

98-12-09b Colossians

In Colossians chapter 2, we are reminded of the fact that God's Word is timeless and that it has its application and has had application in every generation from the time it was first each of these books were set in writing all the way down to the present. And the mistake that is sometimes made is that we think that, well, those poor people back then, I could see where Paul really had to write them and straighten them out and encourage them to get out from under the legalism that they inherited from the Judaizers and that came out of the law tradition. They really needed some straightening out from their pagan ways of idolatry and so forth.

But we're so much further along than that. We don't have those problems. We really do.

We have all of those problems. In fact, if anything, they're probably worse in our day because they are unidentified. And just like in the days of the apostles, they had to stand up and say, your slavish devotion to the law of Moses is wrong.

Your unseemly interest in angels and unseen forces is wrong. It was acceptable. It was common practice.

There were big groups, probably bigger than the Colossian church, that all got together and encouraged each other and sort of looked at each other and said, oh, there's others by my side. Here's some upright, upstanding citizens here that believe like I do. So we're, you know, there's sort of safety in numbers kind of a thing.

They're talking about this now. As you know, the hearings are going on in Congress for the possible impeachment of the president of the United States and so forth. And one of the things that struck me when they were analyzing this the last day or two is they're saying, well, one of the big factors in the way this vote goes is there's a big desire for safety in numbers.

If one or two of the moderate Republicans breaks ranks with the rest of the Republicans, you know, whatever you think about that issue right now, the Republican line is we want the president to go and the Democrats, we want him to stay. He's our guy. Well, the moderate Republicans will swing the difference.

And so what they're saying is, well, if one or two depart the Republican fold and go the other way, it'll start a stampede because everybody's going to figure there's safety in numbers. This struck my ear when I heard that because rather than the deciding issue being, is this the right thing to do or not? And it's immaterial for my purposes of illustration, whether it's the right thing to do or not. But that ought to be the thing that determines the vote for each one of those representatives in Congress is they decide in their own mind, this is the right thing.

But instead it's, well, my political future, I don't want to be singled out as somebody that's different, somebody that hasn't, can be brought under fire. Well, that mentality is abroad and has

been probably throughout history, but it's abroad today and Christians feel like there's a safety in numbers. Well, if I'm going to a huge church, at least if I'm wrong, I'm going to be wrong with this big crowd and nobody's really going to hammer me too hard because I was in good company, so to speak.

Well, we fail to understand that with God, each of us is a son and an heir and each of us, God looks at us for these purposes as an individual and we're held accountable as an individual. We can't, as we go into that private interview with God and stand in front of his desk, if you will, with the door shut, we can't look around and point to a teacher or a pastor or a group or a denomination or a theology or a book or anything and say, well, it's that over there. That stuff's not going to be in the room, so to speak.

We're responsible to hold fast to the head. The head is Christ. That's what Paul has come to here in verse 19 of Colossians chapter 2. The reason people have fallen prey and we say, I don't want to be one of those that goes astray.

I don't want to be wrong and if deceptive things are deceptive, then you're going to think you're right and you're really wrong. A lot of people who think they're right are wrong. In fact, most people who think they're right are wrong.

Do you ever think about that? Almost everybody that thinks they're right is really wrong. That's just a law of the universe. Just virtually everybody thinks they're right and the vast majority of us are all wrong.

So how can we be certain that not only do we think they're right, but we really are right? That we're not deceived. We're not led astray by tradition, philosophy and all these other things. This is the key in verse 19, holding fast to the head, desiring Christ, desiring a greater understanding, a deeper understanding, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If that is your burning ambition, if that's your desire, that's the fundamental guiding motivation of your heart to be pleasing in God's sight, to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you're going to wind up in the right. You're going to wind up on the narrow road going through the straight gate because that is holding fast to the head. If you let anything interpose, you see this happen with animals.

You go to certain places. I have relatives who have lots of animals and things. You go up there and you get out of the car and all the dogs come up yapping and jumping and so forth.

