

The Supremacy of Christ over Man-Made Religion

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[0 : 00] Good morning. You can be turning in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2. Last time we looked at this book of Colossians together was at the end of November for our evening Lord's Supper sermon.

And when we looked at that passage together, we took a very quick walk through chapter 2, verses 6 through 15. We saw the recurring theme of our union with Christ. We saw that we're united to Christ in his death, united to him in his burial, and united to him in his resurrection.

And the main point, the takeaway, was that all of our spiritual blessings and position is bound up in Christ. They're all rooted in Christ. We are alive in Christ.

And our passage today, verses 16 to 23, immediately followed that declaration. So we're going to take a few minutes to read this passage and then starting in verse 13.

Colossians 2. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

[1 : 32] This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 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, and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body, nourishing it together through its joints and ligaments, grows with the growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you still were alive in the world, do you submit to regulations? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings.

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

[2 : 51] Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for your word, and I thank you for your Holy Spirit in inspiring the Apostle Paul to write this letter to the church in Colossae, to encourage them, to strengthen them.

Lord, I pray that your spirit would use your word to encourage us here in Hazleton so many years later, that we would be strengthened and equipped. We would grow more and more in love with you for who you are and what you've done for us.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So, if you've been here for the prior sermons, you know the Apostle Paul has written this book, this letter to the church in Colossae.

This church is probably led by a man named Epaphras that Paul mentions in the first and last chapter. And Paul's writing to encourage them, to tell them about who they really are in Christ. He's also writing to deal with false teaching that's making its way throughout the church. We see this throughout the book, but we see it very clearly at the beginning of chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2, verses 1 through 5 reads, 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, that their hearts may be encouraged, be knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding, and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[4 : 29] I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in the body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of

your faith in Christ.

Paul's heart and his desire for this church is the encouragement of their hearts, their growth together as a body, their maturity into the knowledge of Christ. He wants them to be mature Christians.

And his approach to doing that is to make sure they have good, strong, biblical theology. Good, strong, clear, proper teaching.

In fact, he says, I say this in order that no one may delude you or convince you with plausible arguments. He doesn't want this church to be deceived.

He rejoices to see their good order and their firmness in faith. And so as we look at this passage, we'll see Paul start taking a scalpel to some of the infection that's crept into this church.

[5 : 31] This church has started to become infected with false teaching, false views of God, false views of Christ, and how to live the Christian life.

And that's something that Paul does with many of his epistles, because false teaching isn't harmless. There is victims in false teaching. It affects the faith and lives of people who embrace it.

Listen to what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2. Writing to Timothy, he says, The Holy Spirit has given these words of warning, warnings of those who have labored for the growth and maturity of Christians and don't want to see them abandon their maturity and growth and truth for heresy.

You can see an example of Paul's passion for truth throughout the book of Galatians. In fact, as homework, I'd encourage you this week, read the book of Galatians from the perspective of it being written by a man who's heartbroken and angry at the same time.

Heartbroken that people have left the true faith and angry at people who are deceiving his church, Christ's church. Listen to how Paul feels about those that distort the truth about God and try to add to what Christ has done in Galatians chapter 5.

[7 : 09] He says, You were running so well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?

In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those that unsettle you would just emasculate themselves. You can sense the passion that Paul has for this church to stay running on the correct path.

And the abstain that he feels for those who promote and teach falsehood. God wants the bad teaching, bad theology, bad doctrine far, far from his church.

Which is why he's given us his word. Which contains both teaching and theology, but also some of these examples that we see here today of the apostles' heartbreaking appeal against what is incorrect and false.

[8 : 14] So as we look at this passage today, keep closely in mind Paul's intent, and really God's intent in this passage, is that we aren't led astray by false teaching, or false gospels, or false hope outside of Christ.

And it's my intent, with the aid of the Spirit, that we see not only ways the church in Colossae struggled with this, the ways the church had let teachings creep in, but how we ourselves may have bought into false teaching.

So today we're going to look at the false teaching that was promoted in Colossae. We'll see the correction and correct theology that Paul provides, and then we'll look at the application as it applies to us.

