

No Mixes Needed

Colossians 2:16-23

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It's good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you would join us. And we recognize, I realize that if you are new to us, if this is your first Sunday, that walking into a place that is new to you, seeing people that you've never seen before, experiencing things that you're maybe unsure of, can be kind of a daunting occasion. It can be difficult. It can be hard. It takes a bit of courage to walk into a new place. And we recognize that and know that. And so we hope that what you experience is the welcome of Christ, that you would experience the hospitality of his people, that you would know more of his grace and his kindness, because that is what you need and that's what I need. And that's what we're all in need of. So whether this is your first Sunday or your 101st, you are welcome in this place. We're glad that you would come and as we worship the Lord.

And this morning, we're continuing in our series in the Book of Colossians. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Colossians chapter 2. You can also find our passage in the Bibles in the chairs in front of you on page 984. But as we've been going through Colossians, you remember Paul is writing this letter to a church that he's never been to. He's never met them. This is a church he didn't plant. He's just gotten wind of what's going on in their church through his friend Epaphras, who we believe was the person who planted this church. And so Paul's heard through Epaphras that there are philosophies and ideas that are seeping into the church through these false teachers. And these philosophies and ideas are encouraging the people of God to add to Jesus, to move on from Christ. That yes, they embrace the gospel, they embrace the truth, but now these teachings, these false teachers, are encouraging them to move beyond Jesus, to mix things with him. And so Paul is writing to the Colossians and helping them to be rooted in the truth of who Jesus is, that he is all that they need. And Paul's going to continue in that vein this morning, as he encourages them and us what it looks like for us to walk with Jesus, what walking with Christ, what life with Christ is like, how he is all that we need. And so let's read Colossians, chapter 2, beginning in verse 16. Paul writes,

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)— according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we ask that as we come to your Word that you would now help us, help us to see the beauty of Jesus, help us to know what it means to be his people, help us to

understand your Word. For Father, apart from the work of your Spirit, your Word and your will would be darkened to us, and so we ask that you would illuminate it now, that you would minister to our hearts and our minds, and that you would lead us in your truth. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Now, like many of you, I have a number of cookbooks that line my kitchen, cookbooks that have specific purpose, right? Cookbooks that are all about baking, cookbooks that are about grilling, all sorts of different cookbooks, and they all have something in common, right? They have recipes, right? That's what cookbooks have, right? Whether it's Julia Child's or, you know, America's Test Kitchen or whoever it might be, they're just filled with recipes. But there's this one cookbook I have that actually is unlike the others because there are very few very few recipes in it. You see, this cookbook is talking about the science behind cooking, and specifically how four elements, salt, fat, acid, and heat, how those four elements contribute to the process of cooking, and how the use of these different elements in their proper ways can enhance flavor and turn something beautiful and good. And we understand that, right? We know that when we mix certain things together, it brings about something delicious, something wonderful.

We know this, even if we don't know why, right? We may not understand how the mixing of these different elements, these different things, function and why they taste good, but we know that mixing certain things together are wonderful, right? Peanut butter and jelly, right? What a great mix, right? Whoever came up with that, like Nobel Prize, right? Tomato and basil, right? It's glorious. It's beautiful. It's aromatic, right? Salt on almost everything, right? It's just so good. But we also know that there are things that when we mix them together that they taste bad. We think they're going to taste good, and we think, you know, on paper that this is going to be delicious, it's going to be wonderful, but when we mix them together, it actually turns out to be a giant mess. I mean, case in point, Hawaiian pizza, right? Okay, okay, okay. That's a disputable matter. But there are those things, right, that when we mix them together, we know that they're just not good. That there are things that when we mix together, it's beautiful, and things that when we mix them together, they're gross. But then there are those things, a few things, not many, but there are just some, that they are so good and wonderful, we don't have to add anything to them, right? That to add a sauce or a spice, it would actually take away, not enhance the goodness.

Adding to Jesus Through...

And that's what Paul is telling us about Jesus in this passage. You see, the false teachers, the detractors from the gospel, they're trying to add to Jesus. They're trying to mix different things with the gospel, to mix their philosophies, and their teaching, and their ways with Jesus. And by adding these man-made elements to Christ, they're not enhancing the gospel, they're taking away from it. You see, Christ doesn't need any adding to. Christ doesn't need anything mixed to him. He is beautiful and good as he is. And these false teachers, they're trying to mix with the gospel, mix with Jesus legalism, and mysticism, and asceticism. And so this morning, how we're going to approach this passage, and what our sermon is going to entail, is that we're going to look at these three mixes that they're trying to combine with the gospel. We're going to look at them briefly, and then address all three of them together.