And you see an old dog you've known a long time and you say, well, hi there, Rusty or whatever his name is. And you start petting him. Well, then here comes this other little dog and just interposes right in between.

They're wagging and lapping and jumping and then some third dog will come and interpose

themselves between and you wind up having this whole complex of dogs or cats or whatever they are to deal with instead of the one you started out with for old time's sake. Well, there are people who have as their fundamental psychological need to feel meaningful, to feel like they have value because they have made a difference in your life. And it is sincere.

It is humble. They delight in that sincerity. They delight in that humility.

They like to characterize themselves as having a servant's heart. And there's nothing intrinsically wrong with having a servant's heart and helping people and so forth. But if you make that the goal and you start interposing yourself, you start inserting yourself into the lives of believers.

And while they were standing there looking at the Lord Jesus Christ, now they're standing there looking at you and you're telling them what Jesus Christ looks like on those occasions when you happen to glance around and look at him yourself. You have messed up another believer and you have made yourself, you might as well just go put on a frock and become a Catholic priest and say, well, come to me if you want your sins forgiven. Come to me if you want to participate in a sacrament.

Come to me if you want to, I will broker your relationship with God for you. Don't let anyone become your spiritual broker or your spiritual banker or your spiritual insurance agent. You don't need it.

This is what Paul is saying. You hold fast to the head. When in doubt, there's a swarm of ideas, there's a swirl of philosophies and traditions and this guy seems persuasive, that guy seems persuasive, old Sam sounds persuasive when he talks but I hear this other guy and he's very well schooled and been around a long time and he's written books and on TV or whatever.

Don't base your belief and the credibility of teaching from the Word of God on the messenger. Hold fast to the head. Is this something that draws you closer to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you find yourself holding fast to the Savior? Do you find yourself having a better understanding of your relationship with him? Do you find his power active in your life? Are you finding more patience, more peace, more joy? If you are, then keep doing what you're doing.

If you're not, something is pushing you away from the head. You're lacking the necessary food, the power of the Word of God, the power of God the Holy Spirit which is designed and given to each one. Did you ever wonder why it is that if the pastors or the priests or whoever it is that want to be the intermediaries, if that were the case, why didn't God just give the Holy Spirit to them? There's been a, even within the tradition to which a lot of us have been exposed, there's this idea that, well, my right pastor, he's the guy.

By the way, when I'm talking to you all, I'm not saying I've seen symptoms of this and I think you all are putting you all out of, this is something that we have all seen in our past. I'm not trying to remedy something that I think I have seen or something. I just want to make that clear.

But this is a, because I don't think there's any real danger of it, frankly, but this is something I think we have all seen where people begin to think that, well, I'm just going to hitch my wagon to this pastor or this church or this denomination or whatever. If that were the case, that's where God would put the Holy Spirit. If that's going to be the leadership and you're supposed to go cling to that, well, this would be like the old days in Israel when the Israelites were going to go to the promised land.

They were supposed to follow Moses and God said, look, Moses, I'm going to make sure that they listen to your voice. I'm going to give you supernatural power. You can throw down rods and turn them into snakes.

You can stick your hand out of your robe and it'll go leprous. You can stick it in and pull it back out and it'll be, God gave him a supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit so that people would focus on him and follow him and listen to his voice because he was the mouthpiece of God. God said, there isn't anybody else like Moses.

I talk to him face to face. I don't talk to you rabble out there face to face. I talk to Moses face to face.

Hear ye him. Later on, when the Lord Jesus is on the earth, God speaks and says, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.

Well, he didn't say that about any pastor that I know of in this age. He didn't speak out and say, this is my beloved apostle. Hear ye him.

We have a personal responsibility in this age to know our Savior, to understand the plan of God. And that's why God gave each of us the Spirit, gave each of us access to the word of God. And that's how you can understand when John says, you have no need of anyone to teach you.

