

Stop Christ Abuse, part 1

(Colossians 2:16-23)

(preached 4/24/16; Sunday AM)

Introduction

When I was 7 or 8 years old, we had a small family reunion of sorts in Whitmire..

At the reunion, I met 2 or 3 second cousins of mine from Charlotte...

Its a Sunday afternoon and we are looking for something to do, so I ask if they ride bikes...

They said yea we do, we even do a few bike tricks...

We are at my grandparents but I tell them I am going to run to my house and grab my bike and we can all ride and share...

They are a little excited, and ask me what kind it is...

I tell them it is yellow and black and has mag wheels and that it is the latest BMX bike.

They get all excited and I run home and come back with my bike.

When I get close, I see them start smiling...

Thinking they are about to brag on my bike behind those smiles, I ask them what are they smiling about?

They all get this smirk on their faces and tell me...

“That isn’t a BMX bike. It doesn’t even have a brand name like Mongoose or Diamond Back.”

It is just a bike from Kmart that is trying to copy a real bike...

Well, I still remember feeling like a fool that day.

They were from Charlotte.

I was from Whitmire.

They obviously knew their bikes, and I didn’t.

Guess what I did the next week?

I emptied out my savings of \$125, asked my dad to take me to Greenville and bought me a white BMX Diamond Back Viper...

And you know why I did that?

Because I was intimidated by my cousins...

Intimidation is the act of making someone feel inferior through word or action.

And long story short, my cousins had intimidated me about owning an inferior bike, so I set out to change.

Intimidation is a horrible thing.

I remember showing up at my first golf tournament with less than brand name clubs...

I was paired with two kids who had brand name clubs...

One of them asked me what kind of driver I had, and I flipped it over to reveal a cheap brand name...

Even though he didn't say a word, I was intimidated by my inferior equipment...

And it is a horrible feeling to say the least...

To be made to feel inferior is not the best of feelings in the world..

It makes you want to drop your head and run for cover...

For some, the church has become a place to be intimidated...

That was certainly happening in the church at Colossae in Paul's day...

The false teachers that were attacking Jesus as not being enough to save were also attacking his followers as not doing enough to be saved...

And they were going on the attack in a number of ways...

Paul mentioned one last week as we looked at how to walk in Christ by reminding the Colossians not to be led astray by the philosophies of men....

And though I didn't stress it last week, false teachers and even unbelievers try to intimidate us with their philosophies of life...

They label us as "uneducated" and "uninformed" because we only read the Bible...

Your children and grandchildren will feel this intimidation when they walk into the classrooms in high school and college...

Where professors will openly ridicule students who point to the Bible as their source of authority...

Their comments and questions will range from...

“Haven’t you been exposed to the great thinkers of history?”

“Do you think a 2000 year old book holds the secrets to all of life?”

“You are so simple minded and fundamental.”

And many students will give in to the intimidation, discard a biblical worldview, and buy into hundreds of empty man made philosophies...

All because they are intimidated by an unbelieving world who appears to be more sophisticated and intelligent...

However, the intimidation of philosophy is not the only way that delivers are made to feel inferior...

In fact, there are 3 other ways to intimidate believers that we will begin to look at this morning in Colossians 2:16-23...

And I do say “begin” because we wont get through this whole passage this morning...

The reason for that is two fold...

Number one, there is a great need for this teaching today because all 3 of these abuses of Christ are very much alive and well today...

But number two, these abuses are source of great irritation for your pastor...

I will just be very transparent with you this morning....

As a pastor and under shepherd of the the Lord Jesus Christ, these methods of intimidation really get under my skin when I see them in or around churches...

This is one of those passages where I need to keep my emotions in check because I see so much abuse of these practices today in the world...

And it saddens me, but it also frustrates me to no end because all 3 of these practices have one thing in common..

They all diminish the person of Jesus Christ and his sufficiency to save completely.

I have entitled this...

Stop Christ Abuse...

And that is exactly what these 3 practices are...

We will get a view of just one this morning but hear this...

These abuses insult the completeness, the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ...

So, let's look the first of 3 ways to abuse Jesus Christ this morning in Colossians 2:16-23....

The first way is found in Colossians 2:16-17...

I. Stop Abusing Christ through Legalism (16-17)

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.

The Colossians were under attack by the false teachers who were making them feel inferior for their simple faith in Christ...

And in chapter 2, God inspires Paul to get to the heart of the matter by reminding the Colossians that their simple child-like faith in Christ was enough...

And since it was enough, they needed to walk confidently in it..

And not be swayed by the empty philosophy and tradition of these false teachers...

