

Colossians 3

- Last time we met, we had covered up to 2:19, where Paul begins his assault on those teachings that he called empty philosophies and traditions
 - Things that the Judaizers were trying to re-insert into the lives of the believers
 - Those things that stood in opposition to a trust in Christ
- We looked at verse 17 where Paul had said that these things were merely shadows
 - As they were given in the OT, they pointed to Christ in one way or another
 - But a shadow is useless once the real thing has arrived
 - Don't keep the shadow as sacred once the real (Christ) has come
- Finally, we ended with a brief mention of how submitting to such teaching, to legalism, allows someone to defraud us of our prize – which is our liberty in Christ
 - Today we pick up here, moving quickly through the end of the chapter and into Chapter 3

[Col. 2:16](#) Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day–

[Col. 2:17](#) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

[Col. 2:18](#) Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

[Col. 2:19](#) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

- We'll start by focusing on verse 18:
 - What were the tendencies of these false teachers in Paul's day?
 - Self-abasement (*ta pe ino phro sune* in the Greek)
 - Could mean two things:

- Self-denial
 - This is the practice of denying yourself in the expectation that this gains merit with God
 - It's a work, and as a work intended to make one righteous, it has no benefit
- False Humility
 - These were men who acted humble for effect
 - In reality they were proud of their accomplishments
 - Either way, they were men who trusted in self
- Secondly, they worshipped angels
 - Ingrained into the Jewish mindset - hence the book of Hebrews begins with why Christ should be worshipped rather than angels
 - When we look back through Scripture, we see that every time God had something significant to tell the nation of Israel, He did it through a mediator which was an angel
 - What they missed was that a greater mediator was now available in Christ
- Third, they take their stand on visions they've seen
 - Their truth is experiential, not based in scripture
 - Traditions of men take precedence in their beliefs rather than the unchanging truth of God's word
 - And these visions have been inflated by their minds
 - The word for inflated is *phusioo* which means to make arrogant
 - So "inflated" refers to puffing up their visions in importance and significance
 - We see this today in the Mormon church, where one man's vision dominates their theology
 - This concept is subtly sneaking into the church today

- If study of the Word is not as appealing as the experiences in the church, generally that is a Christian that is not maturing
- Finally, they don't hold fast to the head of the Body
 - The head being Christ
 - And in holding fast to the Head, the church will realize growth by God's direction
- So, what do we learn about these men?
 - They falsely claim faith in Christ
 - But instead they pridefully trust in their own works
 - They claim to worship Christ
 - But they promote worship of angels
 - They claim to follow scripture
 - But they trust in vision and experiences, inflating those experiences in an arrogant way
 - Making their visions more important than scripture
 - Finally, they claim to be a part of Christ's church
 - But they are not holding to the Head of the church
 - They have abandoned Christ
- Then in verse 20, Paul begins to touch on the specific traditions and rules these false teachers had begun to impress upon the church at Colossae

Col. 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

Col. 2:21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

Col. 2:22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Col. 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- What a powerful set of verses for living a life of liberty
 - First, Paul sets up a test of sorts
 - Speaking to the church, he says if you have died with Christ
 - If you are a believer
 - And furthermore, you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of this world
 - Referring to the picture of baptism - being put under the ground (water) and being resurrected back to new life (out of the water)
 - Spiritually, at this moment our sin nature has been put to death
 - And God gives us a new spirit
 - We are halfway to regeneration (old body but new spirit aligned with God)
 - But Paul is asking why if we have a new spirit, do we live a pattern of life that is true for the old spirit
 - If we have died with Christ, then we have died to the rules that teach us to gain righteousness by our own works
 - Then why do you submit to degrees that tell you what you can't eat or handle?
 - Submitting to decrees could be translated "coming under this dogma"
 - Willingly embracing a system of thought that contradicts Christianity
 - In other words, why are you doing this?
 - The test is this: if you are submitting to them because you believe these actions are a part of your salvation, then you are terribly wrong
 - And if you are submitting to them because you were unaware of how they contradict the teaching of scripture, then you are dangerously naïve

- Paul says in verse 22 that all these rules concern things destined to perish in time anyway
 - The false teachers in this church were advising that in order to be acceptable to God, they encouraged self-denial; limiting eating or drinking certain items
 - They were told to observe the festivals
- But Paul highlights these things are meaningless things of the physical creation, rather than eternal spiritual things that matter
 - And in verse 23 Paul acknowledges that these things have the appearance of wisdom
 - But they originate in self-made religion
 - Self-abasement, self-denial and false humility
 - And severe treatment of the body, as if by sacrificing pleasure we are earning merit with God
- Paul ends the chapter with a great irony
 - These teachings were all directed supposedly at restraining the evil of the flesh
 - But the irony is that they have no value against indulging in the flesh
 - Fasting is not unbiblical, but the reasons why we do it matter
 - But when we try to advance the cause of salvation by these works (like fasting or otherwise), then that is unbiblical
 - Remember we are saved despite our works
 - But when we make the flesh the focus, we only make our problem worse
 - When we yield to the Holy Spirit, we naturally give less attention to our flesh
 - When we try to do it in our own power, we instead put focus on the very thing we're trying to avoid
 - Such as the person who is concerned about eating too much so weighs their food and tracks their food - they are thinking about food all day long!

