

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Spiritual Intimidation, Part 1

Scripture: Colossians 2:16-23

Code: 2143

I trust you'll be praying along with me even as I speak that the Holy Spirit will guide and guard all the things that are said. I have in my study of Colossians, chapter 2 where we are going to look, verses 16 through 23, really been led of the Lord to see some things that maybe I never really saw so clearly before, and I want to draw them to your attention tonight. The same time that I do that I want to say some things to us that are very urgent and very much on my heart. I guess one of the things that any faithful prophet of God has to do, any faithful spokesman of God, is to speak his mind and his heart about current issues, current things going on in the world or in the church, and I intend to do that tonight. And if I use names or organizations or anything like that I hope you'll understand the spirit in which it is said, so that we'll better understand what's going on in the church, better be able to evaluate things as we see them revealed in the Word of God.

Now the topic that I want to speak about I have entitled "Spiritual intimidation," All of us get intimidated, there is no question about that. There is a book out called "Winning by Intimidation," and it teaches us all how if we don't already know how to intimidate people, we can learn from the book and begin right away. One thing that the author says to do is that if you are in business, any kind of business at all and you want to pull off a big deal, where ever you go to pull off that deal, take two secretaries with you. If you have to hire them for the day and pay their air fare, you walk in with two secretaries behind you with notepads writing down everything you say; you are an instant big shot. Doesn't matter whether you have anything to offer, or whether you know anything.

The very fact that you have two secretaries trailing you. Taking down everything, gives "People the idea you are big stuff. That's intimidation and they immediately feel under you and beneath you and what you say they are more liable to buy.

Now that is a worldly illustration of how to intimidate people. There are many other suggestions in the book. You feel intimidated, bone up a little and you can do a little of your own intimidating, you feel the need to do that. One of the things that concerns me very greatly is not so much the intimidation that occurs in the world, and that concerns me and there really is no place for that. But one of the things that occurs to me is that in our modern day Christians are equally being intimidated. And we are being intimidated on a very massive, very effective scale. And I think that it is time for us to back off a little bit and say, "Hey, everybody, we know we are being intimidated, we don't want to be intimidated, we are not going to be intimidated, we want to reevaluate where we care. What we have as Christians and whether or not we need to bend to this kind of pressure." The Christian is

perennially by good looking, exciting appearing false doctrine intimidated. And I suppose that any good pastor or any good elder, any good teacher, any responsible person as a Christian should be warning his fellow believers, his flock, about the intimidation that goes on. And I am afraid to add too that we may do a little intimidating ourself. And we are not going to be able to cover the whole spectrum of all that could occur in this area, but I do want to at least speak to it as much as the apostle Paul does here in Colossians, chapter 2.

The Colossians were being overtly and potently intimidated. There were certain false teachers who were infiltrating the Colossian assembly and bringing to bear on them a tremendous amount of intimidation. They were beginning to feel like spiritually they were left out, like they were less than necessary, like they were inadequate. Like having Jesus Christ was not enough, like they had never arrived yet. Like there were a lot more things to get in Christianity that they hadn't even begun to see. Like maybe they were wrong, and somebody else was right. And I think that that is not unlike what we endure today. We live in a day of overexposure of everything. There isn't anything in our society that isn't over exposed unless it is good. The mass media transmission of error is unbelievable. Just about every time you turn on your television or your radio you hear something that is either wrongly represented or wrong. The truth has a very difficult time worming its way into the scene. In Paul's day the volume and the intensity of such presentation may have been somewhat less, but the impact was still there. And I am afraid that we are being victimized by it today in a way that nobody in history has ever, ever been victimized. Just a constant flood of false doctrine. And it comes to us even in the guise of being Christian. There are books that Christians are supposed to read to tell them the truth, and they don't. There are teachers that are supposed to be speaking the truth and they don't. There are programs that are supposed to be on the radio and the television to help us along in our Christian growth and they can't. And all the time there is a certain feeling that we are being left out, and we are intimidated by things that are occurring around us that we can't relate to as Christians, that are supposedly Christians things. And we'll explain that in detail as we go. Just want to set your thinking up.

Now the letter of the Colossians, and it is a very important one, and becoming more important to me as I continue to study it, is an open rebuttal to false teachers. It restates the basic truth of Christianity at the very outset, and then it tackles the heresies that deny that Truth. The basic truth of Christianity is Christ. Christ is sufficient. Christ is all. Christ is God. Christ is Savior. Christ can redeem. Christ is everything you need. Christ is sufficient. That's the message, and after stating that message as powerfully and as potently as he can, right through chapter 2, verse 7, Paul then attacks the heresies that would deny it. The heresies that would come along and say, "It's fine to have Christ, it's necessary to appoint, but there is more than that. And the poor Colossians who up to now had thought that Christ was all they needed, and that they had everything in having him, that they received everything in being saved, were now being told that they were a long way from having received what God wanted them to have. There were more things for them to seek for, there were higher levels for them to reach, there were deeper depth of spirituality to go to, there was

greater humility, greater piety, more things to experience, and the intimidation was mounting and mounting so much that they were very tempted to say, "Hey what is it, we're glad we are going to buy it, we join you, we want it."

So Paul writes this letter to tell them Christ is all they needed. Look at chapter 2, verse 10, you have a summary of the first part of the book. "You are complete in him, who is the head." You are complete in Christ that's the point. There isn't anything lacking. There isn't any insufficiency.

