

Paul's Examples: Root and Fruit (Colossians 2:16-19)

1 I. Introduction

A. This morning we are continuing in Colossians looking at Colossians 2:16-19

1. But, again, before we start, I want to remember what Colossians is about and how Colossians is organized
- 1.2. So, we'll start with our purpose statement for Colossians: Colossians calls us to see how truly glorious Jesus is and to root all of our hope in Him knowing that He is true wisdom to meet our every need. This will prevent us from instead pursuing the hopes and purposes of this world and being captured by worldly wisdom.
- 1.3. And the outline we're Colossians, we are looking at Colossians in four parts:
 - 1 a. Rooted in the Gospel (~ chapter 1)
 - 1 b. Refusing Worldly Wisdom (~ chapter 2)
 - 1 c. Renewed in Christ (~ chapter 3)
 - 1 d. Relational Truth (~ chapter 4)

1 B. Last week we started the second section of Colossians, Refusing Worldly Wisdom

- 1.1. We saw that Paul's main concern was that the Colossians were in danger of being captured by worldly philosophy - arguments that might sound good but ultimately were rooted in human traditions or the elements of this world and weren't rooted in Christ
2. And this was a huge danger, one that threatened to carry them off from Christ, to carry them off as spoils of war, so Paul emphatically warns them against it
3. And then Paul gave them a glorious reason why they didn't need to be enticed by the wisdom of this world - because they have everything they need in Christ
4. They are completely filled in Christ, they are completely cleansed in Christ, they are completely alive in Christ, they are completely forgiven in Christ, they are completely victorious in Christ - the world doesn't have anything more to offer
5. So we ended last week with the question: is everything in my life according to Christ? Are my principles and passions according to Christ or rooted in the world? Are the things I'm devoted to and the distinctives that I follow, are they according to Christ or in line with the world? Am I in danger of being captured, or am I refusing worldly wisdom?

C. As we go on this week, we're going to continue thinking about that question: is everything in my life according to Christ?

- 1.1. In verses 16-19, Paul is going to very helpfully give some examples of things that could be worldly wisdom in our lives and demonstrate how to identify them and combat them
2. In some ways the examples that Paul gives are very far away from us, things that generally we aren't tempted by anymore - following Jewish festivals and new moons, animism and angel worship, etc.
3. But, on the other hand, the ideas at the roots of these things are still very active in the world around us and we can see many comparable things - rules about food, honoring days, listening to extra-biblical wisdom - so these examples are powerful and help us understand how to diagnose and combat worldly wisdom
4. And, as we should expect, the way Paul identifies and combats worldly wisdom is by taking it back to Christ - how are these things according to Christ? Are these things according to Christ?

D. Let's read Colossians 2:16-19

- 2.1. You can follow along in your Bibles, or I have the text up on the screen this morning

2 E. Proposition: We can identify worldly wisdom by those things that aren't flowing from Christ and flowing to Christ, so identify how this idea came from Christ and how it is pushing you towards Christ, both in theory and in practice.

- 1.1. Don't substitute shadows for substance
- 1.2. Don't substitute novelty for knowledge
- 1.3. Instead, hold fast to the head

1 II. Don't Substitute Shadows for Substance

1 A. We'll start with verses 16-17 this morning (read)

1. Paul's first set of examples seem to have to do with Jewish law and how it applies to the believer
2. It's a little hard to determine exactly what Paul is referencing here, because he doesn't describe the actual arguments very much, but it seems that some teachers in Colossae were teaching that there was wisdom in following these Old Testament laws - you could be a Christian without them, but following them added to your experience of salvation
3. I say this, because this passage doesn't sound like the parallel passage in Galatians where Paul is very upset that some of them follow days and years and are bound to foods - in Galatia these things had been tied up into the gospel, but in Colossae Paul is less harsh and perhaps it reflects less integration into the core of the gospel
4. Paul still, obviously, considers them dangerous and warns against them but not with the harshness of Galatians - so let's try to tease these examples apart and see what we're supposed to learn from them

