

Sermon Notes



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Hard Resets, Resolutions, and Grace

Colossians 2:20-3:4

We need to take a long, hard look at this passage, especially in light of what we learned from Matthew chapter one and the genealogy of Christ.

There is more grace here, right now, for you than you've ever imagined before. That became plain when we saw the women in Jesus's genealogy. Paul tried to tell us this when he said, "Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Ever notice the tense of that verb? He was still a sinner, reluctantly, I am sure, but he was very aware of his inner and outer life. He was realistic. And he was convinced to his core that the grace of God was sufficient for him because God told him so. (1st Timothy 1:15; 2nd Cor. 12:9)

Let's look at those passages. 2nd Timothy 1:15-16. How much patience does Christ have for us and with us? And what is the result of that patience? May I ask you to take a deep breath and relax just a bit? You are saved to the uttermost (read Hebrews 7:25). Hold that thought.

(Set up what is going on in 2nd Corinthians. Then read 2nd Cor. 12:1-10) God's grace is sufficient for you. This does not mean that we don't care about sin, but sin no longer rules our lives, and we no longer have to live in fear of sudden rejection by God, or by His patience wearing out with us.

God stresses this again and again in scripture. Since Jesus has come, everything has changed. The 611 laws of the OT have been reduced to "Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself," which Jesus says fulfills ALL the law and the prophets. Endless rules about assemblies and liturgies and Doctrinal Statements which must be signed collapse into "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick or in prison, lift up the fallen, free the captives."

We need to have a hard reset here because we have been soaked in Victorian-style morality and British and American Fundamentalism (which the Americans took a lot farther, as is their habit). We are so soaked in the concept of "religion is rules" that we even take the beautiful, freeing passage in Colossians and twist it. When my wife and I first came back to the States, we lived in Lancaster, Ohio. A couple of hours away was a congregation in our same tribe that sent out a paper every month attacking anyone who disagreed with them, by name. During Easter, they sent out a broadside, excoriating anyone who celebrated Easter because it was, they claimed, a Catholic innovation. Then, they said, "We are to have nothing to do with such things. As the scripture says, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!'" I threw the paper across the room in disgust. What a twisted way to use scripture, to try to make it say the opposite of what it actually said.

Why does the Bible say in Colossians that these human rules lack value? (read it again) Because they do! You can see a sign that says, "Speed limit 55," and you might even drive 55, but do you like it? Did that sign change your mind, attitude, and plans? You were told not to have sexual thoughts. Did it work?

Islam and many Christian fundamentalist churches act in direct opposition to this passage. And, yet, history and every study we've done shows that the rules have zero effect when it comes to establishing clean hearts and restraining behavior.

That does not mean that we are given license to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Romans 6:1-6 makes that plain but so does the rest of Colossians. In 3:5-11, we get some basic rules for our behavior as well as the reason why – we are all equal in the eyes of God and, therefore, we are never allowed to misuse or harm someone else.

Positive rules are then given in 3:12-17. This is a hard reset. Instead of living a life defined by don't, no's, and negative rules, live life so full of Jesus that you literally sing; you vibrate with the resonance of the love of Christ.

Here's a suggestion on how to do the hard reset – and it isn't that hard. Read the Gospels in 2026. I suggest you read one a month. At the end of the year, you've read all four of them three times each. Read them in any order you like, but if you are asking for my advice, I would start with Luke, then Mark, then John, and then Matthew.

If you are going to read the entire New Testament, I would suggest you read Luke, Mark, John, Matthew, then go back to Luke. Next, go to Acts, Romans, and Hebrews. Then, I'd suggest 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and then...back to John. Then read James, 1st and 2nd Peter, and the three epistles of John. Last, I would read Revelation but, if it were me, I would read Isaiah and Matthew first, and then read Revelation. (This is all in our newsletter for December 14th. If you do not get the newsletter, let us know at info@oursafeharbor.com)

Then, give yourself grace. Talk to God at the end of each day. Tell Him about your successes, your failures, the things you are concerned about, and express your thankfulness. It doesn't have to be long or complicated. You don't have to approach the throne in shame, no matter how often you have failed. Hebrews 4:14-16.

It's okay to remind God that it is hard down here. It is okay to ask Him to speak to Jesus about this. Of course, He knows, but it is good to express your need for His continual grace and your thankfulness that He has already promised to supply that grace. 1st John 1:7 ("Purifies us from all sin" or "continually cleanses us from all sin.")

This is your hard reset, a couple of suggested resolutions, and a reminder of grace. You have sufficient grace. God is not tired of you or fed up with you. Walk with Him. Walk in the light. Be a light-sharer with all you meet. And when you fail, remind yourself that God loves and forgives you. Good news, indeed.