It doesn't mean that God hasn't gifted people to be teachers and pastors and all of the other functions in the church. But your need, you don't need it. It's not like without that, you're lost.

If you don't find your right pastor, you're just going to drift in a sea of confusion and you can't ever understand your scriptures yourself and so forth. This is a wonderful provision that God has made in all of the different gifting. But we have to look at all of the spiritual gifts and value them equally.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, you know, you're getting all focused in on the gift of tongues. He says, let me show you a more excellent way at the end of chapter 12. And then in 13, he talks about love.

Every single believer has the ability to exercise love. And that love benefits any believer with whom it comes in contact. It's a ministry.

You can have as much and perhaps more impact, if you want to measure things that way, in the

lives of believers by your love than a dozen guys like me standing up and grinding through passage after passage in the Word of God. It is what Christ functioned in and under when he was here on earth. It's love, faith, hope, and love.

It's a matter of balance. It's a matter of priority. Not to diminish the importance of teaching, the importance of teachers, the importance of the Word of God, the importance of understanding, a lot of these things.

But it's meaningless if it doesn't work itself out in love. That's how you know you're holding fast to the head. Do you find yourself with opportunities? Do you have the means? Do you have the motive to express and exercise love? If your soul is being fed, that will be a necessary bearing of fruit.

It will be a necessary outpouring from your soul. You pour the power of God into your soul and his Word and his Spirit. It's going to have to come out in some form.

And it's going to manifest itself in the fruit of the Spirit. A tree, a healthy tree, that sinks its roots into the soil and in the spring the sap is running and the sun shines and photosynthesis takes place and so forth. That tree isn't just going to sit there and look good.

It's going to pop out leaves. It's going to pop out seeds. It's going to pop out blossoms or fruit or whatever kind of tree it is.

It's going to take all of those resources and there's going to be the manifestation of that process in motion. And that's what James is talking about when he says, I'll show you my faith by my works. If I have genuine faith, it's going to out.

It's going to make a difference. Well, that's how you know. How do you know if you're being deceived or not? How do you know if what you believe and what you're hearing in the teaching of the Word of God is accurate? Well, look in your own soul.

This is what Paul is going to do. Notice, he says, look, in verse 20, therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations? Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using. Here's another big area of subjectivity.

This is eyes on people, eyes on things. I've got to follow these rules. These people are telling me, somebody is saying, don't touch, don't taste, don't handle.

Somebody is saying, thou shalt not. And all of these regulations are focused on earthly things. Thou shalt not come to church wearing a hat or thou shalt not come to church without a hat or thou shalt not come to church.

I've been in a church just in the last few years where if you're a lady and you come to church and

you don't have a dress on, woo, dark looks will follow you everywhere you go. Wear a dress to church. Slacks, pants, unheard of.

Don't wear pants or slacks to church. What is this? Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle. Somebody is looking at you and saying, what do you mean you don't have a building or you're in some non-traditional mode? What do you mean you're not out there taking every opportunity to browbeat people with the gospel or hand out tracts? Or how come you're not joining us in picketing the abortion clinic? Or how come you're not out here being proactive? We're going to have the day of prayer.

How come you're not out there standing around the courthouse praying? Or some, what is this? As though living in the world, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, you see that in verse 20, that's the same phrase you find back there in verse 8. According to the basic principles of the world. This has been translated, I think, in the old King James, the elemental spirits of the world. These are the things that people think make the world go round.

This is what makes the clock tick. This is what floats the boat. This is how it happens.

This is what makes things go. Do we have a category for that? Everybody does. Some people think, well, it's financial security.

Whatever it is. If you died with Christ from these things, if you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you were joined with him by baptism, and I could go and give you a whole lot of linguistic evidence, but I'll just tell you that this is not water baptism. The word that says buried with him in baptism that we saw last time, that word buried is never used of dunking anybody in the water.

It's not water baptism. You don't get joined with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection in water baptism. You get joined with him in those aspects through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which takes place at the point of salvation.

