

Believers Beware! The 3 Deadly Errors of False

Teaching – part 2

By Dr. Joe Miller

Bible Text: Colossians 2:16-23
Preached on: Sunday, March 13, 2016

Good morning, folks. I'm glad that most, if not all of you, were able to spring forward and spring is here and we celebrate that. That's just a huge blessing for us as we can not only enjoy God's creation but also enjoy it with a little bit more light at the end of the day.

Bless the Lord, and indeed I believe the Lord was blessed by what we just got done hearing, "Behold our God," and he is indeed sitting on his throne and we are glad and grateful. Thank you for taking the time to truly bless the Lord with your voices because that's 103, I understand we read through Psalm 103, praise God he is worthy of us blessing him and that's a wonderful thought that we in the simplicity of our voice and the joy that we find in our heart because of what Christ has done in our lives, that we can through our voices praise, bless God. And that is an important element of what we are going to look at this morning. We are confident that in all things God is working out his good and great historical plan of redemption in the lives of his people, you and I, and we know that God is good therefore we have the motivation from our heart of praising him. But I do believe there is a continual element within Christ's church from the very beginning, there has been a need to guard our hearts, to guard our hearts, to make sure that our hearts are showing great love and gratitude for what God accomplished through his Gospel.

There has been this movement of trying to reflect back on what the Gospel means and the importance of the Gospel and we got together for the Gospel which is coming up and the Gospel coalition which is consistently proclaiming the importance of the Gospel, and in many ways there is just a great point that is being made there: we have to be focused on the Gospel every day because the Gospel is not just the means in which we experience salvation, but the Gospel is the means in which we change. Too many of us, actually all of us, I'll just paint with a wide brush, use a wide brush and say all of us struggle with sin and all of us have that one or two or three, if you're me, those sin issues that just tend to keep coming back and we just are not killing it and the problem is we're trying to kill it on our own. We're trying to put off that sin and put on an attribute of Christ on our own, or we are forgetting what the Gospel has empowered us to do. I believe that is really missing within the church. We're so excited about learning some new theological term or understanding finally the difference between sublapsarianism and infralapsarianism and whether we're pre-trib, mid-trib post-trib, amill, pre-wrath or whatever comes down the pike and it's God's sovereign will to do that anyways, and in the midst of trying to learn all of this theology, we're missing the whole point and the point is how has the Gospel changed us and continues to change us in a way that as we live our lives, we can indeed bless the Lord and all that is within me, bless his holy name. How do we do that more

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effectively? More efficiently? More passionately? And with greater heart and with greater meaning and with greater observable results in our lives? How do we do that? I'm going to look at three points in which I believe man and a man-centered approach has tried in futility to see change take place within the hearts of God's people and we're going to look at the Gnostic false teaching that was revealed by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2 in regards to what they were teaching in that church as a man-based, works-based, futile means in which men can experience lasting change.

About four months ago is I think was the last time I hit this pulpit and we looked at the first point. Because it's been four months, we're going to go back and review that first point just so that we're all on the same page, but Paul is calling not just the Colossians but you and I to reject that kind of Gnostic heart attitude and dial back in on the sufficiency of God's word; that God's word in the Gospel is not only sufficient for our salvation but it is sufficient for our sanctification and it will take us all the way to glory and that's the kind of heart attitude that we need to be continually fostering here at Calvary Bible Church. It's the idea and I know some people get a little bit sort of uncomfortable when we used terminology like this, in fact, I've always wondered, you know, what is it when people say, "Well, Jesus is just more beautiful, more splendid and more magnificent than I've ever thought he would be." What does that mean? What does it mean that Jesus is beautiful to you? What does it mean that he is splendid to you? What does it mean that he's marvelous and wonderful to you? Can you sit down with me and say, "Joe, this is what I mean when I say Jesus is more beautiful to me today than he was yesterday." And give me just observable, succinct, clear at my level of comprehension terms that tell me what that means to you. But maybe some of you don't know what that means. Maybe you don't even have that kind of ability to express that but I believe you should be. I believe that we are beautiful and splendid and wonderful, those terms that Reformers have used forever and ever, should be something that we should be very likened to and used to and then when somebody does say Jesus is more beautiful to me than anything, to be able to very quickly, succinctly explain what that means. What does that mean? Because if you don't know what that means, then you need to go back to the Gospel and this is not, folks, this is not a, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," message. This is something that I believe is missing in our lives and I'm not saying that you're not saved because I know that I know that I am but I still struggle with sin and I struggle with seeing Jesus every day as being wonderful and beautiful and splendid. I do. And when that's the case, I'm not living a life that is pleasing or glorifying to him, I'm living a life that is pleasing and glorifying to me. I'm living a life that is more earthbound than it is heavenward and I believe we can turn that heart attitude around and that's when we're going to change what we think, what we say, and what we do because we think

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what we think and we say what we say and we do what we do based off of what it is in our heart that we truly love.

