

Fighting Fire with Gasoline

Colossians 2:16-23; Coast Community Church's Pastor's Class; Earl Miles; November 10, 2013

'You can't fight sin with sin.'

Pursuing God and fighting sin is a good thing. But the way we do this is not optional. We can actually stoke the fires of sin with our approach to fighting sin if the way we fight dishonors the Lord Jesus and the gospel. We can try to fight a fire with gasoline but it will only have the appearance of fighting and instead will be fueling the flame. Paul warns against this in this fascinating passage.

What fuels sin rather than fights sin?

But are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:23, NASB)

A wisdom with no true value—they in reality result in fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:23 – NET)

1. Playing God in other peoples' lives.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day ... in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men (Colossians 1:16, 22)

Is trying to 'dictate' what people do a problem in the church? This shows up in the problem of authoritarianism among church leaders and in the problem of church members trying to control other church members choices in areas of freedom. Do we help people by requiring of them what God doesn't require?

2. Focusing on 'shadows' instead of 'substance.'

Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:17)

Is there much 'shadow' worship in our day? The 'shadows' Paul is referring to are the Old Testament ritual requirements that pointed to Christ and were fulfilled in the life and death of Christ. Some have criticized the Messianic Judaism Movement along these lines. Calvin applied this to the Roman Catholic Church in his day. Is there value in doing something that no longer serves a higher purpose?

3. Depending on self-denial in place of self-sacrifice (love).

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement ... If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit to decrees such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! ... severe treatment of the body (Colossians 2:18, 20, 23)

When is self-denial a bad thing? We need to see the difference between self-denial and love, as well as how they are related. Will I become more loving by simply focusing on myself even if it is in self-denial?

4. Worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

By delighting in ... the worship of the angels (Colossians 2:18)

What things do 'spiritual' people worship today? The fundamental problem we all deal with every day is the temptation to worship (ie, esteem most highly and look to for ultimate help and happiness) what God has created rather than God Himself. Can we fight sin against God by replacing the worship of God with something else?

5. Trading Scripture for subjective experience.

Taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind ... These matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion (Colossians 2:18, 23)

Is there a problem with how people hear God today? Any practice of 'hearing God' that replaces the written Word of God as the authority for what we are to believe and do in obedience to God is not from God. Can I grow in faithfulness to God's Word by elevating something else above God's Word?

6. Minimizing the Person and work of Christ.

And not holding fast to the Head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (Colossians 2:19)

Is there such a thing as growth that isn't from God? All growth is not equal. And the growth that is from God, true and lasting growth that glorifies God, will exalt His Son! Can I become more like Jesus by minimizing who Jesus is and what He did for me and my daily dependence on Him?

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Is this idea true in our everyday world in other ways?

- Can you fight overeating by eating?
- Can you fight watching TV by watching TV?
- Can you fight eating peanut butter sandwiches by eating peanut butter sandwiches?
- Can you fight sleeping by sleeping?
- Can you fight fire with a flammable liquid like gasoline?

Some things we may overuse and give up because of boredom or distaste.

But this isn't the case with flammable liquids and fire or sin!

Pursuing God and fighting sin is a good thing. But the way we do this is not optional. We can actually stoke the fires of sin with our approach to fighting sin if the way we fight dishonors the Lord Jesus and the gospel. We can try to fight a fire with gasoline but it will only have the appearance of fighting and instead will be fueling the flame. Paul warns against this in this fascinating passage.

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This shows up in the problem of authoritarianism among church leaders and in the problem of church members trying to control other church members choices in areas of freedom.

Authoritarianism in The Church Steve Martin

The Problem

A tragic and dangerous trend can be observed in some contemporary evangelical churches. While standing against the lawlessness and anti-authority mood of this generation, some conservative, Bible-believing churches have drifted into deadly authoritarian tendencies. This sad phenomenon is increasingly becoming publicized and well-documented (see suggested reading list at the end of this article).

Why is this happening? What kind of attitudes engender authoritarianism in a church? Whose fault is it? What can be done about it?

