

Don't Be Spoiled

Colossians 2:16-23

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The believers in the church at Colosse were facing a great danger. They were in danger of being spoiled in their relationship to Christ. False teachers had been telling them that Jesus was not enough.

If I were going to summarize the reason that Paul wrote Colossians, it would be just that: false teachers came into the church and said, "We know you're Christians, but that's not enough. There are things that you need to add to your Christianity. Things that will make you more spiritual than just knowing and loving and serving Jesus Christ." The same kind of dangers face us as Christians today: saying that Christ is not sufficient or that Christ is not enough.

I want you to see these warnings in the Bible. Notice first in chapter 2, verse 8, Paul says, "Beware lest any man spoil you" or "cheat you." Secondly, in chapter 2, verse 16, he says, "Let no man therefore judge you," and thirdly, in chapter 2, verse 18, "Let no man beguile you" or "defraud you" or "rob you." I like the word "disqualify" you.

The false teachers in Paul's day, as the false teachers of our own day, were teaching Christ plus legalism, Christ plus mysticism and Christ plus asceticism.

Paul has made it clear that we, as Christians, are complete. Notice it in chapter 2, verse 10: "...ye are complete in Him." The word "complete" is a nautical term. It means we're shipshape, fully rigged and ready to sail. The moment you were born again, you were placed in Christ, and Christ is the fullness of God. You draw from that fullness, and you have that fullness.

So Paul gives us in our text three warnings. He warns us of these three dangers. The first is legalism. The second is mysticism. The third is asceticism. They are three present dangers in our world today that can derail us as believers.

First, Paul says to watch out for legalism. "Let no man therefore judge you," verses 16-17. Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

Whenever there is a "therefore," the rule of thumb is, of course, to find out what it is there for. The "therefore" is there because just before in verse 16, Paul had said that you have died with Christ, you've been buried with Christ and you have risen with Christ. He talked about our identification with Christ as believers. Now since you died, since you were buried and since you were risen as new creations in Christ, verse 16, "Let no man therefore judge you." He tells them not to be judged in these two areas: what you eat and what you drink and in your holy days, your new moons or your Sabbath days—in your diet and in your days.

The word “judge” means not to let anyone “take you to task.” I think in my old hippie days, it would be saying, “Don’t let anyone put you on a trip,” or “Don’t let anyone trip you out.” “Don’t let anyone mess with your head,” we would say. That’s what these false teachers were doing. They were putting them on a trip. They were messing with them. They were putting them under legalism.

What is legalism? Legalism is the religion of human achievement. It teaches that salvation and spirituality are based on Christ plus human works. It fails to recognize that God’s grace in Christ has made us acceptable to Him and that human works have no part in it. So it is basically saying that you have to work to be saved and that you have to work to be sanctified. You’re not only saved by works, but you’re sanctified or made holy by your own efforts and by your own good deeds.

There are two areas I’ve already mentioned in which the legalists were judging them. They are common even in our day. They were the areas of their diet and their days. Even today, people will say that if you eat certain foods or you don’t eat certain foods—usually it’s don’t eat certain foods—and you worship on certain days, you’re more spiritual. They tell you that it’s not enough just to be a Christian; you have to worship on this particular day or eat certain foods and follow particular dietary laws. So the false teachers were imposing a Mosaic legalism on the Christians in Colosse as a means of spiritual growth.

First of all, notice the diet, in verse 16: in food or in drink. My King James Bible says “in meat,” but that’s just a word referring to their food. So it’s a matter of what you eat and what you drink. It could be translated “in your eating or in your drinking.” It’s from the Old Testament Mosaic Law. In the Old Testament, Moses gave the people of Israel—given to Israel and not to the church—dietary laws. Notice it was in the Old Testament and not repeated in the New Testament, so you have to take that into consideration.

What did Jesus teach about food and diet and these things? He taught a lot. In Mark 7, Jesus said, “It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you. It’s what comes out of your mouth.” It’s not what you eat that messes you up; it’s what comes out of your mouth, your words. Why? Because what you eat just passes through you, and it’s gone. But what you say comes from your heart, and that defiles the whole person.