1 B. Paul starts by saying, "let no one pass judgment on you"

1. One of the first things we need to do to understand this passage is take it to other New Testament passages that talk about food and day regulations and try to understand how this admonition fits together with Paul's other teachings
 - 2 a. So we could go to Romans 14 which sounds a lot like Colossians 2, Romans 14:2-6 - *One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. - Paul doesn't want us passing judgment on one another in these issues because we're all seeking Christ together*
 - 2 b. On the other hand, Paul reacts with much more fervor in Galatians 4:9-11 - *But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. - Paul is worried that the Galatians are losing the gospel by binding themselves to rules about things like days and food, again in I Timothy 4:1-3 - *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.**
 - 2 c. And, on yet another hand, Paul reacts in the opposite manner toward the Corinthians in I Corinthians 8:8-13 - *Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. - Paul admonishes them for being too free about the food they eat*
 - d. As we consider each of these different teachings, we need to do some synthesis - what is Paul trying to say?
- 3 2. I think a good summary of Paul's teaching here is that you can have too much freedom or too much regulation
 - 1 a. The Galatians focused on rules, they started making rules about what Christian's could and could not eat - to be a Christian meant you had to bind yourself to Jewish laws about food and Jewish festivals
 - 1 b. The Corinthians, on the other hand, rejected any concept of rules - they had so much freedom they could participate in demon worship and eat at their tables because food didn't really mean anything
 - 1 c. And both things were dangerous and wrong - demanding too much freedom or too much regulation in any area of life is dangerous - but there's a lot of ground in the middle where we can have different positions without pursuing too much freedom or too much regulation, and there in the middle we should not judge each other
 - d. And I think this is where the Colossians found themselves right now, their church was well-ordered, not given to foolish freedoms nor pursuing excessive rules, but there were some in their midst that were suggesting that these things might be good to follow, looking down on those who didn't, starting to pass judgment on them
 - e. So Paul says, "don't let anyone pass judgment on you" - don't listen to them, you aren't bound by these things
 - f. But how do we tell if we have too much freedom or regulation? How can we know if we're in the middle or at one extreme? When should we resolve not to pass judgment on others and refuse others' judgment against us, and when should we worry that the gospel is being compromised? How do we balance Galatians, Colossians and Corinthians against each other?

2 C. And that's what Paul talks about next - there are shadows and there is substance

1. I think Paul carefully chose these Jewish laws as examples because they really call us to think about what things are required of us - why did God make these laws in the first place.
2. One way of understanding this is to ask the question, is food important in and of itself? Are days important in and of themselves? Paul's answer would be no - food and days were shadows, they were pointing forward to something, their importance didn't lie in themselves but in what they pointed to
 - a. Even God's rules about foods and days were not important in and of themselves, God designed them to point forward to Christ - they were designed to help those before Christ understand and pursue their savior in faith
- 2 1 b. Hebrews calls us to see the shadow character of the Old Testament laws clearly in Hebrews 8:1-6 - *Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. - so the author finishes up in Hebrews 10:1 - For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities,*
 - 1 c. The laws of God weren't an end to themselves, they were a means to an end, a pointer to Christ - but if that's true, then when we have Christ, these things don't bind us anymore, they are nothing on their own
 - 2 d. To pursue these things in faith before the revelation of Christ was to be pursuing a savior that was yet to be revealed, the mystery of the gospel
 - 2 e. But to pursue these things after Christ is to turn away from what has been revealed, to love the rules rather than the substance the rules were pointing to
3. So Paul calls us to see that these were shadows of things to come, but the substance is Christ
 - a. So we don't need to be pursuing such things nor do we need to be judged by those that do because we have the fullness, the substance and not merely the shadow
 - b. Paul's calling us to weigh to options and to pursue the better one - do Old Testament rules and regulations bring you more benefit, or Jesus Christ? Which are you going to dedicate yourself to?
4. And these Old Testament rules and regulations become an excellent example for us
 - a. These things rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures should be close to the believer's heart - they were the very words of God meant to reveal Christ - and it would be easy to make a plausible argument that we should follow these rules, that binding ourselves to these things would add to our experience of God
 - b. But, if even God's rules were serving a greater purpose and have now been set aside in order that we might grasp Christ directly, that we might grasp substance and not shadow - then could any rule made by men bind us? If God's rules for Israel are not binding to us, we need not submit ourselves to anyone's judgment.

