

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

“Let No One Defraud You” Colossians 2:16-23

We'll be in Colossians Chapter 2 this morning so if you turn there we will be finishing it up, through the last several verses.

And if you've been with us you've seen that Colossians chapter 1, as we taught through that, shows that the church is grounded in the truth by knowing who Christ is, the person of Christ and what he did, the work of Christ. If we are going to grow in our spiritual life we have to deepen our appreciation for knowing who Christ is and knowing what he has done for us. Reconciling us through His death on the cross.

Now in Colossians chapter 2 we see the church guarded from error. There's error, there's deception, they're coming on to the church and we need to be protected from that. They needed to be protected from that nearly 2,000 years ago when Paul wrote, and the things he speaks about ring true today. First, he spoke about not being deluded by persuasive arguments. This delusion speaks of being susceptible to being inclined to being led astray. To being drifting off because of weakness we have and not being mature. So then persuasive argument comes our way and it sounds attractive to us. If we are strong, we won't be inclined to be led astray.

Then last week we saw the philosophy of men. Empty deception. Deception speaking of the inaccuracy of being led astray, the error that was speaking of, the error of the world as opposed to the truth of God in His Word. Now, today, we will be focusing on the defrauding.

“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—

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

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 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.

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters, which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

Let no one keep defrauding you Colossians 2:18 says. Defrauding speaks of the infliction that occurs from people who lead us astray. When people lead us astray it just doesn't bring error to us, it hurts us, it damages us. It inflicts difficulty into our lives and we need to be careful, we need to be on guard and resist being defrauded. Defrauding is like when you are swindled. We have had something taken away from us, deception robs us of much in Christ. And we are going to look at three ways that happens. It happens through Legalism, it happens through Mysticism and it happens through Asceticism. We will look more closely at each one of these.

We are going to start off this morning with Legalism.

1. The Problem of Legalism (2:16-17)

We are going to look at Colossians 2:16-17 that describes this problem of legalism. It says this, ***“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or new moon or Sabbath day. Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”***

So here we see legalism, let no one act as your judge in regards to things that people may present as an obligation, a moral obligation that you must follow, but indeed there is freedom to choose in this, that's what legalism is.

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Let no one act as your judge, that is the command, the exhortation that you are to follow, let no one act as your judge. Don't follow this, don't let people judge you in this.

When you ask the average person what legalism is (because it is a word that gets thrown around) what do they think it means? To the average person down the street probably thinks it is a strict adherence to a set of rules. But with that kind of understanding, you're a legalist, I'm a legalist, Jesus was a legalist, I'd say everyone's a legalist because everyone has some set of rules they are holding to strictly. Even if they've created the rules themselves. Even if it is as simple as "don't mess with me." They are going to hold to that strictly. "Don't mess with me." Well, whatever your rules are you've got them. Everyone has some set of rules they are strictly adhering to. Hopefully your rules are closely aligning with the Lord's rules so you won't be a legalist.

Here is what legalism is, theological speaking. When we speak of Legalism this is what we are talking about: **Legalism is when people exalt their opinions to the place of the Word of God.**

Opinions, everybody has them, you have opinions, I have opinions, you think your opinions are right, I think my opinions are right. Where we run into danger is when you think your opinions are so right that they are equivalent to what God says. And you are willing to then judge people because you are so convinced of this. We need to be careful. When we think something is right, we need to recognize that we might be mistaken. We might be wrong and we should defer those opinions to the Word of God, ultimately, and to realize that our opinions are only that, our opinions, our way of viewing things. When God's Word says some thing that's different. God defines truth. Why is it so important to get a handle on it? What's the problem of legalism?

B. The Explanation: Why legalism is wrong.

To explain this, legalism is wrong for two basic reasons. The first is more clear.

1) Legalism results in wrongly condemning people for something that God allows.

It is wrong to condemn someone if God is not condemning them. If God gives them the freedom, we should restrict ourselves from condemning them. Even if our opinion is, "that doesn't seem to be the best way of going about it."

That's why legalism is wrong. The converse is true as well. We shouldn't allow people to do something that God condemns and say that's fine and encourage that. So either way, if we don't get a clear understanding of what God says and be able to accurately represent what He thinks is wrong and what He thinks is right, we run into danger. So be careful with opinions and don't exalt them into the place of God's Word and judge other people by opinions as if it were God's Word.

