

# Colossians Ch2v16-23 - Satisfied in Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] A new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ.

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen.

They are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belong to the world, do you submit to its rules?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

[ 1 : 12 ] such regulations, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body.

But they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Well, let's ask for God's help.

Let's pray. And we need his help in all that we look at together. So let's do that. Father, again, we thank you so much for your many good gifts to us.

You've blessed us this morning by giving to us musicians and those who are leading us and helping us to sing. You've blessed us by giving us people to be here with us to support and encourage.

And you've given us your word, your truth, written down and preserved for us today so that we can hear what you are saying to the church.

[ 2 : 21 ] So, Lord, give us minds that are open to you. Give us hearts that are tuned to you. And may we learn more of Christ.

And may we learn to understand more what it is to be your people, encouraging one another on to follow Christ. So help us now, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For we all like to be in. We don't like to be out.

We want to be people who are included, not excluded. So you know what it's like if there's a party on or a social gathering and you don't get that invite, you feel hurt.

You feel left out. What's wrong with me? We all like to be in the in club. Well, if you're a Christian, you're in like you never could imagine.

[ 3 : 31 ] But it wasn't always like that. Have a look back at chapter 1 and verse 21. Chapter 1, verse 21.

Once you were alienated from God, that is, you were outside God, God. You were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour, but now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.

We were separated, excluded. We were on the outside. But now through Christ, by his death, we've been brought into a relationship with God.

We are now accepted. We're included. We are inside. And of course, the good news is, everyone, no matter who we are, whoever trusts in Jesus can come in.

Because God is a welcoming God. And no one is beyond God's forgiving embrace. However, it seems that in the church at Colossae, there was a question mark over who was actually in and who was out.

[ 4 : 49 ] And people, it seems, were judging one another and disqualifying one another by certain traditions and by certain experiences.

Now, maybe you have felt that. You've trusted in Jesus. You've experienced God's welcome and forgiveness. But you feel judged and you feel disqualified by other people.

You feel as if you don't quite measure up to other people's standards. Well, not only is that hurtful, it can actually push us away from Christ altogether.

Something, I think, was happening in the church at Colossae. So, if these sorts of things were happening then, well, it can happen today. So, three big things we're going to look at as we look at this text this morning.

Don't let religious tradition judge you. Don't let spiritual experience disqualify you. And don't let the world's views tempt you.

[ 6 : 03 ] So, we're going to look at religious tradition, spiritual experiences, and the world's views. So, here's the first one. Don't let religious tradition judge you.

Look at verse 16. Therefore, because you have been welcomed in by God, because you are in Christ and you have a relationship with God, therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or in regard to religious festivals or a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

Well, tell me, what on earth has the food you eat and the religious festivals you attend got to do with anything? Well, keeping or not keeping these particular traditions was a sign of whether you were in or whether you were out.

And to help us understand this better, we need to go back to the Old Testament. So, keep a finger in Colossians and go back with me to Leviticus chapter 11.

So, the first book in the Bible is Genesis, then it's Exodus, and then it's Leviticus. Leviticus chapter 11, verse 45.

[ 7 : 32 ] I'll just give you a moment to find it there. Leviticus chapter 11, verse 45. And here God is speaking to his people about particular food laws.

What you can eat and what you can't eat. We'll pick it up in verse 45. God says, I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God.

I'm the God who rescued you, who saved you out of Egypt when you were there under the tyranny of Pharaoh. I brought you out to be your God.

Therefore, be holy because I am holy. You belong to me, says God. I'm your God and I want you to be set apart for me.

Well, how would they show that they belong to God and that they were set apart to God? Well, it was all to do with the food they ate.

[ 8 : 43 ] Look at verse 46. These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves in the water so the fish as well and the creatures that move along the ground.

You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten.

And if you go through Leviticus, you'll get a whole long kind of list of certain foods you could eat and certain foods you couldn't eat. Let's go back to Colossians.

Now, all of that may seem very strange and odd and foreign to us, but under the old covenant, the food you ate marked you out as belonging to God.

It was almost a mark of identity. Just as today, if we talk about people who love pasta, they're from Italy, yes? Or people who love rice, they're from China, or, well, those who love their spuds, well, they're the Irish.

[ 9 : 52 ] That's it. So, it may seem strange to us, but this was a mark of identity that you belonged to God. And it was the same when it came to, as we look at verse 16 again, not just food, but what you drank and the religious festivals.

There were certain things you could not drink out of and there were certain festivals you had to participate in. So, the food you ate, the drink you had, the festivals that you attended was a sign to all the other nations around you that we're different.