D. So we could pull out a question that could be applied to any question in life: am I pursuing Christ or something else?

1. That's Paul's burden here - those who were judging each other, calling them to bind their lives to these rules and regulations, their focus wasn't pursuing Christ, they were pursuing rules, they were pursuing food, pursuing days - they valued shadow over substance
2. And we can bring that question to any situation in life - am I doing this because I want to pursue Christ and how is it helping me to pursue Christ? Is the end result of this thing that I am more satisfied in Christ, that I am renouncing all things in favor of Christ? Or is the end result that I am distracted from Christ and pursuing something else?
3. That's a question we can take to all of life - what is the fruit of this thing? Where is it leading me to? I hope the answer in all of life is that we are pursuing Christ! And if we are pursuing Christ, then we don't need to pass judgment on one another and we don't need to listen to the judgment of those who do
- 1 2 4. And we should apply this to the situations Paul talks about - I don't think it's mere coincidence that Paul discusses things that still are discussed in our day. Do we need to follow rules about food? Are their rules that I can follow about food that will make me and my family more godly? How should I interact with holidays? Am I bound by rules and regulations not to observe a day or do I have so much freedom that I can pursue it in the way the world does?
5. **Derrek/Sabbath example** - are we pursuing our position or pursuing Christ? And isn't it glorious that in pursuing Christ together, we are pursuing each other. We can "agree to disagree" because this isn't our axis, our axis is Christ. As long as your axis is Christ, then we should be in agreement with each other - the problem comes when your axis isn't Christ.
6. So where is your axis? Where are the passions and positions of your life leading? Examine and make sure it is Christ! No other pursuit is worth it. At their best, other pursuits are merely shadows. And pursuing shadows is running from Christ, pursuing shadows breaks Christian fellowship, pursuing shadows is mere emptiness. Pursue Christ!

2 E. Kid's Question: What is Paul's first helpful question? Is this helping me love Jesus?

1 III. Don't Substitute Novelty for Knowledge

1 A. For our next point we're going to continue on into verse 18 (read)

1. Paul's second set of examples seems to be novel religious practices
2. Some teachers were calling believers to asceticism - religiously depriving yourself of something - as a way to be a better, wiser Christian
3. Other teachers were calling believers to understand the spiritual realm more fully - to understand and revere the hierarchy of angels and principalities and powers - to find more fulfillment as a Christian
4. Others held out new revelation from God - they were wiser believers that were filled with visions and called other believers to follow their visions - I and my visions can lead you to God in a better way

