

WHY JESUS WINS [Colossians 2:16-23: Balance]

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INTRODUCTION

1. In 1826, the American Temperance Society was formed in Boston.
 - a. One of the founders was Lyman Beecher, one of the most famous preachers in the U.S.
 - b. The organization's original goal was to discourage people from drinking altogether.
 - 1) Alcohol consumption was massive in the U.S. at that time.
 - 2) Our forefathers drank an average of six times annually what people do today.
 - 3) The issue: male drinking was negatively impacting their wives/families.
 - c. After the Civil War, the society moved from **encouraging abstinence to legislating it**
 - d. On January 16, 1920, the 18th amendment was ratified, prohibiting alcohol.
 - 1) It stood 13 years before being the first (and only) amendment to be repealed.
 - 2) Repeal was less about morality & more about potential tax revenue during Depression.
 - 2) America's prohibition serves as a larger lesson for human behavior.
2. Mark Twain once said, "Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits"
 - a. It's typical to expect others to live exactly as we do.
 - b. And in this week's text, the issue of pushing morality is brought before the Colossians.
 - c. Our series is *Why Jesus Wins*. The Bible speaks of Christianity as a movement of exclusivity.
 - d. If Jesus triumphs over all other beliefs, how can we Christians help the world to see it?

VERSES 16,17

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

1. If you're joining us in the middle of this series, let's do a quick review of Colossians.
 - a. It was a small church to which the apostle Paul wrote while imprisoned.
 - b. Generally, Paul's attitude is *ENCOURAGING*. He's not disciplining this church.
 - c. There was an issue he addressed: an alternative belief system.
2. This competing belief system was harsher than Christianity.
 - a. In fact, those who believed this philosophy *CRITICIZED* the Christ followers
 - b. The critique centered around the practice of spiritual disciplines.
 - c. Paul tells the Colossians **NOT TO LET THESE PEOPLE CRITIQUE THEM**.
 - 1) They had every right to continue to observe these religious practices.
 - 2) In fact, festivals (lunar and otherwise) and Sabbath were part of Jewish beliefs.
 - d. **FESTIVALS AREN'T WRONG**, but practicing them shouldn't be a litmus test of faith.
 - 1) The issue is when disciplines **become the goal**, rather than the means to a larger goal.
 - 2) Richard Foster wrote a book called **Celebration of Discipline**.
 - a) In this work, Foster shares his view of why disciplines are important.
 - b) *"The purpose of the disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear."*
 - 3) Spiritual practices should lead us from slavery to the place of God's liberation.
 - 4) Jesus said in **Mark 2:27**, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*
3. Today, we too often expect others to live up to our personal measures of spirituality.
 - a. And sometimes those beliefs aren't even biblical, but are based upon tradition.
 - b. That's why it's imperative that we understand why we do what we do
 - c. As Paul writes in **Colossians 3:17**, *"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