We belong to God. And if you kept these laws, you were in. But if you broke these rules, you were most definitely out.

Now, the thing about these laws, they were all outward, weren't they? And they were meant to reflect an inward change. However, over time, the outward became more important than the inward. The physical became more important than the spiritual. And so, people began to use these laws as a means of judging one another to see who was in and who was out.

[ 11 : 12 ] Well, there was a word for that kind of attitude and we know it today as legalism. In other words, what counts is your outward performance.

And it seems that in the church at Colossae, people were importing, were bringing in these old laws into the life of the church. And they were saying, look, if you don't follow them, you're out. your performance isn't up to scratch. Now, we today mightn't have any worries about the kind of food we eat or have any troubles about new moon celebrations, whatever they were, but we do have a way of judging people, don't we?

We have our own little traditions that we expect other people to meet. It's called the standard of me. So as long as people meet my standard, well then you're in. But if you don't meet my standard, you're out. So as long as you have the same level of commitment as me, you're in.

[12:27] But if you don't get involved like I do, if you don't attend meetings, if you're not here at ten o'clock in the morning on Sunday helping set up and talk to people, if you don't pray the way I pray, if you don't serve the way I serve, then you're no longer in.

You're out. If your performance doesn't match my performance, well then you're kind of on a lower level to where I'm at.

You see, this outward show can become more important than an inward change. It's called legalism. You see, these legalists that were active in the church with their religious traditions were really missing the point.

Look at verse 17. These laws are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ.

You see, the law that God had given to his people way back in the Old Testament, they were good. They were given by God. They were right. And they were there to help people express their loyalty and devotion to God as reminders every single day when you sat down to have your breakfast, or as you picked up your cup to drink, or the festival that you went to, it was a reminder to say, I belong to God, and I need to live a holy life, a different life.

[14:10] However, all these laws that they had could never actually change the inward heart. And no amount of laws or traditions that we apply to ourselves can change our hearts.

We need something better. We need someone who is greater. Do you see it there in verse 17? The laws, they were shadows.

They were shadows of the reality, or they were shadows of the substance that was to come. So picture with me a dad on a sunny day, outside with his toddler daughter.

There they are playing, and the daughters are way off there in the distance, and behind the dad is the sun shining, shining, and it casts a great big shadow of the dad all the way in front of him.

And he calls for his young daughter to come. She looks up, she can't see because the sun is so bright, but she keeps her head down, she sees the shadow, and she keeps following the shadow until she reaches her dad and embraces him.

[15:27] well, that's exactly the purpose of the law. It's to lead us to Christ. The law is a shadow, not the reality.

The shadow is to lead us to a greater substance, which is Christ himself. You see, legalism is just playing with religious tradition.

It's just grasping at shadows, and well, have you ever tried to grasp a shadow? It's nothing, isn't it? It can't do anything for you.

What we need is to embrace Christ. Look at the end of verse 17. It tells us that the reality is found in Christ.

You see, we're never accepted on the basis of our performance. We are welcomed in and included in by the performance of Christ. You see, Christ is our reality.

[16:34] He's the one who we look to. He's the one we depend upon. He's the one who obeyed the law perfectly for me. But more than that, Christ dealt with my disobedience for me.

He died in my place for me. So as I trust in Christ, he takes on himself my failed performance and gives me his perfect performance.

Or in the words of chapter 1, verse 22, have a look over there with me, chapter 1, verse 22 at the end, he presents you now, because we're trusting in Christ, as holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation.

The law, tradition, can never do that for you. Only Christ can do that. So look, instead of judging others, we need to turn all that around and look inward at our own hearts.

Because Christ is the standard for my life. Not me, and not you. And only Christ can achieve the standard that God has set for us.

[ 17 : 57 ] So as we trust in Christ, we become secure in Christ. we're trusting in his life for me. Which means no one can judge you.

No one can mark you and say, you're now out. Once in, always in. You are secure.

So first, don't let religious tradition judge you. So the second big thing we're going to look at is don't let spiritual experience disqualify you.

So verse 18, do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you.

Well, I have to tell you this. Last night, after fasting and prayer, my goodness Jesus, me, I was just there, and all these angels came around me.

[ 19 : 05 ] It was amazing, and I just got caught up worshipping as I looked around my room. All these angels were there. It was amazing. It was like I was entering into heaven itself.

Cursed you, you should really experience this. Well, you could imagine, couldn't you, how people felt if they never had that kind of experience.

experience. That's what was going on in the church at Colossae. They were made to feel like you were some sort of second rate Christian. I mean, you weren't meant to worship angels.