So your spirituality isn’t based on whether you had hamburgers or steak or whether you go to In-N-Out or not. Praise the Lord for that! What I read Jesus saying is that it’s not what goes in your mouth that defiles you. It’s like, “I’ll have a double-double.” Hallelujah!

If you say that you think you shouldn’t eat meat, that’s great. Just watch me as I eat mine, okay? With great delight. But don’t put me on a trip. Don’t mess with me. Don’t try to tell me I have to do what you do or that I’m going to be more spiritual if I follow your dietary laws. There has to be a clear command and teaching in the New Testament for believers today if we’re going to follow dietary laws, and there isn’t any. So Jesus said that it’s not what goes in, but what comes out. What comes out comes from your heart.

I'm a pastor and I've been around people before who don't like to say bad words around the pastor. They'll slip and they'll say, "Oh, sorry, Pastor. I don't know where that came from." I know where it came from. It came from your heart. There's an old saying that says, "If it's in the well, it comes up in the bucket." I like that. Whatever's in your heart comes out of your mouth.

A good test, by the way, is if you're driving a nail and you hit your thumb, what comes out of your mouth? "Oh! Praise Jesus. Hallelujah." If you speak in tongues, you know your spiritual. If you say things you shouldn't say, that's what was in the well. It came up in the bucket. So you need a change of heart.

So diet is not an issue. Paul taught here in Colossians that diet is not an issue, but in 1 Corinthians 8:8, he says that food "commendeth us not to God: for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither if we eat not, are we the worse." In Romans 14:17, Paul says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

I don't purposefully want to offend anyone today, but I am going to offend everybody today. This is one of those sermons in which I'll probably make everybody unhappy somewhere in my message. With all due respect to my Seventh Day Adventist friends, food is not an issue. I grew up my whole life next to Loma Linda, and I know a lot of Seventh Day Adventists. They are sincere and devoted and they love God, but they feel they are more spiritual because they don't eat meat. Or Roman Catholics feel they can't eat meat on Friday, and they can't eat meat on certain days. That's not Scriptural; it's not Biblical. It's not really what the Bible teaches. It's a form of modern-day legalism.

I had a friend who was a vegetarian, and he would shop at Loma Linda and would brag about the fact that he could buy veggie hot dogs. I'm thinking, Wait a minute. Don't you think it's sinful to eat meat?

Yeah.

Why do you have 'fake sin'?

It looks like I'm sinning, but I'm really not. Ha ha! It's like, what's the deal with that? If you're gonna go veggie, go veggie. Why does it have to be a veggie hot dog? He was trying to convince me that they were really good. No thank you. If it's going to be a hot dog, it's going to be a real hot dog. Not a veggie hot dog. What's that? It's like an oxymoron. People get so hung up on diet.

Then there are the days, verse 16: "...or in respect of a holyday," which would be the annual Jewish feast, there is "the new moon," which would be the monthly feasts and "the Sabbath days," which would be the weekly Saturdays or Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a big deal for many today. We once had a group show up at my former church, and they put fliers on all the cars that said because we were meeting on Sunday, we were

taking the mark of the beast. Because we were worshipping on Sunday, we were all condemned. The Bible says it doesn't matter what day you worship on. God doesn't esteem one day above another. God esteems every day alike. God looks at our hearts. When you cry out to God, He doesn't say, "Oh, sorry. Wrong day. I can't hear you. Check back with Me Saturday after the sun goes down." It's not an issue.

I want to give you five issues about the Sabbath. I get so many questions about the Sabbath day. This is a little footnote in my sermon. First of all, the Sabbath was a sign of the Covenant that God made with Israel, Exodus 31, and not with the New Testament church. Secondly, God does not command Christians to observe the Sabbath in the New Testament. Of all the Ten Commandments, the one that is not repeated in the New Testament was the keeping of the Sabbath day. Thirdly, in our only glimpse of the early church worship service in the New Testament, we find the church meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week, in Acts 20:7. Fourthly, in Acts 15, as they were imposing restrictions on the Gentile believers, the Jerusalem council did not impose the Sabbath-day keeping. Fifthly, Paul never warned the Gentiles about breaking the Sabbath day when he warned them about many different sins in his epistles and letters. Not one mention to the carnal Corinthians that they were messing up because they didn't worship on the Sabbath day.