Before proceeding any farther, some definition is in order. For the purposes of this article, "authoritarianism" is defined as an abuse of the authority given by Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit and revealed in God's Word which the office holders of the local churches are to exercise. It has been my observation that this abuse of authority usually takes on one or both of the following forms.

First, the sin of authoritarianism exists when pastors and other office holders speak with binding authority where God Himself has not spoken in His written Word. If God has not pronounced on the subject, it is a usurpation of the Creator. A pastor may rightly proclaim "Thus saith the Lord" when preaching against idolatry, adultery, greed, marrying an unbeliever or any other violation of the express commands of God. That is his duty and God help the man who "cuts and trims" texts to speak smooth words to his flock. But the pastor has no warrant from Christ to speak with the binding authority of God's *imprimatur* to issues upon which the written word of God is silent. Second, the sin of authoritarianism exists when pastors and other office holders usurp the Lordship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people by deciding the will of God for them where Scripture is silent. Church officers may not declare the will of God for God's people on such choices as one's career, choice of Christian mate, choice of lawful employment, place of living, schooling they attend, etc. without becoming surrogate deities. Flocks of sheep with paralyzed decision-making faculties reveal exposure to shepherds who played God with them. Thus the sinful tendency revealed in John Milton's wry observation ("New presbyter is but old priest writ large") returns to haunt churches. And even more sadly, some idol-worshipping sheep love it to be so.

What are some teachings/commandments of men that people hold on to today?

God helps those who help themselves. (see Matthew 15)

'When persons have once taken upon them to tyrannize over men's souls, there is no end of new laws being daily added to old ones and new enactments starting up from time to time.' – Calvin

‘Ten Commandments for Standers in the Gap for God’

Can I become more obedient to God by focusing on what God has not commanded me to obey?

Rudiments of the world = 1,2,3 or A,B,Cs of worldly viewpoints:

The key to happiness is the worship of the creation (self-worship). Worship what you see!

The key to having happiness is keeping rule-keeping (self-righteousness). Earn what you want!

The key to rule-keeping is coming to my own conclusions (self-determination). Make up your own mind! Or Do your own thing!

Do we help people by requiring of them what God doesn't require?

2. Focusing on 'shadows' instead of 'substance.'

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(Colossians 2:17)*

Is there much 'shadow' worship in our day?

The 'shadows' Paul is referring to are the Old Testament ritual requirements that pointed to Christ and were fulfilled in the life and death of Christ. Some have criticized the Messianic Judaism Movement along these lines. Calvin applied this to the Roman Catholic Church in his day.

Messianic Judaism Movement:

‘So, he is right that:

- 1) Messianic Jews are ethno-centric to a fault
- 2) Such congregations attract many "Gentiles"
- 3) Leadership tends to be kept among "Jewish" members
- 4) they express joyful praise, dance, and worship with an ethnic flavor
- 5) There is a tendency to keep all speakers on Jewish themes; all performers Messianic
- 6) Confusion exists over "the Law" and the New Covenant: how much tradition should be practiced?
- 7) Messianics do NOT want to be called "Christians"
- 8) Ethnic identity seems to be the primary defining point among the members, with Jesus second, and the wider Church absent

- 9) They can express an Us and Them attitude against the Church
- 10) They appeal to Christians because they embrace Jesus and the faith's Jewish roots

'He points out how some groups divide based upon Jewish and Gentile heritage, and this is of course wrong, but just because in his experience some groups do this by no means characterizes the entire movement. He points out that some believers felt peer pressure to keep a kosher diet, but then again does this type of scenario happen in other groups as well?

(comments on book on Messianic Judaism by Stan Telchin: *Messianic Judaism is NOT Christianity – A Loving Call to Unity*)

'In Popery you would scarcely find any other holiness, than what consists in little observances of corruptible things.' - Calvin

Is there value in doing something that no longer serves a higher purpose?

3. Depending on self-denial in place of self-sacrifice (love).

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement ... If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit to decrees such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! ... severe treatment of the body (Colossians 2:18, 20, 23)

When is self-denial a bad thing?