But to walk in Christ because Jesus completes them..

Nothing is lacking in them that they need the special knowledge of the false teachers...

Nothing is lacking in them that they need the added good works that the the false teachers told them they needed...

They are ready for the Christian life by simply seeing their completeness in Christ...

By seeing how well equipped they are for the Christian walk...

And so in verse 16...

Paul simply repeats...

Therefore,...

And by that, he is simply saying, since you are complete in Christ and you have equipped for life by him....

That means something....

Therefore, since faith in Christ Jesus is enough, no one is to judge you in regard to food or drink or festival or new moon or a Sabbath.

Now before, we define all those things, let me simply say this...

One tactic of a false teacher is that he often sits in judgment on others..

Sometimes it is a simple shaking of the head or a clicking of the teeth, but false teachers essentially become judges of others spirituality.

Phrases like, “Wow, you should know better than that.”

Or, “I can’t believe that call yourself a Christian and don’t know that.”

Their aim is elevate themselves so that you will seek them out for their wisdom and superiority...

Paul says to that....

No way is a false teacher to be your judge on the matters that he listed...

In other words, you are complete in Christ, don’t let somebody come along and intimidate you with fancy teaching on things that you are or aren’t doing....

Jesus has made you whole and he has equipped you for walking in Him...

So, don’t let the judgment that these false teachers are trying to put on you go anywhere..

Now, what was the source of judgment that was happening in Colossae?

You see 5 judgments that were being passed on the believers at Colossae by the false teachers...

#1 was food...

The false teachers were telling the believers at Colossae to follow the dietary laws of the OT...

To stop eating this meat or that meat or stop eating this dish or that dish because God had prohibited that in the OT...

You still find that teaching today, and it goes something like this...

“If God forbid it in the OT, it must be forbidden today. Same God.”

Lots of people make that argument from Scripture, and yes God is the same God but that doesn't mean that everything we see in the OT applies today...

None of you brought a lamb to be sacrificed today, did you?

Well, certainly not...

And why not?

God prescribed sacrifices in the OT. Same God.

So, shouldn't we do them today?

Well, this gets back to the basics of Bible interpretation...

Yes, many principles of the OT carry forward to our day, but some have changed in the church because the NT changed them...

And one of them is food laws...

Peter tried to keep the OT food laws and God told to rise and eat even things forbidden in the OT because God had declared all food good in this age.

Yet, false teachers were coming to the Colossians and point fingers about what the people were eating...

No, no, no.

You can't eat that.

You need to be under the Law...

So put down that pork chop...

But Paul is writing to tell the Colossians that no one can no longer judge you for what you eat...

Because Jesus had fulfilled all the OT in his life...

He put a period on keeping the law...

We are complete in Jesus because he kept all the food laws on our behalf...

The same would be true for judgment over what people drank in Colossae...

It also applied to Jewish festivals that the false teachers were telling the people to keep and heaping loads of guilt on them because they didn't.

The new moon was the beginning of the month and in the OT, Jews brought a sacrifice to God to start their month out right...

False teachers were trying to impose this practice on the NT church as well...

The same was true of the Saturday Sabbath that Jews had observed for 1000s of years...

The false teachers were intimidating people into still observing the Sabbath in the church age...

Paul says no one can judge you for what you do on the Sabbath....

Unfortunately, some churches still impose the Sabbath on people and make judgments on them based on what they do on Sunday...

Even though Paul tells us here that no one is to judge you by a Sabbath day in the church age...

I need to tell you this but God probably worked on Sunday when he created the heavens and earth...

It was the first day of the week for the creation week of Genesis 1....

He actually rested on the 7th day which was a Saturday according to Jewish tradition...

Bottom line, we are not to make judgments on a person's spirituality based upon what they eat, drink, whether they observe Jewish festivals or the new moon sacrifice, or how what they do on the Sabbath, which would actually be Saturday....

Now, that may surprise you because all some of you may have been taught that these things tell us if people are Christians or not...

I used to ride down the road and see a man cutting his grass on Sunday and say to myself....

"He ain't saved. No Christian cuts their grass on Sunday."

Or I would see someone eating or drinking something, and I would make an immediate judgment on their salvation.

A Christian wouldn't ever eat or drink that.

There aint no way he is saved.

In some ways, the application of verse 16 to our life is don't act like a false teacher by judging the spirituality of a person by what you see on the outside alone.

Now, let me add a note here that is necessary anytime a passage like this is preached....

Are these verse saying that Christians have complete freedom in these things...

And the Bible would answer that question loud and clear in *1 Cor 10:23-24....*

23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his [i]neighbor.