When we first started looking at Colossians, I'd say that we don't have a good, clear picture of what exactly the theological errors that were occurring. There's no identifiable, nameable system of teaching that Paul was trying to address.

But we can look at his allusions to it, the things he states about it. We can read his statements and his responses, and come up with an idea of what was being taught. The consensus among most biblical scholars and commentators is that there was a synchronistic proto-Gnosticism going around the church.

[9 : 34] Now you guys say that real fast. Back to me, right? Synchronistic proto-Gnosticism. It's a mouthful. You probably have heard of the word Gnosticism. It's a variety of second century religions, and they believed that people could only be saved through special, secret, revealed

knowledge.

They also held a negative view of the body or any physical material, any material world. They placed value on the spirit and the soul and the spiritual realms of angels.

Gnosticism was a secret society of the second century, claiming to have secret knowledge about God, how to get to God, how to interact with him, how to interact with the spiritual realm.

So proto-Gnosticism is really just early Gnosticism, underdevelopment Gnosticism. It's not formalized into a system, but it's coalescing.

It's taking shape. It's taking pieces from the world around it. So to complicate it even more, we throw in this word syncretistic. And syncretism really is just a gathering of different pieces and ideas from various places.

[10 : 46] When we say a synchronicism religion, we say that someone may grab some stuff from this religion and that religion and may pull some stuff from paganism and from Jewish theology and from maybe Hellenistic theology or philosophy, and they may try to build this conglomerate or this syncretistic religion.

Sometimes people do this to make people feel comfortable. They want to pull in the elements that people are familiar with. So we'll just grab some of these pieces that people are familiar with. Sometimes and often, it's done because the one that's doing the picking and choosing, the one who decides this gets included or that gets included in my new religion, likes or feels like the ways and the elements that they chose are good and beneficial.

They choose things that they feel like this means something to me. I can feel something, so I'm going to include this and I'm going to include that. Another way that we might put this in less strictly theological terms is this is a messy collision of Jewish, Christian, and pagan theology.

A messy collision of Jewish, Christian, and pagan theology. It seems in this case the teachers or teacher in this church had sought to reinstitute to bring back some of the Jewish ceremonial law and throw in some of the Gnostic and pagan teaching.

Paul starts to address how this church should respond to the false teaching in verse 16. He says, Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

[12 : 22] These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 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.

Wrapped up in Paul's exhortation and his warning are three distinct areas he's addressing in this passage. Three errors that all share the same core problem.

The problem is they're not rooted in Christ. They're distinct errors because the false teaching has its roots in various parts of this messy collision. of Jewish, Christian, and pagan theology.

And these three errors aren't unique to this situation in Colossae. They and others are almost always found in human or man-made religion. They're a result of what we as humans would dream up if we created our own religion.

That what we would get if we contemplated God and our place in the universe and we look at ourselves and our failings and our shortcomings in the way that we don't do what we think we should do. And then we look at creation and we see the general revelation that God has revealed and we see that there's got to be a creator or at least some good source of life.

[13 : 43] And we look at all those things mankind ends up making religious systems and guidelines in an effort to bridge that gap that we've identified.

to make sure that we can somehow figure out how do I go from this mess that I am to the person that I want to be, the person that I should be. And these items are always in stark contrast to the good news of the gospel.

The three errors that Paul calls out in this passage are legalism, mysticism, and asceticism. Look at any worldly religion or any offshoot even of Christian religion and you'll see these teachings present one way or another.

You'll see legalism, mysticism, and asceticism. So we'll look at these three, we'll define them and then we'll see how does Paul address them as they interact with the church. So the first false teaching we're going to look at is legalism.

Legalism is a concept of belief that the positive actions of a person make that person more acceptable, more righteous before God.

[14:59] It promises life in exchange for obedience. In the case of this false teaching, there is an appeal made back to the Old Testament, to the Jewish ceremonial law.

He says, therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

False teachers were going around this church and they were judging people on whether or not they ate certain food, drank certain wine, or celebrated Jewish festivals or holidays.

