

Colossians 2:16-3:4

This is an extremely important text for us to consider this morning. The applications for Providence are numerous and there is no way I will be able to cover it sufficiently, so I want to encourage you to continue fleshing this out this Tues/Wed in home your home groups. Let's set the stage for this text.

Paul has just reminded the church at Colossae that...

1. When they were dead, Jesus made them alive
2. When they were guilty, Jesus forgave them by canceling the record of their debt
3. When they were defeated, Jesus disarmed their enemies and gave them victory

With that being said....READ

There are 3 main things Paul warns them about.

- 1. Legalism v16-17**
- 2. Asceticism v18a**
- 3. Mysticism v18b-19**

Why does Paul stop to warn them about these distractions from the normal Christian life?

1. None of these will save us...none of these will sanctify us...none of these will glorify us.
2. Life and purity and growth are not through these things, but as verse 19 says, through "holding fast to Christ."
3. The only hope for spiritual growth and health in the body of Christ is
 - a. not visions and charismatic experiences,
 - b. not voluntary suffering
 - c. not Pharisaical regulations.
 - d. but, personal clinging to Christ the head

It seems that the one distraction (or sin) that gives Paul the most pause is legalism, and honestly it is the most applicable to us in our context, in my opinion. With that being said, let's hone in on it.

There are 2 primary areas that Paul addresses here.

1. Diet v16a

- a. The consumption of food and drink is in itself no basis for judging a person's standing with God or standing in God's family.
- b. Mark 7:15-19 *There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.* "And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)
- c. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 *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. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

2. Days v16b

- a. Romans 14:2-6
- b. v17

Why is this distraction so damaging and dangerous? Legalism does nothing but make us miserable Pharisees.

Matthew 23 These Pharisees were...

• Legalists v13-15

1. They shut out those who would come in, because they don't meet THEIR expectations and
2. On the other hand they work hard to create themselves little proselytes.
 - a. They had proselytes of the gate... worshipped like a Jew in the synagogue
 - b. But then they had proselytes of righteousness... who observed all the rituals and traditions of the Pharisees
 - c. It was considered a great achievement to initiate a Gentile into all their legalistic practices.
3. Do we get more excited
 - a. When we talk someone into embracing our favorite confession of faith or when someone believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - b. When we talk someone into embracing MacArthur, Sproul, Piper or some Puritan or when we see someone embrace Jesus Christ?
 - c. When we convince someone that all of our little personal rules and convictions are law or when a soul is saved?

• Justifiers v16-24

1. They prided themselves on their great theological understanding, when in reality they are just blind, hair splitters
2. Oh how easily the theologian can justify anything they want to justify.
 - a. Oops, I just swore by the temple... but it's the gold of the temple that really obligates
 - b. Oops, I just swore by the altar... but it's the offering on the altar that really obligates
 - c. We are the most dangerous folks in the world!
 1. We know our bibles and our doctrines and our Christian history
 2. **And we are skillful at using it to justify anything we want to justify!**
 3. While our theology should be dictating for us our attitudes and affections and actions, we allow our attitudes and affections and actions to dictate our theology... and we are skilled enough to back it up with the Bible!
3. They magnified the insignificant and minimized the significant!
 - a. Mint, dill, and cummin were garden herbs used as kitchen spices, not farm produce, and therefore not required by law to be tithed on.
 - b. But, the holy Pharisees were so righteous they tithed even on their kitchen spices... and I guarantee you they condemned and "exhorted" those who did not!
 - c. But with all of their carefulness in such insignificant matters (like kitchen spices) they neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, faithfulness!
 - d. I mean after all those things sound a lot like social justice... I'll just count my leaves!

4. They would strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.
 - a. Eat an unclean insect? Never!
 - b. So the Pharisees drank their wine through clenched teeth, just in case a gnat was floating in the cup.
 - c. While they were so meticulously clenching their teeth to strain out the gnats, they are swallowing another unclean animal...a camel in their practical life by ignoring the obvious
 - d. Micah 6:8 *He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?*

• **Hypocrites v25-28**

1. v25-26: They looked good on the outside!
 - a. They were experts at pulling off holiness horizontally, but not vertically.
 - b. The God, who looks on the heart, saw passed the facade and right at their robbery and self indulgence!
2. v27-28
 - a. A person would be considered unclean for 7 days if he touched a dead body or a grave
 - b. For that reason, the Jews would whitewash their tombs every year to identify them to unwary travelers.
 - c. Because of all the fresh whitewash each spring, Jerusalem would shine in the sun
 - d. But behind that fresh coat of paint...were rotting carcasses and bones.
 - e. Luke 11:44 *Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."*

• **Vicious v29-36**

1. These people were plotting at that moment to kill Jesus...the greatest messenger of all
2. Do you see yourself in any of this? Paul asks...

v20-23

1. If you are born again, why do you submit yourself to decrees...laws...such as do not handle, taste or touch?
2. They definitely have the appearance of wisdom in self made religion.
3. But, guess what, these legalistic "convictions" make no difference when it comes to the flesh!

So what is the solution? He tells us. v1-3

1. A passionate love for the Christ of Scripture will move anyone to holiness
2. A passionate love for the Christ of Scripture will move anyone to love their brothers in Christ
3. A passionate love for the Christ of Scripture will move anyone to prioritize their lives for the glory of God
4. A passionate love for the Christ of Scripture will move anyone to persevere through numerous tests, trials, and temptations
5. A passionate love for the Christ of Scripture will move anyone to invest their lives in sharing the gospel and making disciples! BUT...BUT...

Wherever true, joyful, passion and love for Christ diminishes, rules and regulations are brought in to maintain what the power of Christ once created.

1. If you erect enough regulations and build a big enough endowment, an institution can endure for decades after the spiritual dynamic that brought it into existence is gone.
2. Legalism becomes the “power” instead of Christ.
3. Galatians 5:6 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*
4. Jesus and the Samaritan woman...*whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* Is this in you??

THE GOSPEL

Application Questions for Home Group:

1. What do we learn about God from this text?
2. Do you believe we, at Providence, are more prone to legalism, asceticism, or mysticism? Discuss why you think so.
3. Every legalist claims to be applying and obeying Scripture to their lives. How can you distinguish between legalism and obedience?
4. What was the most impacting thing you took away from the sermon on Sunday?
5. How should we respond to this text and to this sermon? Discuss the different types of responses that one could make, and share which response you are prone to make.