What is the treasure of your heart? What is your Matthew 6:21? What is it that you treasure? Because I guarantee you and everybody knows, that from your actions, words, and deeds, people know what you really treasure. They know just how much Jesus is of value to you and how much your idols are and your work is and your movies and going hunting and going fishing and playing guitar or creating the next best website. What is it you find more joy in because it will be realized in where you spend time, the things that you think and the things that you say and the things that you do, the conversations that you have. So the question is: what does a person love more, God and his Gospel or self and all these works-based, man-based means of somehow standing in a right position with Christ? That's what Paul is addressing here. So this morning we're going to, in order for us to continue to understand the great joy and sufficiency that we have in God alone and Christ alone and not in ourselves, the Apostle Paul will reveal to us these three false teachings that were alive and well back in the first century and are alive and well today in Christ's church.

Our first point: beware, let no one judge you, a warning against legalism. We looked at this; we spent an entire sermon on this but I'm going to go back and just for the sake of review and add some more clarification. Legalism was defined as, "adding to God's word in regards to salvation; taking away from the full spectrum of God's grace which is found in the Gospel which alone produces true regenerated saving faith." This view of legalism is based on a Jesus and the Gospel plus some other individual good works and that good works which tends to obligate others to conform to those same works which ultimately are self-glorifying, self-pleasing and this is the means in which some of us are trying to establish spiritual maturity and a form of holiness but it's a false maturity, it's a false form of holiness.

Look at verse 16 of Colossians 2 and so Paul says this, "Therefore let no one pass judgment," legalistic judgment, "on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath," and he tells us why. He tells us why we should not allow anyone to establish or force us to follow some legalistic judgment because back in verse 13 he says this, "And you" you all, y'all here, "you who were dead in your trespasses and sins you are and the uncircumcision of your flesh, however God made alive together with him." We were all made alive together with Christ. It was that union with Christ at salvation, after that effectual call, we are now in union with Christ, "having forgiven us of our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its

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law," with the law's legal demands. God's law had a legal demand on you, on all of us, and it showed us lacking, it showed us falling short and it showed us deserving nothing but God's perfect judgment which is hell. This he, God alone and not of any of your efforts, not of any of your works and when we're talking about works or efforts, we're not talking just about at the point of salvation, no, we're talking now today and tomorrow and until we get to glory. It is not about anything you do but it is God through his Son who has set those debts on that cross.

Verse 15, "He," Christ alone and not you, he went after his death, he proclaimed to the demons after his death, he went down and proclaimed the cross and that he had triumphed over sin. He triumphed over Satan. He triumphed over death. He triumphed over hell. Not you, none of you. You didn't do that. You didn't do that because somehow you know the difference between sub and infralapsarianism. You didn't do that because you were a pre-tribulationist. You didn't do that because you attend a Reformed theological church. You didn't earn any of that. You didn't deserve any of that. You didn't accomplish any of that. Christ did. He disarmed the rulers. He disarmed the authorities. He put them to shame. He triumphed over them. Not you, and yet we live like we did something. You know, we do. We live like we did something, "I'm brilliant because I turned to Christ. I get Christ, who doesn't? So there must be something special about me. I'm good." You did nothing and yet the way that we live post-cross gives people the impression that you think you did something. Somehow you're good, they are not.

I think that finds its source, in fact, I know that finds its source in pride, that our way is better, that I have the right view. I mean, I think there's a problem within churches that are so heavily doctrinal and we are, we are heavily doctrinal and I'm just saying this for the sake of it is great and it is wonderful and I think we have and hold the right views but when we have such wonderful teaching, we can tend to get really prideful and when we're either together here at the church or we're out having conversations with other people and some doctrinal conversation comes up, oh man, we've got it. "We are the great defender of the faith. Oh, you've got that wrong. No, let me tell you how you took that verse out of context and let me tell you why you don't understand the Greek imperative here." And we find ourselves as being the great defender, you know. Yes, defend the faith but don't defend it in such a way where it's you that is being highlighted; it's your brilliance; it's your insight; it's your understanding. That's no different than the Gnostics. That's what they were known to do because, folks, the reality is when we try to highlight so much of what we know instead of what Christ has done, that's the problem. We live in a church age where it is all about the gifts that we got from the Giver and that's what gets highlighted. Salvation, "I have this gift of teaching. I have this gift of music, I have this

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gift of administration, I have this gift of service and look at all the great things that I have gotten for Christ. It's all about the gifts I'm in. I'm eternally secure. I have my fire insurance." Folks, that's wrong. When we glorify and find greater joy in the gifts rather than in the Giver of those gifts, we miss something. We miss it big and as a result, if you are much more in love with the gifts that you have realized in Christ instead of Christ himself, it's no wonder you have these habitual sin issues that you just can't get rid of because you're doing it based off of the wrong reasons and the wrong means in which to get rid of them.