We cannot control what people think, but we can prevent their false condemnation from causing us to feel guilty.

We cannot control what people think, can we? This phrase "let no one act as your judge" is something that other people are doing. It doesn't say don't judge other people, there's other verses that say that. This says don't let someone act as your judge. So while we can't control what other people think (we can hardly control what we think) we can prevent their false condemnation from causing us to feel guilty. We should resist from being made to feel guilty by someone else's set of rules that they are demanding that we follow. There is no need for that. We should see it for what it is, a form of legalism. And to not have our heart condemned in that.

But there is another way that legalism is wrong and is hurtful. This one is not quite so obvious but it is directly stated in verse 17, ***"things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."***

2) It guides people away from the substance of Christ

Legalism guides people away from the substance of Christ and onto something else. When you look at verses 16 and 17, what are these things that are a mere shadow of what is to come? These things that are a mere shadow of what is to come is the Old Testament Laws, food, drink, the dietary laws, in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, things and days that were set apart, consecrate.

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So this is an argument from the greater to the lesser here. If the things which God established for the nation of Israel is told to us, don't let people judge you on those things, how much more true should you not be judged by something that man made up. Man created some rule that you should do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that, and their now judging everyone based on their rules not God's Word. Well, if we shouldn't be judging people, even what God gave to the nation of Israel, we shouldn't be judging people on man's creations either.

In regards to what we consume (Matthew 15:11). Now what is it that Jesus said about this? Food, drink, what did He say? He said, "It is not what enters into the man that defiles the man; it's what comes out of the man. This defiles the man." It's not what we partake of that defiles us, it's the words we say that defile us. That's what Jesus said. And that's why we can resist legalism.

In regards to what we consecrate (Mark 2:27) What we think is holy. What we set apart as holy. In regards to the Sabbath day, here's what Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." God gave these things to serve man, not so that man can serve these things.

Now the Sabbath day is interesting. How can Paul give the freedom or say don't let people act as your judge in regards to the Sabbath day? I mean, isn't that one of the Ten Commandments? He even said in Romans 14:5, "one man holds one day above another, another regards every day alike, let each become fully convinced in their own mind." How can he give this freedom? He can give this freedom to hold to the Sabbath or not hold to the Sabbath, one of the Ten Commandments, on this basis?

The reason to "let no one act as your judge" is that we have been released from the Law (Romans 7:6) The Law was given to guide the nation of Israel according to God's will, for them to represent Him to the world. Now with the coming of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit, God is now working through the church and there are guidelines, there are principles that are governing the church. Most overlap but many are different. And the Sabbath is one of those that are different. The Sabbath, according to Exodus 31, was given as a sign of the covenant, the promise that God made with Israel. What's the promise that we have, the sign of the promise of the new covenant? What is that? It's the Lord's Supper according to 1 Corinthians 11. The sign of the new covenant is the Lord's Supper not the Sabbath. And it's on that basis that we can come on Sundays, hold Sundays set apart as opposed to Saturday, the Sabbath. Or Mondays or Tuesdays or any day or none of the days, and hold them all equal. In fact, Romans 14 gives an implication that someone who holds everyday alike, sets apart everyday for God, sees them all as something that is not special but all are equal to serve the Lord in, is more mature. So let no one act as your judge. Resist that because of this.

This is the point I want to leave you with legalism, **legalism destroys the faith!** Because it sets a focus on a bunch of rules, it sets our minds on what things to do, what things not to do, rather than according to living by faith. And then we can carry out these rules. Man likes to be told what to do, you just give him a list of rules and he'll like to do that and say I'm fine. It's much more challenging living by faith, trusting what God says rather than someone's list of things to do and not to do.

2. The Problem of Mysticism (2:18-19)

"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 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."

These visions that are seen, this worship of angels, this is not something that is true. This is something that is understood to be not real truth from God. These are visions that people think they have, or have somehow been manipulated to have in their mind. Don't hold to these.

A. The Exhortation: "Let no one keep defrauding you"

Let no one keep defrauding you as presenting these as something valid and then moving you away. Because it moves you away from Christ, the richness of Christ, and onto something else that is just not true. Let no one keep defrauding you.