Now as we come to chapter 2, verses 8 through 23, that little section in the middle of the book is the heart of the letter. For it is the frontal attack against the heretics that were beleaguering the church in Colossae. And there were four different aspects to this heresy. We assume from our last studies that you recall that the closest group of people that we can really identify with this particular heresy would be the Essenes. They were a kind of a third party in Judaism along with The Pharisees and the Sadducees. And it seems as though this particular heresy, as we begin to discuss it really comes out to be the Essenes particular viewpoint in Theology. And it had four areas. They were basically discussing philosophy. They dealt with legalism, mysticism, and asceticism. And so in those four categories Paul begins to place his argument.

We saw already in the past that from verse 8 through 15 Paul dealt with the subject of human philosophy. They were saying, "You need Christ plus human wisdom. You need Christ plus human philosophy, and Paul says, "You need Christ plus, nothing." Don't be intimidated by people who want to come along and say to you, "well all you believe is the Bible, who could expect to get anything from you. There has to be more than that. You've got to know some philosophy." People who take those of us who are fundamental evangelicals and put us in a little box and categorize us as ignoramus types because all we know is the Bible. We are to fit in this category and they would want to intimidate us because of our lack of education. We don't know all the great philosophies of the world. We don't spend our time studying at the broadest possible base to be most well informed about the human philosophy and wisdom. But we spend our time studying the word of God and in the eyes of some that qualifies us for a strict religionist who know little else if anything. And so there is the intimidation that the people bring upon us who want us to know all about human philosophy.

I suppose I face that more than the average Christian because as I mentioned this morning, after speaking this week, the girls said, "You are so biblical." As if to say, is that all you know is the Bible. If he had asked me that I would have said, "Not all, but 95% of what I know is the Bible. I don't know much else." But basically we can be intimidated by those who would want to impose upon us the label of ignorance because we really don't understand the gamut of human philosophy. There are even certain institutions who call themselves Christians who are fighting so much against this intimidation that a student who goes there to come out in the ministry finds that he gets more information about human philosophy than he ever gets about the Bible. Because the institution itself has been in some degrees intimidated by the need for being lies in man's wisdom. The institution opts out of it's

commitment to Scripture, and begins to teach human philosophy and pretty soon ceases to be what it was when it started. And you can go down the list and name colleges and universities and seminaries in our country who follow that pattern.

But there are three other things. We've already discussed that, so that was just review. But there are three other things that Paul attacks in the heresy of the Essenes that had infiltrated Colossae. The next one is legalism. They not only had said to these Colossian Christians "you are not going to cut it because you don't know human philosophy. There are things that you haven't yet learned." But they said secondly, "You must commit yourself to the religion of human achievement. It is Christ plus works, righteousness." Notice verse 16, and here is Paul's answer to this kind of intimidation, and here the rather Jewish aspect of the Colossian heresy stands out. "Let no man Therefore judge you in," literally, "eating or drinking or in respect to the festival," or feast day, "or of the new moon or of the Sabbath day."

Now stop there. Paul says to these Colossians Christians "look, these people are trying to intimidate you with legalism. They are trying to judge you on what you eat, what you drink, whether or not you attend Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Lights. Whether you make you sacrifice on the first day of the month, which is new moon, and whether you prescribe to all the laws and rules and rituals of the Sabbath day." They are saying, it isn't enough to know Christ, you have to know Christ and keep the Jewish law, and I would add there was even some Greek stuff mixed into this. There was even some pagan ritual no doubt mixed into it, so that it became very confusing. But the whole point here is, salvation and spirituality is based on Christ plus keeping certain rituals, legalism.

Now legalism is simply subscribing your spirituality to manmade rules. That's legalism. Defining your spirituality by your ability to keep manmade rules. Obeying God's rules is obedience, not legalism. But subscribing and defining your spirituality by your submission to manmade rules is legalism, or to those rules which God has made and set aside in this age, and they become therefore manmade for now.

Now notice, he says therefore, in verse 16, "let no man therefore." If Christ has given you complete salvation as we saw in verses 10 to 15, if Christ has given you complete forgiveness, if he has given you complete victory, if everything is complete in him then don't let anybody come along and make a spiritual judgment on you, depending on what you do or don't do ritualistically. And no doubt the pressure was coming like crazy for them to conform to legalistic patterns. And mostly Jewish ones, and remember this is a Gentile city; they never kept Jewish legalistic patterns in the first place.

So they weren't asking to maintain something they had had in their heritage, they were dumping something on them they didn't even know about. And Paul is warning the whole group against suddenly losing their freedom in Christ and giving over their spirituality to externals. This is a serious danger. And Paul is saying, don't sacrifice your freedom in Christ to circumscribe your life to a bunch

of manmade rules. Christ has canceled the bondage of the law. Look at it in verse 14. He has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances; he nailed it to the cross. The ritual system ended at the cross, lie forever destroyed it, and since he has gained complete victory once and for all over this system. Christians have no need to be subscribed to it. And to become entangled again in a legalistic system is pointless and harmful. Now you remember Galatians, don't you? We studied it not long ago. Galatians chapter 5, verse 1 helps us, because it says, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Therefore stand fast and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Christ set you free to be free.

