

NOTES FROM SAM GORDON'S SERMON June 18th am Series in Colossians "Rooted and built up in Christ" Pt 7 "Freedom in Christ" Text: Colossians 2 verses 16-23 Scripture references from the ESV

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, ^[d] puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

As we saw last week, in the Lord Jesus Christ we are free from the law. There is no happier condition for anyone to be in. We have freedom and liberty because Jesus has snapped every fetter and all the shackles are gone.

These believers in Colossae had found a spiritual home in Christ Jesus but now they were thinking about uprooting and moving to a different religious address. That is a sad state of affairs because all the alternatives to Jesus are based on a tissue of lies from the devil. Paul reminds the believers of the freedom they, and we, have in Christ.

1. **We are free from the shackles of reputation (vv16-17).** There was a lot of emphasis on special diets. Eating and drinking was important to those living under the umbrella of Judaism, as we can read in the guidelines given in **Leviticus 11** (Please read in your Bible). It was an issue in the early church too, as you can read in **Acts chapters 9 and 15**. It was made crystal clear at the Council of Jerusalem that salvation was by faith in Christ alone. The kingdom of God is not all about eating and drinking.

- The kingdom of God means righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- There is more to life than filling your stomach. It is much better to have a full heart!

Then there was the matter of days and dates in the calendar. People were expected to keep these in a very rigid way. The events that Paul outlines in **v16** have their roots in Old Testament history. At that time, they were designed as celebrations of God's activity in history, to be regular reminders of God's sovereignty and salvation. However, with the passage of time, they were hijacked by a vocal minority who twisted them to suit their own devious ends. What matters is not what days or dates we commemorate, but the reason why we treasure them. If we use them to celebrate the goodness and grace of God, that is fine. If we use them from a superstitious angle, that is something very different. One is God centred – the other is man-focussed.

- The motivation factor is of huge importance, and when all is done and dusted, that is something very personal between you and your God.

There are dates that are especially important to us as believers, but they are not a basis for salvation, nor are they a yardstick for measuring spiritual growth. Paul points out that all these issues are **a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (v17)**. A shadow has no substance of its own – the substance is what makes the shadow. Jesus Christ is the substance to which these shadows point. To follow the shadow is to whistle in the wind.

A truly spiritual person is not someone who keeps all the rules.

It is the individual who has a passionate heart relationship with Christ.

2. We are free from the bondage of religion (vv18-19). Paul speaks here of mysticism, defined in the dictionary

as the pursuit of a deeper or higher subjective religious experience. This is a way of looking for truth in all the

wrong ways and places. It is dependent on how I feel or on what sensation I experience on my religious trip. The mystic does not deal with the objective, but with the subjective and it is a pie-in-the-sky road to take. The mystics were telling the

believers that they would miss out if they stuck to what they had been taught, and did not go down the mystic route. Paul is exhorting the true believers not to allow these false teachers to keep defrauding them of their prize. These heretics, wolves in sheep's clothing, assumed the role of spiritual referees and disqualified the believers for not doing things their way. They were talking balderdash!

A man may fall on the Rock, but, thank God, he will never fall off the Rock.

Believers are eternally secure in Christ.

Paul tells us that these shady characters were gloating over their achievements in the mystical world of spirituality. They really believed that they had arrived at a different level in terms of spiritual experience. It was what gave them a buzz and made them the centre of attention. It is a far cry from authentic Christian experience and the doctrine of the cross. If you are genuinely humble, you do not mention it. Your life speaks for itself and you don't need to say anything. These people were stinking with pride.

It gets worse, because we read that they were engaged in the **worship of angels**. This further displays their arrogance. In doing this, they were denying the truth that **there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5)**. Scripture tells us that God bans the worship of angels. He alone is to be worshipped. Jesus himself says **For it is written," 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"** (Matt 4:10)

Angels that surround the throne of God in heaven are deliriously happy to worship him as the Lord of heaven and earth (Read **Isaiah 6** and **Revelation 5** in your Bible). We worship the living God, not angels.

Paul has nothing good to say about these false teachers. He points out that they have lost their connection with the head (v19). This is not a biology lesson! It just reminds us that it is the head that gives life to the body. Once it is severed from the body, the body cannot continue to live. Paul is telling them that all their far-fetched ideas are as dead as dead can be. They have no source to

keep them alive. These individuals are out of step and no longer in touch with Jesus Christ.

If churches are going to flourish, and if believers are to grow, then there has to be that vital connection between every single member of the body and the Head. That is fundamental. If we are linked to Jesus Christ, our head, his divine life will energise the body. He will strengthen us and enable us to function in the way that he intends his church to operate on earth. Paul's advice is simple:

Do not listen to peddlers of error.

Stay close to Jesus and keep plugged in and switched on!

- 3. We are free from the chains of regulations (vv20-23).** Paul warns against those who embrace asceticism as a way of life, living a life of rigorous self-denial. There is nothing wrong with self-denial – what matters is how we go about it and the driving force behind our pursuit.

When a person trusts Jesus as Saviour and Lord, he becomes a brand new creation. In that moment of time when God's grace reaches down into our hearts, we are liberated from the shackles of manmade rules and regulations. According to Paul, if we want to follow asceticism then we are in danger of undermining our faith as we take on board what he calls '**the basic principles of this world.**'

- True believers have died to such a lifestyle, and having died, we need to remember that we have done so

and act according to our status in Christ.

We are a free people who live under the banner of the grace of God.

In these verses (vv20-23) we are given more insights into the arrogance and insolence of the false teachers.

False teaching is transient. It will not last, no matter how tempting it sounds.

Fashions come and go but some things can never be shaken (Hebrews 12:27-28)

This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that

cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

The promises of God and the Word of God, the church of God and the throne of God can never be shaken. However, false teaching will disappear. It is man-centred – based on human commands and teachings. God is side-lined.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is divine in its origin and is a life-changing message. The theories, wild speculations and philosophies that were being promulgated were the product of fallen men and women. They came from people who were living in darkness.

False teachers may have many ideas that look and sound good, but in the real world that has been ruined by the Fall they do not result in changed lives. They lack the power to change sinners from the inside out.

That is the telling factor!

Jesus Christ changes people.

The gospel is the power of God that results in transformed lives.

- It brings people together who have nothing in common but the fact that they are saved sinners.
- It gives the ordinary man in the street a hope for tomorrow and something exciting to live for today.

The truth is that the false teachers are no match for God. They are like broken cisterns that hold no water and are spiritually destitute and dry. Paul says:

Jesus is the answer. Trust alone in him.

We can sing with gusto the old hymn:

**Free from the law – oh happy condition!
Jesus hath bled and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.**