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Mysticism is when people exalt their experiences to the place of the Word of God.

Just like our reasoning, our experiences can be flawed. How we see things and sense things and experience things, we might get that a little confused. And even these things can be manipulated and contrived around us and we can be moved to have experiences by others. So we need to be careful to submit our experiences to God's Word and see those things in light of God's Word. And when people don't and they take their stand on visions that they have seen, delighting in self abasement, the worship of angels, they run into mysticism and that's dangerous.

B. The Explanation: Why mysticism is wrong

Now why is this so wrong? It's wrong beyond just that it is not true, that they claim to see visions that they don't see. Here's why mysticism is wrong:

1) In supposed humility, it is prideful.

They delight in self-abasement. Self-abasement is humility, but false humility. It's a sense of pride that comes from having God work so grandly in your life that you have visions that you see and that other people don't get to see.

Now these things happen incidentally, not just on TV, not just in Pentecostal Churches or charismatic movements when people will say in church that God is telling me this for you and these people this is what God says, these prophecies. It happens in Evangelical Churches. It happens in churches that are supposedly founded in God's Word where people will sense that God is guiding me to this, telling me this, leading me this way. This is beyond God's Word. Now God speaks to us through His word, in the Holy Spirit illuminating God's Word to see the application for our life, but that's different than when God says do this, do that.

I've fallen into that when I was a very young Christian, looking at the Word and saying, well Jesus said this to this person therefore He is saying that to me. It may be taken completely out of its context, just totally ripped out and I've totally twisted the meaning of the Scripture but I see these words there and I just co-opted them for my life. Well the problem with that is it did not work too well and I had a choice, either God's wrong or I'm wrong, one or the other. I decided I think I'm going about this the wrong way and so many other people are as well. But it can be prideful; it can be delighting in self-abasement.

2) In supposed spirituality it is fleshly.

“Taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.”

This all feeds off the flesh, this desire to have God working in some special way in your life that is unique to you. We are all together in this as part of the body of Christ and we are not more spiritual because God is specially working in my life and not in your life. And really this feeds the flesh, it's fleshly.

3) In supposed union with Christ, it has departed.

Verse 19, not holding fast to the head. The head being Christ. Christ being the head of the church according to Colossians 1. He is the head of the church and when we embrace visions that are false then we are moved away from Christ, we depart from Him, we have moved on to other things. In supposed union with Christ, it has departed. It's not in union with Christ, it presents itself as such but it's not because it is not true to God's Word.

4) In supposed unity with the church, it is divisive.

Why is it divisive? Well, in not being true, in exalting these experiences, it puts people like me and people like you in a difficult position. Supposedly united, it presents a facade of unity. “Let's bring everyone together, let's get everyone together doing such and such a thing.” And then people like me are going to be struggling to join with this error and worse.

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Yet now I can just say I'll participate in a desire to bring unity and some symbolism that we stand united professing Christ but we have to diminish doctrine in order to get there. And then I bring people to whom I am trying to minister and hopefully your trying to minister to people too and encouraging people along and then they come into contact with this. And what position does that put you in? But saying, "well they say this is from God but I wouldn't believe it, he says God says this but I don't think so." Who wants to be in that position? So it ends up dividing the church because we don't want to be in the position of having people being told this is what God is saying when God's not saying it. So it's difficult.

Mysticism divides the flock! It's a danger to the church and we need to resist it. It's a problem.

3. The Problem of Asceticism (2:20-23)

We've done papers on mysticism, we have a paper you can read on the web site under resources, one of the position papers on healing, on tongues, on prophecy, what that is and how God validates prophecy by miracles not just things you have to wonder about, but things that are undeniable, we can say, "Ah, this person doesn't just say God is speaking, God is speaking." Because this is undeniable, these miracles that surround them. Then legalism, we have a paper on Moral and Non-Moral issues that give more information on this. But asceticism is more challenging to explain and I'm going to try here and I want you to pay attention here because this passage I will read is not widely understood, I don't think.

Verse 20 to 23, ***"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."***

And many people who deal with this passage just pull out the severe treatment of the body part and then reference people who cause themselves to bleed and beat themselves up in order to somehow serve the Lord in terms of pursuing holiness. Or they will look at some monk who sat on some pedestal for 36 years in self denial and that certainly is asceticism, but this is much more relevant just like the others are much more relevant to us today, just as relevant as they were 2,000 years ago. So we are going to try and deal with this.