Now don't go back to legalism. It would be ridiculous to imagine that the Lord Jesus Christ has opened the gate of our prison, set us free only to put us in another cell. That would be foolish. He set us free to stay free. The Galatians were falling for the same heresy the Colossians, here being tempted with, putting back on the straight-jacket of the law. the

Judaizers had told the Galatians, you believe in Christ and you keep the whole Mosaic law, and you get circumcised and you can be saved. Christ plus works, plus legalism. As if you could save yourself. As if you could externalize your salvation. So Paul says to the Colossians, "don't be beguiled, don't be tricked, don't let anybody make a spiritual judgment on you on the basis of your external behavior. Don't let anybody evaluate your

spirituality on that basis."

And you know something people, there will always be folks who will do this. People who want to judge everybody's spirituality on what they do externally. How they eat, what they eat, how they drink or what they drink. Whether they are always abiding by all the calendar of the church, whether they keep all the Christians routines, whether they appear to be Christians on The outside. You see the problem with that kind of evaluation is this; the problem is that somebody who isn't a real Christian can qualify on every one of those counts. That's the problem. It isn't the true Christians

won't manifest some behavioral patterns, but it is that phony people can always conform to externals, and that doesn't make a very good way to judge. There are Christians who see a person with a cigarette, and they immediately write out a whole definition of their spirituality. There are Christians who would see perhaps somebody take a glass of wine or whatever or a glass of beer somewhere and they would immediately say, "That person is not a Christian, or that person is carnal," or whatever because they have a certain standard of what Christians do or do not do.

Now that is not the way to evaluate spirituality. That's what Paul is saying. Don't let anybody judge your spirituality on the bases of your eating or your Drinking. Whether you do or do not eat meat offered to idols. Whether you do or do not drink wine, that is not the criteria. Those Things are dealt with in other passages of Scripture, but those things are not necessarily the spiritual criteria by which a man can judge. Because when you start doing that, you know what you do? You make Christianity

a game that you can play on the outside. And true spirituality goes outside and when that happens you have hypocrisy and that is a problem.

Titus chapter 1, verse 14 says, "Not giving heed to Jewish fable and commandments of men that turn from the truth." other words, don't base your life on works, but listen, "unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, even their minds and conscience is defiled, but they profess to know God in the works they deny him being abominable, disobedient unto every good work reprobate." In other words there are some people who can mask themselves in externals who internally are reprobates. That's not the way to evaluate someone's spirituality. In Romans 14 it says, "Some people obey The Sabbath, some people don't." But that is no' a criterion for judging spirituality. In I Timothy, chapter 4, it says in verse 2, "Some speak lies in and hypocrisy having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God has created and to receive with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

Now here you have some people who have all kinds of rigid rules. You can't eat this and you can't eat that and you can't get married, and so forth and so on, and they are nothing but hypocrites. They are nothing but probagatros of the doctrine of what, of demons, verse 1. That is not the way to evaluate. The problem is some people will conform to all the externals and be nothing but carnal hypocrites. Now Paul is saying of the Colossians don't you let these people rob you of your liberty.

Now I want to hasten to add a footnote. There are some people who can make me restrict my liberty. You know who they are? They are whom? They are weaker brothers, Christians. Or people that I might offend, who are perhaps open to Christ. They are not false teachers. I do not need to restrict my liberty for the sake of false teachers. You can read 1 Corinthians chapter 8:10 as we have studied it. You can read Romans 14 and 15, and Paul says where you have a weaker brother at stake. Another Christian whose conscience doesn't let him do certain things, then don't you do them either, because you don't want to wound his conscience. And you have some situations also in Acts 1, where the Jerusalem counsel said, there are certain things that are all right to do, but don't do them for the sake of the unsaved Jews in your community who would be offended. But when you are dealing with false teachers, Paul says you go about enjoying your liberty, and don't let them restrict it with their works righteousness system. Because with them it isn't just a personal conscience issue, with them it is a satanic lie right out of the pit and they are trying to say that Christ is not enough to save you, Christ is not enough to make you spiritual, Christ is not enough to mature you, you have to have works righteousness. And you don't need to respond to that.

Now notice what it says in verse 16, that they tried to intimidate them by eating and drinking. This probably has Old Testament roots. There were certain prohibitions in the Old Testament, relative to eating and drinking. We don't need to cover them all, but there are some that are perhaps familiar to you Leviticus 10:9, I'll just mention this one to you.

It says There, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou know thy son is with me," and this of course was for the priests, "when you go to the tabernacle of the congregation, lest you die." In other words, before you go in to minister before the Lord don't you take any wine or strong drink. There were certain prohibitions, for the priests; there were certain things relative to drink that are indicated in the Old Testament. In Numbers chapter 6, I think another one is in the 3rd verse, "Those who take a Nazarite vow shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink, and drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor or grapes, nor eat moist grapes or dried." You didn't know that part was in, dried grapes, did you? The Nazaritevow was a vowof abstinence. A vow of abstinence. So there were certain things in the Old Testament that were indicated relative to what child of God in a certain position within the economy of Israel was permitted to do. In Judges I think, it's verse 4 of chapter 13, "Do not drink wine or strong drink," and this is relative to Samson and it goes on to discuss it there. So, and you know there are many laws in the Old Testament about eating, many things that the Jew couldn't eat. So there were certain things in the Old Testament that God had given relative to eating and drinking. The purpose of them was either to create a unique situation, or to keep them from eating something that would be harmful to them physically and nutritionally.

