

Don't Be Spoiled

Colossians 2:16-23

Pastor John Miller

I want to read the whole text, and we're going to go back and unpack it phrase by phrase. Follow with me beginning in Colossians 2:16. Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat,"—my King James Bible has which means food—"or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ,"—the substance, the essence, the reality shadows Christ. Verse 18, "Let no man beguile you,"—I'm going to come back to this, but notice—"Let no man therefore judge you," verse 16; and verse 18, "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, 19 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." That "head," by the way, is referring to Christ who is the head of the body the church.

Verse 20, "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,"—these are the ordinances—"Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?"—they're not after God. Verse 23, "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

The believers in the church at Colossae were facing great danger, so Paul wants to warn them. So many of Paul's epistles were written in the historical context of false teachers who had come into the church, and Paul was wanting to protect them from these wolves. The church is the flock, the body of Christ, the sheep of God, and the pastor is the shepherd. They need to protect, many times, the sheep from wolves which come in sheep's clothing. Paul is protecting them.

The false teaching was as a general term called Gnosticism. That term comes from the Greek word *ginōskō* which means to know or knowledge. It's a group of believers that claim they had a superior, deeper knowledge than anyone else, and they would initiate you into their group, but you had to become a part of their group to get their information or their knowledge. They were basically telling the believers, "Christ is not enough. Christ is not sufficient." The whole theme of the book of Colossians is the sufficiency of Christ, the preeminence of Christ, and that we are complete in Christ; and if we have Christ, we need nothing else in addition to our relationship with Him.

Paul is warning us, back up to verse 8, "Beware lest any man spoil,"—the word is cheat—"you." Notice in verse 16, "Let no man therefore judge you," we saw that just a moment ago, and verse 18 as well, "Let no man beguile,"—or defraud—"you." So, don't let anyone spoil you, don't let anyone judge you, don't let anyone defraud you. The false teachers in Paul's day, as the false teachers do today, were teaching Christ plus legalism, Christ plus mysticism, Christ plus

asceticism, but Paul has made it clear in verse 10 that in Christ you, as a Christian, are complete. The simple overarching thought is: Don't let anyone tell you that you need more than Jesus Christ. Amen? If you have Christ, you are complete.

That word "complete" in verse 10, as I pointed out several weeks ago, is a nautical term. It means you're shipshape, fully rigged, ready to sail. You as a believer have everything you need in Christ, so don't let people say, "Well, you need a little legalism," or "You need some laws and rules," or "You need a little mysticism," or "You need some philosophy," or "You need some psychology," or "You need this," and "You need that." "No, I have Christ, thank you very much, and in Christ I'm complete. I have everything that I need." Jesus is not only all we need, but Jesus should be all that we want. Amen? That's all that we should want is more and more of Jesus Christ.

Paul gives us in our text three warnings, and we're going to go back over them. They are the warning of legalism, mysticism, and asceticism, three present-day dangers as they were in Paul's day that could derail or destroy or defraud you of your simplicity you have in Jesus Christ. Let's look at them one at a time.

First of all, watch out for legalism, "Let no man therefore judge you." If you just want to write that term down, "legalism," don't let anyone else judge you, verses 16-17. Go back there with me in the text. Paul says, "Let no man,"—that phrase "no man" literally means no man. Don't let anyone in a place of authority or leadership in the church put you on a trip. That's kind of an old hippie term we used to use, "Hey, man, you're tripping me out," or "Don't put me on a trip." So, he says, "Let no man therefore judge you,"—or defraud you. He tells them that they're not to let them do that. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat,"—or food—"or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days,"—I'm reading from the King James translation, and the word "days" is italicized. It's just sabbaths. Verse 17, "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." What a great warning. It's so important for us today. Legalism is alive and well in the church today.