What is asceticism? **Asceticism is when people exalt their restrictions to the place of the Word of God.**

A. The Exhortation: "Why do you submit yourself?" Why submit yourself to these decrees? Why do this?

They have restrictions and they exalt their restrictions to the place of the Word of God. Everybody has restrictions, you have restrictions, you may not even realize that you have restrictions. You have restrictions, I have restrictions, but when we exalt our restrictions to the place of the Word of God, seeing that these restrictions are accomplishing what the Word of God accomplishes, we have created an artificial thing which is, frankly, asceticism. These restrictions are only that, restrictions.

Now I'm not here trying to get you to throw away your restrictions, that's really irrelevant. I'd like you to understand this passage. This passage says that whatever your restrictions are, they are of no value against fleshly indulgence. You may think they are but they're not because that's what the Word of God says, they are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

This is like a second cousin, if you will, to legalism. You can have some appreciation in some sense for people that are seeking to establish restrictions, at least they are trying to seek holiness. They are not saying, "Who cares, I'm going to do whatever I want to do," but they are just going about it the wrong way. As the second cousin to legalism, at least they don't go so far as to judge other people by saying you need to do this too. Although often they do go that far. But even if you don't judge other people by your restrictions, still you have to see your restrictions in the right sense and not misunderstand what they can do and what they can't do, because they are no value against fleshly indulgence.

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B. The Explanation: Why asceticism is wrong

1) We have died with Christ

Why is it wrong? First and foremost it's wrong because of verse 20, *"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees."*

We have died with Christ, a simple concept but a critical concept. This is such a critical concept that we are going to spend an entire message next week focusing on this concept. It gets developed in Colossians 3:1-4.

It is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. And the life, which we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God who loves us and gave Himself up for us. If we have died with Christ and it is no longer we who live, that is the means by which holiness is achieved. That is how God desires to bring holiness into our lives, through His life within us. Not by a list of restrictions that we are not prevented from doing because we are trying to protect ourselves. We have died with Christ and that realization brings holiness and we'll explain a lot more about that next week. That is a critical and a simple concept but not one that is easily appreciated.

2) It is the world's way

It is the world's way of doing things. Verse 20, *"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"*

The world can recognize the problems of sin. They say "this is sin." They may not call it sin, they may call it something else. They may say "this produces something bad" and we shouldn't suffer by this bad thing so we will try to help people not do this bad thing that hurts them. And they will construct ways to protect people from doing these bad things. And it surrounds this "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

These worldly ways of going about it actually work. People can actually stop doing certain behavior, they can! And so this is why the church can embrace all this stuff and they can say we'll start doing it that way too because it gets people to stop certain things, it appears to work. But here's the problem, it's all external.

The whole motivation to getting you to stop these things is for yourself. You stop these things because it is better for you. Yes, these things are bad, they hurt me, I want me to be better, so I'll not do these things. And I'll construct techniques and tactics to protect myself from doing these bad things. Well, I'm not advocating people do these bad things but what I am saying is that these restrictions are of no value against fleshly indulgence because they do not deal with the heart. The world can do nothing with the heart. They can only deal with the external behavior.

And many churches are just willingly giving up with dealing with God in the heart and just deal with external behavior through these techniques. God's desire is to change the heart and in changing the heart the external behavior changes but let's not get that turned around because it doesn't happen the other way. It happens internally and through the internal heart change life changes around us. If we have died with Christ we don't have to submit ourselves to the world's way of protecting against bad things there's a better way, it's Christ way.

3) It emphasizes what is temporary

What's temporary, all these things are passing away. They are coming for awhile and then they are gone. They are focused on things that are very earthly and passing away. What's eternal, the Lord, will not pass away, He will endure. So we need to be focused on those things. The Word of God endures forever, people endure forever, but all this stuff passes away. Verse 22, *(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?*

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4) It only appears wise and godly

I'll admit it appears wise, it looks like it works, appears like a great idea at face value. Verse 23, ***“These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion.”***

So when people do these things, these restrictions, they appear godly because it appears to be protecting people from sin. And when it is done by churches, it appears as a religious thing as well. But it only appears that way. It is not the true ministry that God desires to have in people's heart, it's external not internal.