Primarily the issue in the Old Testament however was this, God wanted a peculiar people. God wanted people set apart by certain ways, certain things. Israel, by the virtue of its diet had a hard time having relations with the country they were living in, because they couldn't eat together. God wanted it that way, he didn't want them to intermingle. So God gave these laws, but in the new covenant those laws were set aside. In Mark chapter 7, Jesus made the first statement to abolish them. He said, "it is not that which it goes in to a man that defiles him," and that was revolutionary. That was absolutely shocking to a Jewish mind, because they always thought you could eat and be defiled, but it was what came out of a man that defiled him the envy and the murder and evil thoughts. So Jesus had abolished that then, and then to just further qualify, in Acts 10, the vision of Peter, that was further stated by illustration that it was abolished. And later on in Acts 15it was formally declared to be abolished. And by the time you come to Romans 14:17 it says, "The kingdom of God is not in food and drink, but in righteousness and joy and peace and the Holy Spirit." So everything goes internal, everything gets spiritual, and no longer are there dietary laws.

But these false teachers, giving the #1 big satanic lie of the ages, Christ is not enough. It's got to be Christ, plus works. That's the big lie. Every false system in the world says you get saved by works. Did you know that? Every single one. Christianity is the only system of religion in the entire world that is purely a system of grace. Why? Because Satan counterfeits it and in every single counterfeit the only way you can counterfeit grace is with works. They all come out the same. So the heretics are holding on, saying there has to be Christ plus works righteousness. And like Paul says in Galatians 5, if you have Christ plus anything, you lose Christ. And then he says further, look at this, "Don't let him judge you in respect of a feast day." Don't let him determine your spirituality, whether you go to a

Passover or Pentecost or the Feast of Tabernacle, or the Feast of Lights or any of those other things that are mentioned in Leviticus 23 and, Numbers 28 tells us that the sacrifice is made on the first day of the month of the new moon, or on the Sabbath day.

Now listen, some people still hold These things as the standards of spirituality. I've been Through That. You hear people say things like this "I am a Christian." "You are?" I have asked people, "How do you know you are Christians?" "I go to church Easter, Christ-mas and a few times in between and I believe all that." Does that make you a Christian? "And I smoke, I don't drink, I am nice." That's one end of it. The other end of it is. I don't believe they are Christian. Why? They don't come Sunday nights. The true church prays on Wednesday night. I question the rest. You hear people say, "How can he be a Christian, he smokes?" don't know if so and so is a Christian, I saw him with a can of beer?" What kind of an evaluation is that? They can probably say To you, "I don't know if you are a Christian, I heard you gossip." You have a choice, trade in your gossip for a can of beer.

Now don't quote me out of context. Gentile Christians never were subjected to this Jewish legalism. Why impose it on them. Why? Because Satan wanted to convince them that Christ was not sufficient, you see. And that's why Paul comes chiming in there in verse 10, "You are complete in him." Verse 9, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily! You are totally saved, totally forgiven, total victorious, and that is the whole message of the verses prior. Don't let anybody hassle you about the Sabbath. You know that is a great verse for the Seventh Day Adventists, who say you have to keep the Sabbath. If you have to keep the Sabbath, why is that one of the things the apostle Paul includes here in verse 16, that is a legalistic imposition? Answer that!

The Jews kept the Sabbath, some of even christened Jews, and that was all right Paul said in Romans 14, if their conscience was that way, they have been raised to keep it and if they wanted to go to the Sabbath, fine, let them go. If they are a weaker brother and they still have the conscience of the Sabbath, they have been raised in it, fine, don't hassle them. But don't go hollering over to a bunch of Gentiles that don't even know anything about it, and tell them they have to do it to get saved. From the beginning of the church, the Gentile church had met on The Lord's day, the first day. And in Romans 14, Paul says, some regard the Sabbath. That is good. Some go, that's good too. If the man regards it, he regards it under the Lord's if he doesn't regard it he doesn't regard it under The Lord's. But either way it's fine. He is the Lord's. And you know what the early church did. The early Christians, just to be sensitive to the Jews, particularly in Jerusalem, the early church probably had to keep the Sabbath. Because that was the day off, surely they all had to work on Sunday because that wasn't the day off. And so it is very likely that they celebrated their time together that they worshipped late Saturday evening after Sabbath and early Sunday morning before they went to work. They started the worship on the first day. That didn't mean they had that day off. They still maintained the Sabbath, they rested on the Sabbath. And they had to worship in the interval in between.

To give you a good illustration of that, you can remember Paul preaching right through midnight, can't you? Right on through midnight, until morning. They had to squeeze it in so as not to offend. So Paul is giving a strong warning against being intimidated by people who want to impose a legalistic system on us. He said, don't let it happen!

Now look at verse 17. This is the point. "These things are shadow, but the reality is Christ." All these rules and all these legalistic things, they were just shadow. A shadow just anticipates the arrival of somebody and the somebody is here and you don't need the shadow. They were content to live in the shadow side of religion where fear lurks and inhibitions abound. He says, get out of the shadow, reality is here.

Listen to it this way, why regard as indispensable ordinances, certain things relative to eating, when the one foreshadowed by Israel's manna is offering himself as the True bread of life. How can the observance of Passover be considered a means to spiritual perfection when our Passover Christ has been sacrificed already to perfect the saints. What justification could there be for demanding Gentile converts to observe the law of the Jewish Sabbath, when the bringer of eternal rest has already granted that to us? And if this was true in relation to Old Testament regulations that God had made, it was certainly true with respect to a whole pile of man made rules that God didn't have anything to do with. The whole point here was the errorists were trying to convince those people and get their heresy across that Christ wasn't enough to save. They were denying the all sufficiency, the preeminence of Christ, and that's the worst lie there is. The ordinances and the rituals are there, but they are external.