So what Paul is saying is if you're saved, guess what? You died with Christ to these things. You are not subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune anymore. Your life is no longer governed by the elemental principles of the world.

It does not apply. You have moved into a different realm. There is power available to you.

This has been taught, Bob Dindon in Houston taught this when he went through the Elijah series. It's the difference between what he called power politics and pivot politics. The difference between the power that Ahab and Jezebel had as leaders of the land and the power that Elijah had as a prophet of God.

There's being a remnant of the 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. There's a power there. And then there's a power of being the king and having the armies and so forth.

Well, once we become believers, we transcend these puny powers on earth. It doesn't mean we become lawless and disobedient. Don't have one guy square up and down.

He didn't have to pay his taxes because he was no longer under the principalities and powers and the rudiments of the world and this, that, and the other. He just went way off into left field and was climbing over the fence from there. And that's certainly not the application.

But we're talking about how do you value yourself? How do you set your priorities in life? What are you looking at? Are you setting your mind on earthly things or are you setting your mind on heavenly things? Are you clinging fast to Christ, to the head, or are you letting yourself be pushed about and blown about and governed by things happening in the world? Things that perish with the using? Think about your great, great, great grandparents, whoever they may have been that lived back in the early 1800s. Does anybody know at this point what the forces and temptations and pluses and minuses were in their lives? Unless they wrote a diary down or something, nobody knows anymore. You may have some faded photograph in an old album somewhere that is a record.

Some places all you have in a family tree is just a name for somebody. They lived 50, 60, 70, 80 years maybe. What happened to all of their trials and tribulations, their ups and downs, their successes and failures, their joys and their tears? It has gone with the wind.

It's gone with the passage of time. But what is the thing that lasts? If they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if they're going to be raised on that day when Christ returns, the thoughts that they thought, the actions that they performed in the power of the Holy Spirit, looking to God, doing things heartily as unto the Lord, faith, hope, and love operating in their soul, every single one of those things comes back to life with them and reflects the glory of God eternally with them because those things bear reward. It is the guarantee of their inheritance.

And to the extent that each of us looks at our life and remembers that if time goes forward and the Lord doesn't return, we are going to be equally obscure and vanish away. Our efforts, all the things we thought were so important, are going to perish with the using. The things that count and the things that yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, that yield an eternal reward, the things that redeem this time and purchase something eternal, it's what we think.

It's how we do what we do, why we do what we do. This is what Paul is talking about. He says, look, if you died with Christ away from these elemental principles, the things that everybody thinks makes the world go round, you died with Christ, then why live as though you're living in the world? Why live as though you're still under these things? Why sit and fret and worry and stew just like some unbeliever that has no hope? Why grieve with others that have no hope? Why worry with others that have no God? Why get wrapped around the axle on things when you have such a greater set of resources? You have a God to turn to, you have a Savior to cling to and to hold fast to.

Why do you subject yourself to these regulations? Why do you let somebody push you around? Why do you let somebody tell you how good you are? Why do you let somebody come up and define for you what your Christian faith is worth and where you stand? Are you going to let somebody, here's somebody going to a church and maybe they get a thimble full of teaching in a year, they're going to come up and make you feel bad about the way you live your life before the Lord? Why do you do that? But all of us do. We all feel that twinge. We wish we could just be accepted and everybody smile and say, Oh yeah, well, great, you're just like me.

You don't necessarily want to be, quote, just like me. That's not always a good thing. And the fact that you blend in and the fact that you conform and the fact that it doesn't raise an eyebrow or cause a ripple, that may not be good at all.

Maybe you're talking to a crowd that's on the wide road and the broad gate leading to destruction because they're not redeeming the time. They're not holding fast to the head. They're holding fast to their church, holding fast to their tradition, holding fast to their philosophy, holding fast to their values, and all of this stuff perishes with the using.