5) It is false humility

Verse 23, ***“the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement.”***

Self-abasement is humility. It's what the word means, but it is false humility. It's self-abasement, it's the exalting of self in the striving for humility. So then it's what I have stopped doing, I no longer do this, I have no longer done this. It is not God's work in my life that has brought this change and not just that change but the other change and my whole heart has changed, I'm a new person, I'm a new creature in Christ, old things have gone and new things have come. It's not that, it's I stopped doing this thing and basically because the motivation is it's bad for me.

6) It is of no value in the pursuit of holiness

“It is of no value against fleshly indulgence.” It is of no value against fleshly indulgence! It is of no value against fleshly indulgence!! I still think that people do not appreciate this. That restrictions have what God's Word says is no value against fleshly indulgence. It isn't going to work in changing your life into becoming more holy. It pretends to work but it doesn't work.

It only changes external behavior, non-Christians can change external behavior and they do all the time. My mother stopped smoking after 45 years of smoking. She stopped one day, she changed. And that was with an addictive element to it, nicotine. She hasn't smoked for 18 years now, not once. She changed. People can change externally; God desires change internally to change the heart and that changes our behavior. To just change our behavior through restrictions has no value against fleshly indulgence. It is not going to accomplish holiness.

Now I wanted to get this across so badly that I did something unusual for me, very unusual for me, I made an attempt at writing you a poem:

Colossians 2:21

A Poem from Gerry Andersen's sermon "Let No One Defraud You," May 18, 2003

The world's become so perverse
And it just can't get any worse.
The antidote is my life verse
Best of all, it's very terse,
“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch”

On the job they think I'm too clean
But you should see who I work between.
One man's words are beyond obscene
And the woman looks like Halloween.
“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch”

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When you think of it, it's common sense;
To protect from sin, we need a fence.
Our temptation can be intense
And we can't resist without a defense
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

So as to not be drunk with wine
When at home or out to dine,
All alcohol I will decline;
This is where I draw the line.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

The world's music, I just won't buy it;
Christian music is now my diet.
Some tunes are great, you need to try it;
It's given me a sense of peace and quiet.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

I've unplugged the TV and the internet;
They're just too much of a threat.
I have not even one regret;
Sanctification is now no sweat.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

In my wisdom, I have forbid
My family from the neighbor's kid.
Fleshly indulgence will I rid
By keeping my home under a lid.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

My oldest doesn't like the restriction
That comes with living my conviction.
Better this than drug addiction,
Even if it means family friction.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

Many I speak with are prone to grumble
When I explain how to avoid a stumble.
Yet I've even heard some who mumble;
Amazed at how much I am humble.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

My rules work so well I'll make some more,
At last count I'm up to ninety-four;
Write a book? I might explore;
So more will know what I abhor.
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

To decrees, why choose submission?
It serves to keep evil from fruition
I move we bring back Prohibition
So all can gain from the proposition
"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"

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If you think my words are a bit too much,
Don't you think you need a crutch?
If you want not to sin so much,
You ought to live by words like such:
“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch”

Asceticism develops the flesh!

The point being asceticism is just not of no value against fleshly indulgence, it actually develops the flesh. Legalism destroys the flesh, mysticism divides the flock and asceticism develops the flesh. It gives a sense that I have accomplished something. It gives a sense that my rules and my adherence to my rules have brought holiness and it's a lie.

Lets pray together. Lord, we ask that you give us the wisdom to see Your Word for what it is. To not impart our thinking, our wisdom to Your Word, that we will receive it as such, the Word of God. So that we will be able to resist those who judge us according to their man made rules. Lord, help us to see mysticism for the danger that it really is and that we will not be led astray by people pretending to have visions and being puffed up by their fleshly mind. Lord, we also pray that you help us get a deeper understanding of what it means to have died with Christ so that we can live according to Him. Not our way, but His way. Not according to our power, but His power. Not according to our restrictions but His life within us that changes our heart. We pray, Lord, that You bring us a new heart and give us a change from the inside so that we can be holy both inwardly and outwardly. We ask that in Jesus name. Amen.