John are you saying you ought to do all those things, you ought, not to come to church, you ought to smoke and drink, and you can do anything you want to do, and just live it up and never come to church. Is that what you are saying? No, I am saying just don't judge spirituality on those bases. True judgment will take place in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, "when God reveals the secret things of the," what, "of the heart." Here is the principle here. Paul says, "look, spirituality is not a matter of external ritual, but a matter of the internal relationship with Jesus Christ." And don't let anybody intimidate you by the fact that you do something or don't do something, therefore you are spiritual or not spiritual. I am going to sum that up at the end.

Second point. Having discussed legalism he moves to his second point for tonight, the third point including philosophy, and he discusses mysticism. And this is so very interesting. These people were also trying to intimidate the Colossians in the area of mysticism.

Now you say, what is mysticism? Let me give you a simple, layman's definition. Simple enough for me to understand. Mysticism is a deeper or higher religious experience based on some personal intuition. Subjective. It is a deeper or higher subjective spiritual experience. It is like saying, "Well I have had an experience that I can't define, but I have touched God."Mysticism.

Now the heretics were claiming this. They were saying, "we have a higher and a broader and a deeper and a greater, and a mystical union with God. We've obtained a humility and a piety that is unlike anything you have experienced. We have connected ourselves with the eons and the demigods and the subgods, and we've climbed the ladder to the presence of the one true deity." You hear some of that palaver don't you now and then, from people, even today. And so in verses 18 and 19 he says this. And I'll read it out of the new American because it unscrambles it a little, "Let no one," just listen to this, "let no one," here he is telling them how to back off from being intimidated, "let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind," and then verse 19 "and not holding fast the head." Stop there.

What is he saying? Don't let anybody tell you, you are disqualified from obtaining the prize of spirituality, because you haven't reached the level of self abasement. You haven't understood the worship of angels; you haven't had the right visions. All they are is inflated by their own fleshly minds. And the one thing they are not doing is holding fast to the head, and who is the head? Christ. You see, they've said, it's Christ, plus my visions, plus my experiences with the angels, plus my deeper experience, my higher experience. The first one is Christ plus rules; the second one is Christ plus mystical experience.

Now this is the heart of the heresy that was to plague the church for centuries. This became known as gnosticism. We have defined it before and I want to define it in just that way by saying again gnosticism became a very prevalent heresy in the early church and it was the idea that to become a Christian you had to have a greater knowledge, a higher knowledge, a deeper experience with God, that came through a knowledge of various emanations, one of which was Christ, various subgods and you sort of ascended the scale to God. And you reached a point of great humility and great piety when you had experienced these mystical things. Now that is very intimidating, because you don't even know what the people are talking about. I have had people say to me the other day, "Jesus came in my room and put his arm around me and talked with me." And I say.....well what am I going to say? I don't relate to that. "How nice!" "Why you?"

Now notice what he says in verse 18, he says, "Don't let, anyone deny you the prize." And what is the prize of spirituality, of salvation, of completeness? Don't let anybody say, "Hey fella, you can't win the prize, you are disqualified." And the idea here is like a track meet. If you watched the Olympics, you saw the officials. And the officials could say, you are disqualified, you ran out of your lane." Don't let anybody tell you you are disqualified, and you don't get the prize, because you didn't attain the higher knowledge, because you didn't have this special kind of self abase pious humility, because you don't have that higher knowledge of the various angels, because you have never had super visions. So in verse 16 he says, "don't let the legalists condemn you," and here he says, "don't let the mystic condemn you." Don't let them intimidate you by what you haven't experienced and make you think

that you don't really know God at all, because you have never had any of those experiences. There are always those people, coming along, claiming a higher level of spiritual knowledge, a higher experience. And one way they intimidate us is by putting on funny robes, and going around. Turn on your television and you can see one. You can, in fact you can see lots of them. I even think and I am very honest about this, I really think that even the backwards collar routine is intimidating. It's as if this person has attained a certain spiritual level, and then when you get more and more of that stuff on, and they flow around in that stuff, and that becomes intimidating.

Of course that's just a very simplistic illustration. But this idea of piety, of being a spiritual elite, of having arrived spiritually, a higher plain because of mystical experiences. What it really boiled down to here, Paul says, if they don't believe Jesus is enough, that's what it boils down to. It's Jesus plus, some super knowledge, and that's a lie right out of hell. It says they delight in humility. Isn't that interesting? They are so happy to be humble. Their own humility thrills them. I am so proud to be humble. They are like, I don't know if you ever read David Copperfield, and read Uriah Heep. "I is humble. You sure is." Humility, somebody said, the sweetest loveliest flower that blossomed in Eden and the first to die has rarely bloomed since on mortal soil. It is so frail, so delicate a thing, 'tis gone if it but look upon itself and he who ventures to esteem at this proves by that single thought he has it not. Their supposed humility was nothing but ugly pride.

And they worshipped angels, verse 18 says. What does that do? There is one what, mediator between. God and man, and who is it? The man Christ Jesus. They were worshipping angels, denying the one mediator. William Hendrickson tells us that there is evidence at this particular time in Colossae that angel worship was rather prevalent. And we know that the Essene community leaned toward angel worship. One of their writings tells them to carefully regard and guard the names of the angels. But angel worship is forbidden. In revelation, when John tried to worship an angel twice, the angel said, "Get up, do not worship me, I am a creature, worship God!" Remember that? Even the angels forbid it.