Paul starts in verse 16, "Let no man therefore,"—you know the drill, right? Whenever there's a "therefore," you do what? You ask, "What is it there for?" What it's there for takes us back to what we covered last week that we have been dead with Christ and buried, that we are risen and living with Christ, and that we are forgiven and free in Christ. You, in your identification with Christ as a Christian, true of all believers, died with Christ, you were buried with Christ, you rose with Christ, and in Ephesians he takes it even further, which is a parallel book to Colossians, you have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies, "Far above all principality, and power;" so verse 16, "Let no man therefore judge you." The word "judge you" means take you to task.

What is legalism? I'm glad you asked. Legalism is the religion of human achievement. It teaches that salvation and spirituality are based on Christ plus human works and human achievement. 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. You are not saved by works, which is legalism. You

are not sanctified by good works.

Now, you're saved, " . . . unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," but we're not saved by them. We cannot merit, earn, or deserve salvation by performance. Legalism is a performance Christianity—you have to do in order to be saved, and then you have to keep on doing and follow, many times, man-made laws, rules, and standards that are not biblical or scriptural that are fostered upon people thus to be able to meet a standard that's man-made and not something that is truly ordained in the Word of God.

There were two areas the legalists were judging or condemning them, and that was in the area of diet, the food they ate and the things they drank, and days, the holy days, the new moons and sabbath days. The false teachers were imposing a Mosaic legalism on the Christians in Colossae as a means to spiritual growth. Paul deals with this whole subject in the book of Galatians, if you're interested. The whole book of Galatians is about that we are not saved by works, we are saved by grace, and we're not sanctified by works, we're sanctified by grace. That's why Paul says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel,"—this is not the gospel, it's legalism—"unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." The word is anáthema. It means cursed to the lowest hell.

We don't have very many Christians like that today that are willing to say, "That teaching is anáthema." Today it's kind of like you've got to be politically correct and nice and tell everybody, "God loves you," and "Everything's okay. You're okay, and I'm okay." If you say, "That teaching is anáthema, and God's Word says you're cursed to hell," that's a bold stand that Paul takes as an apostle, and on the truth of God's Word we can do the same. Now, we're not saying their motives might not be right, but you can have right motives and wrong message, and it's a disaster. We need to be discerning. This whole passage tonight is a lesson in discernment that we need to have as true believers, followers of Jesus Christ. The false teachers were imposing this Mosaic legalism upon them—diet and days.

First of all, look at the diet, " . . . in meat,"—food—"or in drink," my King James Bible has. From the Old Testament we have what's called the Mosaic law given to Israel where they had dietary laws that were required under the old covenant for the Jewish people, the nation of Israel. Those dietary laws are not mandatory upon Christians today, praise God! Amen? They couldn't eat certain foods. They couldn't eat certain meats. They couldn't eat certain things. There's people today that think if you don't eat meat you'll be more spiritual. You might be more healthy, and you might be smarter, I'm not a vegetarian, by the way. I'm thinking right now of In-N-Out. You can almost write that in the margin of that text right there, a Double-Double with cheese, extra onion, toasted bun with mustard. I just thought I'd throw that out there.

There's people that say, "Oh! I don't eat meat," or "I don't eat pork," or "I don't eat fish on certain days," or "I don't eat that," or "I don't eat this, therefore I'm more spiritual." No, no, no, no, no. Jesus said, "It's not what goes in your mouth that defiles you." When I read that I say, "Praise the Lord! Let's go to In-N-Out right now! I'm free in Christ. Praise Jesus!" Don't let anyone put you on a trip, "You eat meat? Oh, you're not spiritual." "You eat that? Oh, you're not spiritual."

