



Colossians 2:16-23
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Legally Dead

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NCCC

1. V16 “Therefore...”
 - a. Link to last week – the hinge of the letter. Here we see a “charter of Christian freedom” (‘Colossians’ in *New Bible Commentary*, O’Brien, p1271)
 - b. Penal substitution V14 (2 Cor 5:21) AND Christus victor V15 (1 Jn 3:8b) – KOG is at hand, and is way more amazing than we could ever imagine!
 - c. Also see NT Wright being interviewed by Justin Brierley, ‘*Christus Victor and Penal Substitution Atonement*’ at www.premierchristianity.com
2. V16 “don’t let anyone judge you” (akin to ‘condemn’ – used elsewhere in eg Matt 7, Rom 14:3). Q: how can we stop others judging us? A: we can’t – but we can stop allowing their opinions power over us!
 - a. Don’t let them judge (and see Rom 14:16-17).
 - b. Likewise, don’t judge others thereby creating division (and see Jn 17:22-23).
 - c. “Our worship, traditions, ceremonies can help bring us close to God, but we should never criticize fellow Christians whose traditions and ceremonies differ from ours. More important than *how* we worship is *that we worship Christ*” (Emphasis added, ‘Colossians’ in *NLT Life Application Study Bible* by Hoehner, Silva & Snodgrass, p.2032)
 - d. Nexus of worship and mission – holding each other in healthy tension.
3. Vv16-17 “eat...drink...religious festival...celebration...Sabbath...these are a shadow” (a la Heb 10:1) – *beware traditionalism and legalism*.
 - a. Nu 28 – the (healthy) weekly/monthly/yearly rhythm for God’s people.
 - b. CF “The Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.” Matt 12, Mk 2, Lk6.
 - c. Beware misunderstandings of Gospel freedom.
4. Vv20-22 (note, out of sequence, placed here for contrast) “died with Christ...submit...to [worldly] rules” – *beware asceticism*
 - a. Above in V16 it was Jewish tradition; here it appears they’ve added some pagan rules “elemental spiritual forces” NIV, alt rendering “basic principles of this world” (RSV).
 - b. Gal 3:3 “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”! (and see Rom 5:1-11)
 - c. Terrible ping-pong between legalism and license (Rom 8:1-2)
 - d. Be dubious of teachers/ books / podcasts that claim to be elucidating God’s truth but rarely mention the Bible – or claim there’s rules that when abided by will somehow gain favor with God.
 - e. “Asceticism was apparently a prominent feature of the Colossian heresy, and in various periods of history it has appealed strongly to misguided people. It was the ascetic spirit that led to the depreciation of marriage, the exaltation of virginity and monasticism, and the devising of endless means of self-torture. Paul condemns asceticism and urges the Colossians to reject it as a way of life.” (*The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Gæberlain, p206)
5. V17 “reality...is found in Christ” – *be aware of Who Christ (truly) is!*
 - a. Preeminence of Christ. There is none like Him! He is above all! In power, reconciliation, wisdom & knowledge, holiness, arbiter of ethics.
 - b. Christian freedom (Gal 5:1), outworked in love! (Rom 14:1, 1 Cor 8:1)
 - c. Freedom FROM sin not freedom TO sin. Freedom TO love not freedom FROM love.

- d. Christ's finished work is the *totality* of our being made right with God. So what remains of OT law? Moral law, ethics, rhythms of grace – resting, tithing, meditation etc (Q: could it be that we don't *have* to, but we *get* to?)
- e. "[L]et us note well that the 'liberty' he means is the very opposite of license and has nothing in the world akin to the miserable individualism whose highest ambition is to do just what it likes. The whole aim of St. Paul is for the fullest, deepest and most watchful holiness" (Moule, *Colossian Studies*, p171)
- f. Culminated teaching in 1 Cor 10:23-24.
6. Vv18-19 Charlatan/s who advocate "false humility...worship of angels...they have lost connection with the Head" – *beware hidden pride & false worship*.
 - a. Biblical hermeneutics
 - i. Meaning – text, context, whole text
 - ii. Application – them, us, me.
 - b. Don't be 'beguiled' or 'cheated' of 'robbed' of your assured salvation!
 - c. Socio-historical context. 'Colossian heresy'. Complex church problems, simple solution, difficult application!
 - i. Epaphras who heard Paul's preaching in Ephesus AD52-55, is a church planter & concerned pastor, who brought news to Paul in Rome a decade later – sharing deep concerns. Letters (Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon) taken 1200m by Tychicus & Onesimus to churches.
 - ii. "What likely happened at Colossae is that a shaman-like figure within the church had attracted a following and was presenting himself [or herself] as something of a Christian spiritual guide." (ESV SB, 'The Letter of Paul to the Colossians', by Arnold, p.2290)
 - iii. Likely a weird mix of proto-Gnosticism mixed with ascetic Judaism.
 - iv. Ceremonialism, asceticism, angel worship, depreciation of Christ, secret knowledge, reliance on human wisdom and tradition (NIV SB, 'Colossians', by Hawthorne and Wallis, p.1813)
 - v. Democratization of knowledge v collective corrective of good community. Great (*Christianity's Dangerous Idea* by Alistair McGrath); and not-so great (village idiot syndrome).
 - vi. Disconnected to the Head – Christ. Beware teachers who don't evidence an intimate, Spirit-fueled interiority with the Lord, straying from the Gospel.
7. V23 "appearance of wisdom...but lack[ing] any value in restraining sensual indulgence"
 - a. The irony of rules, whatever their origin, is, *they don't work!*
 - b. Whereas "...the controls of the Christian life spring from within...genuine piety grows out of an inward conviction generated by a consciousness of union with Christ. Indwelt by the Spirit, we walk by the Spirit and thus avoid carrying out the desires of the lower nature (Gal 5:16)." (Gæberlain, p208)
 - c. Don't use your freedom to cut others out, beat others down, boss others around, or trip others up. The point of our freedom isn't us. The story doesn't stop at us!

Challenges for the brave of heart:

- What are your 'sacred cows' – things that you've added to the Gospel?
- How can freedom and restraint co-exist? *Why* should they co-exist?
- Which of these are you: Whatev, Legalist, Holy-moly, Freebie? (if in doubt, ask a mate)
- Tell a friend to hold you to account on how you are going to address that this week.
- When was the last time you wept thinking about the Gospel? Take a walk, listen to some music, sit in silence, peel an onion, etc till you do!