

# Colossians 2:16-23

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] well if you could ask you please to turn now in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2 we'll pray as we go then Heavenly Father we thank you that the word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit and we thank you that the Holy Spirit is the one who is here with us and we pray that he would be our teacher and that he would enable us to see all that you have us see today and that he would enable us to hear all that you have to say to us touch our hearts we ask, open our minds and enable us to know that you are ministering to us and we ask it in Jesus name, Amen

One of the objections to Christianity that we hear when we go out and we have conversations about the things of faith is that it's a whole lot of do nots I doubt that there are many people here who if they've had a conversation about Christianity seeking to encourage somebody to consider the things of God most people will have at some point heard a response like that I don't want anything to do with Christianity because it's just a whole lot of do nots and I don't need anyone telling me what I can and can't do and if that's what Christianity is then just I'm not signing up and yet some of the do nots that we have to hear and take are the most loving and necessary instructions that we will ever actually have to hear and when a parent says to a child do not go near the fire you'll get burnt or do not eat these berries in the tree they're the poisonous ones or do not poke that wasp's nest then that's an instruction that's a do not that comes from a parent not in order to try and spoil and stifle the joy in a child's life they're trying to do the best for the child

I've been told don't poke that wasp's nest before I rammed over two of them and got I don't know how many hundred strings and here in Colossians chapter 2 we have our heavenly father our heavenly parent and through Paul the apostle he's talking us through for our spiritual well being three do nots and they're probably unpredictable do nots we think about the ten commandments and we think in terms of do nots but there's three do nots in this section that Paul writes to the Colossians the Colossians were a group of people and if you're here for the first time if you're here visiting the book that we've read Colossians chapter 2 this is a letter it went from Paul the apostle one who was sent by God with the good news about Jesus it went from Paul in letter form to this church this group of believers in Colossae and so he's writing to encourage them and he's writing to instruct them and we get to this section in chapter 2 where he gives them three do nots and I'll just give you these three do nots we'll spend more time on the first slightly less on the second and very little on the third just in case you're panicking as the sermon goes on the first do not is do not let anyone judge you do not let anyone judge you but enjoy your salvation in Christ the second do not that we come to is do not let anyone disqualify you but remain connected to Christ and the third do not is do not submit to the rules of this world but enjoy your freedom in Christ so that gives you the structure the map for the the next 20 minutes 25 minutes or so and we start with the first do not here do not let anyone judge you but enjoy your salvation in Christ and we see that in verses 16 and 17 the apostle Paul says therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival a new moon celebration or a sabbath day these are a shadow of the things that were to come the reality however is found in Christ now these two verses they start with a therefore therefore do not let anyone judge you and whenever we see a therefore that's a signpost that points us back the way it's based on what we've just heard so if we just glance back and try and think back a week if you were here in church last week what is it that God has previously said to the Colossians through Paul well if you glance at 8 through 15 essentially what's said in that section is that Jesus has done everything for us Jesus is God the son he's the one who came from heaven to this world with a mission and he's completed the mission he's completed the work of salvation for us if we want to be saved if we want to have our sin taken away if we want to know that we have eternal life that work of salvation could only be done by Jesus and he has done it he died for us he rose for us it's done he's paid the debt of our sin that's

something else that Paul goes into in these verses the debt of my sin against God and yours it's a vast sum that accumulates but Jesus went to a cross to take our sin from us upon himself and he's paid for it so that I owe you between God and us it's cleared and we see also in these verses that our great enemy

Satan the one who seeks to destroy us he's defeated on the cross Jesus defeated him that that devil he is finished yes he growls yes he snarls but he's chained as we said last week he's finished so that's what came before and Paul is with the therefore word directing us back that way and if we look back that way our hearts should be thrilled the Colossians hearts should be thrilled as they focus on these things that the Apostle Paul has just said these are amazing huge joyful biblical truths that we can know that we're saved through Christ that we can know that our debt of sin has been cleared by Jesus we can know that our greatest enemy he's done these are the kind of statements that that should put joyful enduring smiles on our faces one of the translations the the J.B.