We shouldn't allow a false teacher to judge us for what we do, but that does not mean that what we do isn't important...

Sometimes, we restrict our freedom to maintain our witness to our neighbor...

Now let me dwell here for a moment...

For example, I have freedom in Christ to eat and drink as I desire...

But my freedom is restricted by the example I set before the world..

I don't drink alcohol because there is a verse that says I can't drink it...

Now there are verses that prohibit drunkenness....

Drunkenness is a sin...

I don't drink alcohol for a number of reasons....

The primary one being the message it sends to my neighbor...

As a Christian, much less as a pastor, I never want to give license to people to take part in an activity is associated with horrible consequences....

Alcohol dulls your senses and affects your judgment...

Alcohol throws some people into a rage of anger...

Alcohol is simply illegal for some.

Alcohol leads to addiction for some and leads them to being enslaved by it, even to the point where they cannot care for their families...

The consequences of alcohol are far reaching, and why would I as a believer want to satisfy my thirst with a drink that could lead to disaster for others..

Though I have freedom to do it, the exercise of my freedom is not my highest priority in this world...

My highest priority in this world is to be a gospel witness to my neighbor...

Much of the same can be said for Sunday activities..

For churches and people who place the burden of a Sabbath day on their brothers and sisters in the Lord, they are acting as false teachers to them..

Not only is the Sabbath actually a Saturday and not a Sunday, the church is not bound by Sabbath laws...

Now, let me balance that with this statement...

Seeing Sunday as church day is fine and maybe even helpful to your family and your kids...

Sundays are different for our family not because we have to, but because we want to...

I want my kids going up and seeing the value of setting aside Sunday for going to church and enjoying the fellowship of other believers...

I want to teach them that nothing gets on the schedule ahead of church...

Though church attendance doesn't save them, very few things in our life have more importance than Sundays and even Wednesday nights to a lesser degree...

I never make people feel pressured about church attendance, but I also never encourage people to miss...

Church attendance and giving to the Lord are very similar....

Neither are required to be saved, but I rarely meet people who are saved who don't give and come to the church.

And place a priority on both in their family life....

And so the balance to what Paul is saying is this....

Don't let anyone judge your spirituality on outward action, but don't for minute think that outward actions are unimportant...

They don't save you, but they can reveal who is truly saved...

Now, why shouldn't Christians be judged solely on outward actions?

Verse 18....

Well all these things....

Food and drink restrictions...

Jewish festivals...

New moon sacrifices....

And the Sabbath....

Paul writes that all of these things were shadows of what was coming in Christ....

In other words, all of these things pointed to a greater reality that was coming....

Let me give you an example...

Let's say your wife gets pregnant and you go to the doctor and she gets an ultrasound that shows that little tiny baby...

Well, that picture is gold, and you treasure it and show it to everybody and maybe even frame it...

It is exciting to see...

But then the day comes when that baby is born, and the importance of that picture fades away...

It isn't that you throw it away but the reality of the actual baby in your arms is far greater than the picture...

It will eventually come off the fridge and be replaced by pictures of a 1, 2, or 3 month old...

Paul's point is this...

All of these 5 things in the OT were ultrasound pictures that pointed to the coming of Jesus...

But now that Jesus has come, these old shadows aren't important...

Let me you an example...

We have talked about this before, but the Jews celebrated the Passover festival...

It was a reminder to them of God's goodness in bringing them out of bondage in Egypt...

In God's deliverance of them, he sent plagues after plague on Egypt....

The final plague would destroy the first born sons in all the land of Egypt...

Yet, God provided a way for Israel to save their firstborn by killing a lamb and using the blood of the lamb to mark their doorways...

When the angel of death passed through Egypt, the blood of the Lamb would cause him to Passer those Jewish homes and spare their sons...

And so, to remember God's goodness to them, God told Israel to observe the Passover festival every year...

And as great as that festival was, it was a shadow of what God was going to do in Christ...

Who would come and die as a lamb for the entire world....

And those who repent and believe in Him would take his blood and smear it over their lives to be saved from the angel of death when He came to their home..

Therefore, the Passover festival was just an ultrasound pic of the greater reality of Jesus being born and then coming into the world to die as the ultimate Lamb of God...

The festival was a shadow of a greater reality...

And Paul is simply reminding the Colossians of that glorious truth....

Don't let anybody judge you for not celebrating a shadow of what is called the Passover festival....

You have Christ in all his fulness of glory....

Don't be intimidated by someone who tells you you need to be celebrating a festival that was a shadow....