And notice what else it says in verse 18. This is hard to understand because it gets shifted around in the translations, "Taking his stand on visions he has seen." Your Bible may say, 'has not seen,' but the true entering, "taking his stand on visions he has seen." Saying, "Well I am sorry about you, I have seen things beyond what you have seen, I have comprehended things, I know the secrets not known to ordinary man. I take my stand there." That's very intimidating, folks. That is very intimidating. You feel like sort of second class Christian I never had any of that. I never saw anything. Very intimidating Super Pious, hypocritical, self humiliating, having deeper experiences with angels, seeing visions, getting special revelations, and we're sitting around at the Bible studies just trying to understand what it says on the page. And Paul says to the Colossians don't be intimidated! Don't let those people take your prize away and say, "You are disqualified from, you are just qualified from spirituality because you haven't had that greater experience." The Truth is, they are puffed up in their fleshly unspiritual minds. That's pretty straight stuff, isn't it? They are guilty of the worst hypocrisy

there is. Spiritual pride and they are devoid of the True spirit. They are not holding fast to the head. I love that.

As a Christian you know who you need? Jesus Christ you know what else you need? Nothing! He is all in all, isn't He? Christ plus nothing. You don't need special visions. You don't need conversations with angels. You don't need some kind of self-imposed piety. You don't need to keep a bunch of rules. You'll just hold fast to the head, from whom all the body by its joints and ligaments is nourished and knit together and increases with the increase of God. You just hold to the one who holds the whole church together. Don't you be intimidated. Don't you let these people tell you that works and self-righteousness and false humility and angel worship and special visions and special revelations have to be added to the sufficiency of Christ to bring you to spirituality. That's a lie that wants to dishonor Christ. That's right out of hell.

Believe me people, I think one of the most satanic lies going on today is the fact that when you are a Christian you still haven't got it all. That is a lie. That is a lie. You don't need anything else. It's all yours, and you're complete in him. People come along and say "well if you haven't had the baptism or if you haven't had this, you haven't gone to the next level.. That's a lie. That isn't true. You have received, says Peter, all things that pertain to life and godliness, doesn't he? This is insidious, and it is intimidating to people. Where are they getting cheated? The Lord Jesus is the head and he holds it all together, and he is the one who brings about the growth, he is the pituitary gland if you will, as the head contributes to the growth of the body by the pituitary gland, so the head the Lord Jesus causes the growth of the body and he is all you need to grow to maturity, to grow to spirituality. Legalism is out and mysticism is out.

Third thing. The third thing that they tried to use to intimidate these dear Colossian Christians was asceticism. You say, well what is that? a s c e t i c ascetic. The dictionary defines that ascetic is somebody who lives a life of rigorous self-denial. An ascetic is somebody who sells everything and goes and lives in a monastery. And these religious phonies in Colossae, man they really had it all. I am telling you, they had every heresy there was. And they were saying that the only true spirituality comes in self-denial. You know I think the church has been intimidated by that for centuries. That the only truly spiritual people are the people who become monks or nuns and go live in a monastery. Or the only truly spiritual people are the people who have nothing, sell everything and live in absolute abject poverty. This is extreme rigid abstinence. Look at verse 20, "Wherefore if you already are dead with Christ," from the a b c's of the world are from the basics of human religion, "why as though you are still living in the world are you subjecting yourself to ordinances like touch not, taste not, handle not?" Stop there.

He says, "Your union with Christ in his death has caused you to die to the rudiments of the world." Your union with Christ in his death has caused you to be separated from human religion, and human religion is based in legalism and mysticism and self-denial and all those works-kind-of-things. But he

says the redeemed are set free from self styled man made rules designed to make you holy. And the world comes along as if you want to be really holy, give up everything. Deprive yourself and go live in total abstinence. And he says, if you do that you are simply modeling yourself after the system of religion in the world. Now just to give you a little background, the ascetic were really weird, .They believe that the body was evil. The pa-gan ascetics went to extremes and when we studied 1 Corinthians I men-tioned some of this to you. Let me remind you of it. Some monks re-garded it a sin to take a bath, because they would see their body.

That's right. Very serious with them. There are writings about that.

They felt marriage was an experiment of the serpent which separates from the Lord. Why? Because you would see somebody else's body. Asanatus boasted of the devotion of Anthony who never changed his vest or washed his feet, and that was praiseworthy. Fortunately he lived in a society of other people who didn't do it either. Antonius proudly related that such was the holy asceticism of Simeon Styletus that when he walked vermin dropped of his body. That's how holy he was. And some early church fathers in a fit of asceticism castrated them-selves as an act of self denial, seeking by such rights to attain holi-ness, Stupid.

You know there have been people floating through our society. I remember the children of God who said, "the only spiritual people in the world are the people who sell everything and come and join our movement." Remember that? They kind of died out. There have been monks and nuns and there have been all other kinds, even within Protestantism. Now I am not saying that there should never be any self denial. if God so desires that you and I live like Hudson And Taylor to accomplish what he did and to be God's man and the place that he was, then that's glorious. but he never did it to attain spirituality, he did it because that was God's call to him. That's the difference.

