

LSB Colossians 2:16 - 23 Christ Plus this, Christ minus that

NASB77 16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

This is the apologetics portion of the letter. The apologetic argument against error. Or errors plural as it were.

Whatever the ailments present at Colossae were, it's lost to us now whether it was a single false system of belief that embraced all of these problems, or if it was multiple influences of different errors and Paul addresses all of the individual errors here.

But we see; Human philosophy, religious legalism, asceticism, angel worship, visions, and other rules keeping nonsense all addressed by Paul here.

But before we get into any of these problems, let me make you aware again, as I have in the past, of Paul's method. Paul has begun his argument by positively stating what we have and who we are . . . IN Christ. We labored over all of what we are and what Christ has accomplished for us, and our elevated status in Him . . . ALONE.

In Him I'm spiritually circumcised, spiritually baptised into His person, my sins are paid for, I'm purchased out of Satan's domain and baptised into Christ's domain with a circumcision performed without hands. My sins are

gone. My debt is paid. I have fellowship and forgiveness and wealth my brain cannot yet even fathom. In Him In Him In Him. Through Him. With Him.

And then someone comes along and says but just having Christ isn't enough. You have to have Christ, yes, He's helpful, as far as He goes, but you have to add more stuff. Just Christ alone isn't going to get it done.

Christ can perhaps take care of the sin issue but human philosophy is needed in order to get along in this world. You need Christ for forgiveness, but He can't make you thrive. You need all the really smart people to tell you what to do so you can thrive and be happy.

Or; Christ is OK but God didn't cancel out all of the ceremonial and civil laws of Israel. Christ is helpful but only if you embrace ALL of Moses law. Christ plus physical circumcision to get you into judaism. Then, Christ plus Sabbath observance. Christ plus all of the jewish gobble-de-gook. All the washings. All the ceremonies. All the dietary restrictions. All the feast days and other observances. All of the Sabbath day extrabiblical restrictive nonsense. Christ plus Moses can perhaps get you to heaven if you're righteous enough according to Moses righteousness through works.

or; Christ minus stuff. We need to join into Christ's sufferings, physically. Christ didn't suffer enough for us, God still has some suffering we need to do ourselves in order to appease Him. God is most happy when I'm miserable, so I need to go through life with carpet tack strips in my shoes. If I'm enjoying something, it's probably sin. Enjoying food is sin. Enjoying healthy intimacy with my wife is almost certainly sin. Any pleasure of any sort is suspect.

or; There's more out there than just Jesus. Jesus is a useful starting place, but, He was just a phantom. Just an angel. There's billions more angels equal to Jesus. Probably more important even than Jesus. He's just the one we know about. But there's a lot more going on . . . than just Jesus. I've

had visions. I know about stuff.

It goes on and on. Jesus plus, or Jesus minus. Or Jesus lateral with other equal or better angels or beings. So Paul fights back by laying out the positive. In Christ you are complete. In Christ is all the fulness there is, in this world and the next.

Vs. 9,10a. 9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10a and in Him you have been made complete,

OK, let's dive into Paul's denials. We write creedal statements these days with affirmations and denials. Are you familiar with some of those. I've linked to at least one I can remember that I thought was very important to let people who are curious know who we are here at TCC. We affirm this this this, but we deny this this this.

That's important because Satan invented double speak. In the 3rd century at Nicea hammering out the apostles creed there were double speakers doing the wink wink, we can make this statement and still believe this. So we have to have both affirmations and denials in order to come to a narrow understanding of christian orthodoxy. We learned from the best. That's what Paul does here. Affirmation vss. 9 - 15. Denials vss 16 - 23 This is what it IS, positive, this is what it isn't, negative.

One cautionary word seems really appropriate exactly here. We live in a world that exemplifies compromise and demonizes argument. We've so bought into the world's philosophy of inclusion that we've co-opted the world's posture. Disagreement is wrong. Compromise is right.

Apparently, Paul didn't get the memo. Because all of his letters are correctives. Here is truth. Here is error. Jettison error. Embrace truth. Somebody is right. Somebody is wrong. Paul lays out truth, and then Paul doesn't mince any words pointing out error. Cancer kills if it is allowed to remain and continue on an aggressive path.

You say, "You're no Paul". Good point. But I would remind you that Jude has told even me to "earnestly *contend* (fight) for the once for all delivered to the saints faith". It's OK to argue for what's true and right. It's OK to point to error and call it error.

We had a little lady who visited us a couple of times and was so offended by the fact that we actually believe someone is wrong and someone is right, based on the authority of God's book that she was scandalized and never came back.