Don't let them, as I would say from my hippie days, put you under a trip. Jesus taught that, as I said, Matthew 7, it's not what goes in, it's what comes out, " . . . for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

What did Paul teach? I want to give you a couple of verses. To parallel this text, write down 1 Corinthians 8:8. It says, "But meat,"—food—"commendeth us not to God,"—that just says it right out—"for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." That's pretty clear. In Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not meat,"—food—"and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

I grew up in San Bernardino and just south from there was the City of Loma Linda and the Seventh-day Adventist folks, so I've been around it a lot for many, many years. They're big on vegetarian and health food and diet and certain days that you should worship on. I had a friend that was a vegetarian. He used to shop at the market there in Loma Linda. He used to brag that he got veggie hot dogs. That's an oxymoron. What is a veggie hot dog? I know that you can get hot dogs in different kinds of meat, but give me a real hot dog. And there are those that believe that meat is sinful, yet they make veggie hot dogs. That's like fake sin or something. It looks like I'm sinning, but I'm really not. This is awesome. What is that all about? If you want vegetables, eat vegetables. If you want meat, have a real hot dog. Amen? Meat does not commend us to God.

Then there are the days. Look at verse 16, " . . . or in respect of an holyday." If you're taking notes, write this down. That's annual feast. It's conveying the idea of their annual feast, and they had several annual feasts—Passover, Tabernacles and all that. Paul then says, " . . . or of the new moon," which is monthly. They had a monthly calendar that they had to worship by. " . . . or of the sabbath days," would be weekly, the Shabbat, the Sabbath day. The Seventh-day Adventists make a big deal about that.

In my former church we had some people that were Seventh-day Baptists but they were so zealous for their seventh-day that when we would worship on Sunday, they would picket our church and said that we were going to hell because we worshiped on Sunday rather than on Saturday, which is taking the mark of the beast. That's getting pretty crazy, so be careful of those who want to put you on a diet or say that you can only worship on special and certain days.

Now, I don't want to get sidetracked, but because it's an important issue and many people are confused about the Sabbath today, if you're taking notes, write down just five (there are actually ten) points I could mention. I want to give you my top five reasons that Christians today are not bound by the Sabbath day—that we have to worship God on Saturday. First of all, the Sabbath was a sign to Israel of the old covenant, Exodus 31, Nehemiah 9:14, and Ezekiel 20:12. It was a sign of the covenant with Israel.

Secondly, the New Testament nowhere commands Christians to observe the Sabbath. Of all the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, the one that is not repeated in the New Testament is

the Sabbath day, which is fascinating to me, and the New Testament clearly teaches that our Sabbath is found in resting in Christ and His finished work on the cross.

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, Acts 20:7. Paul also mentioned on their gathering together to worship on the first day of the week that they would take up an offering, but that's when they gathered on Sunday because it became what they called the Lord's day, the day Christ rose from the dead.

Fourth, the Jerusalem counsel, Acts 15, did not impose Sabbath keeping on the Gentile believers. When they gathered together as Jewish believers to determine whether or not Gentile Christians must keep the Mosaic law and the dietary law and the Sabbath laws, they did not impose that Sabbath day law on the Gentile believers.

Fifthly, Paul warned the Gentiles about many different sins in his epistles but never about breaking the Sabbath day. When he wrote to the carnal Corinthians, he never said, "You're supposed to worship on Saturday. Why are you worshipping on Sunday?" He didn't correct them. There are many other reasons why as well that we're not restricted to specific day when we have to worship God and that God doesn't hear us or doesn't recognize us unless it's His specific day that He's designated for us to worship on. Like the other old covenant holy days, the Sabbath is not binding them to New Testament Christians.

In verse 17, the weakness of legalism is seen. I want you to look at it with me, "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Why would you want to mess with the shadows when you have the reality, which is Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 10:1, "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." You know, all the Old Testament sacrifices and laws that they kept could not wash or cleanse them from their sin. They were all pointing to something, and that's Christ, who was the substance who would fulfill the promise. All they did was form a covering temporarily until Christ came and died on the cross and forgave our sins. Those things are just like a picture. When Christ came, they had the substance, they had the reality. Christ is the substance.

Notice the old covenant was a shadow, and secondly, verse 17, Christ is the substance. He took care of the law on the cross. Back up to verse 14. We saw this a couple of weeks ago, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances,"—this is what Jesus did on the cross—"that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." All the law that demanded of us righteousness was nailed to the cross, and Jesus paid for our sins there.