So that's why Paul says, "Let no one legalistically judge you on questions of food and drink or with regard to a ceremony, a festival or a new moon or Sabbath." And again, Paul lays out two forms of legalism: diets and religious days. He says, "Don't let people hold you legalistically to these because they don't understand what they're saying here," because quite honestly, the Gospel grace took care of these past, present and future issues, all these sin debt issues. Only on the basis for anyone to pass judgment upon us, they can't pass judgment upon us in the way in which the Gnostics were passing judgment upon the Colossian believers. They were making false assumptions that Christ did not fulfill the law completely and because he didn't fulfill the law completely, it's a Jesus plus your actions; it's a Jesus plus your legalistic practices; it's a Jesus plus mysticism; it's a Jesus plus asceticism or self-denial or physical discipline; that there something that we need to do but this makes the Gospel no longer good news, right? There's nothing good about the Gospel when it's a Jesus plus and, "Man, if I fall short of my plus, I'm out." Thanks for playing, Joe. There is no good news there and that's why Paul reminds us in Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law of righteousness to everyone who," what? Works, goes to church, wears the right tie? No, "for those who believe," and it's a belief that has been generated or comes from a regenerated heart that has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Nothing that you did. It finds its source in the Gospel.

So the Mosaic law, while wonderful, has no power in our life to condemn us anymore. This is what makes the good news good news and I know Dave Hoffman appreciates that, right? Because you need a lot of good news, brother, don't you, every day, every moment. I look at my children and, you know, I love them dearly but, man, they need good news every day, especially when there battling with their homeschooling mom. They need good news every day. "We love you but you've got to do your homework. No, you are not condemned. We will always love you. Jesus will always love you. I will always support you but you've got to get your homework done, alright?" That's good news. That's good news in knowing that you're going to get your homework done but we're not going to

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throw you under the bus. Jesus is not going to throw us under the bus because we are established in a right and redeemed and eternal relationship with him based on what he did, verse 17.

So Paul says, so these things, festivals, new moons and all these legalistic things, these are shadows of things to come but the substance, the soma, belongs to Christ and his point is here he's saying, "Look, all these Old Testament religious rituals and stuff, they were just a shadow of what was to come." They were just a shadow portraying 1, what is going to come but it shows us how far, if we just try to fulfill those rituals and those regulations and the dietary law because we're going to fall short and we're not going to be able to do it and so with all these laws and regulations, it just condemns us because we are going to fall short, because we are going to goof and there are going to be gaffs. But they were a picture of something greater and more substantial and more perfect and more sufficient and the soma, not the shadow, but it's the soma, it's that solid being that produces the shadow. Who is that solid soma? Jesus Christ. He's going to come and he's going to say, "Now, I fulfill all those things for you because you can't do it and I'm going to do it for you and I'm going to give you the ability to want to do those and to do it with the right attitude." We have certain things that we are supposed to be doing as believers: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and by the way, stop loving yourself so well and start loving the person sitting next to you better. Do we do that on our own? I can't. Ask my wife. But Christ through me can.

So Christ is that soma, he's the one that not only is saying, "This is what we need to be doing but you can't do it but I can through you." Who gets the the glory for that, you? Who gets the glory for that, you? Christ does. Our entire life is about giving glory to the Lord. Everything is meant to point towards Christ and you look at these dietary regulations, certain things that you were allowed to eat and not allowed to eat but then Jesus comes, the full body now on display and from John 6:41 he says, "Look, those food regulations, let me give you the 411, I, I am the bread that came down from heaven. I am the bread. Don't be so concerned about this dietary regulation now. I'm the bread. I'm the one that you need to be ingesting spiritually."

About religious days, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Christ is our new Passover, right? He's the new Passover. He's the one that was sacrificed to fulfill the final sacrifice for all of our sins past, present and future. So verse 17, Paul is pointing out that it is Christ who has plans and purposes for all of us. For all of us, it's Christ who fulfilled those obligations and the shadow of the Old Testament was simply preparing people for that Genesis 3:15 promise which was a Savior who would come and redeem us and that Savior became a reality,

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became the soma in the Greek, became the substance, became the solid body at the incarnation of Christ.

That's our first point. You have to remember that. It's not about anything we do, it's about the Gospel of grace, the glory of the Gospel. It's about understanding the Gospel is not about a one dimensional truth, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Wrong. That is so wrong. There is some truth to that but it misses everything. The Gospel is seen as a diamond and a diamond is brilliant, a diamond is beautiful and a diamond is lovely, not just because of its clarity or the carat size, but also because of the cut, how that diamond is cut, and as a diamond is cut by a jeweler, it creates facets, sides, and depending on how those sides or facets are cut, it produces a much more brilliant diamond. The Gospel is like a diamond and it is brilliant because it has these multifaceted cuts that represent God's grace in our life.

What is one of God's graces in our life because of the Gospel? The Gospel reminds us in a personal way that there is a living God that controls the heavens and the earth, controls everything that we see in nature, but also is the source and the means in which we can be restored to a right relationship with our Creator. I'm just going to list a bunch of these Gospel graces. We have a King and his name is not Obama, and his name is not Washington, and his name is not Putin, it's Jesus, and he is right now on the throne and he rules and he reigns and he is in control and we can trust that everything that he allows to happen until the moment which we stand in his presence is exactly the way he determined it. We have a King.