You can picture this happening, right, in normal church life. It doesn't have to come from the pulpit for teaching to spread. All it takes is a conversation, a quick chat before walking into worship or a talk with someone at home or at work.

It just takes a minute for someone to say something and then judge somebody for their response to make them feel spiritually inferior or even unsaved based on how they respond.

[16:05] It's interesting Paul doesn't tell them to stop doing these things. He's focused on the judgment that was occurring. And you can imagine some of the sayings that people might say to each other as they're talking and they're looking at these religions around them.

You aren't celebrating Passover this year? You ordered a pork lover's pizza? Don't you know that pork is an unclean meat?

And suddenly the opportunity is open, open to judge the person, to make them feel spiritually inferior or even unsaved. People were taking these Old Testament ceremonial laws and judging people by them.

They created a position of judgment about a person's spiritual state, maturity, or even salvation based on whether they kept these Old Testament laws. Teachers were expecting people to keep the laws intact and as a requirement for spiritual salvation or growth.

That's what people do. That's what legalism is. People, we, our hearts, find rules to obey. If we can't keep the rules, we'll make new ones on top of that that we can.

[17:18] That's what Paul fought in Galatians. Judaizers insisting on circumcision and other parts of the ceremonial law in order to feel right with God.

Because circumcision is tangible. You could do something and see a result. Obviously, that's got to have something to do with faith, right? It's got to have something to do with God's being pleased with me.

It feels like the thing that would get God's attention. But our hearts, just like our hearts are factories of idols, our hearts are very easy, very happy to find ways to be legalistic.

R. Kent Hughes says, the idea that spirituality can be quantified provides an unfortunate basis for pride and judgmentalism. The flesh finds doing spiritual things difficult, as the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

But the flesh has no problem with religious rules and regulations. There's an authentic lure to legalism. And we see this today, don't we? We see this in the church and outside the church.

[18:24] People create standards and rules, and rules upon rules, often with the intention to protect people, to keep them far from breaking the actual rule. But those rules quickly become the new rule.

They become equal with God's rules. They get treated like they're God's rules and even claimed to be God's rules. Or we'll make new rules. New rules with no scriptural basis because that's what we've always done.

That's tradition. There was a video clip making its way around where a pastor is preaching on what does it mean for men and women to be holy. And he makes the claim very loudly and very angrily that it's wrong for men to have beards.

That a beard is worldly. And that any person, no matter how good a preacher he was, he'd never let that man in his pulpit if he wasn't clean-shaven because it's a holiness issue. Now you know where I stand on beards in the pulpit.

But today, men are preaching rules that have no foundation in scripture, no biblical support, or even in this case, biblical support for the opposite of their position.

[19:32] And then judging people, disqualifying people for not maintaining those rules that they've made up. We see this with parenting, dating, or courtship.

How many of you have read a book that held up a standard or rule or set of rules that promised if you could obey them, God would bless you? I'm not talking about biblical rules like the commandments on your father and mother that it may go well with you or that your days will be long

in the land the Lord has given you.

I'm talking about rules and systems that are man-made. And then judgment is made by others in the opposite camp. Just watch this in a mom's group.

Bring up breastfeeding or bottle feeding, on-demand versus scheduled feeding, processed food or organic, homeschool, public school, private school. Paul's point is that people love creating standards for spirituality, creating rules and guides, and holding other people to them, judging them when they can't do it or don't agree with the standard they've laid out.

The other air that Paul wants to address is this air of mysticism, specifically pagan-rooted mysticism.

[20 : 53] Mysticism is defined as the pursuit of the divine, searching for and trying to get close to God, trying to get yourself in communion with the creator of the universe.

And that all sounds great, but this air was in the assumption and the teaching of the various ways to get to know God. They were teaching some of the ways that you can get to know God very, very incorrectly.

He says, Paul says to them, don't let anyone disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and the worship of angels, going on and on about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.

The NIV translates and ranges their sentences differently. It says, don't let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they've seen.