Just a couple of thoughts before we leave this legalism point. Those who become legalistic become judgmental. It leads to judgmentalism. Jesus said in Matthew 7, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." This Sunday morning in our study of the Sermon on the Plain, which is the parallel to the Sermon on the Mount, we're going to be looking at that concept—don't judge others, if

you don't want to be judged yourself. Now, that word "judge" doesn't mean don't be discerning. Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." You have to discern the wolf in sheep's clothing. " . . . neither cast ye your pearls before swine," so you have to try to decide, "Is this a swine or is this a sheep?" We need to be discerning, but that phrase, "Judge not," literally means don't be critical or fault finding. The word is censorious—a critical, judgmental, fault-finding attitude toward others. If God has been merciful to you, you should be merciful to others.

It also leads to uniformity. Sometimes you can tell what a person's theology or doctrine or church affiliation is by the way they dress and the way they wear their hair, the way they look, the things they put on. You can identify by their clothes their theology and doctrine. I can go to a restaurant after church on Sunday morning and see certain people dressed a certain way and tell you what church they're from and what their theology and doctrine is based on attire. It leads to uniformity. Let me explain this. Uniformity comes from pressure on the outside to conform—you gotta have the right haircut, the right Bible and it's gotta be the right color, too and the right kind of leather, the right translation. You've gotta have the right clothes. You've gotta speak the same way. It's pressure on the outside to conform. Unity comes from the work of the Spirit on the inside, so there's diversity with unity.

When I got saved I had long hair and a big beard. I know it's hard for you to imagine, don't think too much about it, it'll freak you out, but I was Duck Dynasty before Duck Dynasty. I got saved and went to work for a Christian organization that was very conservative. They had Christian haircuts, Christian clothes. They had their style, I won't tell you what it was, but they had all the way they dressed. They were praying for me to get saved because of the way I looked. They said, "Lord, please save John Miller, that hippie, crazy man. He needs Jesus." I said, "I look more like Jesus than you do. What's the problem here?"

Be careful not to judge a book by its cover, "Well, they can't be saved, look at the dress she's wearing." "They can't be saved, look at that dude's hair." "They can't be saved, look at the things that he's doing." They have their standards and want to identify by their outward look. You see people from Revival, they don't know where we came from I don't think—every shape, every size, every color, every age, everything. That's what we are. We want unity that's created by the Spirit in the midst of diversity. Amen? We're all different. We have different gifts and abilities. Legalism creates uniformity. We don't want that.

It also fosters hypocrisy because Jesus said, " . . . for ye make clean the outside of the cup . . . but within they are full of extortion and excess." It's just an exterior cleansing, not an interior work. It also leads to pride, "I'm better than you because I keep these laws and rules." It also leads to joylessness. Legalists aren't happy, they're miserable. They look like they've been baptized in lemon juice.

I can't tell you how many times over the years I've had legalistic people get real upset with me because I used humor when I taught. "You cracked jokes while you preached. That's ungodly." I say, "If you knew what I held back, you'd give me some credit." Jesus used humor. Jesus said

things that had people laughing. He was so hilarious when He talked to the people about the camel through the eye of the needle. What a picture, a camel through the eye of a needle? It's a literal camel, a literal needle, and they must've chuckled when He talked. Or, you have a board sticking out of your eye and you're trying to take a sliver out of someone else's eye, that's funny. That's hilarious. I think that God's given us the gift of humor and laughter, but we need to be sober-minded as well. Joylessness Christianity is not true biblical Christianity.

Let me give you the second warning. The second warning is watch out for mysticism. Let no one disqualify you. Watch out for mysticism as well as legalism. Let's read it, verses 18-19, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility,"—it's a self-imposed, self-righteous, proud humility because you're so humble you don't go directly to God, you worship angels, which is what the Gnostics did. " . . . intruding into those things which he hath not seen,"—no doubt, visions which they claimed to have had—"vainly puffed up by his fleshly,"—or carnal—"mind."

