

Christ Is All We Need

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[0 : 00] Tonight we are continuing our series through the book of Colossians.

! So if you would go to Colossians chapter 2.! We're going to be in verses 16 through 23 tonight. So several years ago when I served at First Baptist Venita, I had this bowling pin that was in my office. To this day I don't know where the bowling pin came from. I don't know why I had it, but for some reason I had found a bowling pin and decided that's going to look great on my shelf. It was a great conversation starter.

People would come in, they would see the bowling pin and they would say, hey, you must like to bowl. Well, usually the conversations went like this. No, I hate bowling.

And that was the end of it. I know nothing about bowling except for how bad I am at it. Even though this decoration gave the appearance, the outward signs that I might have been a bowler, the truth is it was not a reflection of my actual love for the game or my skill level.

[1 : 23] Now I know a couple of you in here, I can't remember who, have bowled in a league before. For those of you that are actually good at bowling, I salute you. It is truly something that is too lofty for me to understand.

Now, on the other hand, if you look around my office, which by the way, I got rid of the bowling pin. I realized how useless it was and I threw it away when I moved. On the other hand, if you ask me about the trombone that's sitting in my office, I can talk about that all day.

I love playing in an orchestra. I love playing in an ensemble. This is something that I had devoted a good part of my life to learning how to play. And music in general really is the passion that's within me.

The decorations in my office, the instruments that I own, the other weird things that I own that are musical in some way, shape or form, those are not the substance of what I like.

They are a reflection of what I'm passionate about. I devoted time and energy into playing my horn. I neglected sports. I neglected any hope of having a real social life in high school to play trombone.

[2 : 33] Mostly any hope of having a romantic relationship. Thankfully, I found Nicole back there. But again, these things are not a substance of what I love.

These things are a reflection of my love for music. Now, religion, it can fall into kind of the same trap. You know, it can quickly become about, you know, observing certain holidays.

Maybe going to a certain number of church services. Having your home decorated with Christian things. There was a guy that I knew that that was his claim to Christianity.

As he would point to things on his wall and say, of course I'm a Christian. Do you not see the painting on the wall? Literally. I'm thinking, okay. Maybe you are somebody that's so Christian that you vote straight Republican every election year.

I don't know. But many people that check all of these boxes are still going to be empty inside.

Because even though they have the outward appearance of what they perceive as being Christian or spiritual, these things are not a reflection of what's going on in their hearts.

[3 : 39] It's not a reflection of where their passions lie or what they love. They hold to these things because they think that's what Christians are supposed to do. But is there a real relationship with Christ?

To them, these things are the substance of their faith. Rather than just a product of it. All of these things are a shell of Christianity that they have created for themselves.

But as we're going to see in Colossians today, if you skip past Jesus, you've really missed it all. And Christianity then becomes about these outward actions that make you look like you are a religiously devoted person.

And it basically becomes the same thing as the bowling pin that was in my office. People see it. They might have a chance to start a conversation with you. But in the end, it's not a reflection of what is going on in your heart.

In the context of all this that was going on in Colossae, they were facing a very similar predicament. That you needed other things along with Christ. That you needed all these outward appearances of religious devotions to be righteous.

[4 : 50] To be spiritually enlightened to them, or at least to these false teachers that were infiltrating their ranks. Because Jesus was not the only way. He was just part of the way. Jesus was a good place to start.

But in order to be spiritually enlightened, you needed to have all these other things that pointed to a devotion. Or to point it to some devotion to casting off the fleshly nature.

Now, Epaphras, we've talked about him a little bit in the past sermons. He was the one that started this church. And this is no doubt concerning to him. Having heard the gospel from Paul, he probably started this church off on the right foot.

And now that these heresies have entered into the congregation, this is something that he's trying to correct. He goes to great lengths, including going all the way to Rome to receive instructions from Paul, who at this time was in prison.

Now, we don't know much about Epaphras personally. But there's two things that I like about the guy already. One, when he heard the gospel, when he received it, he went home and shared it. He started a church in his hometown in Colossae.