You have Jesus; the festival don't even compare...

That would be like somebody telling a new mom...

You need to take your newborn out of the crib and lay them on the floor and put that ultrasound picture in the crib...

I mean that is ridiculous right....

The ultrasound picture is on a different planet than the actual baby...

And the festival is on a different planet than the Lord Jesus Christ to whom it pointed...

The same is true for those false teachers who were trying to push the Colossians back to the food and drink laws or the new moon sacrifice or Sabbath laws...

They were leading the people to honor the picture over the person of Christ...

Do you know why we don't gather on the night of the new moon and offer a sacrifice to God?

Because the ultimate Sacrifice was made once and for all on a hill outside of Jerusalem....

Jesus' death was the central sacrifice in all of human history....

Even the sacrifices of millions of lambs and birds and bulls throughout the OT were but a drop in the ocean of the sacrifice on Calvary...

They only covered the sins of the ones offering them for a little while....

Jesus forgave the sins of his people for eternity....

We don't observe a new moon sacrifice, we hold tight to the sacrifice of our Messiah...

The same applies to the idea of the Sabbath...

On the final day of creation week, God rested...

And Jews had set aside, Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown as their Sabbath.

God's instructions about the Sabbath were simple in the book of Exodus...

Work six days, but you shall not do any work on the seventh day....

It was made for man to enjoy rest from his labors as a grace of God...

But it was also a shadow of Christ as well..

Christ is our Sabbath...

He provides rest from us attempting to be saved through our good works....

But He is also the gateway to eternal rest in heaven with the Lord...

Now that doesn't mean that heaven is a place of laying around..

The Bible paints a much different picture....

But heaven will be rest in the sense of fighting against sin that characterizes us as believers even after salvation...

Jesus Christ is our Sabbath, so why would anyone impose Sabbath restrictions on people when the true Sabbath has come in the person of Jesus?

When we try to make others rest on a certain day of the week, we abuse the truth that Jesus has already bought the best rest a man or woman can find...

Trying to find rest in a restless world is impossible.

I don't care what day of the week it is..

However, for those in Christ, we can find rest in the most restless environments imaginable..and why is that?

When the worst thing that can happen to you is to die and go to be with the Lord, what can this world really do to take away your rest?

And the answer is nothing...

Those in Christ sleep well at night because Jesus is our Sabbath...

Conclusion

Well, verses 16-17 are just one way that Christ is abused by false teachers and even well meaning Christians at times...

We will have to wait to next week to get the other two ways, but I assure they are just as frustrating and even more common today...

However, for today, know this...

Jesus Christ is abused by legalism, which says salvation comes through Christ AND following my man made rules...

Rules like what you can eat or drink....

What you need to celebrate or sacrifice and what you do on certain days of the week...

It could also be called ritualism because so many people think you get to God by a certain formula of Jesus plus these 5 east steps of diet, Sabbath, festival, and sacrifice...

But regardless of what you call it, this Christ abuse needs to stop for this simple reason...

Adding to Christ ultimately subtracts from Him...

When people need to believe in Christ and then only eat certain foods, Christ is less than Who He truly is.

When people need to believe in Christ and follow rules for a certain day of the week, Christ is less than who HE truly is.

When people need to need believe in Christ, and then keep man made rules, Christ is less than Who HE is...

And the shame is that people who love legalism think they are making Jesus bigger in the world, but the reality is that they are making Him much smaller...

If Christ alone is not enough, you have picked the wrong Christ or you have simply made up one to sit your needs...

The application of us is this....

Don't be one who judges according to a man made standard...

But also, dont be intimidated by anyone who tries to impose their man made rules on you as well...

They certainly can apply the commands of Scripture to you, but they are not allowed to go beyond it as a

way to intimidate you and make you question the sureness of your salvation in Christ alone...

There is one final application as well...

If you are someone who has been reluctant to come to Christ because you won't be able to keep the rules...

Let me tell you this...

Jesus kept the rules for you, and if you repent of your sins and trust in Him, you will have a Savior whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light...

Sure, you will need to obey Him, but the wonder of true repentance and faith in Christ is this....

You get equipped to obey him with a new heart and access to the wisdom of God when it comes to living in the world...

Jesus is sufficient to save you as you are and where you sit...

No matter if you came in after engaging in sin this morning or all week or all year...

Jesus + Keeping the Rules does equal Salvation...

Salvation is Jesus + Nothing = Everything...

Don't be intimidated by what you think the rules of Christianity are...

Be encouraged that all you need to do this morning is lay down your sins and come to Christ...

I pray you will do that today...

Let us pray...