

**July 27, 2008**

**Colossians 2:16-17**

Welcome – I'm glad you are here today! Let me invite you to grab your Bibles and let's go back to Colossians chapter 2.

This summer Nicole and I have really gotten into The Next Food Network Star on the Food Network. I'd love to be able to say that Nicole is really into it and I just watch it to humor her and spend time with her – which is how it started out – much like American Idol – but now I am as excited to watch it as she is. For those of you who actually have a life and don't know what I'm talking about, the Next Food Network Star is one of those reality TV shows where several self-proclaimed chefs compete in various culinary challenges each week with the goal of becoming the Next Food Network Star – thus the name – getting their own cooking show on the Food Network. And the reason I'm telling you this is that we are down to the final show.

Last week the last three contestants were in Las Vegas and had to come up with a buffet that they would buy food for, prepare, present, and then serve in Vegas. So they did all that and were all excited about it until they saw who was coming in to eat their buffets. They had the cream of the crop from Vegas. They had Vegas showgirls, magicians, actors from Monty Python's Spam A Lot musical, big name headliners – all in costume – and the head chefs from one of the major hotels in Vegas along with the normal judges from the Food Network. And it was totally intimidating.

All three of these contestants knew they knew their stuff – they knew they could cook – they knew they could prepare the buffets – they knew they could talk about it and present it – but when they saw who was coming in to judge them – they totally got intimidated and began to question whether or not they really had what it takes. And all three of them in one way or another blew it because they got intimidated by the challenge. And that is really exactly what Paul is talking about in Colossians today – not the Food Network – but being intimidated by others to the point that you question the truth that you know.

See in chapter 2 we are right in the heart of this book – not just because we are in the middle, but because these verses are where Paul is addressing the false teaching and the heretics that are causing problems and intimidating the Colossian Christians head on. And we'll see today and then in the rest of this chapter, 3 ways these Christians were being intimidated and put at risk by these false teachings. And though every one of them is very specific to a time and place and culture in the Bible, it is amazing how we face the same principles of intimidation today. And how we too find ourselves getting knocked off what we know is true because of it. In fact it happens so easily I decided not to cover all three in one sermon but to separate them out so we can look at them individually. In fact I will end up saying the same thing in as many different ways as I can today so we don't miss what God has to say. So Let's look at Colossians 2:16-17:

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

Let's look at this. He begins with “**therefore.**” Hopefully by now you know that when we see that kind of beginning in the Bible, you always go back and see why – what is it referring to. In this case, back to **verses 9 through 15**. In case you weren't here for those sermons – verse 9 tells us that **Jesus is GOD**. Verse 10 tells us that we have been given fullness in Christ – been **made COMPLETE in Him**. Then verses 11 through 15 tell us what that means – that **our salvation is complete** in Christ because **our forgiveness is complete** in Christ which means **our victory over the enemy is complete** in Christ. We were buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through our faith in the power of God. If you missed the last two or three sermons, you'll want to go back and get those online in order to really get the weight of this truth.

So because of the singular sufficiency of Christ when it comes to our salvation, verse 16 says “don't let anyone judge you with regard to” these things. **The word “CONDEMN” probably catches the meaning of the word judge in the context of what Paul is saying best.** Don't let anyone

condemn you. These false teachers are tying salvation to more than Christ and here we see one of those “more’s” specifically: by what you eat or drink or this festival or celebration or Sabbath.

Basically **they are trying to enforce the Jewish LAWS and rules and ceremonies on these Gentile believers** just like back in verse 11 they were trying to make them get circumcised externally. And Paul said – no – you have been circumcised by Jesus on the inside through the putting off of your sinful nature. You don’t need the external circumcision – it is pointless for you. And yet these false teachers were **saying that these things were NECESSARY for salvation along with a belief in Jesus Christ.**

Now for the Jews of course it had to do with the Old Testament. They had dietary laws, food and drink laws, feasts, celebrations, Sabbaths all these laws that in the new covenant with the coming of Christ were set aside. You ask what were all these laws for in the first place? Well primarily I want you to understand that God gave them all those unique living habits for the primary reason to make their life so unusual, their diet so unusual, and their behavior so unusual that it was difficult for them to interact with the pagan nations around them.

