**Colossians 7**

Colossians 2:16-23

9/7/25 AM

**If you have your Bibles, go ahead and open them to Colossians 2.**

* Today, we’re going to continue making our way through this short NT letter.

In previous weeks, I’ve argued that Paul’s letter to the Colossians is a celebration of Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency.

* DeFazio – application for your life.

But also, Colossians is a call to continue in Christ alone, to say no to all the competitors that contend for our attention and keep us from full devotion to Christ.

Paul begins this letter by telling us why we should stick with Jesus. But in the last couple of weeks, he’s begun telling us how.

**He’s told us that we can stick with Jesus by:**

* Walking with him.
* Fixing our eyes on him.

In our text today, Paul adds that we can stick with Jesus by avoiding distortions of the gospel. Look at…

***Colossians 2:16-23 NLT*** *So don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths.****17****For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.****18****Don’t let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud,****19****and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.* ***20****You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as,****21****“Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”?* ***22*** *Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them.* ***23*** *These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.*

**Katie – Spanish.**

* Online translators.
  + With the rise of AI, it’s becoming more and more tempting for students to not think for themselves, to not actually learn the material.
* **But even though online translators have gotten better, Katie can almost always tell when students have used a translator because certain things get lost in translation.**
  + Linguistically and culturally languages just don’t always translate seamlessly.

To prove this point, a few years ago a guy took the song, “Take Me Out in the Ballgame,” typed it into something like Google translate, and translated the lyrics from English to German. Then he translated it back into English to see if anything got lost in translation.

Now, you know the song “Take Me out to the Ballgame”:

Take me out to the ballgame.

Take me out to the crowd.

Buy me some peanuts and Crackerjack.

I don't care if I ever get back.

Let me root, root, root for the home team.

If they don't win, it's a shame.

For it's one, two, three strikes you’re out

At the old ballgame.

So, this guy translated it into German and then back into English and here are the results:

Execute me to the ball play.

Execute me with the masses.

Buy me certain groundnuts and crackerstackfusig.

I'm not interested if I never receive back.

Let me root, root, root for the main team.

If they do not win, it is dishonor.

For there are one, two, three impacts on you

At the old ball play.

**It just doesn’t have the same ring to it, does it?**

**With an online translator, something got lost in translation and what we’re left with is a sad distortion of the original.**

PAUSE

**Church, I think the same is true with the gospel.**

It’s easy for something to get lost in translation. It’s easy for things to become distorted. And I’m not talking about the literal translation of the NT text from the original language.

I’m talking about the way we hear and perceive the gospel. The way we hear and understand the invitation of Christ.

* It seems so hard for us to accept salvation simply by free grace that we are tempted to turn to distortions, to try and adjust, to try to find ways of saving ourselves.

**Church, the truth is, our fickle human hearts are constantly trying to add to the gospel.**

If read across the NT, read across church history, we find story after story where we approach the gospel saying, *“Thank you Jesus for dying for me and all, but there’s got to be more.”*

* Let me do this, let me do that, let me find something that I can feel good about, let me find something that I can compare to others, let me find something to add.

**But Paul’s argument in our text today (and his other writings) is that nothing, absolutely nothing, can be mingled with Christ as a ground of our acceptance with God.**

I mean, just consider what Paul told the believers in Ephesus…

***Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT*** *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.****9****Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*

**Paul’s statement in verse 8, *‘God saved you by his grace’* means that it is by the unmerited grace of God that we fallible human creatures are accepted by him.**

* He does not accept us because of our goodness, for without his grace we are not good. He does not accept us on account of our good works, for our sins outweigh them.
  + God accepts us as his children only by his grace in Christ Jesus.

To believe what Paul has declared about Christ in Colossians, that He is the supreme, exclusive, and sufficient Savior, is to believe that Jesus needs no supplements, tweaks, or adjustments.

* In Christ, the grace of God has been revealed.
* In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the gospel invitation for all of us to turn to him as savior and Lord, God has revealed that He is willing and eager to accept us as his children.

