

COLOSSIANS

Proclaiming the Supremacy of Christ

²⁰ 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— ²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ 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 indulgence of the flesh.

Colossians 2:20–23

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF THE WORLD (v. 20)

- Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.
Galatians 4:8-11
- Rules-based approach to God

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LEGALISM AND ASCETISM (v. 21-23)

- Asceticism involves abandoning sensual pleasures and leading an abstinent lifestyle, in the pursuit of redemption salvation or spirituality. Outside-in philosophy of cleansing body and soul.
- The Colossian church faced teachers who developed a heresy that combined elements of Judaism in conformance to the ceremonial law, Christianity, and paganism in the form of asceticism or physical abuse of their own bodies.
- Extra-credit mentality

COLOSSIANS' SITUATION

- Tradition of ceremonial law obedience (outward focused)
- New covenant in Christ breaks slavery to the law and requires obedience of the heart (inward focused)

ASCETISM VERSUS BIBLICAL SELF-DISCIPLINE

- Self discipline is required: 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Tim 2:3, 1 Tim 4:7; Gal. 5:23; Matt. 16:24
- Biblical self-discipline is what God commands and asceticism is what men add to God's commands.
- Asceticism sees the body as evil, to be totally suppressed, denied and physically abused; biblical self-discipline sees the body as good, but needing control.
- Asceticism is submitting my body to my will; biblical self-discipline is submitting my whole life to God's will.
- Asceticism labels all material things as evil; biblical self-discipline properly uses and enjoys the things of the world.
- Asceticism is restrictive; biblical self-discipline leads to greater freedom.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IN THE NEW COVENANT

- Freedom from the Jewish ceremonial law
 - Galatians 5:1
 - Romans 14:17
 - Romans 14:20
- Freedom from extra-biblical, man-made rules
 - Mark 7:7
 - Mark 7:9
- The cross ended the rules-keeping approach to God

LEGALISM , GRACE AND GRATITUDE

- Legalism is a sin disguised as a virtue
- If legalism and asceticism don't work, then what does?
- "The essence of Christian theology is grace, and the essence of Christian ethics is gratitude."
- God's grace before the giving of the moral law
- Exodus 20:1-3 And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me.

APPLICATIONS

- When you hear a powerful teacher ask these three questions:
 - Who is being exalted ?
 - What is not being said ?
 - What is the effect ?
- Does this teaching allow me to overcome sin or simply to disguise it?
- Does this teaching serve to build up the fellowship of the church or to destroy it?
- Does this teaching enslave me to the person who teaches it?
- Does it focus on man-made regulations rather than the glory and honor of Christ?