You have to remember that when God put His people in the land, they were like an island in the midst of a cesspool of paganism. They had invaded pagan territory. And the fear of course was that their purity would be totally destroyed by the encroaching paganism – like planting a little pretty flower in the midst of a weed field.

So God built insulation around them in dietary laws and behavioral laws that made it almost impossible for them to interact with other people on a social level – to protect them. And all these laws & ceremonies & rituals were all symbols of spiritual things – chances for obedience to God. But then a time came when God set all those symbols aside in the coming of Christ. And in **Mark chapter 7** for example we see a monumental statement from Jesus. In verses 14-15 the Bible says: “Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'” That was a shocking statement – the Jews had always believed there were certain things going in that did defile and Jesus says it is a new day – defilement doesn’t come from diet anymore. And later in **Acts 10** God give Peter a dream that has all these unclean animals coming down in a sheet and then tells Peter to get up and kill and eat. And Peter is like – no way – these are all the big bad. And God says don’t call unclean what God has sanctified anymore. And then you have the culmination of this right here in Colossians 2 – “don’t let anyone condemn you because of food or because you don’t keep a feast day or because you don’t celebrate a new moon or because you don’t follow a Sabbath law.”

Why – verse 17: These things are a shadow of the things that were to come, the reality however is found in Christ. Those things were shadows – symbols – pointers to what was to come but now the reality has come. Now that Jesus has come, there is no point in all that. **It’s not what you do on the OUTSIDE – it’s the change that Christ has made on the INSIDE that makes you right with God – that sets you apart.** All those things were just shadows. And a shadow only points to someone’s coming. You see the shadow and you look further and there’s the person. And once the person is there, you don’t care about the shadow. You don’t embrace the shadow, you embrace the person.

See **their whole point was that salvation was based on Christ PLUS keeping certain rituals. They were denying the all-sufficiency and the pre-eminence of Christ.** That’s the worst lie there is, but it was intimidating these Colossian Christians into wondering if they really had enough to be saved.

This may all sound familiar today. There may be a word kind of bouncing around in your head that you haven’t heard me say that seems to fit what is going on here and you’re wondering why I’m not addressing it. Well that word is legalism. That’s what this boils down to. But the New Testament never uses the word “legalism” – so it is kind of thrown about today pretty carelessly to mean

whatever someone wants it to mean – usually to get them out of having to do something they don't want to do. So let me define this term in two senses today.

First of all **legalism in this context is making rules of conduct beyond the teaching of SCRIPTURE and making obedience to them necessary for salvation.** And what Paul is saying here is look – **salvation is not a matter of external RITUAL, but a matter of internal relationship with Jesus Christ.** Don't let anybody intimidate you based on what you do or don't do in order to determine if you are saved or not.

A second similar but slightly different and maybe more dangerous meaning for us of **legalism is treating biblical standards of conduct as rules to be kept by our own POWER in order to earn God's favor.** That means trying to be ethical in our own strength without relying on the merciful help of God in Christ. Basically – **moral behavior that is not from FAITH is legalism.**

And I want you to really understand that. For the legalist, morality or moral behavior serves the same function that immoral or selfish behavior serves for the atheist or rebel or whatever. It is an expression of self-reliance and self-assertion. As John MacArthur explains it – “Both reject the sovereign mercy of God in Christ as a means to righteousness and use either immorality or morality to express *their* independence and self-sufficiency and self-determination.”