The Gospel also gives us the grace of knowing that the King is both our Savior and Lord. That's a wonderful expression of God's grace. I don't need to save myself and, man, I don't need to follow myself anymore, I just need to follow the Lord, King Jesus. And what did the King do? He came and he lived and he died and he paid a sacrifice and he rose from the dead. Look at all of those wonderful graces of the Gospel, these gifts of the Gospel, and because of the Gospel we are now indwelt by his Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God. He indwells us. What does that do? He convicts us. He encourages us. He teaches us. He gives us help. He gives us hope. Man, is there anything better than that? I mean, the indwelling Spirit of God is far better than Hunter's Pooh bear that he sleeps with, not anymore. He used to find great comfort in Pooh bear but you and I, even when we are struggling, you know, with just fears and anxieties, frustrations, and you have a hard time sleeping at night, you've got the Spirit of Christ in you. Commune with that Spirit. Ask the Spirit to give you comfort, give you insight, enable you to deal with whatever you need to deal with so that you can sleep so you can have an effective day. It

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is a Gospel that promises our salvation will take place because salvation is a promise, right? It's not yet known but it will be and he says it will be known.

The cross makes the Gospel good news. Why? Because it has set the captive free. It was the act of Christ on the cross that set the captive free. It's good news because we now have peace with God and with one another and that's a reality. We don't have to live in enmity with one another. You know, when I go up and I offend Dave, which I do constantly, it's because of the Gospel and it's because of the Spirit that indwells us because of the Gospel that we can have reconciliation. It is the Gospel that makes eternal life apart from hell now a reality and not a hope-so. Some of us are living in such a way that you hope you're saved because you're not sure you're saved because you keep stumbling and bumbling with your sin and you don't get the Gospel or maybe you do but you are forgetting. It's not about your performance. If you live godly in Christ Jesus, if you live a more holy and righteous life today than you did yesterday, you don't do it because you have to, you do it why? Why? Because you want to. Because you love whom? Christ. That's why you do it. Not because you have to, because you want to, because the Gospel gives us a great reason to.

So legalism, how do I define legalism? It's a spirit that fails to recognize that God's grace has made us acceptable to Christ and no human works will ever do that. So I don't live based on my performance. I don't find hope based on my performance. I don't find joy based off of, "I memorized two verses today and I got this many Awana merit badges and this many Word of Life stars and I went to church five times a week and I did three hours of prayer this morning and I also shared the Gospel with someone." That's wonderful. If you did all those things because that was an act of absolute worship of the King, praise God, but if you did that as a means of proving yourself or someone else or even proving to God that you're one of his, thanks for playing, it's worthless. It's a depraved act. So the question is, what kind of person are you? Are you that legalistic person that's always trying to convince yourself or convince others or convince God that you're saved? Or do you realize, "I am saved because it's a free gift that I received 10 years ago, 15 years ago, 30 years ago. All I'm trying to do now is live a life that glorifies God and that shines brightly so that he can get the glory through the way in which I live my life and how others view me in him, not me, what Joe does." That's the goal.

And the answer to legalism, the answer to that Spirit-quenching, joyless, sin-plagued life is realizing through the continual preaching of the Gospel to yourself. You hear that a lot, you know. Milton Vincent has a book that came out a few years ago, "A Gospel Primer," and preach the Gospel to yourself. Okay, that's fine. I guess that communicates what I

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should be doing. I just say, don't preach the Gospel to yourself, just remember the Gospel every day. Remember what you have been saved from and now remember what you have been saved for and that is to praise God today in how you live and the things that you think, say and do. That is the cure for legalism. That is the cure to a Spirit-quenched, hopeless Christian life. That is the only means in which somebody is going to be able to die to self, die to their flesh and die to the culture because every day they're living at the foot of the cross, in the shadow of the cross, and remembering what that cross means to them. That's the cure for legalism.

2. Beware, let no one trick you. It's a warning against mysticism. What is "mysticism"? I like the way that MacArthur defines mysticism, quote, "It is the pursuit of a deeper or a higher subjective or a particular religious experience." You had a religious experience. "I remember, I went up to Forest Home Camp and because I went to Forest Home Camp up in the San Bernardino Mountains, I got saved there. It's because of the pine trees up there. There is something supernatural about those pine trees. Or it was as Tony Campolo was the speaker and because I was sitting in the front row and he gets all lathered and he spits like I do and I got hit by some spittle, that that is what brought me to the regenerated state." No, it's not a pursuit of some subjective religious experience, it is a belief that spiritual reality for them, for those that are mystic, the spiritual reality is perceived apart from the word, from human intellect, from natural senses that are observable and provable. It looks for truth internally. It weighs your feelings and your emotions and your intuition and other sensations more heavily than the objective, observable and external data of the word of God. Mysticism ultimately derives its authority from self-actualizing self-authenticating, that light rising from within because of some wonderful experience. Mysticism is purely the opposite of Christian theology because Christian theology find its value and its legitimacy in the truth of God's word.