[ 8 : 25 ] Phillips translation he translates these two verses like this he says in view of these tremendous facts everything that Jesus has done for us don't let anyone worry you then he goes on to paraphrase these verses now why is it do you think that God through the Apostle Paul has to tell the Colossians don't let anyone worry don't let anyone judge you don't fret well it was necessary because they were worried because they were fretting because they were disturbed in their hearts there were false teachers who were in Colossae they were out of the church and they were in the church and they were causing these young believers believers to lose their joy they were keeping these young believers up in the middle of the night with stress and worry spiritually speaking because they were taking them away from the light of

Christ and they were dragging them into the shadows of religion I don't know if you know but it's only 85 days till Christmas and every Christmas in our house a film comes out called The Grinch and for those who haven't seen The Grinch The Grinch is a kind of green ugly angular creature and The Grinch's mission was to suck all the joy out of Christmas in this particular wee place the Grinch's ambition was to do anything that he could to try and cancel out Christmas and you could say that there were gospel Grinch's in Colossae and the sight of these new fresh young believers who had a salvation spring in their step and a joy in their heart that was bubbling from their hearts up into their faces it was nauseating to these people so these false teachers sought to try and wipe the gospel smiles off the faces of these young believers they sought to fill backpacks of religion and superstitious rules and strap them on to the shoulders of these young believers so they'd be weighed down and they did that by judging them and by heaping upon them their religious codes and regulations and God through

Paul says to these young believers in verse 16 do not let anyone judge you do not let anyone rob you of the joy of your salvation which is 100% in Christ see these false teachers they were preoccupied with these laws these eating laws and these washing laws and these circumcision demands and the holy days and the religious festivals and all these things you know they were they were signs you could go into the old testament and you could you could see that they were signposts that pointed them forward to Christ they were shadows they were previews but the reality of God with us the reality of the salvation that these things pointed to was it was found in Christ you never see anyone do you posting a picture of the sign post to Luskintar beach on the Isle of Harris Facebook page I mean the sign is not that special it just says Luskintar ain't miles you know people they follow the sign but then they enjoy the reality of the beach you know the offshore worker who's out on the high seas for six months at a time he goes out and he has the photograph of his family and every day he's looking at it and he cherishes this picture of his wife and his family but when he gets home he puts the photo down and he embraces the one ones that he loves and God through Paul is saying to the

Colossians and to us don't let anyone judge you in such a way that you get stuck at the signposts of the rituals and rules of religion and you miss the reality of knowing Christ don't let anyone get you in such a way that you're stalled halfway along the road that points to Jesus and you never actually get to knowing Jesus and being in a relationship with Jesus see the Colossians as they heard these false teachers using religious language criticise them and declare their negative thoughts about them they were worried and we can worry at times we can worry about what people think of us we can worry about what people say about us we can have the joy sacked from our hearts by those who we know are judging us and God's word to us here is do not let anyone judge you you have

one judge the Lord himself and he's the only one who sees our hearts he's the only one who's qualified to make true judgments about us so the thrust of this passage is that we will not be anxious about what other people say about us and think about us but that we will be sure that we are in right relationship with the one who is our

[ 15 : 15 ] Lord the thrust of this passage really is that we will be sure that we are saved that we are in Christ so how can you and I be saved well it's not about what we eat and drink and it's not about how well we can keep the Sabbath and it's not about how correctly we observe the religious calendars in fact it's not about what we do at all it's all about what Jesus has already done for us on the cross it's what we talked about with the children the salvation that we need it's not something that we earn as we tick the boxes but it's something that we receive as a gift through

Christ I want to ask a question to all those who are Christians here this morning and I've asked myself this question before I ask any of you and that is do you know the joy of salvation in your heart today truly do you and I know the joy of being saved I don't know whether your day or your week's been a good week or a bad week our happiness spikes with our circumstances but our joy is linked to what Jesus has done for us and because it's finished because it's done because it's completed that joy should be constant it should be always there so do I know and do you know the joy of salvation you know people and their judgment of us can rob us of that joy our own judgment of ourselves as we look into our hearts and we see our many many shortfalls we find that the joy drains out of us as we analyse our own religious performance but as we look back in faith to Jesus as we revisit the cross as we look again at the open grave as we remember this is the Lord's day the joy of salvation

I pray is restored why are we here you're not here to look at me you're not here to look at each other you're not even here to look in your own hearts we would see Jesus and as we see Christ and as we see what he has done for us the joy of his salvation of us is restored so I hope and pray that all of us here this morning we have that joy my faith looks up to thee thou lamb of calvary saviour divine now that's why we sang psalm 51 in psalm 51 you know the story David the psalmist he has sinned catastrophically he's a saved person but he sinned he's sinned in a terrible way and he's been away from the