We need to see the difference between self-denial and love, as well as how they are related.

C.S. Lewis

'If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to

desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.' – C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

How do people try to fight sin through severe treatment of their bodies?

Fasting?

...that as a young monk in Erfurt Luther was obsessed with atoning for his sins and went to ridiculous lengths to punish himself. This ranged from extreme self-denial and self-flagellation. One night, at the height of winter, he was found lying in the snow and had to be carried back inside the convent. (welcometohosanna.com)

Can I change a sinful heart by inflicting pain and discomfort on my physical body?

Will I become more loving by simply focusing on myself even if it is in self-denial?

4. Worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

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What things do 'spiritual' people worship today?

Opus Angelorum

'The Vatican has issued a warning to bishops around the world to monitor a Catholic sect founded by an Austrian housewife which promotes devotion to angels. Opus Sanctorum Angelorum (The Work of the Holy Angels) was founded by an Innsbruck housewife, Gabriele Bitterlich, in 1949. Bitterlich became obsessed with angels and wrote extensively about their fight against demons. Among her teachings were the beliefs that women who suffered a miscarriage had been attacked by demons, and that journalists and communists were held in special regard by these evil spirits. She believed that the animals most susceptible to demonic possession were "most grey, spotted and black cats, pigs, smooth haired dogs, flies and rats". Bitterlich taught that the faithful could only protect themselves from these demons by worshipping angels. After conducting two reports, the prominent Catholic theologian Johann Auer said he believed Bitterlich's beliefs were a result of "paranoid schizophrenia". The sect established itself in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Brazil and Portugal and today counts between 80 and 100 priests

and around 400 nuns among its members. Opus Angelorum eventually attracted the concern of the Vatican and in 1992, after more than a decade of investigations, the sect was brought into the fold of mainstream Catholicism. In return for recognition, followers of Opus Angelorum, while promoting devotion to angels, had to undertake to follow the doctrine of the Catholic Church. "In particular," the Vatican stated, "the members were not to make use of the 'names' of angels derived from the alleged private revelations attributed to Gabriele Bitterlich and they were not to teach, spread or make use of the theories originating from these alleged revelations." The assimilation of Opus Angelorum into the mainstream - and the purging of heretical ideology - appeared to have been successful, with the Vatican saying that bishops could now welcome the movement into their Dioceses. But, yesterday, Cardinal Levada, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - the Vatican office responsible for safeguarding Catholic morals - issued a warning that some priests who have left the sect are seeking to "restore what, according to them, would be the 'authentic Opus Angelorum'". The Cardinal said these priests were circulating "very discrete propaganda" which falsely suggested that the Church was happy about their "wayward movement". (theweek.co.uk)

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Is there a problem with how people hear God today?

‘Jesus Culture’/Strange Fire conference

“I have one [of these encounters with Jesus/the Father] and live off of it until the next one” – how she begins the relating of the vision she had:

Worship leader Kim Walker-Smith claims to have had a vision of Jesus, in which she was physically cuddled in his arms as he told her how much he loved her. Here is a transcript of her encounter with Jesus:

‘So, I had this encounter, all the sudden I see Jesus standing in front of me and He’s reaching for me like this (gestures)—like He wants me to come to Him. And, I was terrified. I—I felt like I couldn’t go to where He was. I felt—I felt ashamed, I felt scared, I felt like I didn’t deserve to be close to Him. I couldn’t even look Him in the face. And

Jesus (laughs) is completely irresistible. I always say [that] there are three things [in my life] that are completely irresistible to me. One is, of course, Jesus. Number two is my husband. And number three is chocolate (laughs, audience laughs); completely irresistible.