I want you to notice the weakness of legalism from this text. First of all, the Old Covenant was only a shadow, verse 17. Paul says that these holy days, these new moons, these Sabbath days, food and drink "...are a shadow of things to come, but the body..."—or "substance" or "essence"—"...is of Christ." So weakness number one, the Old Covenant, was only a shadow. In Hebrews 10:1, it says, "For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year, continually make the comers thereunto perfect."

The Old Testament was like a shadow. Whenever you have a shadow, you know that you have a substance that is creating that shadow. Have you ever tried to clean a spot on the carpet and you are rubbing and cleaning and all of a sudden you realize that the light is coming through the window and something is in the way; it's a shadow and not a spot? I remember once working on a spot for a long time and I couldn't get it out. I finally realized it was only a shadow being cast by something else.

So the Old Covenant is likened unto a shadow, but now Jesus has come, and He is the substance. He's the real deal. Once we've come to Jesus, we don't need the shadow anymore. It's like having a picture of someone you love. Maybe a young couple gets married, and the husband goes off as a soldier to war, and the time that he is gone, she has a picture of him. She carries it close to her heart, and she looks at it every night. She prays for her husband. Then that special day comes when he returns. Don't you love those moments when you see soldiers returning, the family runs out and the kids get to hug their daddy and the wife and husband kiss and embrace? Can you imagine a soldier coming down the gangplank or coming off a plane and a wife saying, "I know he's here, but I just want to look at his picture. I'm just going to hold the picture." No. She puts the picture away, she rushes out and puts her

arms around her husband and embraces him.

Once Christ has come, we can put the picture away, because we have the reality, the substance in Jesus Christ. That's what Paul is saying here. That's what he says in verse 17: "...but the body..."—or "substance"—"...is of Christ."

Jesus took care of the Law on the Cross. Look at verse 14. Jesus "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us..."—or that was "contrary to us"—"...and took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross." Jesus took care of the Law, which condemned us and was against us and contrary to us. He nailed it to His Cross.

What does legalism lead to? Let me mention five things. Legalism leads to judgmentalism. Be careful of the legalists; they become very judgmental. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." Now don't make the mistake of interpreting those words as saying that you are not to be discerning between truth and error. Jesus, in the very same passage in verse 15, also said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing." And He said in verse 6, "Neither cast ye your pearls before swine." You're going to have to be judgmental about what's a swine. So it's not saying that that's wrong and that's right and this is true and that's false.

What He's talking about when Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged" is He's talking about a critical, fault-finding, judgmental, censorious spirit where you criticize other people, because they don't meet your standards. By your standards, I mean unbiblical standards, man-made rules, that you feel are necessary to be spiritual. "If you were really spiritual, you wouldn't wear those clothes. If you're really spiritual, you wouldn't listen to that music. If you're really spiritual, you wouldn't go to that place or be around those people." Or you wouldn't do this or you wouldn't do that. They try to put a standard on you that God hasn't given to you in His Word. They become very critical, very fault-finding, very judgmental.

This deals with a lot of controversial areas like clothes. Some Christians have an idea of what Christian clothes are. If you don't dress a certain way, that's not the Christian way to dress. What are Christian clothes? I make jokes about Christian haircuts. When I got saved, I had long hair and a big beard. I had kind of the Duck Dynasty look. This was pre-Duck Dynasty, and I was a full-on Duck Dynasty hippie. Don't think about it too much; it'll freak you out. I got saved, but I didn't cut my hair or shave; I still had long hair and a beard. But I got saved.

I went to work for a Christian organization, and I found out, after working for them for years, that they didn't think I was really saved. They were praying for me the whole time. "God, just save John Miller. Just save that hippie, Lord. Just save him." What they're really saying is, "Lord, cut his hair." I found out that they didn't think I was a Christian because of the way I looked. I thought, Man, I look more like Jesus than you do. What's the deal?