Lord for about a year the commentators reckon and then in psalm 51 as he realises his sin he comes back to God and he says to God because you are loving and kind because you are merciful because you are compassionate cleanse me take away my sin and as he confesses his sin and doesn't hide it and as he looks in faith to God as saviour he's able to pray to God restore unto me the joy of your salvation I remember reading that line for years and thinking is that not a misprint should it not be restore unto me the joy of my salvation you know of knowing that I'm saved but no we know that the Bible is right and our thoughts are the thoughts that go wandering off salvation it's not my salvation it's

Christ's salvation of me as David confesses his sin as he returns to God the joy of his salvation is restored so my prayer for all of us this morning is that we will know salvation and that we will know the joy of salvation in Christ it's found only in Christ so don't let anyone judge you don't let anyone take you off track don't let anyone wrap you up in all the regulations and rules of religion so that your joy is sacked look again to Jesus that's the first point the second do not is do not let anyone disqualify you but remain connected to Christ we see this in verses 18 and 19 do not let anyone who delights in false humility and worship of angels disqualify you for the prize such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions he has lost connection with the head from whom the whole body supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows as God causes it to grow so in the last point as Paul addresses the [ 21 : 56 ] Colossians he's conscious of the distractions that came from those who would seek to falsely teach using the language of Jewish religion in these verses Paul is addressing those who more brazenly attack from a pagan perspective see in Colossae as a city it was full of a whole mash of faiths and religions and pagan superstitions that was outside the church but it was seeping into the church because the culture is always trying to seep into the church so there were people who were in Colossae and they professed to be Christians and yet the person and the work of Christ was a huge turn off to them that's why Paul has to write in chapter 1 in verses 15 and following of the supremacy of Christ he writes that because there were those who were seeking to take

Jesus down a level and say well he's one of a number of gods but let's not get too excited about him and let's not get too hung up on the whole idea of the atonement let's explore other ideas and

other ways and other deities and so Paul he addresses that and he's speaking to those who would profess to be Christians and yet they're not interested in Jesus and these people still exist I've met them somewhere college some of all the credentials of divinity degrees and yet have very little interest in Christ and his cross and there was these kind of people in Colossae all these years ago talk about Christ they close their ears talk about angels they're all over that talk about deep and spooky experiences spiritually speaking they love a bit of that and when I was reading this it put me in mind of a lady who was asked to come and speak to us in a class called popular spirituality I can't remember her name if I did it I probably wouldn't tell you anyway but she came to a class that we had and she very humbly introduced herself as a Christian but her only interest was in angels and she talked at great length about the experiences that she and others had had in connecting with spiritual beings on the other side she went into great detail about the angelic activity that she claimed that she and others had seen and she did everything she could to try and draw us into exploring that kind of niche you know she fitted verse 18 perfectly but then when some of us in the question and answer time at the end sought to try and get her on to talking about Jesus because after all she said she was a

Christian she just got furious when we tried to talk to her about heaven and hell and these spiritual realities when we tried to speak to her about the cross of Christ she was absolutely indignant she just seemed to be willingly and determinedly disconnected from the head Christ now the likelihood of us having an angel woman coming to Tarbert to give a seminar that are slim not impossible but it's slim but there are no shortage of people here and elsewhere who sometimes through spiritual avenues and sometimes through very worldly ideas will seek to take our focus of Christ and will seek to take us away from

Jesus and every Christian here and those whom God is seeking here will know something of this battle and even in things that can be very good in themselves we have to be careful the relationships we get into the leisure activities that we commit to the work that we engage in the places that we go these things can all be good things in themselves but they can also be vehicles that are used to take us not closer to but further away from Christ and that's incredibly dangerous because if we do not connect with Jesus by faith and receive his grace and accept him as our Lord we cannot be saved we can be religious people we can be experts in many world religions but unless we are trusting in

[ 27 : 37 ] Christ we can't be saved Jesus said I am the way the truth the life no one comes to the Father except through me and if we are Christians here this morning but we do not remain in Christ as he calls us to in John 15 if our connection with Christ drops in and out like a faulty phone mask we don't grow our growth gets stunted and we're like spiritual babies there's no maturity and there's no progress so as we apply this point what do we do well I think what you and I do is we ask God the Holy Spirit to search our hearts to do a spiritual audit of our lives to see if there is anything or anyone who's causing us to lose our connection with Jesus let's ask