Again, I'm reading from the King James translation. You might have a modern translation that maybe makes it a little clearer. This is one of those passages, the whole section, where the King James with the old English is a little challenging to understand or to read. He's basically saying, "You put on a show. You claim experiences as you are so superior because you worship angels, you've seen visions, you're puffed up in your fleshly mind, and you don't hold to the head, of course, which is Christ. You're all into visions and dreams and all these experiences," and I could really spend all night on this. Verse 19, "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints,"—are held together. You're not connected to Christ, and they, " . . . ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." It disqualifies you from your fellowship and your intimacy and your connection to Christ.

Let me address this issue of mysticism. What do I mean? Mysticism looks for reality in subjective experience. In this teaching tonight, I'm probably going to say something that upsets, angers, bothers, or freaks out everyone here tonight because everybody has their little things that they don't like the preacher to talk about or they'll disagree with. I'm not saying—listen to me carefully—that we cannot have an experience with God, a powerful, real, genuine experience with God. But if that becomes your number one focus and the experience is not biblical or scriptural and it cannot be supported by the Bible, you have opened a Pandora's box to where you have to be subjectively open and receptive to any experience that comes down the pike. That is so, so dangerous. I wish there was some way I could get the light to come in people's minds and hearts to understand the danger. Yes, granted, and this was my upbringing.

I was raised in this Pentecostal, hyper Pentecostal, experiential-focused type church, and this is why I'm so adamant about standing solidly on the Bible because I saw just a lot of immature baby Christians that just wanted tingles, emotion, experience, wanted to be touched by the Spirit, jump real high, and when they hit the ground they couldn't walk straight. It's not how high you jump when the Spirit touches you, it's how straight you walk when you hit the ground, that's what matters; and all experience must be based on the Bible.

If you're in a church where they're doing things that you can't find in the Bible, and when I say in the Bible it should be solidly backed up and supported by Jesus taught it, the apostles taught it, did it, it's explained in the epistles. You had to have a good biblical basis for it, then be careful. If you start getting into, "I worship angels," or "I talk to angels," or "They talk to me," or visions or dreams or other experiences, then you need to be careful that your relationship to God is not based on subjective emotion and just experience. You want to have true biblical foundation for what you believe.

This is so prevalent today because we live in a culture that has abandoned absolute truth and everything is relative and subjective and it has infiltrated into Christianity. It's very dangerous, a very dangerous thing. Mysticism looks for subjective experience to validate how spiritual you are, so if you haven't had a vision, you haven't had an experience, you're just not that spiritual. It's false teachers claiming special visions, which is so common today, "God spoke to me. God reveled to me. God gave me a dream."

One thing that I really am so grieved by is when preachers get up and don't expound Scripture, they tell you about what God said to them. Sometimes they'll even say, "God put this on my heart." I understand that's fine, but pastor-teachers are called to preach the Bible, nothing more, nothing less, to teach the Word of God. Sometimes they try to intimidate you as though, "I have a hotline to heaven. I have a direct revelation from God. God so spoke to me. God revealed to me. God showed me. I have this revelation from God," and people shut their Bibles and lean forward and say, "Wow! This dude is in tune with God. He's getting direct revelation from God. He's channeling God." No, no, no, no, no. God has your phone number. God can speak to you, but God speaks through His Word. He will never contradict His Word.

If I have to take my experience and make sure it's biblical, then why don't I just stick with Scripture. Why don't I just stick with Scripture where I'm safe and I know this is what God says and what God has spoken? When I talk like this, I realize that some people who like to focus on experience are going to think that I'm missing out or, "I feel sorry for Pastor John. He doesn't know what he's talking about." That's fine. I can live with that, but I couldn't disagree more. Special revelation, special visions, contact with angels, spirits . . .