Where is there a dress code in the Bible? There isn't one. But people get hung up on that. Or should women wear makeup? (I told you I was going to freak some people out.) I love what J.

Vernon McGee said. He said, "If the barn needs painting, paint it." I'm just quoting Dr. McGee. But I do like that quote.

I had a guy call me at my former church one time and tell me, "How can you call yourself a Christian church when all those women are painted like Jezebels! I've been watching the women come into your church, and some of them are wearing pants!" At least they're wearing something. It's like, "What is your problem, dude?"

"They're of the Devil and they've got makeup on and all painted up," and he's freaking out.

People worry about the music you listen to. "That's demon music." If you have drums, those are demonic beats. Demons are going to fly out of the drums and possess you. We get all hung up on hymns versus worship choruses or music in the church and on and on.

People get hung up on whether Christians can swim or dance. People ask me if Christians can dance. My answer is, "Some can; some can't." I've gone to weddings where they dance afterwards. I don't dance, by the way. I sit there and go, "Oh, Lord, I pray right now." It's embarrassing. If you're going to dance, know how to dance; okay?

Can Christians smoke? Can they chew? Can they hang out with those who do? I had a good, solid, Christian friend who lived in a different state. We got together and he was chewing tobacco. I said, "I thought you were a Christian?"

He goes [spitting], "I am." That didn't compute for me. "Praise God [spitting]." Spitting tobacco. It's like I don't know about that, but I looked in my Bible. I couldn't find any Scripture that says, "Thou shalt not chew tobacco." It's not in the Bible.

But legalism wants to have all these little rules. Now I understand that we need to love God and not live in a way that is offensive to Him. I want to be pleasing to God. I want to live a holy life. I want to love other people and not do anything that causes them to stumble or offend them. So I think it's the law of love we need to operate under. Not the Mosaic Law, but the law of loving God and loving others is what we need. So legalism becomes judgmentalism.

Secondly, legalism promotes uniformity. Uniformity comes from pressure on the outside. Unity comes from the Spirit on the inside. You can go to lunch on Sunday after service, and you can see Christians come in and you can tell their doctrine or their church affiliation by the way they dress or the way they look. People who come from Revival, they don't know where we came from. "I don't think they're saved." I can tell you their theology by the clothes they wear and the way they look. So there is this pressure of uniformity on the outside to all look the same.

Then it moves to hypocrisy; legalism becomes hypocritical. Jesus said to the Pharisees that they may clean the outside of the cup, but inside, it's full of extortion. It's full of sin. God looks not on the outside; God looks on the heart. When your heart has been changed, I believe the outside does change. The outside should reflect the true, spiritual beauty of Christ on the inside. You don't want the outside to distract from Christ. But it's not an issue to God.

Fourthly, legalism leads to pride. "I'm better than you, because I don't listen to that music or I don't dance or I don't go to the movies or I don't do those things."

And fifthly, legalism leads to joylessness. Show me a legalist and I'll show you somebody who looks like they've been baptized in lemon juice. They have no joy. There's no liberty in Christ.

I heard the true story of a pastor back east. On a cold, Sunday morning there was a blizzard, all the streets were iced over, and he was unable to drive his car to get to church to preach that Sunday. His only option was to put on ice skates and skate to church, so that's what he did. The elders found out about that he skated on Sunday and called him in after the service. They said, "Pastor, we heard that you skated today, and it's the Lord's day. That's not right. Did you skate today?"

He said, "Yes; it's the only way I could get to church. The streets were iced, so I had to skate to church."

So after listening to the pastor, they came to the conclusion that it was okay, "as long as you didn't enjoy it."

"Oh, no; I didn't enjoy it. I was miserable the whole time. So it's okay with God."

Where did we get the idea that Christians can't have fun? That it's more spiritual to look sad? That the sign of being spiritual is being grumpy or have a sad face? I believe that the Spirit of God brings joy into our hearts. So beware of legalism.