[5 : 58] The other thing that I like about him already is that when he faced a problem that he couldn't handle himself, he went for help. He went for wise counsel. He knew that this particular situation was beyond his abilities.

And on his own, he needed wise counsel. So he went to Paul. And he went to great lengths to get to this person. But going back to the main point of this text, the church was adopting practices that they believed would curb their sinfulness and make them more spiritual.

They were adopting practices that would give this outward appearance of religious devotion, but in the end would really only lead them farther away from Jesus. When Jesus ceases to be the sole focus of your faith and your affections, your sanctification and your effectiveness as a Christian is greatly handicapped.

So the main point that we're going to look at today from our text is that Christ is the source of our sanctification. So if you would, let's go to the text, Colossians 2, verses 16-23.

It says, Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food or drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

[7 : 18] These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings.

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgences of the flesh.

The first truth that we're going to see from this text today is that all of our practices should point to Christ. So what's happening here is that even though this church started off in Christ, false teachers have come in and mixed in mysticism, worship of angels, and other Jewish traditions.

Now, with these Jewish believers, keep in mind that Christ's redeeming work is still a fairly recent thing in history for them in regards to their whole history as a Jewish people.

[8 : 52] All right, so this is still something that's fairly new for them. And for generations, Jews have practiced dietary laws. They've observed festivals and holidays and all these things. And in themselves, these are not sinful practices.

It's not sinful to observe these holidays or to even hold to these dietary laws. In the Old Testament, these were commands that were instituted by God to follow for his people.

So not only was this cultural to them, but for a lot of these people that were just very traditional and rigid, this was an act of obedience to the Lord that had been carried out through generations. But here's where the problem lies in all this. They had lost sight of what these practices, what these laws, what these festivals were supposed to be about. These weren't just ordinances that God had passed down to keep the Israelites busy throughout the year.

God had commanded these festivals to be observed, to remind them of the things that God had done for them, thus stirring their affections for the Lord. You know, God's present grace is always something that's worthy of our praise and recognition, but also looking back on our past, the ways that God has delivered us, the ways that God has shown himself faithful, when we reflect on those things, it has a way of bringing us into a more intimate embrace with our Savior.

[10:13] When we can see God has been faithful then, he will be faithful now. And that's really what the heart of these practices were, to remind the people, see what God did in your past.

He is worthy of your devotion, your love, and your worship now. Now, if God was working all these things out for my good then, he's still doing it now.

But again, unfortunately, like I said, these religious practices had become the end in and of themselves. And rather than pointing back to what Christ had done, they were using them to add to what Christ had done in this church.

So what does Paul do in this? He reminds them that Christ is a substance and these things are the shadow. Now, have any of you ever played shadow animals with your kids before, grandkids, or just maybe do it by yourself for fun?

Well, we like to do that with our kids every now and then. They'll crawl in bed with us. We'll turn all the lights off. We'll get our cell phone lights out. And then we'll start doing shadow puppets on the ceiling. Now, it's kind of funny just what's going on in all this because as adults, we try to contort our hands in all these unnatural ways to make things look like a rabbit or a dog or an octopus or something along those lines.

[11:31] In the meantime, Titus, he'll just throw his hand in the light and it's like, dad, look, it's a salad. Bark, bark. Now, imagine just for a second though that I take Skylar to the animal shelter.

I tell Skylar, hey, we're gonna get a dog. Let's go look for dogs. And we start looking through all these different dogs and different animals that need a home. And then she says, well, dad, I don't want these dogs.

I want the shadow puppets that you were making earlier. That'd be ridiculous. You're not gonna get the same joy and affection out of a shadow puppet that you do out of a real, you know, live, breathing, slobbering dog.

Paul is telling the Colossians something pretty similar here that these practices, they had their purpose when they were, you know, when they were instituted. And that purpose has now been fulfilled in Christ.

These practices and ordinance, they were but a shadow of the substance that is Jesus. He is all that you need. If you would, go to Mark chapter two.

[12:37] We're gonna start in verse 23. Jesus, he had had several encounters with Pharisees and religious elites with his disciples on these issues of following the law to the letter.