1 B. And Paul addresses these arguments saying, "Let no one disqualify you"

1. I mentioned this briefly on Wednesday for those of you who were there - but the Greek word translated 'disqualify' in the ESV is a word that means to umpire or to arbitrate - someone who can determine who wins and who loses
 - a. So we need to think about the examples that Paul is holding up here in the second set - these examples are somewhat different than the first set and the first thing that stands out is that none of these were commanded in Scripture
 - b. The first set of examples dealt with Old Testament laws, this second set deals with new ideas - these things are rooted in visions, in new knowledge, in someone's good ideas about how to be a better Christian, how to lead a better life
 - c. The teachers were 'puffed up' with themselves, in their own minds they knew what God wanted and they wanted everyone else to know what he wanted, they wanted everyone to follow their way
 - d. And their ideas sounded good, they sounded very religious - giving up things to demonstrate your devotion, revering the angelic powers, receiving communication from God
 - e. But to listen to those who have new ideas, new visions, a better revelation from God is to let someone else umpire your salvation - someone else is claiming to have new and better knowledge of what God wants
 - f. These teachers believed they were better Christians than other believers, that they led better lives because they had these new and better practices - if only you would listen to them, you'd know what God wants
2. Paul is saying - don't let other people mediate your salvation because they think they have better knowledge than you
 - a. No matter how religious or how godly their novel teaching sounds, they can't bind you with it
 - b. Whether they are calling for false humility and restrictions on things God has given us to use and enjoy or whether they are encouraging you to find mystic revelation and touch the spirit world, you need not follow any of them
 - c. No one else needs to arbitrate your salvation and you don't need to bow down to rules made by men - no one has special knowledge that can make you wiser, that can direct your life
 - d. But how do we distinguish between rules made by men and listening to a godly leader who is truly calling us to wisdom?
 - e. Because the danger here is that we would hear Paul's warning and throw off all teaching and rejecting all avenues of authority in Christ, but that would be a terrible fallacy in the other direction - there are good and godly authorities appointed under Christ that we should listen to and Scripture says even obey - but how do we distinguish between godly authority and rules made by men?
 - f. We don't need our salvation umpired by someone else's supposed knowledge, but that doesn't mean we don't need to listen to and respect Christ-appointed authority - but how do we do this? How do we distinguish these?

C. And that's where Paul brings us at the beginning of verse 19

1. He describes these teachers as teaching these novel and spiritual sounding doctrines that were merely man-made rules and religion - making themselves feel better in their supposed wisdom
1. But in verse 19, he contrasts their attitude with the correct attitude - they were going on about their own self-made religion instead of 'holding fast to the Head'
3. Paul is saying, these teachings are flowing from people and not from Christ - they revel in their visions but their teachings fail to make much of Christ
4. These teachings don't find their root in Christ as revealed in the Word of Christ, the Scriptures, their root is in mere men who want to make much of themselves
5. So that's the massive difference between a godly, Christ-appointed authority, like an elder or a husband, and someone who is merely trying to arbitrate your salvation with his superior knowledge
6. The godly authority will take massive pains to state exactly what Scripture states and to bind your conscience to those things that Scripture binds your conscience to, and because of that any teaching or doctrine or regulation or rule or wisdom that they hold out will be clearly tied to Christ in Scripture
7. The godly teacher will always be quick and willing to show you how this practice is taught by Christ and why this practice helps you represent Christ well - he will be making much of Christ - drawing his wisdom from Christ
8. The puffed up teacher will fail to take you back to Scripture or will significantly misinterpret Scripture in a way that obscures Christ - he won't be making much of Christ, he'll be making much of his own wisdom - his teaching won't be rooted in Christ, it will be rooted in himself

D. So we could pull out a question that could be applied to any question in life: Is this rooted in Christ or something else?

1. That's Paul's message here - there were teachers 'disqualifying' those who didn't listen to their exalted wisdom - but Paul wants them to see that these teachers were making much of themselves and not holding fast to Christ
2. Their teaching was rooted in men and not in Christ - Paul wants them and us to follow godly authorities but not mere rules made by men - so when someone tells you something, think carefully about whether they are rooting that in Christ - how is this flowing from Christ through Scripture to us?

2 E. Kid's Question: What is Paul's second helpful question? Is this teaching coming from Jesus?

1 IV. Hold on to Christ, the Head of the Body

1 A. As Paul finishes verse 19, he talks about what it looks like to hold fast to Christ (read)

1. Holding fast to the head will be like a body - one of Paul's favorite images - attached to its head
2. While it is attached to the head, the whole body will work well as it is held together by its joints and ligaments and will therefore grow in good and healthy ways
3. But a body disconnected from its head generally fails to grow - a body disconnected from its head dies
4. So Paul finishes this paragraph by bringing us back to the importance of why we are asking these questions - we need to make sure that our lives are being lived "according to Christ" because Christ is our head and without our head we die
5. But, also, this short statement of theology helps us identify whether things are rooted in Christ and bearing fruit in Christ, because if they are the things in this verse will be evident
6. So, when our lives are according to Christ, what things will be evident? I see at least three things here in this verse:

