

Stop Christ Abuse, part 2

(Colossians 2:16-23)

(preached 5/1/16; Sunday AM)

Introduction

Take your bibles and turn with me to Colossians 2:16-23...

Last week, we looked at verses 16-17, but let me read this to us to kinda review...

16 Therefore no one is to [n]act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath [o]day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the [p]substance [q]belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep [r]defrauding you of your prize by delighting in [s]self-abasement and the worship of the angels, [t]taking his stand on visions he has seen, [u]inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and [v]ligaments, grows with a growth [w]which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ [x]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 [y]with use)—in accordance

*with the commandments and teachings of men?
23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the
[z]appearance of wisdom in [aa]self-made religion
and self-abasement and severe treatment of the
body, but are of no value against fleshly
indulgence.*

Let us pray.

Major league baseball umpires must have very thick skin...

Because they are criticized for something on almost every pitch...

Marty Springstead went to umpire school as a young man, and eventually worked his way up to being a major league umpire in 1966.

In his first game behind home plate calling balls and strikes, Frank Howard came up to bat.

Howard was huge by baseball standards at 6 ft 8 inches and weighing 275 lbs.

He was a power hitter who often led the league in home runs and RBIs.

He was given the nickname “The Washington Monument” due to his size and the fact that he played for the Washington Nationals..

Springstead said that Howard smirked at him as he came to bat, knowing that he was a rookie umpire.

The first pitch was thrown and it passed level with Howard's knees...

Springstead yelled "ONE!", meaning strike one.

Howard turned and glared at him and said,

"Let's get something straight right now, buster! I don't know where you came from or how you got to the major leagues, but they don't call that pitch on me a strike. Understand?"

Springstead said he just stood there but was about ready to cry...

The second pitch came Howard's way and it passed through the exact same spot, right at Howard's knee level...

Springstead said "Two" and Howard quickly replied, "Two what?"

And Springstead said, "Too low." Way too low.

Telling that story years later, Marty Springstead said that was most intimidated moment that he ever experienced in baseball...

And he vowed to himself that day that he was refuse to be intimidated ever again into making a bad call...

And he went on to be one the best umpires in the league, becoming the youngest crew chief ever for the World Series in 1973...

And became the head of American League Umpires for 14 years from 1986 to 2000.

However, his rise in the ranks began with this story of being intimidated by Frank Howard...

If you were here last week, we have been talking about spiritual intimidation in the church at Colossae..

How false teachers had come into that church and intimidated people to think that faith alone in Jesus Christ alone wasn't enough...

That they were inferior because they were too simple minded and that salvation was more complicated than just faith in Jesus Christ...

And these false teachers were telling the Colossians that they needed to follow the OT laws as well...

And observe the Jewish Sabbath, and follow the OT food laws on food and drink, and offer new moon sacrifices and observe Jewish festivals as well..

And the Colossians were being bullied by these false teachers into adding to Jesus Christ...

Last week, we looked at how people were adding legalism to Christ...

And legalism is simply the piling on of man made rules in order to be saved...

It is judging a person's spirituality by how well they follow the commands of men....

And as we saw last week, legalism is still alive and well in 2016...

There are pastors and churches that add legalism to salvation...

And in doing so, they abuse the perfect and complete work of Jesus Christ...

By adding to what it means to be saved.

And while they any think that they are elevating Christ by demanding others to follow their rules, they actually lower Christ...

And it shameful, and it bothers anyone who understands the simplicity of repenting and trusting in Christ alone to be saved.

Unfortunately, legalism is not the only way Jesus was being abused in Colossae.

He was also being abused through philosophy that we looked at 2 weeks ago, where the false teachers were trying to add a special higher knowledge to the gospel as a requirement for salvation...

And so philosophy and legalism were two tactics of the false teachers.

But there are two more that we need to look at today, and these are points 2 and 3 on the outline in your bulletin..

The false teachers were also abusing Christ through mysticism and asceticism...

And so, let us dive into the remaining verses of this section this morning...

We only got through verses 16-17 last week, but we will get to verse 23 today before we head to the Lord's Table...

Let's begin back in verse 18...

II. Stop Abusing Christ Through Mysticism **(18-19)**

Verse 18...

18 Let no one keep [r]defrauding you of your prize by delighting in [s]self-abasement and the worship of the angels, [t]taking his stand on visions he has seen, [u]inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and [v]ligaments, grows with a growth [w]which is from God.

Mysticism can be defined as a deeper or higher religious experience based on a personal event.

Mysticism is spread by false teachers who talk of a higher plane of spirituality that few people get to..

Mysticism talks about out of body experiences being part of those who are spiritually elite..

Mysticism points to visions or higher languages as requirements of salvation...

People who hold to and teach mysticism value experience over everything else in the Christian life.

As a young Christian, I attended a youth camp as a chaperone...

And I still remember the worship leader telling the crowd that he could take them to a higher spiritual plane if they would just sing the songs from their heart...

And I remember concentrating real hard and singing real sincere, but never experiencing anything different...

And I struggled with that for years thinking that I was less spiritual than other people...