Secondly, Paul says to watch out for mysticism. "Let no one disqualify you." So we have legalism—"Let no man therefore judge you"—and now we have mysticism—"Let no one disqualify you." Look at verses 18 and 19. Paul says, "Let no man beguile..."—or "disqualify"—"...you of your reward in a voluntary humility..."—notice it's a feigned or phony humility—"...and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen..."—I think that would be better translated "which he claims to have seen"—"...vainly puffed up by his fleshly..."—or "carnal"—"...mind..."—and here's the problem with mysticism—"...and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

Here's a description of mysticism: Mysticism looks for reality in subjective experience. I tried to make that as simple and to the point of a definition as I can. Mysticism looks for reality in experience. Now there's nothing wrong with experience. There is a true mysticism, but that experience must be based on the truth of God's Word.

If you miss everything I've said this morning, don't miss this: The way to determine what is true and what is false, what is real and what is not, what is of God and what is not, is the objective truth of God's Word, the Bible. It's not your subjective feelings. "Well, I felt it. I saw it. I heard it. Well, I just knooooow it's true, because I have a 'burning in my bosom,'" the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints will say. Mormons will say that they know their doctrine is true

because they have “a burning in their bosom.” Eat a burrito and get a burning in your bosom. The older I get, everything burns my bosom. What’s the deal with that? That’s subjective.

What about the Bible? Is what you teach true with God’s Word? Is it aligned with the truth of God’s Word? That’s the plumb line. That’s the authority.

The false teachers claim “special visions,” verse 18. Special visions that only they have seen. New revelations. Contact with angels and spirits. Again, I don’t want to offend anyone, but the Mormon church is based on the testimony of one man, Joseph Smith. His testimony is that he was visited by an angel, whose name was Moroni. Moroni showed Smith where the golden tablets were and gave him special glasses to read them. It’s all a claim that he had this subjective experience. So they come up with other writings. And this angel said that all of Christendom is apostate. All Christians have fallen away from the truth. “I’m going to give you the truth. I’m going to give you a new revelation.” If it’s new, it’s not true; if it’s true, it’s not new.

What about God’s Word? What about the Bible? God has given us His Word. We don’t need a new revelation and some new insight. Paul, the Apostle, said that “If any man...”—or an angel from heaven—...preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed,” Galatians 1:9. It doesn’t matter if I or an angel—Paul, Pastor Miller—It doesn’t matter who it may be—preach any other gospel than that which is in the Word of God, let them be anathema.

It was a subjective kind of experience they professed. The New Age movement is creeping into the church. We have the experience-focus of the church. I’m all for experience. I’m all for experiencing God, but it must be based on the teachings of Scripture.

So Paul says in verse 18, “Let no man beguile you.” The word “beguile” was taken from two words. In the Greek it is “prize” and “umpire.” It means “to disqualify a prize.” What would an umpire do? He would either disqualify you or he would reward you. If you stepped outside the line, outside your lane, the umpire would disqualify you. What Paul is saying is that these false teachers will rob you of your prize. The prize is Jesus Christ. They will disqualify you.

There are two problems with false mysticism. The first is that it promotes self, verse 18, and secondly, it demotes Christ. It elevates man and then it demotes Christ. Verse 18 says, “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.” They take their stand, verse 18, on visions that only they have seen.

This phrase is really a challenge to translate from the Greek. Scholars debate as to how it should be phrased. After studying this, I believe it should be phrased that “They take their stand on visions only they have seen.” This brings you into intimidation; “I saw something you didn’t see. I know something you don’t know. I’ve had experiences you don’t have, so you need to look to me and I’ll teach you and train you. You can follow me.”

I’ve actually seen and heard preachers preaching, and in the middle of their sermon they will

stop and start dialoging with God. I saw one preacher stop and say, "Lord? Lord, no; I can't say that. Lord, you sure you want me to say that? I don't know if I should say that." Everyone in the room closes their Bible and says, "Wow! What does the Lord want him to say? He has a direct hotline from heaven! He's hearing from God right now!" That's dangerous to start with. "The Lord wants me to tell you right now that there are ten people who should give \$1,000 each." Really. Wow. Why not eleven people? It's just crazy. It is a false kind of intimidation.