The world's doctrine was perfectly stated by Rodney King. "*Can't we all just get along?*" Beloved, Satan loves that argument. Compromise with error for the sake of unity. Let the cancer stay. Maybe it isn't malignant.

OK, obviously that pendulum can swing wildly too far the other direction. We need wisdom in choosing battles. You all think I'm too contentious, but my conscience tells me I'm probably too lenient. As your shepherd I will answer to Jesus Himself. Maybe best to err on too narrow than too inclusive?

So we triage our battles. Is the error immediately life threatening, spiritually? That one *must* be fought. If the wolf comes into the sheepfold, this sheepdog is going to snarl and show some teeth. Is the error less harmful, maybe we need to wait patiently for God to give maturity and wisdom over time. So, yes, we need to choose our hills to die on with some wisdom.

Paul went to all out war against the error that threatened the very life of the church at Galatia. Works righteousness through observing Jewish ceremonial requirements canceled out Jesus. In that war, Paul tells them it's either or.

If you decide you need to get circumcised and become a Jew in order to be saved, Jesus is useless to you. You have abandoned salvation by faith and embraced some kind of works righteousness approach to salvation. If you

stay on that path, you are anathemized. Severed from grace.

God doesn't allow any competing saviours. If you insist on saving yourself with your own works righteousness, OK, have at it, but God won't save you then. You're on your own. And all self effort falls short of the glory of God.

Pretty strong stuff. Here at Colossae we've perhaps got some vegetarians acting like they're more righteous than meat eaters. Level 2 level 3 errors that don't require the fiery strength of Paul's response to level one salvation defining doctrinal errors.

Human philosophy can rob you of the best, perhaps, but it may not be a salvation issue. So let's look at what Paul combats here in these verses where he goes into specific denials.

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

The problem here is intimidation. Spiritual intimidation. And it is intimidation that can side track you away from the simplicity of just enjoying Jesus.

That word "judge" means the guy who's doing his food or his drink different than what you're doing, because of his religiousness, thinks he's better or at a higher spiritual level, than you are. He's coercing you to modify what you eat or drink, for righteousness sake somehow.

Remember the fish on friday rule? My mother used to do that but her motivation was, fish is cheap. We never got red meat. At least on friday we got some class of protein. But there are people who think fish on friday is penance.

Penance somehow pleases God. Jesus was crucified on Friday so by not enjoying meat from warm blooded animals on Friday we're going to

remember the crucifixion every friday while we suffer a little bit for Jesus sake. Therefore, we're more holy than people who have a steak on Friday.

Krino. Judge. Yes, it's the same word used in Matt. 7:1. The most oft quoted verse in the Bible. *Judge not lest ye be judged*. It is based in choice. It's a judging of what's valuable over what's worthless. It's the word used on the threshing floor when you separate the wheat kernels that are useful from the chaff that is useless.

(from Strong's greek concordance dictionary) 2919 (krinō) originally meant "separate." So Homer, of Ceres separating the grain from the chaff (Iliad, v, 501). Thence, 'to distinguish, to pick out, to be of opinion, to judge'

We humans do that. We can't help ourselves, it's built into my sinful nature. And it's helpful. I don't eat moldy food. I don't drink milk that has chunks. That's krino. I cull out the worthless and harmful.

Religious people do that. Have you ever walked in some place and felt like you're canceled. You don't measure up to their requirements. We do that too. If someone walks in here that's left this gospel we have in this book behind because he's following someone who saw visions and angels that gave him a new and different gospel, we're told by Paul to cancel that guy. Actually we value the person but we refuse his beliefs.

Error on salvation issues is cancer and we won't allow it here. So this is interesting. What Paul is saying here is don't let these folks who have left the Jesus plus nothing gospel behind for other things . . . cancel you. Don't let them coerce you into doing or following extrabiblical behaviours that have nothing to do with real salvation by grace alone.

In other words, we DO judge error according to the authority of God's written word. We do NOT allow people in error to judge us.

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in

respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

Food restrictions are lifted in the new testament. Pig is delicious. Drink restrictions are spelled out. Paul clearly says don't get drunk. But alcohol, even if not the best or wisest choice doesn't send people to hell.

None of those things listed either helps or hinders salvation. So if someone is canceling you because you're enjoying a glass of moscato with your baby back ribs on Friday . . . let 'em cancel you. We are not to be intimidated and coerced by people who think they are somehow more spiritual or godly because they observe extrabiblical observances and do's and don'ts.

Peter's up in Galatia enjoying some ham with the gentiles and when the rest of the jews from Jerusalem show up he gets intimidated about what those more fastidious ex-pharisaical folks are going to judge him on, and separates himself from the gentiles.