There is a lot of mystical stuff out there that is taking place and we see that in movies, a lot of movies anymore focus on the mysticism. A lot of heaven movies are out and there is a lot of mysticism in those movies. One of my favorite movies but it's very mystical is "The Natural," in 1984, a baseball movie. I was playing baseball at the time and I remember going and watching that movie. I watched that movie on a Friday night, I was pitching the next day, it was a night game, and my best friend at that time was the catcher and so "The Natural" came out, Robert Redford and I was like, "Let's go and watch 'The Natural.' Let's kill some time." We went to the batting cage before. We went to watch this movie and the movie is great if you're a baseball fan. This is a great movie but I'm not recommending it for anybody, okay? So there's my disclaimer. But for an unregenerate baseball fool, I loved the movie. What was really neat about it is its about a real star

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baseball player, young man, great pitcher and he was going to be the next MVP, the next bonus baby and so he goes off and gets on a train back in the 1930s during the depression. He gets on a train and he's going for a tryout and during the tryout he meets a gal and the gal sidetracks him and he ends up getting shot. So 30 years later he comes back and, again, he's a prodigy, he's the natural baseball player, he's a prodigy. He comes back and he's now old and he's got some gray hair and his skin is all wrinkly and so he was playing minor leagues for a week and then a recruiter for a major league baseball team said, "We're going to sign you," and so he sends him up the team and the team is in the middle of a game and so he walks up to the manager, he's the manager of a last place team, they're just getting killed in their game at that time, and he hands him his contract and he looks at him and he says, "You're joking, right? You should be retiring, not starting baseball." He said, "Well, I've got a contract. I want to play." He says, "I'm never going to play you. This is a joke." He was bitter and angry so this guy, Roy Hobbs, the great natural sits on the bench for multiple games and then finally the coach ended up showing his anger toward someone else and so, "Okay, you're on the bench. Roy, get in there and go hit." So Roy grabs his bat and he goes up to the plate. The first pitch is called a strike. You know, welcome to the big leagues, Roy Hobbs. The second pitch, before he hit the ball, a big old lightning bolt lights up the sky and then he hits this ball and he knocks the cover off the ball and as the ball is coming back down to earth, it's unraveling because baseballs are made of wound string. So all the guys out in the field are trying, "Where's the ball? Where's the ball?" And so there are men on the base, Roy is running, the other guys are running. Everybody is scoring and he slides into third safe, and he's winning the game and the game is called because of rain. Well, the next day they have batting practice and the worst batter on the team comes up and on the shoulder he has a patch and the patch is the symbol of a lightning bolt and every single pitch that was thrown at him, he was hitting them out of the park, he's hitting line drives. Everybody is like, "What got into him?" And they're all like, "Lightning bolt." And so the next day everybody on the team had what on their shoulder? Lightning bolt. That team went from last place to first place. Mysticism. You know, it's all about lightning bolt, folks.

You know, it has nothing to do with anything else but the lightning bolt and that is the way, at times, we can see believers living their life. Some experience that they had and their comfort and their confidence is found in the experience instead of the truth of God's word. It's found in, "If I am living holy today according to what I believe is acceptable holiness, then I'm okay today, but, man, next week I was living like I was a child of the devil and I must not be saved today so I've got to go back and do those things that the child of God does." Man, if I believed in bipolar, sorry Joe Tierney, but we're all bipolar, we're like one day we're saved and the next day we're not. One day we're saved, the next

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Believers Beware! The 3 Deadly Errors of False

Teaching – part 2

By Dr. Joe Miller

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date we're not. My goodness, folks, that isn't the way it's supposed to be and I'm not advocating sin at all but what I am advocating is at our worst, his best on the cross takes care of that and we don't perform in order to believe we're saved or to have peace and joy, we are saved because of what Christ did on the cross. But too many of us are living this performance driven Christianity and I'm not saying you're not saved but I am saying this: you are living a Spirit-quenching, very, very depressed and very anxious life because your heart has to be all over the place. Folks, don't steal joy from yourself by buying into this nonsense.

So verse 18, Paul encourages us and urges us and not allow this Gnostic thinking, this mysticism or this legalism to, as Paul said, keep defrauding us of our prize. What is our prize? Christ and Christ crucified and Christ resurrected and Christ returning and our hope, no matter how much we goof and gaff is in that alone. But why are we allowing these other things to tap our joy? Let no one defraud you. Let no one steal you of your prize.

He goes on and he says, even these Gnostics, they present this self-abasement, this idea of false humility. These are individuals that are portrayed as false humility and they delight in their false humility and at the same time, they're also worshipping angels. Wrong. So we've got people walking around, "Look at how humble I am. Are you noticing my righteousness here? Do you see the way that I'm living? I go to church, do you go to church? I listened to MacArthur on the radio today three times. How many times did you listen to MacArthur? What? You listen to Piper?" Good grief, this is false humility but self-abasement and we do that. The only thing that people need to see from us is not our humility, they need to see Christ glorified. If they see our humility after the fact wonderful but they need to see Christ first before they see anything.

And this is where false teachers go and then they start delighting in the worship of angels, verse 18, the worship of angels and this is forbidden. I mean, their thought was, "We can't really get to Jesus because we won't really qualify so we'll start connecting with an angel down here because he's one of those lesser beings and then we'll just work our way up to a higher level of lesser spirits and then eventually we'll earn our way up to a right relationship where we can actually communicate directly with God." Where is that in the Bible? I mean, the Mormons get that, okay, I get it. They're a cult so they embrace that. That is nowhere to be found in Scripture. Christ makes us acceptable. It's because of Christ we have direct communion with God. You don't need to worship angels, in fact, Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 2:5, "There is one mediator between God and men," and who is that? Christ Jesus. Even the Apostle John in Revelation 19:10 was rebuked by an

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angel because he's like, he was brought up into the third heaven probably in spirit, maybe in flesh like Paul, and all of a sudden he sees this angel and he's like bowing down and he's worshipping it and the angel is like, "What are you doing? Get on your feet, brother. My goodness, you don't worship me. There is only one that you worship." Verse 10, "I fell at my feet to worship him, this angel and he said to me, do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God."