Anyways, (pause) so, irresistible, I go to Jesus, I fall in His arms. And as I'm lying in His arms, I'm still feeling kind of afraid to really even look at Him. All the sudden this thought comes into my mind, and I know this is not my thought. I would never, ever, ever in a million, trillion years think this; and I think, "I need to ask Him two questions." I need to ask Him, "How much do You love me; and what were You thinking when You created me?" And as this thought comes into my mind, I'm thinking, "No way! I am not asking those questions." Now, here's what you need to know about me, and why I'm so afraid to ask those questions.' But she plucks up the courage and asks Jesus how much he loves her

'So Jesus, His arms are like stretching out forever and ever, and I'm looking and looking and I can't see the ends. I can't see where it's ending; and he starts laughing, and he goes, "I love you this much ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" And He's laughing hysterically. (audience laughs) And then, I start laughing. I'm cracking up. I'm—I'm suddenly like—I'm—I'm becoming like so full of joy; and I'm just like, "What?! You love me that much?!" I can't even see the ends—it's going on forever and ever and ever. Oh my goodness, I can't—"You love me that much?"' (Kim Walker-Smith of Jesus Culture band, Redding, CA)

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Is there such a thing as growth that isn't from God?

All growth is not equal. And the growth that is from God, true and lasting growth that glorifies God, will exalt His Son!

'This Paul speaks of as the increase of God, by which he means that it is not every increase that is approved by God, but only that which has a relation to the Head.' - Calvin

'The American Religious Identification Survey gives Wicca an average annual growth of 143% for the period 1990 to 2001 (from 8,000 to 134,000 – U.S. data / similar for

Canada & Australia). According to The Statesman Anne Elizabeth Wynn claims “The two most recent American Religious Identification Surveys declare Wicca, one form of paganism, as the fastest growing spiritual identification in America“. (Michael Synder, thetruthwins.com)

What ‘made up religions’ are there?

There Are Only Two Religions
February 27, 2012 by Tim Challies

There are only two religions, said the Apostle Paul – we worship and serve the creature or the Creator. There are no other options. At truthXchange, we call the worship of the creature “One-ism” and the worship of the Creator “Two-ism.” In One-ism, all is one. We worship and serve creation as divine. All distinctions must be eliminated. Though enlightenment, we discover that we also are divine. In Two-ism, all is two. We worship and serve the eternal, personal Creator of all things. God alone is divine and is distinct from His creation, yet through His son, Jesus, He is in loving communion with it. These terms evolved through the research and writing of Dr. Peter Jones, who came back to the States in 1991, after teaching at a French seminary for seventeen years under Mission to the World (PCA). When Dr. Jones arrived in California to take up a New Testament teaching position at Westminster Seminary, he was shocked to find that although the US culture was still very spiritual, it had basically changed religions—from a generally Two-ist position, to a generally One-ist position. To understand the change, Dr. Jones began to analyze books written by self-professed pagans and to attend conferences where academic pagan leaders and thinkers laid out their beliefs and plans for society. Eleven years and several books later, he decided to devote himself full-time to informing and alerting the church concerning the false teachers of our age, and equipping Christians to share the gospel in a post-secular culture.

Can I honor God by worshiping Him and pursuing Him in the way that I want to?

‘For it happens, as Augustine elegantly writes to Paulinus, by wonderful means, as to the soul of man, that it is more puffed up from a false humility than if it were openly proud.’
- Calvin

Can I become more like Jesus by minimizing who Jesus is and what He did for me and my daily dependence on Him?

Can you really fight sin in such a way that you only fuel it? (fighting fire with gasoline)

Psychology of self-esteem (fighting pride with pride)

What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women:

"In fact, low self-esteem is a threat to the entire human family, affecting children, adolescents, the elderly, all socioeconomic levels of society, and each race and ethnic culture." (Dr. James Dobson)

Can I expect to walk wisely in God's eyes if I am embracing the 'spiritual wisdom' of a world in rebellion against God?

What is the right way to fight sin?

By holding on to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ!

What does it mean to hold on the Head? (Colossians 3-4)

Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and humility achieved by an unsparing treatment of the body—a wisdom with no true value—they in reality result in fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:23 – NET)

Remember:

'You can't fight sin with sin.'

- In your time alone with God (Colossians 3:16; 4:2)
- In your family relationships (Colossians 3:8; James 1:19-20)
- In your Church (Colossians 3:13)
- In your workplace (Colossians 3:22)
- In your world (Colossians 4:6)

