

ChristReformationChurch

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Christ Exalted and Ascended (Part 3)

June 11, 2017

Sermon Text: Colossians 1

Scripture Reading: Galatians 2

Colossians 1:13-23 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

(17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from

the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

(21) And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, (22) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

We have been considering the risen and ascended Christ – what He has accomplished and who He is in His glory. In doing so, our intent has been to put together several studies from this first chapter of Colossians as an aid to presenting the gospel of Christ

to people. Eternal life is only found in knowing Christ, in being vitally joined to Him through repentance and faith by His Spirit.

Now, this morning I would like us to turn our attention to something Paul says in verse 18 -

(18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Here is our subject:

Every Christian, certainly every new Christian, needs to be made aware that they must expect some enemy to come along and try to lead them away from Christ. These enemies may not necessarily plainly and obviously deny everything about Christ. But in some way they will introduce lies which most certainly work to turn our faith away from Christ to some other object. They bring, in other words, a false gospel.

This you recall is what had happened in the new churches of Galatia. It is why Paul wrote to them:

Galatians 1:6-9 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— (7) not that there is another one, **but there**

are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

What is the gospel? It is this:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, (2) and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

And it is this:

Romans 3:20-25 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (21) But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— (22) the righteousness of God through faith in

Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (25a) whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith....

The very same infection had reached the church at Colossae as well –

Colossians 2:1-4 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, (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, (3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (4) **I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.**

Colossians 2:6-10 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, (7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (8) **See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.** (9) For in

him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10) and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Colossians 2:18-23 **Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, (19) and not holding fast to the Head,** from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? (23) **These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**

Now, here is the trickery of most of these deceptions. *The people who came in and started pushing these kinds of teachings still claimed to be Christians.* But in fact because of their perversions of the gospel, they did not belong to or represent Christ at all.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, **your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.** (4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

This one really nails the thing. The goal. Note these points very, very carefully –

- Wicked people of this brand will always be “religious.”
- In fact, they will claim to be followers of Christ.
- But in fact they are presenting “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” “another gospel” that is no gospel at all.
- AND NOTICE their goal! It is to *lead you away from pure devotion to Christ. To persuade you that you need a kind of mixture of “Christ AND _____ something else.”*
- You say that you would never be duped by such people? Well, these Corinthians who had just heard the true gospel and believed it quite soon started to

accept these lies “readily enough.”

Paul pulls no punches here telling us what such people really are –

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

Oh, and let’s not forget to note the *motive* of such phony teachers-

2 Corinthians 11:20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

See it? They want you to believe THEM so that you can follow THEM, worship THEM, be enslaved to THEM, rather than follow Christ. These kinds of people are everywhere today just as they were then:

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Now, you might be feeling pretty confident still that you are strong enough and wise enough to never be taken in by such wicked counterfeits. And that is where most teaching today in local churches leaves it – with the assumption that, having been warned, every single member of the church is surely immune to such deception.

And that is a grave mistake as I am about to show you. Listen to the Apostle Paul as he tells us what happened in the early church, specifically in an incident that involved *the Apostle Peter* and a very faithful associate of the Apostles – *Barnabas*. Here it is – [Peter is called Cephias here]:

Galatians 2:11-14 But when Cephias came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (12) For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

(13) And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, **so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.** (14) But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephias before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew,

how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Ok then, the cultural background. Jews in that day were taught from childhood that they were not to associate with Gentiles. Sitting down to eat with them, eating the food they ate, and much more was strictly a no-no. Big time. This is why the Jews harshly criticized Jesus –

Matthew 9:9-13 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. (10) And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. (11) **And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"** (12) But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. (13) Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Now Peter, of all people, should have learned that Christ came to save Gentiles as well as Jews. Peter, being a Jew, had a hard time with the radical changes Christ brought, and he appeared to have come to terms with

those changes some time before this incident Paul is describing here at Antioch. The following incident involved a God-fearing Gentile named Cornelius:

Acts 10:27-35 And as he [Peter] talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. (28) And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. (29) So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

(30) And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing (31) and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. (32) Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' (33) So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

(34) So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, (35) but in every

nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Lesson learned, right? Well, Peter fell big time later as we read in Galatians. These bigshot religious types from Jerusalem came, Jews, and claimed they were followers of Christ. But they also claimed that if a person was going to be set right with God, *not only did they have to believe in Christ, they also had to literally become Jews by being circumcised and keep the Old Testament Law. They also taught a continuing separation in God's salvation of Jews versus His salvation for Gentiles.* This is a false gospel, it leads people away from Christ because (Colossians 2 again) -

(9) For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10) and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

And also-

1 Corinthians 1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

Understand? *Christ is the whole package!* Not Christ PLUS anything.

So here these phonies come to the churches of Galatia and start laying

their lies on the Christians there and even Peter and Barnabas start listening to them, separating themselves from the Gentile Christians. We call this kind of false teaching *legalism* because it claims that in order to be justified before God we must not only believe in Christ as our Savior, but we must also obey certain laws, traditions, rules, and so on that add to God's acceptance of us.