Also, those Gnostics and their mystical works-based means of salvation and right relationship with God, they start boasting in the various visions that they have and the things that they've seen and they boast about it with this false humility. "Oh, you know, we've seen things. We're sort of on the inside. You know, the rest of you are up in the cheap seats up there but we have club level right here and we have visions. God gives us visions. We have an inside scoop and you don't." So all these things are focusing on what man should do and what man can possess instead of going back to the Originator, going back to the great gift Giver and that is Christ.

But what does all of this do? What does mysticism do? What does legalism do? Legalism just stokes our pride. Mysticism stokes our pride and here's where this ultimately finds itself going, Benny Hinn states this, quote, "The Lord tells me to tell you," in the mid-90s so he said this probably back in 1980, about 94, 95, no later than that, "God's going to destroy the homosexual community in America but he will not destroy it with what many might have thought him to be, he will destroy it with fire and many will turn and be saved and many will rebel and be destroyed." How is that prophecy working out for us? Or another quote from Mister Benny, quote, "People of God, we must never speak such faith destroying words as these, 'If it be thy will, Lord.' Don't state that for I am him, Jesus, and the word has become flesh in me," Benny Hinn, "and you are little gods." This is where pride and false teaching has the ability to take us.

So at the end of verse 19, Paul says this, he encourages the Colossian believers to hold fast to who? The head. Who is the head? It is Christ. It is Christ's word. It's the promises that he has fulfilled and has available for us in the Gospel. He is all sufficient. Christ is from whom the entire body of Calvary Bible Church is being supplied, it is Christ who holds us together. He is what holds our joints and our ligaments. He is what grows us in all that finds its source in Christ, not in anything that you and I do. I'm sure when Brother Ed was in the waters of the South Pacific and his ship was sunk and had been in the water for hours, if not days, and I'm sure he wasn't clinging to all of his wonderful abilities as the source of any kind of true hope for him. He wasn't telling God, "I'm just so wonderful and great, just watch me survive this. You know, my legs are strong and I can survive

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this. I'm not going down." I'm sure when push came to shove he was clinging to the only thing that he could cling to that had any substance or value or power and it was Christ and the promises of the Gospel. Amen?

Mystical visions, legalistic actions, none of these have the means in which to transform us. The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ is all sufficient. Quote, "Seeing that his divine power is granted to us," what? Some things? "All things pertaining to," what? "Life and godliness." It doesn't mention legalism. It doesn't mention mysticism. It doesn't mention the worship of angels. It mentions Christ. He is the source and if through true knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and excellence, not by our own glory and not by our own excellence, then our final point: beware, do not submit to the commands and teachings of men, and this is a warning against, here's a big word and I'm going to define it for you: asceticism. Asceticism. What is asceticism? It is that third false teaching of the Colossian heretics and it means this: it is the religious philosophy that teaches that depriving a person's physical body of its normal desires is a means of achieving greater holiness and approval from God such as fasting or celibacy or withdrawal from the society like monasticism, like monks that withdraw into caves, abandonment of possessions and even self-flagellation meaning self-whipping. Okay? That somehow those things are going to produce a greater love and commitment, a greater sense of holiness in a person's life. While that might produce a very outward form of righteousness because it's not done for the glory of the Lord, it is an absolute pointless act. It is worthless. There is no value in it.

This is such a man-centered and such a works-based effort and it goes, it is contrary and counter to the Gospel. It steals glory from Christ. It makes the Gospel pointless and we are all back to that works-based self-glorifying action that somehow we're going to hope are going to get us into a right relationship with God. Matthew 4:1-2, even Jesus practiced fasting occasionally. Paul spoke of for a time for prayer and fasting, abstain from sexual relationships, 1 Corinthians 7, beginning in verse 32. But those weren't as a means of somehow showing our approval or aspiring to a higher level of righteousness, it was for the sake of spending time glorifying and pleasing God, not glorifying and pleasing self. And there are many examples throughout church history for the sake of self-glorification people have stopped, abstained in their marital relationships, they have ended sexual relationships, they have walked away from parenthood, they have ignored all the beauty of God's creation, they have even rejected all the things that we need to continue to sustain themselves. It's that self-denying extremism but all that legalism does, folks, and if you get anything, get this, as far as the negative: all that legalism, mysticism and the self-deprivation, the asceticism, all that this will do and believe me, it will only

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increase self-glorification; it will only increase your pride; it will only increase and fuel your fleshly temptations and it will only produce a less joyful, a more self-centered, works-based approach to life. That's all that it will do. It is the great joy tapper.

