacrifices and festival days were a shadow of what was to come in Jesus

[PowerPoint 3a-Wrong person]

When Jesus came - the shadow became the reality - so there's no need to keep going with the shadow stuff

Today - we have Jesus

When we focus on rules and regulations we are not focusing on Christ. If we let other people call the shots then we give them the position reserved only for Jesus.

As Paul says in Galatians 1:10

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ

When we listen to and obey the person who is judging our behaviour - we are worshipping them instead of Jesus. That's idolatry!

And we start "working" our way to forgiveness and to heaven

This says - that Jesus' work on the cross is not enough.

[Charles Spurgeon said, "*I have found in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit.*"]

B. Legalism puts the focus in the Wrong Place

[PowerPoint 3b-Wrong place]

1. Legalism demeans Life in the Church - We end up with a police state mentality. Everybody judges everybody and the focus is then completely off Jesus.

That's what the Pharisees were like in Jesus' time - they kept all the rules like a police state and jumped on anyone (including Jesus) who appeared to break these rules. The Pharisees appeared like they were super holy praying on the street corner and washing their hands a zillion times - but actually they had false humility - they had a major heart problem - while keeping all these rules - at the same time - in their hearts they were plotting how to rip off widows and plotting how to kill Jesus - before he exposed them for what they were

2. Legalism dims the Light of the Church - The world is turned off by our legalism and they can't see past our rigid rules and regulations. Instead of shining the love of Jesus, we are shining the laws of humans and not many people are drawn to that. Here's what people outside the church hear: "Cut that hair, put out that cigarette, turn off that radio, don't read that book, sing this song, read this version of the Bible, pray this way, seek this experience." Jesus is made into a Drill Sergeant - and who wants to enlist in that sort of army?

What's going to attract people into a relationship with Jesus - treating them like a drill sergeant - or loving them into a relationship with Him - where they see us imitate Jesus and want to imitate Him too!

II. MISS THE MYSTICISM (vv18-19)

2nd Paul says - Miss Mysticism - in verses 18-19

[PowerPoint 4-Definition]

We'd better define mysticism: the practice of religious ecstasies (religious experiences during alternate states of consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, and magic may be related to them.

This is the opposite of legalism. It is being super spiritual. Some in the church at Colossae were into visions and making contact with angels. They looked for deeper spiritual insights so they could feel superior to others in the church.

[PowerPoint 5-Miss Mysticism heading]

So how does mysticism hurt us?

[PowerPoint 5a-puffs up our heads]

A. *Mysticism Puffs Up Our Heads (see v18)*

Oklahoma evangelist Oral Roberts claimed in 1980 to have seen a 900 foot Jesus standing over the partially constructed "City of Faith" hospital he was building next to his - Oral Roberts University. This gigantic saviour did not speak to him, but Roberts guessed that Jesus had come to signal that the

hospital was a good thing, and that people should give him more money to finish it.

Then in 1983 Roberts announced that Jesus had paid him another visit to say that Jesus had personally appointed him to find a cure for cancer.

No cure for cancer was found in his City of Faith hospital nor any other Roberts-connected enterprise.

Then in 1986 Roberts claimed that unless people gave him a lot of money - God would call him home!

How can we verify such claims?

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 tells us how:

²¹ You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" ²² If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.

In recent years - some Christians who speak in tongues have looked down on those who have not experienced speaking in tongues - as though they are inferior Christians. This just comes across as puffed up and arrogant!

Whereas in fact - true spiritual experiences humble us instead of puffing us up:

Like in our OT reading from Job 42 verses 5 and 6 where Job says:

⁵ My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.”

The prophet Isaiah saw the Lord and confessed how sinful he was (Is. 6)

Peter, the Apostle, fell down before the Lord and said, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man.” (Luke 5:8)

When John, the Apostle, saw the risen Jesus he fell at His feet like a dead man (Revelation 1:17)

B. Mysticism separates us from the True Head (see v19)

[PowerPoint 5b-separates us from Jesus

There is no life when the body is separated from the head. We can chase after revelations, out-of-body experiences, visions, healers, angels, saints already departed, etc. and slowly strangle our self from a real relationship with Jesus and become disconnected from Jesus the head! Remember Jesus said in John 15:5 - apart from Him - we can do nothing of spiritual worth!

III. AVIOD ASCETICISM (v20-23)

3rd the Apostle Paul says - Avoid Asceticism verses 20-23

[PowerPoint 6-Ascetism]

We'd better define Asceticism: **severe self-discipline and avoiding of all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.**

An ascetic practices extreme self-denial.

[PowerPoint 7 heading-Avoid Asceticism]

This was popular in the Middle Ages. They thought they could sanctify the soul and become more holy - by punishing their body. They would deprive themselves of food and sleep. They might take a vow of silence or poverty (like the Franciscan monks). They would practice self-flagellation (beating them self), or wear hessian/sackcloth clothes, or sleep on a concrete slab and so on...

Why should we avoid Asceticism?

[PowerPoint 7a-Christianity=positive]

A. We are to be guided by a relationship with Jesus, not by regulations in the world (see v20). **Christianity is not about a list of negative action - a list of don'ts (v21) - but about positive action** - about loving Jesus and loving others
As v22 says - when we focus on worldly things they are destined to perish - food and drink and days all disappear so why focus on them - rather focus on Jesus - who is everlasting.

Also human commands and teachings can't replace God's commands and teaching. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 9:20 - shall the one created question the creator?

(pause)

Jesus and His Word are eternal and never perish! It's much better to focus on the imperishable Jesus - than the perishable stuff of this world

B. Appearance is not reality (23)

[PowerPoint 7b-appearance not reality]

Asceticism also has the appearance of being spiritually wise and holy - because we are giving up so much for our relationship with God. But think about this - a vow of silence - can't lead to making disciples. A vow of poverty - ends up making us a drain on others when we're quite capable of supporting ourselves. Going around in sackcloth is hardly spreading the joy of new life in Jesus. Fasting too much- will lead to sickness. Self-flagellation will lead to self-harm. And we're supposed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19)

CONCLUSION = LOVE

So we've seen - today - we are to:

[PowerPoint 8-List]

- Lose Legalism
- Miss Mysticism
- And Avoid Asceticism

But surely we need rules?

Rules give good order don't they?

And what's the point of the 10 commandments then?

Especially since none of us can keep them?

Well - they show us our sin - and show us our need for Jesus as our Saviour

Jesus summarised the rules down to 2 - love God and love others - and that can be summarised down to one word - Love!

If we love with the example of Jesus' sacrificial love on the cross - we'll keep all the rules like that lady/wife in the story earlier discovered - and we'll have freedom from being dictated by rules!

That's what it means to have freedom in Christ

We're freed up to love!

Think about this statement. Is it true?

When we give our heart and life to Jesus we can live like we want to?

[PowerPoint 9-Conclusion]

It's true - Because Jesus changes our "have to's" in "to want to's")

HAVE TO OR WANT TO - that's the challenge this morning/evening

Do we have to love Jesus and love others or do we want to love Jesus and love others

"Want to" gives freedom in Christ - "have to" leaves us all tied up in rules!

Let's pray...