B. First, things according to Christ will cause you to grasp onto Christ more

1. Paul starts out by saying we are to be holding fast to the head - this is perhaps the most important statement of this paragraph - those things which are according to Christ will cause you to grasp onto Christ more
2. It's a continual cycle - knowing Christ will cause you to live life according to Christ which will lead you to know Christ more which will lead you to live life according to Christ more - and the cycle makes perfect sense because Christ is everything
3. The word here in verse 19 literally means to seize - it's often used of taking hold of someone to throw them in prison or kill them - the point is it is an active and emphatic verb, we should be seizing Christ
4. Our lives lived in light of Christ should lead to us grasping every more tightly to Christ, desiring to know Him, to be in communion with Him, to know His will and to live out His commands
5. If the things in your life aren't helping you grasp onto Christ more, then they are clearly not according to Christ
6. Be pursuing things that call you to grasp onto Christ more and more every day

C. Second, things according to Christ will call you to intensifying fellowship in a local church

1. That's where Paul steps next - if we are to be holding fast to the head, then our actions should be as a united body
 - a. We will be a 'whole body', a body that is 'knit together through its joints and ligaments'
 - 2 b. That phrase 'knit together' has already been used once in Colossians 2, back in verse 2 - *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,*
 - c. If we are holding fast to the head, then we will be in ever intensifying fellowship with the body of Christ - our love will grow for each other and our pursuit and guard over each other will deepen
 - d. So the things in your life that are according to Christ will be calling you to pursue fellowship with other believers in a local church
2. And I think Paul is talking specifically about the local church here because he uses the phrase 'joints and ligaments'
 - a. This is very parallel to Ephesians 4 where Paul is also talking about the growth of the church in Christ
 - 1 b. Ephesians 4:11-16 - *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*
 - 2 c. When Paul is talking about the joints and ligaments of the body of Christ, he is talking about the organization of the local church with its leaders - the pastors and teachers and evangelists drawing on the teaching of the apostles and prophets
 - d. It's when the body is 'well-ordered', as Paul described the church in Colossae earlier in chapter 2, with godly leaders preparing all of God's people to serve Christ that growth in Christ truly happens
3. So the things in your life that are according to Christ will call you to deepening fellowship and love for and submission to a local church
 - a. If the things in your life aren't helping you pursue deep, meaningful relationships in the organized body of Christ then these things are clearly not according to Christ
 - b. Be pursuing things that call you to Christ-honoring fellowship in a local church

1 D. Third, things according to Christ will produce ever increasing Christ-likeness in you

1. This is where Paul is going to go to in chapter 3 - if we are really pursuing Christ then what we need to see is an ever increasing Christ-likeness
- 1 2. But he gives us a preview here in chapter 2 at the end of verse 19, if we are connected to the head then we will 'grow with a growth that is from God' - we will grow in godliness, in the likeness of His Son
3. If our lives are being lived according to Christ then they will be filled with an ever increasing desire for Christ leading to an ever increasing reflection of Christ
4. We won't be puffed up with ourselves and pursuing emptiness, we will be enthralled with Christ and pursuing His image - our lives will be increasingly marked by the Fruits of the Spirit and increasingly devoid of those things that are in opposition to Christ
5. If the things in your life aren't helping you grow in Christ, aren't helping you express in your attitudes and actions that Christ is in you, then these things are clearly not according to Christ
6. Be pursuing those things that help you grow in holiness, that help you reflect Christ

E. It's these things that mark the life of one living according to Christ

1. Living according to Christ will be marked by an ever increasing desire for Christ, an ever deepening fellowship in a local church and an ever increasing reflection of Christ
2. So pursue these things and your life will be naturally ever more according to Christ
3. And be asking - what is the root of this thing? Is it coming from Christ or somewhere else? And what is the fruit of this thing? Is it leading me to Christ or somewhere else?