They're puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. It's saying the same thing. If there are people who are promoting spiritual practices and experiences they can't stop talking about, but their mind is unspiritual.

[22 : 02] They go on and on about the benefits of this religious practice and disqualify those who don't do the same. They promote asceticism and visions of angels and worship of angels and trying to get connected to the divine.

They're saying these are the ways that you as a person can get connected to the divine by this new mystic secret knowledge, this new secret process, whatever this ends up looking like.

This word disqualify can mean judge in a way. It can mean to judge somebody usually in terms of a sporting event or a referee. But it means to judge in a way that you're not allowed to continue.

You could translate this passage, don't let anyone pretend to be your umpire or your referee and declare you out because you aren't following their made-up superstitious rules.

These people go around promoting a system, a method or process that they claim will get you closer to God and then set themselves up as your referee, your judge or umpire if you don't meet the ecstatic experiences that they've experienced.

[23 : 15] We see this today. We see people promoting supernatural books, supernatural or even extra books like Jesus Calling that read personal discussions with Jesus as if that's a way to get closer to him.

People might suggest Easter meditation as a new way to hear from God and settle your soul and be quiet. There are other rituals and guides from other religions that people might try to pull into Christianity to assist them with their spiritual journey.

Things like prayer labyrinths and contemplative prayer which is praying without speaking so you can be emptied and enlightened by God's spirit. there are books, just go to Ollie's, there's tons of books at Ollie's of mega church TV pastors with crazy titles like The Power of I Am, which isn't the power of Jehovah, it's the power of positive thinking and pulling to yourself the name and claim it theology that says that if you can figure out this process, if you can claim it, if you can speak positively, then you will get positivity.

And so obviously Paul's not a fan of this teaching. He mentions asceticism and he mentions it again in verses 20 to 23, that's the third false teaching that Paul addresses.

Asceticism is really the insistence, or Paul's addressing the insistence that people practice asceticism to get or to maintain God's favor.

[24 : 44] Asceticism is when someone lives in a way that they deprive themselves of luxuries or even necessities for a period of time. This may be a result of the early Gnostic thought that held that the spiritual is better, the physical is bad.

The body, the physical is evil. In their mind, if the body is evil, then it should be treated severely. It should suffer to keep that body in check.

Paul's response to them is, 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? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. Refer to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teaching. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self- and religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

These teachers were creating standards based on man-made rules. They insist that you had to practice asceticism.

[25 : 55] They insist you had to deprive yourself, deny yourself, to get spiritually close to God. It could be that these regulations were derived from the Jewish purity system.

Paul says, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. The ceremonial law that declared all things on unclean and that those who even touched them were unclean as a result. These teachers sought spiritual experiences and promoted the neglect or even the abuse of the body.

They promoted the idea, while holding others to it as well, that the way to grow spiritually, the way for a person to become close to God, is to despise all the things in the world, to reject the physical things, don't handle them, don't taste them, don't touch them.

It's like they were saying, unless you can live like a monk or a nun and live with few possessions and pursue intense spiritual experiences, you obviously aren't serious about being a Christian.

These teachers were upholding regulations and restrictions for Christians that looked good from the outside. Regulations looked like they might actually have some benefit, but they provided no spiritual benefit.

[27 : 11] They provided no way to deal with the indulgence of the flesh. We see this today too, we see this where monks and nuns might take a vow of silence and live isolated from the world in hope of getting closer to God, closer to God than they would in a normal life.

They're going to try to seek out God and be quiet and submit their body. People will require fasting, people will practice fasting, not as a way to pray with focus, but as a way to get God's attention, to labor and to say, I'm going to deprive myself of food and I'm going to make sure that God hears me. Some churches even require people in the church to celebrate Lent and to celebrate Lent and fasting and celebration and they may require it because they see it as a way to please God or gain his favor.

Some people may practice Lent because they have a fear of losing God's favor or skipping the tradition, but it's an act of asceticism. If you practice Lent to make God happy with you, to make you close to God, then you're trying to practice asceticism to stop the indulgence of your flesh.