So verses 20 and 21, "if you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of this word," and he's making a statement, he's assuming that the Colossians are believers. He says, "Look, if you have died to yourself, if you have died with Christ and you have died to the world powers and the powers of this world, if you have died to those things and you are rejecting them, then why as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to these decrees that the Gnostics are telling you to do? They're telling you to don't handle, don't eat, don't touch. Why are you following these things if you have died to all of these things in Christ?" If you have died with Christ because of your union with Christ, then you have experienced that right judicial position with a holy and righteous God because of what Christ did on that cross. You all understand that Christ has fully satisfied all the righteous demands of God for breaking his law. Christ and the Gospel of grace has set you and I free from any obligation to have to come up with some man-made rules that will promote our right position and spiritual maturity. Christ accomplished all those things.

Now, why do we live righteously? Why do we live in obedience to God's word? We do it because we love him. Not because we have to but because we want to and it should become natural. Every day it should be more and more natural. Christ and the Gospel and his grace and the word becomes more of the well from which we drink. It's not the exception. We are no longer about pleasing self and fulfilling all these wonderful idols that somehow we have set up for ourselves. No, it's finding joy in Christ but yet this is what happens. Here are some pictures of people that have found themselves in bondage to this ascetic lifestyle. Father Athanasius Anthony, founder of the Christian monastic order, he never changed his vest or washed his feet. Never. That stinketh. But he was outdone, however, by Simon Stylites, 392-459 A.D., who spent the last 36 years of his life atop a 50 foot pillar. Simon assumed that this was the path to spirituality. He was just laying his body exposed to the elements and as he withdrew from the world and he was exposed to the elements, that somehow that would cause greater and greater spiritual maturity and love for God. No, the Gospel does that. And even Martin Luther, the great Reformer, prior to understanding what true justification by faith, what that means, he nearly wrecked his health through self-denial, denial of food, self whipping. This is all that these legalistic, mystical things will do for us.

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What's amazing is we have people telling us don't handle, don't taste, don't touch, don't go to PG-13 movies. If you walk into the mall, make sure you never walk down the same aisle or that same row where Victoria's Secret is at. And if you go to Red Robin, you'd better be 50 feet away from that bar. And, Dave, I don't ever want to see you at Jackson's ever. I don't care how good the wings are there. You know, we just start generating these self-established views of what is righteous living. Folks, I'm not saying don't live righteously, I'm not saying don't abstain from sin, I'm not saying any of that but what I am saying, I'm going to say it dogmatically: if you are doing those things to somehow either draw attention to yourself or somehow find comfort in the fact that they do but I don't so I must be better and I think they're saved but I must be really saved because I don't do what they do, then you totally don't get it. And if I found out that that's how you were thinking, I would sit down and the first thing I would do is, "Let's not even talk about those things. What's the Gospel? Who is Jesus to you? Do you understand who he is? Do you understand what he has accomplished?" We're going to get that right first and then we're going to show somebody how the Gospel is now going to change your thoughts and your words and the things that you do from things that were self-glorifying to things that are now glorifying to God.

That's what the church is supposed to be doing. Every sermon that you hear from this pulpit, you should be going back to your small group and saying, "How does this lesson today help me fight pornography, fight my addictions, fight my anger, fight my fear, to put those things off permanently and to put on the joys found in Christ?" That's the only purpose of what we do here, to make you brighter lights, more effective in your ministries, living more holy lives that show your great commitment and joy that you find in Christ. Period. If you're here for any other reason, then you're missing Calvary Bible Church, you're missing it. It is not about collecting data, folks. It's about taking that data and applying it. It's like going to a doctor and you give the doctor all your symptoms and he says, "Oh, I know what your problem is. You've got this bacteria. You've got this bug. So this is what we prescribe and start taking this and start doing this." I mean, it's foolish, anyone who goes to the doctor and they know what they need, the doctor gives them the prescription and you don't take the medication? I mean, that's when you just need a V-8. What? What were you thinking? Take the medication. Do what the doctor said. It's going to help you. But how many times do you come to church and you hear these wonderful messages and then you do nothing with it. You don't review it. You don't try to apply it. You go to your small groups and you talk more about Sally, Johnny and homeschooling and the Titans or fishing or hunting or computers, whatever you're thing is, instead of just digging in and saying, "How do we collectively apply this truth so that our light shines a little bit brighter?"

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That's it. That's the only reason. If we're doing it for any other reason, we're missing it because we can fellowship perfectly where? In heaven. We can worship God perfectly where? In heaven. But what we can't do right now is to live lives that are salt and light and have the ability to glorify God in a way in which we live what not just live, but live in order to project the Gospel which is the only good news that leads to redemption of sinful man. If we're not doing that, then we're missing it. And do you know what? Whether anybody comes to Christ because of that, that's not our worry. I can't change someone's heart, I can only point to the one that can. But, folks, I'd better be giving them every day a more compelling reason to consider Christ by the way in which I live and the only way that can become more compelling is by having the one anotherings taking place, that we are encouraging one another to apply these truths in a way that makes Christ more beautiful, more splendorous and more desirable. If we're not doing that, then we're missing it. We're absolutely missing it.

Verse 23, we cannot be this. The appearance of wisdom in self-made religions, self-abasement or false humility and the severe treatment of the body and Paul says, "is of no value against fleshly indulgence." It will only stoke your sins, folks. That's all that it will do.