Spiritual intimidation causes him to leave the previously unclean gentiles behind and only eat kosher foods with the jewish brethren. And Paul goes nuts on him!

You are complete in Christ. Verse 10. Therefore do not be intimidated by extrabiblical stuff that makes you look less religious than worldly religions.

I experience this. A couple of ways. Low church / high church. Judaism was high church! A huge hierarchy of different levels of priests doing stuff you're not allowed to do, dressed in vestments that define their positions in the hierarchy. The worship is very ornate and regulated.

When God put judaism on the shelf, temporarily, my dispensationalism is flaring, God isn't finished with the jews but He put them on a shelf and turned His activity to the church during the church age.

When He did that, all of that pompous vestments and highly regulated and organised worship got put on the shelf too. He didn't bring any of that into

the church. We have 2 sacraments. Water baptism witnesses our translation spiritually from death to life. And the Lord's supper is a remembrance service that we continue until Jesus comes and gets us out of here. That's it.

Nothing else is required of the church in scripture. OK, we can glean that some order is required because Paul does address the dis-order happening at Corinth. There was to be dignified behaviour. But none of the ornamental pomp and splendor that the jewish religion had.

So where did high church come from. We love it. Our flesh loves the man made beauty and elegance, the pomp, if you will, and all of that stuff eventually found it's way back into the church.

The pope is equivalent to the jewish high priest. The catholic priesthood like the levitical priesthood. It's all very showy and our flesh loves that.

No vestments here. We are about as low church as you can go and still be church. I am a lay pastor. No certificates on my wall. No formal training. No nothing except a belief pounded into me that it's the book that causes the miracle of spiritual benefit. Teach an orangutan to talk and he could do what I do. I'm just an available mouth and voice to bring God's book to you. Nothing more, nothing less.

But all of the pomp intimidates me. Not very much, but it does. Actually the certificates in the frames on the walls intimidates me more than the smoking pots and vestments and bizarre hats.

Eschatology intimidates me. Because of the resurgence of reformed doctrine, which I do identify with, but in our current fad, I find myself in an outnumbered group. Pre tribulation pre millennial people are getting thin on the ground these days. That's OK, but the a-millennial people tend to look down on us as unschooled lesser theological folk. Sort of the trailer trash of christians. I'm outnumbered and looked down on by christian academia.

Spiritual intimidation has always been present and I suppose it always will be. I've been a christian so long now that I can look back on several, for what we might call for lack of a better word, fads.

When I was a new christian, spiritual intimidation came from the hugely more popular charismatic movement. Those folks told me to my face, I'm missing out. There's a second blessing, after salvation, another **higher** level of being christian. Two tiered christianity and I was on the lower tier. That's intimidating.

They used to tell me, Oh, be careful brother, be careful. We think you're right on the ragged edge of blaspheming the Holy Spirit since you don't buy into our second level blessing experiences. You might have already blasphemed Him.

Hello. 55 years later, I'm still here, and zero of those folks even still believes. They walked away from christianity. Sort of went from level 2 to level zero.

If you have Christ plus nothing ding ding ding. You win. Don't let any of this other peripheral stuff intimidate you. *Vs. 10a and in Him you have been made complete,*

I started out complete, IN Him, and I'll finish, IN Him. Don't need the framed certificates, or the vestments, or the smoking pots, or the funny hats, or the bobbing up and down and chanting, or the visions, or the babbling, or anything else. I just need to be IN Christ. Period.

The only miracle I need to see is that something in this book that I helped you understand, flipped a switch, and made you alive, IN Christ. Paul says, if you've got Jesus, if you're IN Christ, you've got it all, and don't let any of the other extra-biblical baloney intimidate you.

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are

a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

The reason that the church left all of the jewish religious symbolism behind is because Jesus completed all of the symbols. All of the rituals, all of the cleansings and washings and sacrifices and sabbath observances were types.

All of those things were pictures of the ONE who would be the completion of the picture, when He came. Well, He came. So why would I perform some symbolic ritual that looks to a future annointed one, when He's here.

Oh, but performing the shadow makes me feel so . . . religious. Our flesh loves to bob up and down and chant. It gives me goose bumps when the smoking pot goes down the isle. Fleshy showy religion doesn't even need Jesus. It's goose bump religiosity my flesh is after.

That's why there's 40 cars in their parking lot and 12 in ours. We put on a pitiful show, but you're going to get 35 minutes of the book here. People vote with their feet. Something in our flesh wants to chase the phantom when we know exactly where to find the reality. And that's exactly where Paul goes next.