So when we see what Paul is saying and we see what legalism is, then what God's Word is telling us today is don't let anybody tell you that salvation is Christ plus your beads, Christ plus your candles, Christ plus your holy underwear like the Mormons wear. But neither is it Christ plus service or Christ plus baptism or Christ plus observing the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week or Christ plus fasting or Christ plus anything like that. And folks there are many people today who would tell you that. And not only are they in cults and false religions, they are in the quote unquote evangelical even fundamental Christian churches. Listen – I believe churches just like ours are full of people who believe their salvation is attached to how often they read the Bible, pray, and go to church. Or their confidence in their salvation is attached to the fact that they don't do certain things or go certain places or that they *do* do certain things or do go certain places. And they're not really trusting in the fullness – the completeness – the sufficiency of Christ. **Too many churches are full of people who believe in Christ plus their RELIGIOUS activities.**

So catch this - See maybe you're not being intimidated by any one else. Maybe you've done it to yourself. Maybe you are thinking – though not saying – that if I do this and do this and do that, then I'll be right with God. If I go to church on Easter & Christmas & one other time in the year, I'm right with God. If I'm a good student and don't talk back to my parents and come to youth group on Wednesday then I am right with God. If I come to church most Sundays and give some money in the offering plate, I'm right with God. If I don't smoke or drink or cuss and if I'm nice to my wife & kids, I'm right with God. But folks it doesn't matter what the this this or that is – **if you are right with God it is because of JESUS alone – the completeness of the salvation He alone offers – and if you reduce it to a set of things that you are in CONTROL of, you have totally missed it.**

So here's where it gets a little messy – where I need you to really listen and think with me. Why do you do what you do?

We've talked forever about how belief determines behavior. You can't get around it. That's how we are wired. You are going to act on what you really believe no matter what you might say with your mouth. So if your behavior is wrong, then it tells you that somewhere you have believed a lie – your belief is wrong. But here's the deal today – what if your behavior is right and your belief is wrong? What if the reason you are doing what is right is wrong? And here's why it is so dangerous and sad.

Because you are embracing the shadow. **If you are doing the right thing out of a wrong belief, it's legalism.** You're embracing the shadow. See if you are embracing the church service or moral behavior in an effort to be a Christian, my heart absolutely breaks for you because those things are just shadows – the reality is found in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Himself in you that gives those things meaning. The joy – the life is in Christ – without Him first, those things are useless.

Now there are those who would respond and say “does that mean we can do anything?” Of course not. It means **our salvation is not predicated on some kind of religious behavior or some kind of disdain for non-moral things or some kind of fundamental culture that we live in but on our RELATIONSHIP to Christ alone.**

But I also want us to understand one other thing this morning from what Paul is addressing here in Colossians. To put it simply, **what we do do, as believers, must be based on solid DOCTRINE** – not intimidation.

Now the intimidators don’t worry about that. They just come along and say “well you are not spiritual if you don’t do this and you don’t do this and you don’t do this” and make us feel guilty though they can’t defend their rules biblically. Folks one of the truths God is revealing through Paul today is that **it doesn’t matter what MAN says, it only matters what the Word of God says.**

Don’t ever be intimidated unless there is a reason for it and the only reason for it is when what is brought up is something that is biblical. If it isn’t in the Word, then don’t listen to them. Christ is all you need – that’s the Word of God! He is all and He is sufficient.

Folks just hear my heart today. I want you to be in worship each Sunday. I want you to be in a Bible study each week. I want you to be in a small group. I want you to be serving and using your abilities in the church. I want you to be tithing and giving regularly. But not because those things are an end until themselves – not because they can make you a Christian – but because that’s what someone who is in love with Jesus does. I want you to do those things not because I tell you to do them, but because you want to glorify God and to do life in Christ one step at a time every day.

So I really challenge you to ask yourself some tough questions this week.

- **Why do you DO what you do?**
- **Why aren’t you doing the things you DON’T do?**
- **Is it possible that you have embraced the SHADOWS rather than the reality?**
- **Is there anywhere in your life you have REDUCED a relationship with Jesus down to a legalistic set of rules you are in control of?**

Don’t let anyone intimidate you into thinking you need anything more than Jesus for salvation. And when it comes to life in Christ remember this:

**Legalism is about my glory and flows from my STRENGTH.**

**Obedience is about God’s glory and flows from my FAITH in His strength.**

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

Salvation is found in Christ.

Life continues in Christ. Like our vision says -

Life surrendered – Life changed – Life linked – Life shared – all for the glory of God!

Let’s pray.