**But church, our hearts are prone to perverting the gospel by believing that there’s something we can do or be that will cause God to accept us.**

* Our hearts are prone to distortions.

While there are countless forms of false ways of striving for the assurance of acceptance by God, in our text today, I think Paul helps the Colossians, and us, recognize a couple of the main distortions to which we’re often temped to turn.

* So, let’s spend the rest of our time teasing these out.

For starters, one of the distortions Paul addresses…

1. **To believe that we are saved by Christ plus a perfect character.**

**In other words, we try to believe that if we can avoid enough bad things and do enough good things, God will accept us.**

* *As long as I don’t drink, smoke, cuss or chew or run around with girls who do, God will have to save me.*
* If I do certain things (or at least more than some other people I know) and don’t do certain things (at least not as much as some other people I know), then God will have to look upon me with favor.
  + The Creator will be in my debt. He’ll owe me.
  + We may not say this way, but this is the underlying idea.

PAUSE

In fact, this is the underlying assumption of all man-made religions.

* Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoro-astrianism…

They’re all the same. They all hold that we do certain things in this life and in the end, we’re either punished or rewarded based on our works.

* So, do good, try to avoid bad, and just keep your fingers crossed that in the end your good outweighs your bad.
* Work, work, and work, and there are no guarantees, but maybe you can earn your way to paradise or nirvana or the great beyond.
* This is the way of all man-made religions.

PAUSE

**But the gospel Paul preaches, the gospel the Colossians had heard, bears no resemblance to man-made fabrications.**

Paul said…

***Colossians 2:13-14 NLT*** *You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.* ***14****He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.*

* Breaking my hand, having a cast.
* What can dead people do for themselves?

Like Paul says in…

***Romans 5:8 NLT*** *But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

Church, we don’t earn our way to God—He has come to us!

**But the thing that’s hard for us to realize and believe is that God never asks us to persuade him to love us.**

* Shark Tank.
* Budding entrepreneurs present their ideas to the sharks - five titans of industry who turned their ideas into lucrative empires. The entrepreneurs try to convince any one of the sharks to invest money in their idea or business.

PAUSE

I think we sometimes have a Shark Tank mindset when it comes to salvation, our relationship with the Lord.

* We hear the gospel, that Christ died for us and we think, *“No, let me add to it. There has to be something I can do.”*

**This is what the false teachers were telling the Christians in Colossae.**

* They were trying to convince the believers that true spirituality was based on how well they observed certain codes of behavior.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**In particular, Paul mentions diets and days.**

* Under the OT system, certain foods were classified as “clean” or “unclean” (Lev. 11).
  + But Jesus made it clear that, of *itself*, food was neutral. It was what came out of the heart that made a person spiritual or unspiritual (Matt. 15:1–20).
* Also, the OT Jew was commanded to keep certain days on the calendar. They had their feast days (Lev. 25) and their special “new moon” celebrations (see Isa. 1:13).
  + All of this had its proper function under the old covenant; but it was not meant to be a permanent part of the faith under the new (see John 1:17).
  + The Law was a schoolmaster that helped to train and discipline Israel in the childhood of the nation, preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah.
  + Now that Jesus had come, the schoolmaster was no longer needed to perform the same functions (Gal. 3:24–4:11).[[2]](#footnote-2)

**So, Paul reminds us here that the basis of our fullness and freedom is the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

* We have no reason to become enslaved by legalistic living. And Paul tells us that we are not to allow others to intimidate us or question our spirituality.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Fullness and freedom are found in Christ and Him alone.

PAUSE

**But church, it’s important to point out what Paul does not say here.**

Two things in particular…

**For one, Paul never suggests that the OT is useless to Christians today.**

* Paul himself referred to and drew from the OT extensively (as did Jesus).
* The Law still reveals the holiness of God, and in the Law Jesus Christ can be seen (Luke 24:27).
* The Law reveals sin and warns of the consequences of sin—however it has no power to prevent sin or redeem the sinner. Only grace can do that.
  + Dad’s CT scans.