It bothered for some time until I started understanding what the Scriptures taught...

But that is what mysticism is....

It values those moments where people claim to touch the face of God...

Nowadays, my frustration tunes to anger when I hear people promote mysticism from pulpits or leading music at conferences..

Because of all that is a lie told to make people feel inferior to others who are more spiritual...

And it is an abuse of Christ because it makes salvation Jesus + a great experience....

The same was happening in Corinth...

The false teachers were telling the Corinthians that they were super spiritual unless they were worshipping angels or having visions...

That is why Paul put his foot down in verse 18 and wrote....

Let no keep defrauding you of your prize...

In verses 16-17....

The command was to let no one judge you on their legalistic standards....

And now it is let no one defraud you or steal your prize of salvation by telling you that you are saved if you aren't worshipping angels or having visions...

Paul also throws in the fact that false teachers also delighted in self-abasement or false humility...

Your translation may also say asceticism here...

But the thought is this....

False teachers who point to higher spiritual experiences often delight in a false humility...

By saying things like who am I to experience these visions and be able to worship angels...

Because if little ole bitty me can experience it, anyone can...

And in doing that to appear humble, they actually heap on more guilt to those who have never had such an experience...

By appearing to be humble, they only add to their intimidation of others...

And in the end, it isn't a real humility at all because Paul says in the end of verse 18...

They are actually puffed up by their claims...

The word there is inflated flesh but the idea is that false teachers who add mysticism to Jesus only do it so others will think they are very spiritual....

It essentially adds to their ego since they can experience these things but others can't....

And as a result, they will gain a following..

Let me give you an example...

There are various views on whether the gift of tongues is a gift that continues to this day...

But regardless of your view, tongues is simply a reference to a real understandable language, like French or English or German...

But since the early 1900s, tongues has become a bunch of gibberish that is understandable to no one except people who pose as translators...

And the point of speaking in tongues in some churches is to prove that you a person is truly saved...

Many churches believe that only the saved can speak in tongues...

And so people get up and speak like a baby, and the people around them cheer because they have just witnessed a supposed higher religious experience...

You know what they just saw?

They saw modern day practice of mysticism in the church....

Same for churches that require visions to prove salvation or who stress visions as evidence of spiritual maturity...

It is all hogwash.

It is nothing but a lie that abuses Christ...

I dont need to add the works of speaking in tongues
or seeing visions to salvation....

It is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me.

Do you want to know if you are saved?

Read 1 John or the book of James and take the tests
of salvation there...

Don't look to a false teacher who would tell you
that salvation is Jesus + a higher religious
experience...

Mysticism needs to be confronted in the most
aggressive way possible...

And before I step down today out of this pulpit,
there may be many of y'all who will come to me
and say I have witnessed or experienced this...

And I am not here to argue with your experiences at
all...

I am here to point to the word of God to tell you
that mysticism is a destructive force that has existed
for years in the church....

IT has the appearance of spirituality and it appeals to people who want to feel something as part of their faith...

But in the end, mysticism denies the completeness of Jesus Christ and it is a tool abused by false teachers and conceited believers to make others feel like they are less of a Christian if they dont experience them...

And it is a cancer in the church that needs to be treated with the most forceful response possible...

The ground is level at the cross...

When Jesus saves us, he doesn't place on higher and lower spiritual planes...

Jesus is the author and perfecto of our faith, and anything that seeks to take away form his finished work should be the greatest insult to anyone in the church....

And here is how you treat mysticism and really all of these "isms"

Verse 19...

You hold fast to the head....

Who is the head?

Christ Jesus is the head, and you hold fast to him by filling your mind with who He is as described in the Bible...

You follow him by obeying the His words in Scripture...

You hold fast to Him by regularly worshipping him and communicating with Him in prayer....

You don't need a vision or the worship of angels...

You need to see Christ on the pages of Scripture and listen to His commands as He gives them in Scripture...

And you need to adore Him and worship Him and give your life to Him...

And none of that leads to a higher spiritual plane where your eyes roll back in your head...

Rather, it fixes your eyes on Him as He guides you through life...

Listen to what John Macarthur says about holding fast to the head of Christ....

You just hold to the one who holds the whole church together. Don't you be intimidated. Don't you let these people tell you that works and self righteousness and false humility and angel worship and special visions and special revelations have to be added to the sufficiency of Christ to bring you to spirituality. That's a lie that wants to dishonor Christ. That's right out of hell.

Now, let's look at the final form of Christ abuse in this passage, and I have called it asceticism...

III. Stop Abusing Christ Through Asceticism **(20-23)**

Let me read verses 20-22 again...

20 If you have died with Christ [x]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 [y]with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

You all know what asceticism is, you just may not know it by that name...

But a monk is someone who practices asceticism or a nun or anyone who pulls away from a normal life to live in isolation as devotions to God...

In some ways, it is similar to legalism because it has its own rules but the big difference is this....

Asceticism claims to get to God by intense self-denial...

Now, listen carefully....

Self-denial is a good thing...

Jesus even said, “Deny yourself and follow me.”