Worship was for God alone. And those who had these spectacular visions of angels, well, you were in.

But if you didn't have one of these visions, if you weren't caught up with the others, you were most definitely out. They were disqualified. Now, there's a name for all of this kind of visionary stuff.

[ 20 : 14 ] It's called mysticism. In other words, it's all about your personal spiritual experiences that you have.

If you have an experience and it feels right and it's good for you, well, that's okay. Well, don't be fooled by such notions.

Look at the end of verse 18. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen. And they're puffed up. They've got a big head with idle notions by their unspiritual mind.

They just go on and on about these divine encounters that they have, which are nothing more than wild imagination stirred up by their unspiritual minds.

Now, people claim to see all kinds of things today, don't they? All sorts of visions. I know someone who told me that in their church, in the middle of the sermon, the pastor's beard turned into silver.

[ 21 : 26 ] Maybe I should grow a beard. And not only that, but in the middle of the service, they were encouraged to look around and see all the precious jewels that were all scattered on the floor between the people.

Johnny, you must experience this. Well, I asked him, I said, can you pick them up and put them in your pocket? No, he said, you couldn't touch them and, well, the pastor's beard returned to its normal hair and its normal colour.

You see, people say, well, if you've experienced it, well, it must be true. How can you say it's not true? Well, such talk is just another form of mysticism, a personal puffed-up idle notion.

And we need to be careful of these kinds of things. this kind of puffed-up talk is dangerous and damaging. Look at verse 19. They have lost connection with the head.

Now, a body, your physical body, if you don't have a head, you're brown bread, you're dead. Well, Christ is the head and the church is the body.

[ 22 : 50 ] That's what we have here in verse 19. They have lost connection with the head, who is Christ, from whom the whole body, the church, is supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews and grows as God causes it to grow.

So it seems there were those who were going on and on about these wonderful personal experience that they have, but they've actually decapitated themselves. They've become disconnected with the head.

Rather than depending and growing in Christ, they're now delighting in visions and all wrapped up in that. Maybe you know people who claim to have had divine experiences through visions.

They tell you things that they've seen, messages that they've received. Well, if it's just about the experience, if that's the priority and the focus, they're not actually growing, they're dying.

Verse 19, they've lost connection with the head. Rather than being drawn closer to Christ, they are being led away with their idle notions.

[ 24 : 10 ] So it's not our experiences that count, but trusting and walking with Christ who is the reality that counts.

You see, true spirituality is grounded on the fact of what God has done for me. Have a look back at chapter 1 verse 12 as we think about who is qualified, what makes us qualified, chapter 1 verse 12, give joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

How did he qualify us? Verse 13, he rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

You see, we're qualified, aren't we, on the basis of what God has done for us in Christ, not on the basis of my experience or things that I may or may not have seen.

And if God has qualified you, you're in. Nobody can ever say you're out. Now, please don't misunderstand me.

[ 25 : 32 ] I think we should all seek to experience God more and more. But the way we do that is not by idle notions that are unspiritual.

We grow, verse 19, by maintaining our connection to the head. We're in Christ. Our confidence is not in wild notions, but in the revealed word of God that tells us who Christ is and what he has done. This is where our experience is in meeting Christ in his word. So don't let people with their spiritual experiences disqualify you.

It is God who qualifies you once and for all. The third thing, then, is don't let world views tempt you. Now, I want you to imagine with me for a moment. We're going to go back 2,000 years, and here we are. Let's pretend that we're sitting in the church at Colossae. And there's Alexander.

[ 26 : 43 ] He's a member of Colossae Christ Church, but he's struggling. Sitting to his left is Archippus, the legalist, who is pestering him with all kinds of questions.

So, Alexander, what did you have for your breakfast this morning? Sausages? Pork? Oh, well, you can't eat pork, can you? You're not meant to do that. Remember the laws?

And, Alexander, are you going to the Sabbath celebration in the afternoon? It's most important that you're seen to be there. Well, he turned away and looked to his right, and there he was sitting beside Nympha the mystic, who just couldn't help herself.

I mean, she told everybody she'd seen as she'd come in. Let me tell you what I experienced in my prayer time last night. My goodness, all those angels, would you, Alexander, have you ever seen these angels?

Would you like to see them? Well, poor Alexander was just getting confused. He felt judged by the religious group, he didn't fit in there, he was being shunned by them.

[ 27 : 54 ] He felt disqualified by those who had had all these visions and, well, he didn't get on there either, he felt pushed out. He was wondering if he was a Christian at all.

Maybe he thought, I'll just give up and do my own thing. So Alexander stopped going to church and went back to his old life. Well, as he wandered the street, he met a friend from church.