**Also, Paul never suggests that transformation is optional in the life of a Christian.**

* Anyone who’s read the NT knows that Paul was no enemy of self-discipline in the Christian life, but rather the reverse. It’s clear in his portrait of the effective servant of God that appetites will need disciplining, and self-control will need to be exercised, if the ultimate prize is to be won.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* As I said a couple of weeks ago, this idea that we call on Jesus as our savior, but we don’t have to submit to him as Lord, we don’t have to make any changes, we don’t have to obey anyone. We do not have to give up anything, alter anything, surrender anything, we don’t have to deny any of your desires and urges, we don’t have to be accountable for anything—all we have to do is come to Him and believe in Him as Savior!—would have been completely foreign to Paul.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Paul was not anti-spiritual disciplines.**

He wasn’t against, Bible reading, prayer, fasting, worship, fellowship, and self-discipline; but he was opposed to those who appeal to certain practices to measure and even replace the core convictions of the Christian faith.[[6]](#footnote-6)

* For Paul, the mark of true religion was not a rigorous compliance to rules of self-denial, but faith in Christ and a life in his Spirit (see Rom 14:13–18).
* What finally defines the borders of true Christianity is “being in Christ,” where God’s grace transforms us from the inside out.
* Any definition of Christianity that substitutes regulations of self-denial for self-transformation by the grace of God is spiritually impoverished and ultimately useless.[[7]](#footnote-7)

PAUSE

I want you to hear me say it—spiritual disciplines are not a bad thing.

In his book *Celebration of Discipline* Richard Foster wrote, *“the desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world. We must not be led to believe that the disciplines are only for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or only for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation and study. Far from it. God intends the disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors…the primary requirement is a longing after God.”*[[8]](#footnote-8)

**But when they are substituted for faith in Christ or practical righteousness, they become degrading.**

* Just consider the Pharisees.
* A focus on conformity to a code caused them to forget things like arrogant pride, smug judgmentalism, anger, and a host of other dark sins that never seem to make the list.[[9]](#footnote-9)

PAUSE

Alexander Maclaren said, “There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us, and that is the power of the indwelling Christ.”

* When Jesus is given control, he not only gives us the Holy Spirit to fight against the flesh, but he also gives us new desires as well. We don’t need rules for the outside because we have the Spirit on the inside. We simply need to yield to him.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Paul maintains that spiritual life is a matter of relationship with Christ and the heart’s commitment to him.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**So, the question becomes what is our motive?**

* To seek Christ or to check a box?
* To seek Christ or to compare ourselves to others?

The second distortion…

1. **We’re saved by Christ and a perfect experience/s.**

***Colossians 2:18-19 NLT*** *Don’t let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud,* ***19*** *and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.*

The false teachers weren’t merely legalists; they were also mystics who liked to brag about their visionary experiences. They seemed humble, but they were really puffed up with pride.

* And apparently, the false teachers were telling the believers at Colosse that deeper ecstatic experiences were necessary to make them truly spiritual.[[12]](#footnote-12)

PAUSE

**You know, church, experiences can be different for different people.**

* Going to Bella Notte.
* We didn’t experience the restaurant in the same way.

Church, this is true of all experience and it’s even more true of more complicated experiences.

* So, the point I think Paul is making is that it’s wrong, for us to seek to have just the same experience that someone else had when they got saved.
  + Mark Jackson

**So, it’s not that Paul rejected any kind of spiritual/deep/intimate experience. He had some himself (2 Cor 12:1–4).**

* But, having shown how great the status of the believers in Colossae was, he opposed the assertion that they would be disqualified unless they had the same ecstatic experiences as the false teachers.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* Paul even warned that making ecstatic experiences our spiritual quest is a dangerous distraction.
  + He said the false teachers had become disconnected from Christ.
  + What could be worse than that?
    - A body disconnected from its head cannot continue to live and grow. If unchecked, the legalism and mysticism of the false teachers would turn the church into a decapitated corpse.