God the Holy Spirit to show us if there's anything or anyone who's in danger of disqualifying us from the salvation that we need or the sanctification the going on with Christ that we're called to you know when we're using our computers you get these programs that you can use and they will do a kind of search of your hard drive of your computer and it'll come back with a result of the things that may be on the hard drive that are causing the computer to run slow and then it'll come up with a report and it'll say well your computer is not running at top performance because there's this program and that program and this thing and that thing and it's causing the computer to crash and not operate as it should do you want to remove it and you click yes and it sucks it all out and puts it away somewhere and in a sense

Colossians 2 is working that way God through Paul is saying there may be certain habits and pursuits there may be some relationships that need to be reordered or perhaps even removed if we are to know salvation and if we are to be sanctified but the overriding exhortation here is that we would not let anyone or anything any pursuit any interest slow us down or shut us out from the salvation that is found only in Christ so that's the second do not do not let anyone judge you it's the first one but enjoy your salvation in Christ do not let anyone disqualify you from salvation or maturity but stay connected to

Christ and the final thing it's just a word is do not submit to the rules of this world but enjoy your freedom in Christ verse 20 since you died with Christ the basic principles of this world why as though you still belong to it do you submit to its rules do not handle do not taste do not touch these

are all destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence so if I just cut to the chase here and ask the question you know what are the rules the basic principles of this world that Paul's referring to essentially I think it's self-improvement that's how you could summarise it self-improvement we hear it all the time you listen to the politicians on news night and they talk about creating a more peaceful stable society they have their debates in session and they talk about education they talk about therapy and you distill it down essentially what they're saying is we need to improve ourselves and if you explore other world religions you'll find extensive frameworks of self-improvement where through not handling and not touching and not tasting specific things you save yourself one of the commentators says this the orthodox Jew is kosher the Muslim abstains from eating pork and will not touch alcohol the Mormon will not drink tea or coffee Buddhist monks are forbidden to sleep on luxurious beds handle money eat food after midday indulge in entertainments or wear ornaments or perfumes religion is basically about going without pleasures and imposing austerities on ourselves and many people think that's what Christianity is all about I'd be surprised if there aren't people in this room this morning and that's being your your perspective as you've grown up you think that Christianity is about restrictions you think that Christianity is about rules rules and it's like a ladder and if you accomplish the rules to a high enough level you go up the next rung and the next rung and the next rung until eventually if you get on well enough you're up in heaven that's the false belief that so many people think that [ 34 : 26 ] Christianity is and yet we know I pray that Christianity is not about us climbing the ladder up to achieve God's favour Christianity is about God the Son Jesus who stepped down from heaven and who condescended all the way to the cross to offer us his free grace his mercy his favour and we receive it when we receive him and when we receive him for the first time in our lives we get a taste of true freedom

I remember a song in the maybe the 90s I think late 80s 90s I think it was the soup dragons and free to do what I want any old time and yet the reality is that freedom is not freedom and we see the destruction of that across the whole culture true freedom is found in relationship with Christ and you'll know that if you have that relationship so don't worry says Paul about what you taste and handle and touch don't fret over sleeping on a nice mattress or having a sausage roll after midday or a nice cup of coffee don't panic over the necklace that you've just been given for your birthday don't lose sleep over what people whisper about you behind your back don't get imprisoned by the rules of this world don't get stifled and miserable through the man-made traditions of so much religion but come to

Jesus connect with Jesus by faith remain close to Jesus and enjoy your freedom which is found only in Christ we'll pray heavenly father we thank you that you are our father and we thank you that you love us and we thank you that you want the best for us we thank you that the thing that we need the one that we need is Jesus we pray that you would forgive us Lord because we can at times get distracted through religions and philosophies sometimes we can get distracted by looking too much at ourselves and too much at each other help us we pray to look to Jesus who is the author and the perfecter of our faith help us to know the joy and the freedom that there is in knowing Christ we pray this in Jesus name

Amen we sing now to finish what could be read as the testimony of the apostle Paul Paul was a very zealous Pharisee steeped in Jewish religion and yet he comes to be able to say everything that he thought was game is lost in comparison with knowing Christ and we have a paraphrase of that in this hymn mission page 799 all I once held dear built my life upon all this world reveres and wars and wars