There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of heaven. You are complete in Christ. You have Jesus and you have everything you need. You don't need some preacher to channel God for you. You can open your Bible, and God speaks through what He has spoken. Whatever they say must be judged according to the Scriptures. Never shut your Bible when you're listening to a preacher. Always keep it open. Always read before the text and after the text and around the text and ask, "Is that really what it says?" and "Is that really what it means?" Do your own homework. Don't let anyone deceive you. Don't let anyone intimidate you.

"God told me to turn right. I was driving my car the other day, and God told me to turn right. 'Go here.' 'Go there.'" Have you ever heard people talk like that? You go, "Wow! You must be spiritual. Can I touch you? I want some of that anointing." God doesn't talk to me like that. I know God can give us impressions on our heart, and God can lead us by our desires and impressions. But we don't have a direct hotline from God. The Bible says, "The just shall live by faith," and that faith is in God's Word, which leads us to God's Son, in Whom we put our faith and trust. But the false teachers take their stand on visions only they have seen, so they are intimidating you by saying they are hearing directly from God. This is mysticism. In verse 18 it says their minds are "puffed up."

Then the real problem is in verse 19: It demotes Christ. It elevates the man or the messenger, and it demotes Christ. Verse 19, the problem is that they're "not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God."

Paul uses the analogy of the human body and the head. The body must stay connected to the head. It's a good idea to keep your head; right? You can lose an arm or a leg or a hand or an ear, but you lose your head, you're not going to function. Jesus is the Head. Stay connected to Christ. He is the one Who nourishes the body and provides strength to the body, and He is the One Who gives us what we need. The problem is that they are not holding the Head; they are not united with Christ. There is no spiritual life apart from Christ. Christ is the Head of the church, verse 19, and Christ nourishes the church. So beware of those who promote self and demote Christ.

Thirdly, in verses 20-23, Paul says to watch out for asceticism. Let no one enslave you. Paul says, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world..."—or "the principles of the world." Here's the question—...why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments of men?"—Notice the source is the commandments and doctrines of

men—"Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

What is asceticism? Asceticism and legalism are partners in humanistic religion. Asceticism promotes self-denial, deliberate refusal to have material comfort as a means of spirituality. It's saying, "My body is evil, therefore, I'm going to starve it. I'm going to punish it. I'm going to afflict it." Today it is known as "dualism," which practices asceticism, in an attempt to free the spirit from the prison of the body. A lot of eastern mysticism does this. They punish and afflict the body.

Let me tell you something that is so important: The physical body is not evil. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The physical body and the material world are not evil. It's been sanctified by God. It's been created by God. So you don't have to punish or afflict your body to be more spiritual. "I can't sleep on a soft bed, because that would be carnal. I need to punish and afflict this flesh. I need to subdue this flesh." That's not going to help you at all. That's dualism—trying to free the spirit from the prison of the body.

Sadly, this idea has come into the church, especially in the fourth century, when people moved into monasteries; as though moving into a monastery up on a hill or a mountain somewhere, not getting married or not eating certain foods is going to make you more spiritual. The church began to promote not getting married; that you're more spiritual if you don't get married. We have branches of the church in which people are married to Christ and are forbidding others to marry. They think it is a sinful thing. And if you do get married, don't have sexual intimacy, because it's just a necessary evil to procreate and have kids. That's not Biblical Christianity. That's not Scriptural. God created sex to be enjoyed and to have pleasure in the Covenant relationship of marriage.

They denied themselves of sleep and of food. They practiced asceticism. They advocated wearing certain clothes. They purposely wore rough, hard, harsh clothing to punish their skin—uncomfortable clothes—so they would be more spiritual. They would sleep in a swamp, or one monk refused to lie down when he slept; he denied himself laying down to sleep. Another monk lived in a hollowed-out log for seven years, and he was "spiritual." Another monk had maggots all over his body, and he thought that made him more spiritual. They said when he walked down the street, the maggots would fall off of him. People thought, "Wow! He's spiritual!" No; he's stupid. That's creepy. That's flat out dumb. Or if I get on my knees and walk up steps or I whip my body, I'm going to be more "spiritual." Or if I deny myself some creature comforts, that's asceticism.