Commentator Warren Wiersbe wrote*, “There is a fascination with “religious mysticism” that attracts people. Learning mysteries, being initiated into the inner secrets, and having contact with the spirit world all seem exciting. But these practices are soundly condemned by God.*

* *The true Christian glories in Christ, not in his own experience. He follows the Word, led by the Holy Spirit; and as he abides in Christ, he experiences blessing and fruitfulness. He seeks no other experience than that which relates him to the Head, Jesus Christ.”*[[14]](#footnote-14)

**So, again, I think the question comes back to motive. What is our motive?**

* To seek Christ or to check a box?
* To seek Christ or to compare ourselves to others?
* True worship focuses on Christ. He is central. Not rules. Not experiences.[[15]](#footnote-15)

PAUSE

**Church, this section closes with an emphasis on the danger of distorted versions of the gospel.**

Once again, Paul turns our attention to Jesus.

* The answer to legalism is the spiritual reality we have in Christ (fullness and freedom are found in Him).
* The answer to mysticism is the spiritual union with Christ, the Head of the church, and our position in Him.

We put all of this into daily practice as we fellowship with Christ through worship, the Word, and prayer. As we yield to the indwelling Spirit, we receive the power we need for daily living. It is in our fellowship with other believers that we contribute spiritually to the growth of the body, the church, and the other members of the body contribute to us.

* The question is—is Christ preeminent in our lives? Are we drawing on His spiritual power, or depending on some man-made “religious” substitute?[[16]](#footnote-16)

1. Max Anders, [*Galatians-Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc69ga?ref=Bible.Col2.16-17&off=630&ctx=tuality+is+suspect%3f+~Apparently+some+in+C), vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Warren W. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ntbec?ref=Bible.Col2.16a&off=0&ctx=e+important+truths.%0a~The+basis+for+our+fr), vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 128–129. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Anders, [*Galatians-Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc69ga?ref=Bible.Col2.16-17&off=161&ctx=and+set+us+free.+We+~have+no+reason+to+be), 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. C. Lucas, [*Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus72col?ref=Bible.Col2.16&off=990&ctx=ns+of+spirituality.%0a~Every+Bible+reader+k), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Tozer, *Discipleship*, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robert W. Wall, [*Colossians & Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ivntccol?ref=Bible.Col2.16-17&off=2854&ctx=resent%2c+not+future.+~Paul+is+not+anti-Jew), The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Col 2:16–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wall, [*Colossians & Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ivntccol?ref=Bible.Col2.16-23&off=1029&ctx=pect+moral+results.%0a~The+problem+Paul+add), Col 2:16–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Anders, [*Galatians-Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc69ga?ref=Bible.Col2.16-17&off=770&ctx=+codes+of+behavior.+~Paul+mentions+diets+), 308–309. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Anders, [*Galatians-Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc69ga?ref=Bible.Col2.20-23&off=9&ctx=s.+Christ.%0a2%3a20%E2%80%9323.+~Paul%E2%80%99s+final+warning), 309–310. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Richard R. Melick, [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac32?ref=Bible.Col2.16b&off=3363&ctx=heological+beliefs.%0a~Paul+strongly+forbad), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Anders, [*Galatians-Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc69ga?ref=Bible.Col2.18-19&off=109&ctx=citing+experiences.+~Apparently%2c+the+fals), 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Harold W. Hoehner, Philip W. Comfort, and Peter H. Davids, [*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon.*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cstonecm70eph?ref=Bible.Col2.16-19&off=8786&ctx=esponse+is+cutting.+~It+is+not+that+he+re), vol. 16 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ntbec?ref=Bible.Col2.18-19&off=6705&ctx=Head%2c+Jesus+Christ.%0a~There+is+a+fascinati), 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Anders, [*Galatians-Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc69ga?ref=Bible.Col2.18-19&off=318&ctx=sue+back+to+Christ.%0a~Scholars+debate+whet), 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ntbec?ref=Bible.Col2.23&off=1640&ctx=purity+and+victory.%0a~This+section+closes+), 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)