We're gonna start here in verse 23 of chapter two. It says, one Sabbath, he was going through the grain fields. And as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?

And he said to them, have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry?

He and those who were with him, how they entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat.

And also gave it to those who were with him. And he said to them, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the son of man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.

All of the Jewish festivals, all of the laws around the earth, the Sabbath day as it was originally meant, they were ordained by God. But what had happened was the Jews had tried to make laws around these festivals.

[13:58] They were trying to define in legal ways, okay, what does it mean to have a day of rest? What does it mean to labor? What does it mean to do these things? We need to have laws around these laws that God has laid down so that we can make sure that we are staying within the law.

Jesus though has proclaimed his rightful lordship over these things. He has proclaimed lordship over the Sabbath. He has proclaimed his rightful dominion over these things.

The regulations that have been added to God's good law had turned what should have been a blessing into a burden for these people. What should have promoted growth was now hindering it. That's why Paul is reminding them of the second truth that we're going to be studying today. Our growth is from Christ. Our growth is from Christ.

It's not from these practices in and of themselves. So if you would, back to Colossians chapter two here. I want to read verse 18 and 19 again. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

[15:26] So there were several practices that had infiltrated the church apart from the resurgence of these Jewish practices. One was the worship of angels, mysticism and visions and new revelations.

I want to hit on a couple of these. The first one, new revelations or visions. God's final revelation is his word, his complete word.

And that's important because there's a lot of faiths out there. There's a lot of religions that smell a lot like Christianity on the surface, but they believe in new revelation.

They believe that they have, that they can add to what God has handed down to us. So if you ever hear of anyone saying, I have a new revelation from God, it's time to rebuke or run far and run fast. One of the two. Now, the other one was the worship of angels. Angels were very revered by the Jewish people because obviously angels, they represent the almighty.

[16:25] They do his will. They carry his messages. They serve in the very presence of God. Now, while angels serve an important purpose, they are not worthy of our worship.

Everything that God has intended for us to know about angels is right here in his word. And outside of that, they really shouldn't be the subject of any of our devotion. You know, I've heard pastors try to engage in sermon series on angels.

And I'm not saying that it's bad to teach about angels. Sometimes they're obviously in God's word. So they are worthy of our, of our study to some degree. But you know, they would do these long sermon series on angels, their purposes, their jobs.

I even heard one pastor say that he was going to preach a sermon on female angels. Yeah. Talk about new revelation. Now, while some of these things, as far as their jobs and purposes might be true, the passage I like to go to when learning about angels is Hebrews chapter one.

I believe that Hebrews spells it out pretty clear what the purpose of angels are. Which by the way, just before we read this, really when talking about angels, the author of Hebrews, all he can say is how much better Jesus is.

[17:43] So starting here in verse one of Hebrews chapter one, it says, long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He is a radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purifications for sin, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty of God, having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son, today I have begotten you. Or again, I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, let all the angels worship him. Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds and his ministers of a flame of fire.

But of the son, he says, your throne, oh God is forever and ever. The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. And then in verse 14, he sums up his view on angels when he says this, are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

[19:08] So what we take away from this is that angels are created beings. They're under the same authority of the same God that we are. Now, I'm not saying that if I ever ran across an angel, I'd go slap him on the back and say, what's up, bro.

But, they are not people, they are not objects to be worshipped. Now, there was a real desire for spiritual enlightenment in the church at Colossae.

And perhaps even with these false teachers, there was probably a desire for spiritual enlightenment, but they were going about it all the wrong ways. And you see that just in these practices that were pointing away from Christ.

Have you ever talked to somebody that claims to be spiritual but not religious? It's kind of a popular thing now. I've heard it before. I actually had a conversation with someone fairly recently about the fact that they believe they were spiritual but not religious.

I was listening to one guy talk about hunting and how hunting was his spiritual experience. You know, observing nature, realizing that they are one with nature and their place in it.

[20 : 13] another thing is my brother and I, we grew up in martial arts. That was a big part of our life and our childhood. And a lot of people see that as a spiritual experience.