I want you to know three things about asceticism in the text. First it's ignorance, in verse 20. It's ignorant of the fact that they had died with Christ. Paul said, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" It was ignorant of the truth, which Paul just taught in Colossians that you died with Christ, you were buried with Christ, you've risen with Christ, therefore you're not subject to these ordinances.

Secondly, notice asceticism's description, verse 21. It's "touch not, taste not, handle not." Don't touch that. Don't taste that. Don't handle that. Notice that it's only negative. They judge themselves spiritual because of what they don't do rather than what they do.

That's the way a lot of people look at Christianity. They look at Christianity as a bunch of don'ts. Don't have fun is at the top of the list. Don't smile. Don't enjoy anything. Be miserable, but know this: One day you're going to get to go to heaven. That's not Christianity. It's only known by the negatives; don't touch that, don't taste that, don't drink that, don't do this. It's all negatives, and that's pretty sad.

Thirdly, we see asceticism's weakness in verses 22-23. It is a man-made teaching. Paul makes that perfectly clear in verse 22. He said, "...after the commandments and doctrines of men." What you need to do as a Christian is to differentiate what the Bible teaches and from what people teach; what is man-made rules and traditions and what is truly Biblical and what is Scriptural. It's not taught in the Bible.

Asceticism is also weak because it's hypocritical. Notice verse 23: These "things have..." an appearance "...of wisdom..." in self-imposed religion, false "...humility, and neglecting of the body." So it's a feigned or phony religion. It appears to be spiritual. "Wow! You look so spiritual because you wear a robe," or "You look so spiritual because you shave your head." Those things are okay, but God is looking at your heart; He's not looking at your head or the clothes you wear. It's a phony or feigned spirituality.

I love what Jesus said in Matthew 6 when He talked about fasting. He said, "When you fast, don't look sad." He said, "When you fast, wash your face and comb your hair." He actually said they should not appear to others as if they are fasting. This is funny, because I've been to potlucks where people will show up at a potluck and not eat.

"Aren't you going to eat?"

"No; I'm fasting."

"Really. Well get out of the way; I'm not. I'm trying to get to the food."

I've been to potlucks where they just walk around and look at the food. And so often, if they talk softly, that makes them more "spiritual."

"Are you going to eat?"

"No."

"Wow! You're spiritual!"

If they whisper, that makes them more spiritual? Go to the potluck, but don't let people know with a big sign that says, "I'm fasting. You people aren't. I'm more 'spiritual' than you." Fasting's

fine but don't do it "to be seen of men," or give money "to be seen of men." You don't serve God to be seen of men. You do it "as unto the Lord." So Jesus said to watch out, that you appear not unto men as to be fasting.

I love what R. Kent Hughes said. He said, "Asceticism has its own seductiveness. Today, in its eastern form, it attracts the indulgent, cultured elite. Thousands today have their gurus. Through them, they make their ascetic nod to God. Seen for what it really is, this is an expression of independence from God, which says, 'I'm going to get to God on my own terms, by my own might.' Asceticism feeds the flesh by starving it." I like that.

And notice lastly, asceticism is powerless to overcome the sin-nature, verse 23. It says it is of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. There is no benefit or value to help you to resist your sinful, fallen, carnal nature.

What you need is to be born again. What you need is to live a life of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. When you come to know Christ, you are "free indeed." That's not free to sin; that's free not to sin. That's not free to do whatever you want; that's free to live a life that pleases God.

The answer to legalism is the grace of Christ. The answer to mysticism is my completeness in Christ. The answer to asceticism is that I have died with Christ, and I have risen with Christ. The answer is Christ. Christ is all that we need, and Christ is all that we want. Don't let anyone spoil you.

Let's pray.