18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

That's a mouthful, but it's a single concept that we've already been talking about. DO hold onto Christ. Don't chase rabbits.

I love the movie where the dog can talk and he's talking away and abruptly his train of thought just stops mid sentence . . . SQUIRREL! . . . and his head flips, and points towards the squirrel that stole his attention.

I forgot the movie, but I remembered that part. Had to look it up. It's Dug the dog in the movie "UP". The one where the guy doesn't like the world anymore so he ties enough helium balloons onto his house to float it off to another place. Ed Asner. Grumpy old guy. Not much for me to identify with there . . . but I remember the dog's attention span getting waylaid by every . . . SQUIRREL!

We're like Dug the dog. We've got this old leftover flesh that doesn't want to concentrate on Christ. I'm supposed to be staring into the mirror, this book, at Christ, until His image changes me into Him. That's what I'm supposed to be doing. It's a clear and simple command. Dwell on Christ. Look at Jesus. Look into this book until the mirror image becomes me, and I become Him.

But I'm saddled with a ridiculous flesh that has the attention span of a 4 year old, and I'm like Dug the dog. SQUIRREL! It's hard to keep my fleshy 4 year old brain trained on Christ when there are SQUIRREL!'s to chase.

Paul says STOP chasing the squirrels!

18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

Asceticism is a squirrel. Useless draw away from Christ. Angel worship is a squirrel. Dangerous and useless draw away from Christ.

And oh by the way, one nice thing about being this close to the rock bottom is I don't have to be so careful about being offensive to this group or that group. So, listen again to that verse and tell me if it is not the most perfect prophetic statement regarding Joseph Smith anyone could have ever come up with, after the fact . . . but Paul says it 1770 years before Joseph had his visions from angels.

18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-

abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

Here's what Paul wrote to the Galatians about the same thing; Gal. 1:

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

It's almost like a scene in a screwtape letters book where Satan presents God with a plan he'd like to gain permission to embark on. This guy is visited by Angels and has visions and gets special glasses to read golden plates that the angels told him where to find them and he gets a whole different new gospel of works righteousness.

And God says, I'm going to let that one fly, precisely because of what Paul wrote to the Galatians and the Colossians. No one would ever ever believe something that far fetched after what Paul wrote in those 2 letters. So, go for it. Nobody would buy into that. Have at it. *Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize*

The Mormon church has 17.6 million followers and their net worth is 293 billion. Tithing will bring in another 6.5 billion this year. SQUIRREL!

We want to chase the squirrel so badly that we'll dismiss logic. Abandon common sense. It seems like the more bizarre the squirrel, the harder it is to get us not to chase it.

A couple of things happen when you go off chasing every squirrel. The first one is at the beginning of vs. 18.

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize

We're in a relay race for a prize. You are leg 3 in the race. 3 other people are counting on you to finish your leg of the race well so we can all enjoy the prize. You're 3/5ths of the way through the final turn about to get to the final straight of way and . . . SQUIRREL!

And the other 3 runners on your relay are standing there going . . . what the heck is that guy doing! He's distracted by a SQUIRREL! Not only is he going to be defrauded of his prize, but the other 3 guys in the relay can forget about any prize too. That's verse 19.

19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

Paul uses a different analogy, but the idea is exactly the same. Christ is the head where all of the brain function happens. We are parts of the body responding to what the head tells us to do.

So the brain is telling me to pick up a huge rock and my feet respond by walking over to the rock, but when I get there, my arm won't work. Dead arm. Useless arm with zero strength to perform the task. Why? Well, the ligament that holds one end of my arms muscle to the skeleton is off chasing a squirrel, and my entire arm is useless now.

All of the body parts have to work together as a whole in order perform the functions that the head commands them to do.

Human philosophy is a SQUIRREL! Asceticism is a SQUIRREL!
Jumping through religious works righteousness hoops is a SQUIRREL!
Religious rituals are a SQUIRREL! High church with smoking pots and vestments and funny hats are a SQUIRREL! Visions of angels are a SQUIRREL! Signs and wonders are a SQUIRREL!

There's more squirrels in vss 20 - 23 but I'm out of time and you folks may be getting near to being out of patience. I'm like an old fashioned school teacher with a ruler banging your knuckles because you're looking out the window on a sunny day wishing you were there instead of learning the phonics and spelling.

I understand. I'm right there with you. I've got the same flesh that wants to chase squirrels. But I want us to keep our focus pointed towards the prize. Dwell on Jesus. Get into the depths of this book and gaze on Jesus. Ignore the distractors who would draw you away from the simplicity of having Jesus.