There's nothing wrong with taking 40 days to focus on Christ, but we should never see things like that as a way of gaining merit with God or addressing our sinful flesh, our sin nature.

[28 : 40] So all these errors, all these things we've seen are symptomatic of a teaching that sets a bar up here. This is a legalistic requirement that says this is a mark of a true Christian and then dismisses everybody that fails to meet the mark.

If you've been tracking in your Bible or on the screen, you've probably noticed that I've skipped over something in every passage we've looked at. I've discussed the theological error, some background on it, some of the examples of it we see today, but if you look at the passage, I didn't cover how Paul dealt with the error.

I didn't forget. I wanted to show you the errors and the heresy the church was facing, and I want to contrast with the main point of this whole epistle. The main point of Paul's epistle is that Christ is supreme.

Christ is better. Christ has done better. So to that end, let's look at how Paul deals with these errors. Paul deals with the error of legalism by reminding this church that the ceremonial law was just a shadow.

It was pointing to the things that were going to come in Christ. He says, therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink. With regard to a festival or new moon or a Sabbath, these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

[30 : 12] The law was given to us as a tutor. It is good. The law came from God, but no one but Christ was ever to keep it, was ever able to keep it.

at the end of Galatians, Paul says that these Judaizers that were insisting on circumcision, they insisted and insisted and insisted. They themselves couldn't keep the law.

He says, it is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh.

The law shows us we can never do enough to earn God's favor, and the ceremonial law of clean and unclean existed to show us there was only ever one who was clean.

The dietary laws could never save. They could never draw a sinner closer to God, but they can, and they do point us to the real substance, the real bread of life.

[31 : 21] They point us to the real Sabbath rest, the real lamb of God. The shadow points us to Christ. And Paul's going to deal with mysticism, and he's going to tell this church, you've already been brought near to Christ.

You've already been brought near. There's no reason for you to go searching out new ways to get close to Christ. He says, let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism, and worship of angels, going on in details about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous minds.

This person is 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's from God. The premise and the draw of mysticism is that you can do things to get you closer to God.

You can do things, actions, processes, to draw you into proximity with the supernatural. The draw is that if you have the right tools and the right knowledge and the right experience, you can work out how to get into real communication with God.

But Paul's point is that a person that thinks there's something new or novel or unique that will get them close to God has forgotten that they've already been brought near. believers and Christians don't need the next spiritual guru to tell them how to get God to like them.

[32 : 54] Because of Christ, we're already there. Paul's statement to the church in Ephesus sounds very similar and makes the point even clearer. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to you to those who were near.

for through him we have access to one spirit, the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but are fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone and in the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple.

In him you are being built into the dwelling place for God by the spirit. We've been brought near. those in Christ have access to the Father through the spirit, through the work of Christ.

There's no need to go looking for new ways to experience God. No need to go looking for ways to interact with angels or learn ancient rites or ceremonies. No need to go read books that will give you new details into who Christ is.

There's no need for you to go anywhere. Brothers and sisters, you and I are being built. into the dwelling place of God. God searched us out.

[34 : 17] God redeemed us. God brought us to him and sat us with Christ in the heavenly places. He's given us his word, the Bible. He's given us prayer to talk with him.

He's given us his spirit. We don't need visions of angels or extra revelations if God's given us his spirit. That leads to our last rebuttal against his heresy, the heresy of or false teaching of asceticism.

And Paul reminds this church, you've already died to Christ. You've already died. He says in verse 20 to 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?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings. 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.

Paul was again appealing to what happened when we were united to Christ. We've died with Christ, the elemental spirits of the world.

[35 : 35] You've been freed from the need to try to make yourself pure and clean. But more than that, the part of you that was unclean, your flesh, the sin nature that you inherited from Adam, that was sentenced to death with Christ on the cross.

You still struggle with it, I still struggle with it, but it was defeated and sentenced to death. And it's so sure, it's so definite that Paul says here and in Romans 6 that it's already taken place. Paul says, we know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

This is what makes the gospel unique among other religions. Like I said in the beginning, manly religion looks for ways to fix the sin, the shortcomings, the failures it sees.