- The only thing that can restrain our flesh from anything is the Spirit within us

"When we make Jesus Christ and the Christian revelation only part of a total religious system or philosophy, we cease to give Him the preeminence. When we strive for 'spiritual perfection' or 'spiritual fullness' by means of formulas, disciplines, or rituals, we go backward instead of forward. Christian believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism, and the like. We must also beware of 'deeper life' teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. In all things, He must have the preeminence!" - Wiersbe

- Wiersbe is not saying that any given activity by itself is the problem, but rather where that activity fits into our system of theology
 - They should have no bearing on what we feel about our salvation
- Now Paul turns back to encouraging and teaching the Church
 - Looking at how the things we do should be an act of service to God

Col. 3:1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Col. 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Col. 3:3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Col. 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Col. 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Col. 3:6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

Col. 3:7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

Col. 3:8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

Col. 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

Col. 3:10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

- First we see the principle that we need to focus on eternal things, not on the here and now
- Next, we see the repetition of the old vs new

- We have been changed spiritually by God's power in us
- He has freed us from slavery to sin
 - When we were a slave to sin, we could not help but sin
 - Now with the Holy Spirit in us, He enables us to avoid to sin - to make the choice not to sin
 - But like when our mind makes the decision to fast, our bodies struggle
 - Same as with lusts of a sexual context
 - These practices demonstrate we have a physical attraction to the wrong thing - separate from our mind and Spirit
- So Paul is drawing the attention of the church back to sin in the body
 - Number 1: keep seeking what is from above, not what comes from the minds of men
 - Today, we have a ton of teaching material and programs flooding into the church that are little more than man-made philosophy
 - And it's dressed up to appear Christian or at least spiritual
 - It rarely touches on eternal matters
 - Our 40 years on earth doesn't compare to eternity with Him
 - Second: (verses 3&4)
 - Your life was buried with Christ as pictured in your baptism
 - Your earthly life, with all its petty cares, and concerns was ended
 - The only life you should know now is the life you have in Christ
 - To work toward the arrival of His kingdom
 - Like the parable of the master returning to see which of his servants has been faithful in his absence

"Sometimes we say of a man, 'Music is his life—Sport is his life—He lives for his work.' Such a man finds life and all that life means in music, in sport, in work, as the case may be. For the Christian, Christ is his life. Jesus Christ dominates his thought and fills his life." - Barclay

- Even though this may not be true of ourselves, it should be true
 - Point Three is that the Christian life does have an aspiration to be a disciplined body, sin-free life, to the extent we can
- But there is a Christian method:
 - Firstly Paul says consider the earthly members of your body dead...
 - It's the aorist tense in the Greek, showing a decisive initial act that introduces a finished continuing state
 - We can see examples in Paul's life: stoned, shipwrecked, starved, imprisoned
 - The council the world would offer would be to preserve your body for future service to the Lord - all about the here and now
 - But Paul sacrificed his body because it didn't matter
 - He wanted Christ to use any way He wants
 - Whether living in luxury or poverty
 - This was a stark contrast to the false teachers
 - Paul lists those things that we should put to death so that they remain dead
 - He begins with the passions of the flesh
 - Immorality – which literally means illicit sexual intercourse
 - Impurity – any form of moral corruptness
 - Passion – uncontrolled illegitimate desires
 - Greed – materialistic desires, which amount to idolatry

- Paul reminds the church that these are the very same traits that are common to unbelievers and will lead to their destruction
 - These are the traits we shared before we had faith
 - Therefore why share in these traits? Why share in the traits that define someone we used to be?
- Then Paul follows up with yet another list, this time sins of speech
 - Anger – attitude of hostility
 - Wrath – verbal outbursts of hateful thought
 - Malice – a vicious disposition that harbors ill-intent for others
 - Slander – insulting and injurious speech (gossip)
 - Abusive speech – means filthy, profane speech
 - Lying – deceptive and dishonest speech
 - The imperative against lying was especially strong in the Greek
- So, if you want to address the sin nature of the body, don't play around the edges of the problem with false teaching in false humility following practices of men that can't save you
 - Rather, put to death the old nature and instincts and set them aside forever
 - Then Paul says what they should practice instead

Col. 3:11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Col. 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

Col. 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

- All the groups Paul mentioned were groups that were often used to differentiate men in that day
 - But those distinctions disappear for those in Christ
 - Paul reminds them of who they are

- They are the ones chosen by God
- Holy and beloved
- But often the reason we struggle to live this out, is because we still think we can achieve it in our own power
 - When we yield to Him, He provides us a way out of our problems - if only we would take it!