Now I want you to notice verse 21. "Touch not, taste not, handle not." You almost get a, like they would touch not, taste not, handle not, see? That's not spiritual. No more oil, no more wine, no more meal, no contact with a stranger, no touching of religious inferior. You know, these ascetics, that's right. Did you know that the ascetics were not allowed to touch their religious inferior. Simple diet, simple clothing necessary for spirituality. It's the only way to be spiritual. Verse 22 he says, all that stuff will perish with the using. It's all a matter of the commandments and doctrines and man it's all human stuff. Why are you attributing inherent value to what is passing, God doesn't expect all of us to live in poverty. If that is where God calls and that is what God has for you, glorious, that's his plan. If God chooses to give you things like he did Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Job and bless you, keep that in mind. If God chooses to allow you to be rich, he doesn't say it is sinful to be rich, he says make sure in 1 Timothy 6, that if you are rich you do good and share your riches, see? It isn't whether you have it or not, it's how you hold it. But spirituality isn't determined by that. It isn't Christ plus poverty that makes it. It isn't Christ plus never taking a bath. It isn't Christ plus going an live in a monastery. It isn't Christ plus anything. They are all going to perish. All that stuff. They are just the

commandments and teaching of men, it's just human religion again.

Verse 23. Now this is really difficult to translate, so I am just going to give you my translation, no version, but just the Greek with a little broadening so you'll understand it. Regulations of this kind, though to be sure have a reputation for wisdom, because of their self made religion, humility and unsparing treatment of the body are of no real value whatever, serving only to indulge the flesh.

Now listen, I'll say it again. All regulations of this kind have a reputation for wisdom, they intimidate, they appear to be really the divine wisdom, look at this, he keeps all the rules, he has the higher visions, he communes with the angels, he receives revelations, he is in abject self abasement in poverty, and it looks to be so good because of self made humility and unsparing treatment of the body, but it is no value whatever it serves. It serves only to satisfy what, the flesh. You know what it is? It is simply and only carnality. You are trying to glorify yourself as the one who can either save or make himself spiritual. Self styled rituals, self styled mysticism, self styled poverty for the sake of apparent piety and holiness just panders the flesh. These people listened to it. Their religion is godless, for they worship themselves. Their humility is fake because it is nothing but masking of spiritual pride, and their selfdenial is a false standard because it is an effort to make themselves more holy than other people, and in all of those exercises they serve only to indulge their carnal flesh. And the Colossians were being intimidated by them, and so have you and I been. You say, you mean we have them in our world today? Yeah, that's right. These ascetics may be not quite so common in our society, but it is interesting to think about it. Asceticism is such an exercising carnality it is incredible.

Listen to what McClaren says, I thought this was interesting. He says, any asceticism is a great deal more to men's taste than abandoning self. They will rather stick hooks in their backs and do the swinging poodga, whatever that is, than give up their sins or yield up their wills. There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us and that is the power of the indwelling Christ. (end quote) Isn't that good?

You can stick all the hooks in you you want and do all the swinging poodgas you want, whatever those are. I remember a man who said to me that he said, "I have committed myself to wear this thing for the rest of my life to attain holiness." it was in the Roman Catholic Church and he had on a thing under his shirt, all full of nail s, pins, that he wore around his body. An act of asceticism, terrible self denial in order to attain holiness, to set him apart as better than anybody else, a pure and frustrated, disillusioned individual, acting only in pandering his flesh.

Now listen, want to close by drawing it up to the day. And what I say now I want you think about, be in prayer about, try to evaluate along with me. In our modern day, when someone comes along and says to you, "spirituality is Christ plus external behavior. Christ plus what you eat, what you drink, ritualistic, narrowminded, legalistic, super hyper fundamentalism kind of thing." That's very intimidating, often.

I can remember in my own background, being in a situation where I was greatly intimidated, where I became actually paranoid almost about the things I did, because I felt that those were the only things that were validating my spirituality. A guy came to me onetime, and I told you this, but it fits here and I'll tell it to you again. And he said to me, "you are not spiritual." And I said, "how do you know I am not spiritual," He says, "because you don't go to prayer meetings." I'll never forget that. I said, "well what does that have to do with me being spiritual. How do you know I don't spend all day and every day and all night praying?" He says, "spiritual people go to prayer meetings." And later on that same fellow turned me in at the school to the administration and reported me, he was not you know, he was not all there, but he reported me as for being the devil. Later I saw it written on paper. John MacArthur is the devil. You see his whole orientation was that spirituality is determined by external behavior. And you get into an environment like that and I can promise you some, it'll intimidate you. You begin to feel that if you do the wrong things or if you say the wrong things or you happen to be for some organization or for some individual in the ministry and this whole outfit is against them, boy you are really on the out. I remember coming to my Dad sometimes and say, "hey Dad, you have to change your whole ministry, it's all wrong." He looked at me said, "What, where did you get all that?" Well you do this and you do this and you don't do this and you don't do this, and my poor Dad was heartsick. I went through a time in my life when I became that narrow minded legalistic kind of thing. I didn't know A-1 about internal spirituality. One time I taught a class, and when the class was over, it was the first class I ever taught in my college environment. And a guy came to me and he says, "I didn't know you were spiritual. And I said, "how do you know I am spiritual?" He said, "you caught the class." I said, "I taught the class?" And that proves it. Why? Because his evaluation of spirituality was, spirituality is doing or not doing something. Stay with, I want you to get this. But I went through that kind of legalism and I know what it is like, and you don't need to be intimidated by that. You know there some things that are real moral issues, but you don't need to have some narrow person come and intimidate you and force your spirituality outside. Don't let it happen.