VERSES 18,19

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They

have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

1. Unpacking the original meaning behind Paul's words here is difficult.
 - a. We just don't know how or why these critics were worshipping angels.
 - b. Ungodly worship is worshipping the created over the Creator.
 - b. But Paul is more concerned with false humility than false worship.
 - 1) The people persuading the church to move away from Scriptures are arrogant.
 - 2) Paul identifies the elevation of individuals as spiritual gurus as the true problem.
 - 3) They were acting as referees at the spiritual Olympics, ready to DISQUALIFY people.
2. Furthermore, Paul's critique in verse 19 is that they lost connection with *the head*.
 - a. This isn't a critique of their mental capacity, but that they ignored the spiritual head (Jesus).
 - b. Once again this highlights the key concept Paul declares throughout Colossians.
 - 1) It's a belief that has the potential to cause conflict in a pluralistic world
 - 2) **Without Jesus, true spiritual growth is impossible.**
 - 3) Not to say that the Muslim or Buddhist or Jew doesn't perform spiritual practices.
 - 4) But they are never fully realized because Christ is not the center of their worship.
 - 5) This is an example of being puffed up by an unspiritual mind.
 - c. While all truth is God's truth, truth isn't redeemed until Christ is acknowledged.
 - 1) A pluralistic world will reject this concept, perhaps even labeling it bigoted.
 - 2) But this concept is biblical and therefore is indivisible from Christianity.
 - 3) Christian exclusivity means other faiths are spiritual echo chambers leading nowhere
 - 4) In Christ, the true spiritual person dies to self and lives in him. There's nothing like it.
 - 5) We must be responsible when explaining this to non-Christians.
3. One additional point here: Paul warns against faux-humble leadership in the church.
 - a. **Good spiritual leadership is accountable spiritual leadership.**
 - 1) Christianity where human leadership unchecked will always fall short.
 - 2) But that doesn't mean we should reject the local church when it does fall short.
 - b. Think of the church as a **relationship of accountability.**
 - 1) Every layer of Christian belief forces us to live in check with someone/something.
 - 2) The relationship FORCES US to weed out FALSE HUMILITY through true community.
 - 3) We need church because we need accountability. Are you willing to be accountable?

VERSES 20-23

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

1. Paul again addresses this human philosophy and its reliance on self-deliverance.
 - a. The idea that we can control our entire world if we control our bodies is still prevalent today.
 - b. Tim Ferriss, a leadership guru, is popular for living a data driven lifestyle.
 - 1) This involves regimens of exercise, thinking, and diet (as well as use of illegal drugs?).
 - 2) Known "life hacking," it's the belief that we can scientific engineer ourselves.
 - 3) In this era of science/knowledge, we believe decisions can solely make life better.
 - c. Interestingly enough, the Bible addressed this belief 2,000 years ago.
 - 1) The ancients tried to life hack through a series of rules for life and thought.
 - 2) They believed obedience to these restrictions would stave off spiritual attack.
 - 3) What Paul said, however, is that this was false; it was derived from human thought.
 - 4) Even if there are potential benefits to life hacking, it can't be done spiritually.
 - 5) It counteracts the true message of the gospel.

2. Arriving at what the Bible truly says about freedom/religion can be challenging.
 - a. If we're truly free, can we eat, drink, and chew and go with girls who do?
 - b. Paul implores the Colossians to embrace freedom, but gives different advice elsewhere.
 - c. In speaking to the church in Corinth (**1 Corinthians 9:26,27**), he writes.

"I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."
 - d. So it is a tad complex to determine how Paul is telling us to live.
 - 1) Should we be legalists or libertarians?
 - 2) I would suggest that this is a valid reason why people struggle with Christianity.
 - 3) When Paul says one thing to the Colossians and gives an opposite command to others,
 - 4) ... how are we supposed to find the right approach to Christianity?

CONCLUSION

1. Let me attempt to resolve this conflict by discussing the retention wall in my side yard.
 - a. There's a bed of ivy separated by this wall that creates a six foot drop.
 - b. When I weed-eat that bed, I have to choose between poison ivy or falling to my death.
 - c. When I'm doing this yard work, I'm trying to focus on the goal while protecting myself.
2. I'd suggest that living in *the tension between legalism and liberty* requires a similar trade-off.
 - a. It's finding the sweet spot between prohibition and promotion.
 - b. The key, then, is to understand WHY JESUS WINS and understand **BALANCE**.
 - 1) Striving for middle ground isn't what many want, but it's Christ-like.
 - 2) Jesus encourages a balanced existence, where we live in the gray.
 - 3) The challenge is that Christians must constantly think actively of how we must live.
 - c. In every situation, we must consider how we can honor Christ with our actions.
3. This requires work, but our eternal glory is worth the effort. We should strive for balance.
4. Or as Paul says in **Ephesians 5:15**, *"Be very careful, then, how you walk—not as unwise but as wise."*