Look at verse 20. Hey, Alexander, since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of the world, why, as though you still belong to the world, Alexander, do you submit to its rules?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch? Why are you going back to the world's way? That's not a solution to the problem you're facing.

Now, do you see in verse 20 that little phrase, the elemental spiritual forces of this world? You might have a note at the very bottom of your Bible which says it can be referred to also as the basic principles of this world.

[ 29 : 11 ] In other words, what it is, it's the current wind of teaching that is most prevalent in the culture that people begin to follow, and it blinds people from the truth of the gospel.

So it seems that Alexander, our imaginary friend, has been listening to the wind of teaching that was happening at the time. And it seems that in the first century the current view was self-denial.

Verse 21, don't handle, don't taste, don't touch, don't do this, don't do that. It was just another way for people to measure who was in and who was out as far as the world was concerned.

Just follow the world's view of your culture and you'll be fine. Well, there was a word for that, and we know it as secularism.

You don't need God. You don't need religious tradition. You don't need spiritual experiences. You just follow your own path.

[ 30 : 25 ] Just do your own thing. Now, back then, it may have been self-denial, don't touch and don't taste, but for us in our age today, it's the complete opposite, isn't it?

It's touch what you like and taste what you like. In other words, as long as you enjoy it and it's good for you, do whatever you like.

That's the message of the world today. It's not self-denial, but self-gratification. It's your life, it's your body, so you just do it. Sounds very appealing, sounds very tempting, doesn't it?

But be careful, verse 22. these rules which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use are based on merely human commands and teachings.

You see, the source of world views, the current wind of teaching that we hear being pushed in social media and everything else, well, where does it all come from?

[ 31 : 39 ] It comes from the thoughts and ideas and speculations of other people just like us. And anything that has its source in humanity will inevitably be selfish.

Live the life you want to live the way you want, because, well, as long as it pleases you and you're happy, that's okay. Well, we need to be careful, because, as they won't tell you, verse 22, they are all destined to perish.

The things that we invest in or encourage to invest in, well, they're all going to pass away. The things of this world that we look to for our comforts, the desires that we chase, it's like the morning mist, it's suddenly there, but one minute it's gone.

Well, one day all these things will be gone. the problem is, these elemental spiritual forces, this teaching that blows through our culture and through our society, blinds us from the truth.

The world views of today are very tempting because it's all about me, and if it's all about me, well, I'm always in, and I'm never out. so what would you say to an Alexander who was drifting from Christ?

[ 33 : 16 ] What do you say to your own hearts today is, as we all, myself included, we feel the pull of the world's views to do our own thing and live our own kind of life?

What do we say to each other? We need to go back to Christ, don't we? verse 20, since you died with Christ, since you trusted in him and put the past behind and trusted Christ to live for him, why would we ever go back to something that never ultimately satisfies?

The things of this world are all temporary, they won't last, they'll perish. Pursue this way of life and we will remain on the outside, not the outside of the world but on the outside of God.

But pursue Christ and you will find all you need in him because his way is always right and best.

The message of the gospel is Christ will satisfy you and fulfil you.

He summarises his whole teaching, look in verse 23. Such regulations, all this teaching that we've been looking at, such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, their harsh treatment of the body, don't taste this, don't do that, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

[ 34 : 57 ] It can't capture your heart in the way of bringing you to God. It can't change you or transform you. Religious tradition, spiritual experiences, worldviews, they can't change us.

What we need is Christ. In Christ we are no longer judged, but we're forgiven. In Christ we're no longer disqualified, but we're welcomed.

In Christ we're no longer disillusioned or disappointed because in Christ we have all that we need. He is in us and we are in him. He alone will satisfy you.

So we don't need to follow the ideas of man. We need to trust in the revealed word about Christ. He is sufficient for you and for me.

So let's not be judged by those who are legalists saying, meet my standard. Don't be disqualified by mystics who say, oh you have to have this experience.

[ 36 : 12 ] And don't be tempted away by secularists who say, it's your life, live as you please. no, we turn to Christ where we have our security and our sufficiency.

Follow him. Let's pray. Amen. our Father God, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you that he is enough and his work is sufficient for us. thank you that he has saved us and rescued us.

Thank you that we have been qualified, that we have been welcomed in and forgiven. Thank you that no one and nothing can ever push us out.

So we pray, Father, help us that we will get alongside one another and that we would continue to support each other, pointing each other to Christ.

[ 37 : 27 ] and not to ourselves. Father, help us that we would never lose connection with the head, but we would grow in him every single day.