Legalism

Okay, so that's how we're going to approach it. So, legalism is the first thing they try to mix with the gospel. We see it in verse 16. Paul says, "therefore," Now, therefore, we go back to what we heard last week. We've received Jesus, we've been united to him, right? We have died to our sin, we have died with him, and risen to new life. "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival, or a new moon, or a sabbath." So, it's pretty clear that what they are invoking are these Jewish practices that were related to food laws and to ceremonies. So, you know, if you've read the Old Testament, that there were laws that were given to God's people about what they could and couldn't consume, right? So, all the meat, all the blood had to be cooked out of it. So, no medium rare, right? No medium rare, only well done. And no lobster, no crab, no shrimp, right? Because these were shellfish. They weren't allowed to consume these foods. But there were also ceremonies that they were supposed to participate in, and we see them. There were annual festivals that the people of God would go to, there were monthly occasions, that's what the new moon was, and then there was the weekly sabbath. And so, whatever it is that the false teachers were promoting, they were telling the Colossians that they must adhere to these particular practices and in a particular way. Now, that emphasis is important. Particular practices in a particular way. So, hold on to that. We're going to come back to that in a moment. So, that's the first mixing that they're trying to do, legalism.

Mysticism

The second is mysticism. We see this in verse 18: "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by a sensuous mind." So, what we see is that they are trying to encourage the Colossians to engage in this sort of mystical worship. It's clear that this is what they're trying to do because they're disqualifying those people who don't engage in this particular style. Now, we're not exactly sure what worship of angels entailed. It could have been that they had idols, that they were creating statues, they were bowing down, they were worshiping them. But it also could mean, this Greek phrase, it could mean worshiping angels. So, not the worship of angels, but as angels worship. And so, they're being encouraged to worship as angels do. And so, what this might be is that they were being encouraged to move beyond their physicality and have some sort of ethereal sort of spiritual experience. And that would actually fit with this idea of visions that they're having. So, there's this mysticism occurring in their worship. So, that's the second mixing.

Asceticism

The final mixing that they're adding to the gospel is asceticism. We see this in verses 20 and 21: "If we, if with Christ, you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." Referring to things at all parishes, they are used according to human precepts and teachings. So, you see, the false teachers are talking about this ascetic behavior related to the various things they're experiencing to renounce food and to renounce possessions. Now, just as an aside, every time I read this verse, "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch," it takes me back to my days doing campus ministry.

You see, before Kat and I went to seminary, we were doing college ministry in Greenville, South Carolina. And so, Kat would oftentimes spend time with college girls and I would

spend time with college guys doing Bible studies and engaging with them, doing all these sorts of things. And I remember invariably that there would be guys and they're talking about their relationships, their girlfriends, and they would memorize this verse. We would encourage the memorization of verses of passages, to invoke during times of temptation. So, with their girlfriend, they would memorize, "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." And while I applaud them at wanting to have relational purity, that is not what this verse is talking about. There are other passages we could turn to. No, this passage is talking about renouncing of food, renouncing of possessions, renouncing even of relationships, right? This ascetic sort of posture towards the Christian faith.

So, these are the three things that are being encouraged to add to Jesus, to mix with the gospel. And so, what does Paul say about them? We'll look at verse 23: "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body." He acknowledges, y'all, these look wise. They sound right. And not just asceticism, but legalism, mysticism, they seem holy and good and righteous. I mean, after all, didn't Jesus say that we are to deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow him and follow him, right? And Paul himself, in other letters, he talked about disciplining his body so that he could run the race and so that he could fight the battle. So, how is this different? How is this different from what Jesus was calling us to deny ourselves and what Paul was calling us to put our bodies into submission? Well, what's different, as Paul says in verse 23, these are a self-made religion. In verse 18, this puffs up without reason the sensuous mind. That language of puff up, it means to inflate oneself. It's getting at an arrogance, to be arrogant and to have no reason to be. With regard to legalism, he says in verse 16, he's insinuating that there is a freedom regarding food and festivals. I say that there's a freedom that's insinuated because notice Paul, in verse 16, doesn't condemn or speak negatively about food and drink, about ceremonies. He doesn't speak negatively like he does those other mixings. No, instead what he says simply is, "let no one pass judgment on you." And so what it seems like Paul is doing there is that he is encouraging freedom of practice.

In other words, this is a disputable matter. Someone who wants to abide by, say, food regulations, they're allowed to. If they don't want to, they too are allowed. The problem that Paul is addressing is this legalism that is imposing personal conviction as though they are biblical mandates. Do you hear that distinction? Personal conviction, not biblical mandate. And friends, this happens, right? Not just within the Colossian church, but this can happen with us. Let me give you two examples where this could play out. One personal and one corporate. So a personal example. Some of you know that I have alarms that go off on my phone throughout the day. Three times I get an alarm to remind me to pray. 9:00, 11:00, and 2:30. So 9:00, the alarm goes off. It reminds me to pray for my family. That's what it says. Pray family. 11:00, pray for the church; I pray for y'all. 2:30, I pray for the world.

So I have these alarms that go off. Now, there is a biblical command to pray, right? It is right for us. I could, as your pastor, stand behind this pulpit and say, you should pray. God's word tells you to pray. And you should tell one another, as brothers and sisters in the Lord, we should pray. That would be perfectly appropriate. But it would not be appropriate for me to say, "and you need to pray at 9." So it would be wrong for me to say, "now we must pray," right? It would be inappropriate because God's word doesn't say we have to pray at 9, we have to pray at 11, and we have to pray at 2:30. Now, it's a good discipline. It has been super helpful for me. As someone who sometimes gets lost in my day, I don't know if you experience that and forget to pray. It helps me come out of my moment and to remind myself

I need to pray. So it's a helpful practice. Maybe it would be helpful for you, but it would be wrong for me to say you must. That's a personal example.