It drums up new ways to fix it. Buddhist monks worked for years to empty themselves. They beat their body and endure all sorts of ascetic practices in the attempt to reach this mythical state of nirvana where suddenly all desire is gone and nothing but happiness exists.

[36 : 55] They are looking to get rid of the flesh that's hindering them from enjoying life and beat their bodies to accomplish it. Paul warned Timothy to stay away from myths and to prefer spiritual fitness, spiritual exercise over bodily fitness.

He says in 1 Timothy 4, have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive because we have our hopes set on the living god who is the savior of all people, especially those who believe.

Don't look to punish your body to defeat your sin. Nothing physical that you can do to make yourself more presentable to god.

Paul has dealt with these false teachings in the eight verses we've looked at. He's addressed them in line as we've gone through them. He's exposed where they differ from the gospel. But I want to pull our attention to a bigger, larger rebuttal that exists in the context around this passage.

[38 : 13] Let's take a few steps back before our passage looking at verse 13, which you read in the beginning. It says, And you, who were dead in your trespasses and uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them. And then Paul goes right into verse 16, Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink with regard to a festival or new moon or Sabbath.

Therefore, it's in verse 16, connects everything that Paul had just spoken of prior. Everything about the work of God through Christ. All that Christ had accomplished and secured on the cross is the reason we should not let people create legalistic requirements and judge us for not keeping them. God has already taken care of everything that we need for fellowship with him. God's done it all. God made sinners alive with Christ.

God forgave the sin that separated us. He nailed our sin, our sin nature, to the cross and canceled the record of our debt. After these passages, Paul wraps up and moves on to chapter 3.

[39 : 40] He says, If then you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ and God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Paul bookends his warning with truth about Christ and what he has done and what amazing salvation God has worked for those who believe.

And it says that we've been raised with Christ. If I can paraphrase Paul, he says, I love you guys and I want you to grow. I don't want you to be judged or taken captive by false teachers who try to tell you there is still work for you to do in your salvation because God has already done everything needed.

That's really Paul's argument. That's the purpose of this book. His argument is God has united you to Christ. God's placed your sin, your uncleanness, he's placed it on Christ and God forgave you. God crucified the old self, the sinful flesh to the cross. You don't need to beat your body up or look for special experiences or special rules to be brought near to God.

[41 : 07] God raised up Christ and with him he raised up you. God took you from far off and brought you near. there's no reason to look for special exciting aesthetic spiritual encounters or visions.

Just focus and fix your eyes and your mind on heavenly things. Focus your vision on Christ. You've died to this world and you're alive with Christ. One day Christ will return and since Christ is a believer's life the believer will appear with him in glory.

So that's how you deal with bad theology. You show how Christ is better. You show how Christ and the work that he accomplished on the cross is so much better, so much more superior than anything that man could dream up.

So much more effective at removing the separation with God than any man made religion. As we wrap up we'll look at some application.

And I want to remind us that when Paul says that we have, we shouldn't let people judge us. He's not saying the rules are gone. He's not saying that there is no rules or no law for people.

[42 : 22] God's rules aren't gone. Paul is addressing man-made rules that strive to get us close to God. Paul will continue the rest of this book with commands on how to live the Christian life.

Just like he does with the Romans and Ephesians. he's going to give rules about how we should live. The moral law, the Ten Commandments we've been looking at on Sunday morning with Pastor Chad, the command to love God and love your neighbor.

Those aren't gone. Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law and the moral law. His obedience to the law makes us righteous. The ceremonial law was a shadow that pointed to Christ.

He fulfilled it. It's no longer a law for Christians. But God still gives us the moral law. It's still binding. It's not binding for salvation. It never could have been binding for salvation.

But it is and will remain a rule for life. A rule that tells us how we live in this world as creatures in a world created by our God. I also want us to be aware on the lookout for man-made rules and regulations that we may see or even be encouraged to promote.

[43 : 40] First off, be aware of concentric circles of rules. What I mean by that is look out for when somebody creates a rule around a rule around a rule.