And THIS is where this kind of wickedness sneaks up on us today. Let me illustrate.

FIRST, we need to all realize that most local churches that claim to believe the Bible (realize that there are many who do not believe the Bible is God's Word and pick and choose from it as they want to)...most such local churches today teach that God has a separate plan of salvation for the Jew and for the Gentile. There is Israel, and then there is the Church. That is what they teach.

The Bible teaches no such thing and we do not teach such a thing either. This is why here at Christ Reformation Church we embrace what is called *reformed theology*. That is to say, we believe the teachings of the orthodox, historical Christian church and we reject that more modern distortion of Scripture (introduced in the 1800's) known as *dispensationalism*.

We cannot go into all of the detail of this business this morning, but just realize that when people claim to be teaching the Bible, are in fact teaching a continuing separation in God's salvation of Jew and Gentile, when they make the nation Israel the center of their theology, then they are necessarily introducing a false gospel that will always distance people from Christ. In this case, classic dispensational teaching will distance the Jews from Christ, pointing them to their physical lineage from Abraham as the covenantal basis for their acceptance with God.

SECOND, and in some ways even more devious, we are pressured to turn our eyes and faith away from a pure devotion to Christ by people who creep into our midst and bring with them all kinds of rules, regulations, traditions, do's and don'ts', that they really claim *are necessary to be obeyed if we are to be righteous before God*.

THIS is what Paul meant when he wrote those words in Colossians 2 that we have already read. Listen again:

Colossians 2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22)

(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Alright then, to get to that illustration of all this I promised.

Here is Doug. Doug shows up at your church one Sunday with his family. The whole fam looks impressive. Everyone dressed in Sunday best, boys with short hair, daughters dressed quite modestly. Mrs. Doug (Linda) is soooo respectful of her husband, and as he demonstrates that first Sunday through his comments in the morning class, Doug knows quite a lot about the Bible, about reformed theology, and so on. Everyone is really happy and hopes that Doug and Linda will choose to plug in to the church as members.

Now, Doug and Linda have an entire history of what they call “Christianity.” Most of this history is unknown to you when they first come, but over time in many different ways – spoken and unspoken, they communicate their “gospel” to you. And here is what it looks like:

- Men are superior to women

- The father is the priest of the family. His wife and children exist to serve him in *his* ministry to God
- Christians are to home-school their children. To send them to public school is sin
- Boys are to work toward establishing their own business and steer clear of working for anyone else
- Girls will marry when and whom their father approves
- Television and movies are forbidden by God
- Doug and Jane have very strict and narrow views of what music is to be used in the worship service
- Doug adheres to a particular financial plan in his own affairs and actually believes and communicates that every Christian household needs to follow the same plan
- Doug enforces a list of rules that his family is to follow on Sundays

And we could go on and on.

Now, what happens over the course of time to a church where people like Doug and Jane come? I can tell you. We have experienced it ourselves. What happens is exactly what Jesus warned us about:

Matthew 16:11-12 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (12) Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Leaven. We know it as *yeast*. The point is that yeast spreads throughout the whole lump of dough and does its work. Listen to Paul say it as well:

Galatians 5:7-9 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? (8) This persuasion is not from him who calls you. (9) A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

And he says it again:

1 Corinthians 5:6-7 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (7) Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

In other words, we are to reject Doug's false gospel – and please realize that this is precisely what it is – a false gospel. It is a system of “do not taste, do not touch, do not handle” which Doug is demanding we all submit to and which will, if we do allow him to put us into that bondage, distance us

from Christ. Suddenly and increasingly our focus as individuals and as a church *will shift from Christ and our full acceptance before God in Him to pursuing a litany of rules and traditions which supposedly will make us more acceptable to God*. But in fact such things are detestable to God.

And I will tell you something else that this kind of thing ALWAYS does. *Legalism feeds and promotes more sin*. That is what Paul meant when he told the Colossians:

(23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

And sure enough, what do we find to be true over and over again in the lives of people who claim to be Christians but who make the main emphasis of their “gospel” obedience to these kinds of traditions and rules? You know the answer. *We find out eventually that behind the scenes these ‘super holy eminent saints’ have been all along wrapped up in porn, in all kinds of immorality, in devious business deals, and more*.

One of the tell-tale indicators that you are dealing with a Doug is *you do not ever feel at ease around him*. Don't disregard that cautionary sense you

feel. It is there for a reason. Even though you love Christ, even though you are a Christian, even though God has accepted you in Christ – *Doug hasn't. You just never measure up to Doug's gospel, and Doug likes it that way.*

I am convinced that there is only one way to deal with a Doug who creeps in among us. And that is to open the church door (from the inside), point Doug to it, tell him to use it, and to never come back. Because these false teachers simply do not change. We must not be naïve about them, about assuming that they just have some wrong opinions but really are at heart, Christians. No they are not. They do not know the Lord. They are agents of the enemy and they are not permitted to be among us in Christ's church.