Stop and compare it. Stop and think. As you're in the active conversation with these fellow believers, is this thing that I'm being measured with, is this holding fast to the head? Is this a measure of the fruit of the Spirit? Are they asking me about my joy and my peace and my patience? Are they asking about my long-suffering and my gentleness and my goodness and my faith and my meekness and temperance? Or are they asking me about the size of this and the number of that and the extent and the impact and the this and that and the other that all perishes with the using? My great-great-granddad was a primitive Baptist preacher.

I have no idea how many people he preached to. I have no idea what he taught. I presume he was probably a Calvinist, most primitive Baptists were.

I have no earthly idea. I have no way of measuring him. I have a great picture of him sitting in a chair with a Bible in his lap, and I figure he was a man of the book.

That's what we ought to be. We ought to be people of the Word of God. That's what Paul is encouraging.

He says, Don't let these things sway you. This is what Epaphras was having difficulty getting across. And you can see why.

It's a tough thing to get across because we're constantly immersed in forces around us, people measuring us, people measuring us according to the standard of. You remember that back in verse 8? Those three kappas, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, not according to Christ. Before you let someone measure you, before you let someone judge you, before you let someone decide for you how you ought to see yourself, before you let them put a kappa on you, be sure that it's measured according to the standard of

Christ.

And you'll find that anyone who understands the measure of the fullness of Christ isn't going to be coming up and putting a value on your faith or putting an estimation on your worth as a believer. People will come up and measure you by what you do. Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.

These all concern things which perish with the using, in verse 22, according to the commandments and doctrines of men. What is the source? Where did this come from? Do you find it in your Bible? Do you find the size of a congregation listed in the New Testament epistles of Paul? Does Paul ever mention the size of the Thessalonian church or the Philippian church or the Corinthian church or the Colossian church? Does he ever talk to Timothy or Titus or Philemon about the number of people in the church anywhere in there? No, he does not. So why does the church today make a constant issue out of the size of a congregation as though that were a measure? This is a tradition, a commandment, and a doctrine of men.

Your church is healthy if it's big. It's weak and unhealthy if it's small. It is a lie from the pit of hell, as I used to say when I was in Sunday school.

It's just not so. Verse 23, and this is where the deception comes in. How do we get deceived? How do we get fooled? These things indeed truly have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion.

People are going to glory in it. They're going to delight in their humility. They're self-imposed.

I go down to the ghetto three times a week, and I go to the John 316 mission, and I dole out soup, and I do this, that, and the other. Humility and neglect of the body. This is where you start getting into people who are religious about their diet in one way, shape, or form.

You've got your Adventists and your other crowds who say we still can't eat bacon and this, that, and the other for whatever reason. What does Paul say? It is of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. Did you know that whether or not you eat bacon with your eggs makes no difference on your ability to withstand temptation, your ability to fend off the fiery darts of the wicked one, to fend off the pull of sinful nature, or the flesh, or the world, or whatever else it may be? Your diet has absolutely no effect on your spiritual health, how much divine good you can produce and how much evil and sin you can avoid.

What you eat makes no difference. So why sweat it? And we're talking in the spiritual context. If your doctor says don't eat chocolate because it makes you break out in great green spots and go unconscious, well, listen to him.

We're talking about food and diet as a means of spirituality or as a means of improving your view of yourself. Well, I'm a better person because I'm a fruititarian. I'm going to eat like Adam and Eve.

I'm only going to eat fruit. The only stuff that I can pick off a tree. There are different reasons.

It isn't what you do, it's why you do it. These people say this is the measure. This is according to the standard of.

Don't let anyone do that. Notice what Paul says. He says don't let anyone... Look back at verse 16.

We saw this last time. Let no one judge you. Verse 18.

Let no one cheat you. Verse 8. Let no one cheat you. Do you see the issue here? The pattern here? People are going to put this on you.

We don't sit around and suddenly feel inadequate, do we? It's when somebody else comes up and starts making us feel small or making us feel out of touch or out of sync or incomplete in some way. People do this. That's why Paul says over and over don't let someone do this to you with what they say.