The thought being if we can make the rule more strict than the actual rule or the actual commandment, people won't be able to break the original one. An example of that might be seen in purity culture books.

The argument might go something like, in order to prevent you from committing adultery or fornication, you need to have somebody with you at all times and have six inches and never hold hands and never touch and never be seen together in the same place without a chaperone.

But those things are taking what should be a suggestion, what should be a, this might be wisdom for you to do, and it's elevating that to the same realm of the same place as a commandment.

And it's so easy for people to judge how holy or spiritual they are based on how many inches between themselves they allow when they sit together.

[44 : 45] Be cautious of man-made rules and regulations that promise life or blessings if you follow them or curses if you don't. Beware of parenting books that promise perfect children, perfect family life if you just follow their principles.

Purity culture, like I mentioned, often promises if you can do all these things, you'll have a perfect marriage, great marriage. Both parties can abide by them, then you'll end up so much happier.

But take Paul's warning. Don't look to man-made rules to improve your spiritual state. But also, don't judge people who choose to do something different.

than you. That's not contradicting the scripture. Don't look at your success in keeping man-made rules and judge others for naught. Paul warned and encouraged the church in Rome.

In chapter 14, he says, As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.

[45 : 51] Let not the one who despises the one, let not the one who eats, despise the one who abstains. 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. I want us also to be on the lookout for secretistic additions to Christianity.

Watch for things outside of Christianity that sneak in from the outside. They may look super spiritual. They may offer new insight, new methods, new approaches for getting to God's heart, or hearing God's still small voice.

Be careful of anything that's trying to improve on the word of God and the work of Christ. Be cautious of things that promote an isolator, individualistic, I'm sorry, I'm running out of water, individualistic spiritual experience.

Paul says these people were going on and on about the visions they saw, all the things that they were excited about. But they forgot their head. They forgot they were part of a body. God made us to function together.

[47 : 07] Individual prayer and Bible study is important, but God made us to participate in the corporate worship. To sing, read, pray, and take the Lord's Supper together as a body. Finally, I want to encourage you, fix your mind on things above, not on earthly things, because Christ is our head.

Focus more on Christ. Focus more on Christ and what he has done for you, and your spiritual growth and maturity will grow from that. Don't literally beat yourself up because your body is still plagued with sin.

Cast your vision on the one who loves you and redeems you so that you can be with him in glory. Remember that our union with Christ is better than any spiritual pursuit that we could ever attempt. The only way we can get rid of our, we can rid ourselves of this body of flesh, the only way that our sinful heart that seeks sin and pleasure over God, the only way we can get rid of that is to have our whole selves united to Christ.

There's no salvation or hope outside of the work that God has done through Christ. We're united to him in his death. Christ takes our sin, our flesh, our sinful nature, our record of debt, takes it to the cross where it's crucified with him.

[48 : 33] We're united to Christ in his burial. Romans 6, 4 says, we were buried therefore with him and by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Christ. And we're united to him in his resurrection. Ephesians 2, verses 4 through 6 says, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you've been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, don't let anybody just qualify you if Christ has already qualified you. He seated you at the right hand with himself in heavenly places.

Set your mind on that heavenly place. Let's pray. Father, I thank you for your word. I thank you that you have done everything that is needed to draw sinful people to you.

[50 : 03] There's nothing that we could do to make you like us more or to pull us closer to you. And you've already come down and lived amongst us, died for us so that you could live with us and we could live with you forever.

Father, help us to keep our eyes and our hearts set on heavenly things. Help us to not pursue things outside of what you've given us, the good gifts you've given us to have fellowship with you.

I thank you for the word. I thank you for the day we have. I pray that you help us to use it to your glory. In Jesus' name, amen. Our final hymn is hymn number 481.

481 is a reminder to turn your eyes upon Jesus. The second verse says, through death into life everlasting, he passed and we follow him there.

Over us sin no more has dominion, for more than conquerors we are. Let's stand and sing 481. 481.

[51 : 13] 481. 481. 481. 481. 481. 481. 481. 481. 481. 481.

481.