To give you a solid example of a non-Christian religion that claims to be Christianity, it's not, is called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Mormons. Do you know what they base their whole faith on? A guy named Joseph Smith that had an angel named Moroni show up and tell him about these golden plates, gave him special glasses to read the text. Nothing backs it up archaeologically or historically or evidentially, and the angel told Joe Smith, "All of Christianity is apostate. All the churches are wrong. I'm going to give you a new revelation." This is why I say, "If it's new, it's not true; if it's true, it's not new." People are always looking for some new revelation. No, the Bible has a back cover. The canon is complete. God's Word is alive and powerful, and God's Spirit speaks through what He's spoken, and you can stand on God's objective Word, the rock of Scripture. So, watch out for these cults, these false religions. They bring New Age concepts into the church.

The Bethel Church in Redding, California is very, very, very mystical. I know we sing their songs sometimes, and people are all excited about their ministry. The teaching doctrinally and theologically that comes out of Bethel is very, very dangerous, very, very New Agey. It's not the Christ of the Bible, it's not the Jesus of the Bible, yet wholesale people follow them as though it is biblical Christianity. Even in some other Pentecostal churches where I acknowledge they're brothers and sisters in Christ, they're doing things and experiencing things that are not taught in the Bible, and it's a very dangerous place.

Notice verse 18, "Let no man beguile you." The word "beguile" is taken from two words, prize and umpire. We get our word prize and umpire together from that word. It means to disqualify you of a prize. What does an umpire do? I was watching a baseball game the other night, a play at home plate. The centerfielder threw the ball to get a guy out at home. He slid in, a really cool play. He touched the base before he was tagged. He was safe. The umpire called, "Safe." Not everyone liked his call, but he's the umpire, right? He calls, "Safe." The disqualification is the concept of don't let anyone call you out. Don't lose your prize. Jesus is the prize.

There are two problems with false mysticism. First, verse 18, it promotes self. It really does. It promotes self. It leads to pride. Look at verse 18, ". . . voluntary humility and worshipping of angels," it's a perverted lowly humility. It's a false humility, "I'm too lowly and humble to go directly to God through Christ, so I'll just go through angels." This is so common. "I'll just go through the saints. I can't go right to God the Father through God the Son." It's a humility that's phony, it's put on. It's a false humility.

The Gnostics believe that God had emanations come out of Him, which are like little demigods, and that some of them were angels and that's how you get back to God is by stairstepping through these angelic means and these demigods back up to God rather than what the Bible says we have direct access to God through Jesus Christ.

Notice also, verse 18, this is the way it would translate, take their stand on visions they have seen. They take their stand on visions they have seen. Again, we see sometimes people that claim they've had visions, "I went to heaven. I died. This is what I saw." They write books about it and make lots of money. They say things that aren't in the Bible you can't substantiate. It subjective. It's so silly.

Notice also their empty minds are puffed up, verse 18. This is why I said it leads to pride. They're so proud of their vision and their experience. And, it demotes Christ. It promotes self, verse 18, but demotes Christ. Verse 19 says, "And not holding the Head," that's the problem. They're not looking to Christ and connected with Christ. That's the big problem. They're not united to Christ. Christ is the head of the church, verse 19, and Christ nourishes and strengthens the church, but they're acting upon something that they don't really have.

I won't spend much time on this last point, verses 20-23, watch out for asceticism. Let no one enslave you. We have legalism, mysticism, and now beware of asceticism. What's asceticism?

Asceticism and legalism are partners in humanistic religion. Asceticism promotes self-denial, the deliberate refusal to have material comforts as a means of spirituality. Look at verses 20-23. "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world,"—we are—"why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?"

Verse 21 is a description of asceticism. It's denying physical comfort in order to be more spiritual. Like, if you really wanted to be spiritual, you won't sleep on a soft mattress, you'll sleep on hard concrete. If you really want to be spiritual, you'll beat your body with a stick; you'll let mosquitoes bite you; you won't lay down to sleep, you'll stand up. These, by the way, fourth century monks and ascetics have done in church history. " . . . (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?"