Growing up in an environment where people try to embrace humility and overcome obstacles. They see that as a spiritual pursuit. Now, those are just a couple of examples.

But here's a problem with these pursuits and the same thing with the problems with Colossae.

You're seeking spiritual enlightenment from the things of this world. Spirituality, true spirituality is only found in Christ.

Our spirits are awakened or made alive through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit alone. Our spirits are not something that we can just conjure up on our own. Our spirits are given to us by a sovereign creator so that we can commune with him and have a relationship with him through his son, Jesus Christ.

One of the sad things that we see with people pursuing false spiritual experiences and even with some pastors who don't understand their role as a shepherd of a congregation is you see what's called spiritual abuse.

[21 : 27] They make people feel less than if they don't conform to their idea of spirituality. They don't conform to their likeness. What we have here in Colossae are people who are trying to control their brothers and sisters with the notion that they are somehow superior because of these things that they do for enlightenment.

We see that in Paul's admonishments to the church at Colossae in verse 16. He says, let no one pass judgment on you. Let no one disqualify you. These poor people had been led into a religious imprisonment, if you will, by being made to think that they were somehow failing in their growth by only leaning on Christ.

Christ is all that we need. There's never a point in your spiritual walk where you are going to outgrow Christ. We only grow to be more like him.

That's why Paul said in Philippians 1.6 that I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Christ has begun the good work.

He will continue the good work and he will complete the good work. So Christ has not only freed us from sin, he's also freed us from religious bondage, constantly striving to be good enough, wondering if it's enough, if we've done enough to be acceptable to Christ.

[22 : 54] The good news is, is that Christ has done enough to make us acceptable to the Father. He has done enough to wash away our debt of sin so that we can have a relationship with him.

We are free to live for Christ. We are free to serve him without fear of judgment or condemnation through faith in his perfect sacrifice and in his abiding love.

Jesus has made us worthy. So don't let anyone ever fool you into thinking that somehow you are inferior or cast judgment on you because you are not conforming to their likeness.

Our standard is Jesus. Our final revelation is his word. The likeness that we are striving for is his.

And for anyone to ever disqualify you by comparing you to themselves, it's nothing short of arrogant and sinful.

The only way that we can fight our sinful indulgences is by pursuing Christ. Because again, that's really what these people were trying to do. They were trying to find ways to curb their fleshly desires.

[23 : 57] But you can't do what's called mortifying the flesh by engaging in fleshly efforts. And our third truth is this. We are dead to sin by being alive in Christ.

Let's go back to the text. Colossians chapter 2. Verse 20 through 23. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why as if you are still alive in the world do you submit to regulations,

do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used according to human precepts and teachings.

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value. In stopping the indulgences of the flesh.

Now Paul says something there at the end that we really need to hang our hat on. These things are of no value in stopping the indulgences of the flesh. This church was actively trying to do away with this problem.

They recognized that their flesh was sinful. They recognized that they had a problem, but they were going about it trying to find solutions in all the wrong places. You cannot attack the symptoms of sin without addressing the heart issue.

[25 : 19] When Paul was talking about our separation from the world, he said this in Romans chapter 12, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what is good, pleasing, and the perfect will of God. So be transformed by the renewing of your mind, not by the reforming of your flesh, not by the changing of your actions.

You can't battle a heart issue by confronting the physical symptoms only. You need to be changed from the inside out, and Jesus is the only one that can provide that kind of renewal.

So for believers, we obviously still struggle with sin. We still have our sinful nature that we are battling against on a daily basis.

And casting off those vices that we have found ourselves in, it is a fight. And I've talked to a lot of Christians that are in this struggle, and they're trying to attack it with fleshly efforts.

[26 : 27] And I'll just give you an example. One of the most common issues that I've had to counsel teenage boys with is pornography. It is a festering disease that is wreaking havoc on our society because it is everywhere.

And the common trend that I see, at least the profile of these boys, is that they are from a church-going family. They regularly attend church. And they come from a Christian home.