I want to end with this thought. I believe that anything out of loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength, anything other than that heart attitude is really pointless for a believer because the result will be creating other means in which I can somehow feel confident that at my last breath I'm going to go to heaven. As a result of not finding our love for God complete, we establish legalistic rules and rituals. We start getting mystical. I had a friend of mine say, "Hey, you know, how many times have you been to Israel?" I said, "I've been to Israel a bunch of times." "Oh, man, if I could just go to Israel, I know that would just change my life." Really? So just \$1500 and I fly to Israel and I eat some great fruit and cheese and look at these old artifacts and go to Galilee and I take the boat ride and I dance a Jewish dance and that's what makes me saved? I'm in. If that's it, man, I'm in. El Al all the way, you know, and I'm going to buy the first class ticket. That's mysticism, folks. That stuff will not change your heart. The only power in heaven and on earth is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you this question. Heaven is this, it's a place with no sickness, it's a place where all of my believing friends will be that I had on earth, it's where the food that I love will be even more lovely, more tasty; heaven is going to be a place where all the leisure activities of hunting, fishing, jet skiing, skiing, waterskiing, sitting on the beach in

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Hawaii and getting a tan, that's all going to be there, it's just going to be better, okay? All the natural beauties that I have ever seen from the Grand Canyon to Niagara Falls to any place in Asia or Africa or Europe, it's all going to be there just better. All the physical pleasures and activities that you've ever experienced or tasted, just better. No human conflict. No natural disasters. No disease. That's heaven. What's wrong with that definition? Jesus is not there and, folks, I think too many of us are living in such a way where our salvation is all about getting these things and it's not about worshiping, blessing the Lord, oh our souls, and all that is within me. We get the opportunity for eternity to praise God and yet, unfortunately, I think many of us define heaven without even mentioning Christ. And I agree with J. C. Ryle. J. C. Ryle said this about that description of heaven, he says, "If that's your heaven, then you're not fit for the heaven described in the Bible." It's not going to be a good place for you because heaven is going to be the place where our greatest love and our greatest joy, that's going to be our focus in the things that we eat, the things that we see, the leisure activities we participate in, how we serve him as part of his administration as the local church. But if you're not loving the King and you're not waiting to behold the beauty of his glory, then it's going to be like the job that you hate and you can't wait to get your resume out there because, "I'm done with this place."

So here's a word and it's a good word: if you are not finding the idea of being in heaven and worshiping and praising God as the greatest expression of your joy and anticipation, go back to the Gospel. I'm not saying you're not saved. What I am saying is you may not be but that's between you and the Lord but I am saying it's a really great possibility that you get Christ and what he has done for you as far as the Gospel but you have been so distracted by the things of this world that you have lost your beauty and appreciation for who Christ is, or maybe you never got to that point. Maybe you were never disciplined or you were never taught from the pulpit why this needs to be priority number 1. Preaching should be drawing us to a greater love and appreciation for Christ and his Gospel, not about accumulating knowledge. So preach the Gospel, remember the Gospel, rehearse the Gospel every day. If you need resources to help you, I've got all kinds of resources to help you but we should be doing that every single day.

Let's go ahead and close in prayer.

Father, thank you for an opportunity to just spend an hour rehearsing and reviewing and pondering what is the main thing in a life of a child of God, it is the Gospel. It is the glory of Christ. It is how the Father back in eternity past established a plan to redeem that which would be lost and he would identify us all by name and it would be a specific

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salvation for each of us by name, and that his glory would be revealed for everyone to see through his Son who would come and fulfill all those shadows, all those man-made attempts to somehow be reconciled back to a holy and righteous God, but it was the soma, it was Christ, it was the Son, who came with the priority number 1 to glorify the Father and in return, John 17, "and the Father would find glory in Me." And because the Father and the Son and the Spirit were working in tandem to bring about this glorious redemption which finds its source only in the Triune Godhead, in the Trinity, in the one God, because of what they did, we now have the ability to experience the joy of Christ. And what is the joy of Christ? 1 Peter 1:8 and John 17:13 that, "Father, I came so that they can experience my joy." Father, I have pondered that verse for the last couple months and it is mind-boggling to me. I cannot get my head around what kind of joy does Jesus have just being in communion with you, Father? And Father, what kind of joy do you have just hanging out with your Son? I can't get it. I go blue screen in my head. I cannot understand that, but because I can't understand it, I want to that because it's beyond my comprehension and the joy that I am experiencing right now in Christ is great but I can't imagine the kind of joy that Jesus wants to give me and, Father, that's what I'm pressing for. That's what I'm aspiring to. Not finding the joy of this world enough anymore and satisfying anymore, but finding your joy more and more compelling and one day I will understand as well as others here what it means to experience the same joy that Christ has in the Father. So may that be our heart's desire this week to get back to that sweet spot where the only thing that matters is appreciating the Gospel and loving you and worshiping you more because of what you and you alone have done and that alone will be compelling enough reason for me to stop being impatient, stop being short with my children, stop the issues of the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life because you are compelling enough. Father, thank you for this time of worship here. We give all the glory to you and your Son in whom we pray, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to the teaching ministry of Calvary Bible Church in Joelton, Tennessee. For more information on Calvary Bible Church or for more audio, please visit our website at cbctn.org.

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