But when you add self-denial to the gospel and you stress that only those who pull out of the world and live in monasteries are the true spiritual elite...

You have added to the finished work of Jesus Christ...

Jesus denied himself His entire life, and when you are saved....

You are joined to Him....

That is what Paul is writing in verse 20...

If you have died with Christ and been joined to Him, why do you still think that there is more to gain by extreme self denial...

Think for a minute about Jesus....

Did he do all his ministry from a cave or live in a hut in the middle of nowhere?

Not at all...

He ministered in the midst of all kinds of sins, yet he kept Himself unstained by the world...

Extreme self denial is not the way to a higher spiritual experience...

Being content with what Christ has done on your behalf through the gospel is enough...

You don't need to move to an island or harm your body or reject every part of the world to win favor with God...

You have won favor with God by being united with Christ...

Therefore, reject false teachers who tell you to stop handling, tasting and touching things in life as a way to be right with God...

And simply hold fast to Christ...

Stop being intimidated by teachers who tell you that you need to live like a monk to be saved...

Stop being intimidated by men who tell you that all the world is evil and to be discarded...

And that you aren't a true believer unless you deny yourself all the time...

It's all a phony gospel and it is Christ Abuse..

Then look at verse 23...

“These are matters...”

What is Paul talking about here?

He is talking about these false teachings that we have looked at for the past few weeks...

These matters, -philosophy, legalism, mysticism, asceticism, all have the appearance of wisdom...

And this is the key to understanding it all...

For the immature Christian...

The Christian who has little understanding of Scripture....

All of these false teachings sound good...

I have heard people say things like....

I wish I was walking with God good enough to have some visions...

Or I wish I could walk that higher walk that I see so many others walking...

And I have heard pastors and teachers intimidate other believers with their own teaching on these things...

By speaking of their moments of touching the face
of God and seeing God and walking with God...

I hear it so often these days that it actually makes
my stomach hurt when I see it...

One of the most popular woman teachers in the
church today talks about her personal
communication with God and visions He gives
her....

And people eat it up hook, line and sinker...

And it ties my stomach in knots...

The truth of Scripture is this...

You need Christ and Christ alone to be in saving
relationship with God of this universe...

Your faith alone in Him is what saves and saves
completely...

Don't be lured away by the appearance of wisdom
that comes from people who talk of legalism or
mysticism...

You stick with Christ...

You get to know Him through the Word...

You grow to love Him...

You seek to communicate with Him in a consistent prayer life...

And you commit to obeying Him with your life...

Conclusion

That is the Christian life....

And it doesn't happen when you close your eyes and seek a vision..

It happens as you open your eyes and read the Word...

It doesn't happen as you pull yourself out of the world and deny yourself the good things of God...

IT happens as you enjoy freedom in Christ to live in this world but keep yourself unstained by it...

It doesn't happen as you try to elevate yourself to the worship of angels...

It happens as you lower yourself in prayer to a holy God, confess your sins, and seek to obey Him with your life...

The deeper spiritual life is not a product of being taken out of this world..

It is the product of doing the daily things that keep your mind on heaven but your feet on this earth...

Paul was trying to guide the Colossians back to the basics of Christian living...

And the basics aren't found on a far away planet or in keeping the rules or moving into a hut on a mountain...

The basics of salvation and the Christian life has always been centered on the person of Jesus Christ....

He is the head of all things....

And we need to hold on to Him daily...

And today, we get an opportunity to be reminded of how central Jesus Christ is to who we are as believers as we come to the Lord's Table...

And let me remind you of the purpose of the Lord's Supper...

It is done in remembrance of what Christ has done for us...

There is even a tendency at times in churches to make the Lord's Supper a mystical event....

Some people teach that the bread and juice are the actual body and blood of Christ...

And they slip into the error of mysticism when they do that...

Some churches teach that the Lord's Supper is all about self meditation as we prepare for it...

And that we concentrate on our worthiness to take part...

The Lord's Supper is not about self-concentration, it is about Savior concentration...

As we honor the Lord Jesus Christ...

The wafer and the juice that we will serve you in a moment is nothing magical or mystical...

They are simply symbols and representations of the the Lord's body and blood that he gave for us.

Preparing for the Lord's Supper is not trying to enter a higher plane....

It is determining if you are a believer and then determining if you are living in sin...

Because those are the only restrictions on the Lord's table...

The Bible says that no unbelievers can take part, and no one living in unrepentant sin can take part...

Again, examine yourself to determine if either of those is true of you, and if it is....

Either you repent and trust in Christ and get saved or you repent from your sin and then take part in the Lord's Supper...

But once that examination is over, the focus needs to move from you to the Lord...

Because at His table, He shares his glory with no other..

Jesus Christ is our head, and we are going to gather at His table to celebrate the completeness of what He has done for us...

We don't need to add man made rules to Christ...

We don't need to add a higher spiritual experience to Christ...

We don't need to add living as among to Christ...

We have Him, and He is all we need...

So, now let us go to His table to remember his goodness to us in dying in our place for our sins, and let us proclaim that truth to the world as we do

Let us pray. (Men come Down)