And the first thing that I hear from them or their parents is, how do we fight this? Do we need to get rid of our devices? Do we need to cancel our internet? Do we need to put blocks on our devices so that they can't access this stuff anymore?

do we need to do that? Do we need to do that? While there is some value in putting up barriers in your life, and I think that you should do those things, the real healing is going to come through pursuing Christ.

Repentance is only complete if when you turn away from your sin, you turn to Jesus. And that's where a lot of these people are missing the mark when they are trying to fight their sinful nature.

[27 : 35] They think that if they have done all the things by disciplining themselves into a better life, that somehow God is going to be pleased with them again, that God is going to honor their efforts apart from him, apart from pursuing Christ.

But if Jesus does not become your new focus, if your heart is not completely directed to him, your mind has not been renewed like it talks about in Romans, and you are still being conformed to the world.

So Christian brothers and sisters, true renewal comes through Christ alone. Yes, we battle against the flesh, but we don't battle in our own strength.

We battle in the strength that God provides with Christ's likeness as our goal, not a better version of ourselves with Christ's likeness as our goal.

We don't seek to eliminate sin from our lives by trying to put up fleshly barriers, by attacking it, by white knuckling it. We pursue it by growing in our love for Jesus, by pursuing him more.

[28 : 42] Now for those that are not believers, who are maybe trying to hold to some form of, you know, worldly new age spirituality, sin will lead you to believe many lies.

And one of the lies is that you can cast sin out of your life on your own, that the answers are within you, that you can be better without Jesus.

And here's what I see. I've seen people kick addictions. I've seen people make powerful life transformations on their own. But without Jesus, your eternal destination has not changed.

Physical efforts cannot change your standing before a holy God. Your life is still going to be a constant fight against sinful desires rather than a heartfelt pursuit of God.

For those that are seeking the answers to the problems that you're dealing with, one of the best things I've ever heard is that sin is the root of the problem. Things that we struggle with, they're the symptoms of a deeper problem.

[29 : 49] The problem is sin, which is rebellion against God's holiness. And the answer is Jesus. Casting off your former vices does not erase your current guilt before a holy God.

And no amount of spiritual soul searching is going to change that. True spirituality is found in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, not in a better you, because God sent his son Jesus to die and rise again for your sin and debt.

He's paid it in full for you so that you can have peace with God. That is our ultimate need. That's where true spirituality is found. It's not in bettering ourselves.

It's found in peace with God, which is only possible through Jesus Christ. Now, for those that are again, those that are lost, you might look in to a Christian life and see a lot of what you think is legalism.

You see our weekly schedule of worship attendance. You see the things that we abstain from. And you might see these outward signs of religious devotion.

[30 : 54] But I have to tell you, for the true Christian, for someone that has been renewed in Christ, these are just a reflection of our true devotion and love for our Savior, who has redeemed all of us from the same sinful nature that you struggle with.

Our life is a life of freedom to pursue Christ with our whole heart. He can make you new too. For those that are lost, that are listening, he can make you new too.

He wants to make you new. And it won't be by adhering to a list of regulations. It is through faith in Jesus Christ, what he has done on the cross for you and how he can make you at peace with a holy God.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you have made a way for us to be at peace with God, to be at peace with you.

Lord, we thank you that in Jesus, Lord, he is all that we need for our sanctification, that he is all that we need for salvation. And Lord, I pray that for those that are lost, that we're listening to this tonight, or maybe in the future, Lord, I pray that, Lord, that they would come to that realization, Lord, that without you, they are spiritually dead and that they need a regeneration that only you can provide through your son, Jesus.

[32 : 17] Lord, for the saints that are here that might be struggling with sin. Lord, I pray that they would find their fulfillment in Christ. Lord, that they would find that they are strongest when they are in submission to your son, Jesus, and when they are wholeheartedly pursuing him.

Lord, I pray that the things that we do, Lord, the Sunday services that we come to, the acts of worship that we have that look like an outward sign of religious devotion. Lord, I pray that when we do these things, Lord, when we practice these spiritual disciplines, Lord, that they would be a reflection of our love for Christ and our gratitude for what he has done for us, what he has redeemed us from.

Lord, I pray for all these things. In Jesus' name, amen.