Notice they are, " . . . doctrines of men," verse 22, not doctrines of God. Verse 23, "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom,"—they look spiritual because you don't touch stuff, you don't taste stuff, you don't handle, "Oh, you're the deeper life club." It looks like you're smart, "in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

If you read in church history, it started pretty prevalently too in the fourth century, you have Christian circles where they forbid marriage, where they forbid sexual intimacy in marriage—it's only a necessary evil for procreation. They deny themselves sleep. They deny themselves food. They deny themselves wearing certain clothes, or they would wear rough clothes that would be uncomfortable because their concept was the body is sinful and must be punished and subjected and held down. Let me tell you something. In biblical Christianity God sanctifies the physical. First, God created the whole physical universe. Secondly, God became a Man in a human body. The physical body is not sinful in and of itself. It can be used for sinful purposes, but it can also be used for good and godly purposes. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit if you're a Christian. Don't use your body for sexual immorality, that's "sinful purposes." There are those pleasures that God has provided for us, and we can enjoy them. We don't have to punish ourselves or deny ourselves in order to gain favor before a holy God.

Three quick facts about asceticism. First, it's ignorance. Look at verse 20. It says, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world," so they forget that we died with Christ. We're not subject to these things. Its description, verse 21, as I've already pointed out, says, "Don't do this, don't do that, don't do this." The point there is it's only negative and that they judge their spirituality by what they don't do rather than what they do. You got that? "I don't smoke, I don't chew, I don't hang out with those that do." (Clapping) Awesome!

Years ago I had a friend of mine, we went to high school together. He got saved, and he lived in another state. He got saved and became a Christian and we fellowshiped. One day I got together with him and he was chewing tobacco. I said, "I thought you were a Christian." He said, (Spitting first) "I am." (Spitting again) "Why'd you ask?" It just freaked me out, a chewing tobacco, spitting Christian. It doesn't compute in my mind. I'm not trying to encourage tobacco

chewing, but there's no verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shall not chew tobacco," maybe in 2 Fleshalonians or something. It's not in the Bible. The church I grew up in, Christians don't dance, Christians don't go to the movies, Christian women don't wear makeup. I had a guy call my church one time. He said, "I've been looking at those women going to your church, a bunch of Jezebels! makeup and all painted up and all that stuff. Why do you let all them Jezebels come to your church?" I'll stop right there.

I believe that our outward should reflect our inward relationship to Christ. We don't want to draw attention to ourselves. Don't think that you're more spiritual because you don't do certain things. What do you do? Do you show the fruit of the Spirit? Do you show the love of the Spirit fruit in your life? It's only negative and weakness.

In verses 22-23, is that it's manmade teaching, ". . . and doctrines of men," it's not taught in the Bible and it's hypocritical. I love this closing, verse 23. It says, ". . . not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." Earlier in verse 23, ". . . and humility, and neglecting of the body," so it's a phony humility and it's hypocritical in that these things do not produce elimination of sin, that they don't control the flesh, "Which things have indeed a shew,"—have an appearance—"of wisdom," but they have this self-imposed standard of religion, false humility, and neglect of the body.

This is what R. Kent Hughes said about this kind of asceticism. He said, "Asceticism has its own seductiveness. Today, in its eastern form, it attracts the indulgent, cultured elite. Thousands today have their gurus through whom they make their ascetic nod to God. Seen for what it really is, it is an expression of independence from God, which says, 'I'm going to get to God on my own terms, by my own might.'" I love this. Listen carefully. "Asceticism feeds the flesh by starving it." Asceticism feeds the flesh by starving it, and it's purposeless to overcome the sin nature.

The answer to legalism is the grace of Christ. The answer to mysticism is completeness in Christ, and the answer to asceticism is that I have died with Christ, I have risen with Christ, and I can walk in newness of life. Amen?