How about a corporate one? Every year, we have a service. Christmas Eve often does not fall on Sunday. So Christmas Eve is maybe what we would call a modern festival, okay? It doesn't fall on Sunday. It doesn't fall on the Lord's Day. Often, sometimes it does. Now, we are called as God's people to gather together on the Lord's Day to worship. So we can have a Christmas Eve service. We can have a Good Friday service. We can have a Monday-Thursday service. We think it's beneficial as the leadership. That's why we do it. We could meet on a Wednesday night for an additional worship service if we wanted. It would help us celebrate the birth of Jesus. We think it's a good thing. Absolutely. And I can't mandate y'all's participation because the Bible doesn't mandate your participation. It's a good thing. I think it's a good thing. I think it's a helpful practice, but it's not biblically mandated. There is personal conviction, there is good opportunity, and there is what's biblically required.

The false teachers are taking personal convictions, allowable practices, things that benefit, things related to food and drink and festivals and Sabbath and New Moons, and they are raising the practice of them to the level of divine order, biblical mandate, and the requirement for Christian living. And Paul's saying, don't let people judge you on personal conviction. Now listen, this doesn't mean anything goes, okay? This doesn't mean that everything now is related to preference or conviction. We still live under God's law. We still live under God's commands and his requirements. In fact, we're going to hear Paul talk about that in chapter 3 of Colossians. And as we live under God's law, there is freedom not to add to God's law. So the false teachers, they're trying to mix these things in, and Paul is telling us these mixes, these additions, they are self-made religion, they puff up, and they have no ability to produce holiness. That's what he said in verse 23. Did you see that? "They are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." They look like they're spiritual, but they're actually relinquishing of Jesus.

We see that in verse 19. They're not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grow with growth that is from God. So he's saying these things that they're trying to mix in, some of them may have the appearance of wisdom, they may look good, they may look spiritual, but they are of no benefit. So if they don't benefit us with regard to our relationship with Christ, why are they attractive? Not just for the Colossians, but for us. Like, why are we prone to embrace mixing things with Jesus? Well, I think it's because we feel good about how spiritual we are, particularly in relation to how spiritual others aren't. I mean, puffed up. We're arrogant, self-righteous, right? And we're arrogant and self-righteous in comparison to others. It's a way of us measuring our holiness against other people's lack or apparent lack of holiness. N.T. Wright put it this way. He said, "what looks like discipline is really a subtle form of self-indulgence."

Now, what's interesting, whenever we start talking about passing judgment, disqualifying others, those sorts of things, promoting self-made religion, what's interesting is that we only seem to do this regarding the things that we're good at, right? Like, we don't pass judgment on people who are more disciplined than we are, or who are more faithful than we are, or who are good at the things that we are, where we got, unless we try to twist it and turn it and go, well, they're only that way because they're a legalist. I mean, obviously. But even in that, we're passing judgment, aren't we? We're twisting. Because at the end of the day, when we do

these things, when we add to Jesus, when we mix things with him, it's not really about Jesus at all. It's about us. And y'all, that won't bring life.

Food and drink, festival, new moon, Sabbath, Paul said they are a shadow. A shadow. I've never heard anyone talk about how beautiful a shadow is. We talk about the beauty of a tree, the size of the building, right? The beauty of that person, the thing, the one who is casting the shadow. We know that that's what's significant. The shadow, it moves. It goes away. It fades. And that's what Paul's saying, right? These things, they're but a shadow. They're a picture. They point to Christ, the substance. He is the substance.

Those things are just simply pointing to him. And not only that, but Jesus is our head. He is the one that we are nourished from, that we grow in, that we are strengthened as we are united to him, as we are connected to him. We see it in verse 20. Paul says, "if with Christ," (that "if" isn't in the sense of *well maybe*, it's more in the sense of *since*) "[Since] with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations according to human precepts and teachings?" So you see what Paul's saying? He's saying because we've been united to Christ in his death and resurrection, that we have died to the attempts to find life through human regulations, that Christ now is our life. That we don't have to return to those things. We don't have to try to find life from the shadows. That we don't have to try to find life from mixing things to Jesus. We don't add anything to him. Not legalism, not mysticism, not asceticism. No. Instead, we simply hold fast to him, knowing that we don't need anything but Jesus. That what we need isn't the shadow. What we need is the substance. What we need is Jesus. What we need is Christ and Christ alone. And so friends, we need not mix. Jesus is so good and beautiful that nothing needs to be added to him. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask that as you, as we have come to your word, that you would impress this upon our hearts. That Father, that we would live in the midst of the gospel freedom you have given us. And that we would hold fast to Christ and Christ alone. That he would be our beauty, our hope. That he would be the one we have put our faith in. And so Father, help us to see where it is that we are trying to add to the gospel. And help us to free, be free from that. So that we would cling only to Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. And God's people said together, Amen.