I'll bet you that since we've covered this every single one of us during the holidays is going to get a chance. You know how it is. You learn something and then God tests you over it.

My prediction, you'll see I give my gift of prophecy, is everyone that hears me say this before the holidays is going to get tested on it during the holidays. And so what do we do when it happens? Because our natural instinct, we have a natural built-in human desire for approval. It's called the need for approbation.

You can go to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs or any other analysis of human nature and it will say we have the need for acceptance. People need to feel acceptable. They need to feel like they are one among peers.

People have a need to feel loved and approved of and so forth. Well, this is the lever. This is the crowbar that gets stuck in and starts to be pried upon to pry us off center in our spiritual life as well.

But in living this way I'm not acceptable. I'm disapproved. People are frowning.

There's a furrow in their brow. This is going to happen. What do we think about? Well, what is the nature of this measure? I'm starting to be made to feel bad by this person.

If I let this continue, I'm going to lose my reward. It's my responsibility to not be shaken and stirred like a James Bond martini by this person's attitude. This is from the source of people.

Someone is going to shake your faith. Someone is going to shake your view of the Christian life. Paul says it's not a matter of going with feuding them and straightening them out or defending

yourself to them.

He says don't let them pry you off center. Don't lose your correct view of where you stand. You hold fast to the head.

Somebody starts making you feel funny about the way you're living your life before the Lord, think about Jesus Christ. Who are you clinging to? Are you clinging to your church or are you clinging to Christ? Are you clinging to your pastor or are you clinging to Christ? Are you clinging to your notebook or are you clinging to Christ? Are you clinging to your theological tradition or are you clinging to Christ? As soon as you cling to one of these other things, those are subject to attack. They're subject to flaw.

They're subject to removal. But when you're clinging to Christ, there is no flaw. There is no removal.

There is no lack. He's the fullness of deity in bodily form and when you cling closely to him, as the old guy says, ain't nothing going to make me move. You can't be removed when you build on the solid rock and that's where you get the illustration that Jesus gave.

The wise man builds his house on the rock. All of these other things are sand and somebody will turn their fire hose on your foundation and you will be dislodged if you've built your self-image, if you've built your faith on something that's unstable, something that's not Christ. Other foundation can no man lay, but that which is laid, Christ the Lord.

So, that's the answer. It's easy to point out the problem. What is the solution? Stop and think.

Do I have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I learning and growing? Do I see the difference that the Word of God and the Spirit of God is making in my life? If you don't, make a change. Find a way to grow. Find a way to get the spiritual nourishment that you need in your soul because that's the most important thing.

Don't worry about hurting my feelings or hurting anyone else's feelings. If you need to grow and you need to find the sustenance from the Word of God, that's your responsibility because it isn't me or the ice movement, quote unquote, or anything else. It's you and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And cling to Him and use the things that God provides that enables and nourishes that abiding in the vine. And no one will be able to make you feel small and no one will dislodge you and deceive you and cheat you of your reward. This is what Paul is telling us in Colossians chapter 2. And when we resume, we will begin in chapter 3 and see the positive side.

We've seen the negative attack and how to meet it. Now we're going to see rather than concentrating on the negative and how to keep from being blown off center by the negative, in chapter 3 we're going to see the positive side. These are the noble and worthy and beautiful things to focus our attention on that strengthen us and prevent us from being dislodged from the

foundation.

That's where we'll resume next week. But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for the standing that You have given us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is full. It is complete. It is permanent.

And it is the safe environment, the cleft in the rock, the shadow of Your wing in which we can grow and be nourished and know that we are in the very center of Your will. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable us to perceive as a mature believer to discern the difference between good and evil, to have our senses exercised in that regard, and to find firm footing in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask Your blessing during this time of festivity and change and travel and so forth.

We pray that You'll be with us during the holiday season and enable us not only to maintain our own focus on the realities that underlie what we celebrate, but also to be a light that shines that truth forth to those in our periphery. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.