Secondly, spirituality some people say to day is Christ plus a special vision or Christ plus a special experience. Did you hear that one? Oh, I get so tired of this. I used to hear, have you experienced the deeper life? I used to say, "what is it?" The deeper life I don't even ever understand

what they were tal-king about. And boy, you know, I went through some of my college days with real anxiety in my heart, because I couldn't experience the deeper life. What is it? And somebody would get in a testimony, they'd

say, "Ohhh, since I had the second blessing, or since I realized this certain thing I've experienced, the higher walk." I didn't know what they were talking about. And I felt like I am just doing the same old thing. Some people are higher, some people are deeper and I am just here, you know. I went through that, I really did.

But I'll tell you, you know, today I think that the best illustration of this thing is coming from the charismatic movement. And I hate to refer to this all the time, but it seems to be the vehicle that is being used. The 700 Club. The other day they healed a washing machine and a car. A lady called up and her washing machine didn't work and they prayed for her washing machine, she called back to say her washing machine was healed. And yesterday they healed a car. So I am sitting there saying, 'You know I have to take my car to the garage,' I mean I am in the ministry, I am trying to serve the Lord, nobody heals my car. How come some guy out in Kansas gets his car healed? And somebody gets on there and says, "I have experienced something higher and greater that has lifted me out of this plain of Christian living to a new dimension." I don't have any idea and so many poor Christians who don't understand Bible truth, and don't understand the doctrine of the word of God are sitting there saying, "what is it?" "Maybe it's real, maybe I want it, maybe I need it."

The other day they had the absolute end of all on. I was up in Washington watching and they had Marvin Ford. You say, who is Marvin Ford? That's what I say. A dear man. This dear man got on there and Pat Robertson got up and said, "Marvin is here because Marvin has returned from heaven." And I said, "Garbage!" Marvin gave a description of heaven. What was amazing about the description was that it was almost exactly like the book of Revelation says, with a few little additions. Like as he went from mansion to mansion he noticed that there were no bedrooms. I would have been there I would have said, "Were there any bathrooms Marvin?" And I thought to myself if he only knew that the Term mansion isn't even in the Greek, he would have been going from mansion to mansion while he was in heaven, because there aren't any. There is only one and that is the Father's house, right?

You see it is so ridiculous, it's so ludicrous. And the man sits there and says, "how marvelous Marvin that you have come back from heaven." The dear man, I love him and I feel sad for him, but that kind of bologna is intimidating people who don't understand that that is just bologna. And when they shout out, there are 50 people being healed of this and 35 people being healed of this, and I sense somebody over here having this done. It just isn't so folks. And I don't want you to be intimidated by it. And these people having all these experiences and visions, and on and on and on, it just isn't so. And then what just hurts me to the core of my being, is when they come out with this big day that they are going to have sponsored by the 700 Club, with Pat Robertson head at the top, and underneath it is Billy Graham, and Bill Bright and Johnny Cash or whoever and Pat Boone and on and on and on. You know what these people are doing, they are lending credence to that whole bologna that goes on there every day. And it isn't right. And I guess I am at the place where I have had it. And even a dear brother like Hal Lindsey and Walter Martin, by getting into that thing are giving their clout to that kind of movement. And I notice good institutions like woody being on there.

The confusion is rampant, and the poor Christian sits at home and says, "With Billy Graham and Campus Crusade and everybody else behind this thing, it's got to be right." And nobody draws the line. And so somebody sits back and says, "it's got to be right, what am I missing, I have to have this

experience, I have to speak in tongues, I have to do this or I have to do that." Well I don't mean to throw stones at people and you know I never do that and I never mention names but I guess I just got to the point where it breaks my heart. I mean how can you keep the lines clear? How can you teach the Word of God when you have mass confusion and by virtue of being associated with, that all the people that really have the positions in the Christian world line up with it. And I see things that come out of those various organizations advocating that you listen to the 700 Club. Just breaks my heart. I am not saying they are not Christians, they are Christian people, they love the Lord. I am just saying the issue is confused.

I am trying to tell you something folks, I don't know if you are getting the message, but I am trying to tell you what Paul said. Listen "you have Christ, you have everything," is that right? You have his word, you have all you need. You have his spirit, you have all you need. Don't let anybody tell you, you need to add to it a system of works righteousness. You don't need to add to it a special visions and revelations. You need to add to it a sedate kind of living, selfdenial, throwaway everything you own, be absolutely poor. If you are looking for any of your spirituality in those areas, you just bypassed it. And I would add this. Don't you be guilty of intimidating somebody else either. Paul Sailhammer said something good me as I was coming up. He said, "don't you think that for the most part we tend to intimidate people by what we say, we tend to encourage them by what we are."

Well let's pray: Father thank you for our time tonight and I just feel the need in my heart to warn the people about what's going on as a faithful shepherd and you know how I love these men, these organizations, how we through the years have supported them and encouraged them, in so many cases. And yet how it saddens us to realize that they are part of a confusion that tends to intimidate Christians and by such intimidation, force them into error. God help us to teach the Word so that the body of Christ is protected from those within it who don't know the word. Help those Christians, who can't make the right decision because they just don't know your truth somehow to be taught. Raise up more teachers, more faithful pastors, who can Teach the truth with love, and help us to keep the church pure the way you want it. We give you the praise in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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