

PM Galatians 6:9

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Preacher: Dr Jenson Lim

[0 : 00] The Bible, two readings. The first is from Philippians chapter 3. Philippians 3 and verses 1 to 11.

! Philippians 3 and verses 1 to 11. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.

[1 : 31] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

We turn over a few pages now to Colossians chapter 2. I've been preaching through Colossians on the occasions when I've been preaching here.

Must be for the past year or so now, I think. Preaching once every six weeks or so. And we've reached now as far as chapter 2, verse 16.

I'm going to read from there to the end of the chapter. 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.

[3 : 25] These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism or worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 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.

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?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. 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.

And we'll look at that passage in Colossians a little later. Let's bow. Well, let us turn now to the Word of God and to that passage we read in Colossians 2, beginning at verse 16.

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.

[5 : 28] One of the complaints that people sometimes make against the church is that it's all rules and regulations.

Do this, don't do that. And if they don't keep to the rules, people think that they will be judged for it. Whether that is fair or not, I don't know. But that's what people say. It certainly seems to have been a problem in Colossae.

For some people at Colossae, rules and regulations had become very, very important. And they were judging others according to their own rules.

Now this is really a form of self-righteousness. Keeping rules makes us feel righteous, especially if other people don't, because then we can feel that we're better than them.

[6 : 48] At best, it is a distortion of the Christian faith. Wonky Christianity, as I said to the children.

At worst, it is a denial of the Christian faith, because it is a form of salvation by works.

Paul's answer here is, quite simply, to point them back to Christ. Christianity is not about keeping the rules.

It is about relying on Christ. Not rules, but Christ. That, very simply, is Paul's message here.

I'm going to divide the passage into three parts. Misunderstanding the God-given rules of the Old Testament, in verses 16 and 17.

[7 : 57] Imposing man-made rules, of our own, in verses 18 and 19. And then, the danger and uselessness, of all self-made religion, in verses 20 to 23.

I don't want to be negative, though, about it. I hope that as we look at these matters, it will refresh our own vision of real Christianity.

So, firstly, they were misunderstanding Old Testament rules. verses 16 and 17. Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food, on drink, or with regard to a festival, or a new moon, or a Sabbath.

These are a shadow of the things to come. But the substance belongs to Christ. The word, therefore, links it with the previous passage, where he has just spoken of what Christ has done for us, dying for us, on the cross.

He has just explained how circumcision is no longer necessary, because we are spiritually circumcised in Christ.

[9 : 27] And now he moves on to these other rituals in the law of Moses. There were, it seems, some, in Colossae, maybe Jews, maybe Jewish converts, who were clinging on to the old Jewish rituals, and judging those who refused to do so.

Now, this was not a minor issue to Paul. Paul was writing this letter, remember, in prison in Rome. Why was he in prison?

Well, because of a riot in Jerusalem when the Jews had accused him of teaching everywhere against the law. In other words, he had ended up in prison precisely over this issue of whether Christians had to keep the Old Testament rituals.

Now, the laws in question here were probably the Old Testament laws about clean and unclean foods in Leviticus 16 and about the various festivals and Sabbaths in Leviticus 23.

Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles. He is not saying here that all Old Testament laws have been done away with or that there are no rules that we have to keep.

[11 : 15] The law of Moses is often divided into three parts, the moral law, the ritual law, and the civil law. The moral law, summed up in the Ten Commandments still applies today.

It is the ritual law that we have in view here. When he speaks of a Sabbath, it seems to me unlikely that he means the Sabbath as in the Ten Commandments.

He may be speaking of the various extra days of rest during the festivals, or of the many extra laws in the Old Testament about the Sabbath, not kindling fires and not carrying burdens and so on, which the Pharisees had corrupted over the years, and Paul himself would know all about that.

Jesus himself had protested against these corruptions of the law. Or it may have been the issue of the seventh day Sabbath in the Old Testament versus the first day Sabbath in the New.

Now, all of these Old Testament laws were originally God-given good. But these Colossians had misunderstood them.

[12 : 58] They'd missed the point. All of these rituals were meant to point us to Christ. Christ had now come and fulfilled the law, and therefore there was no more need for any of these rituals.

Paul speaks of them here as shadows in verse 17. These are the shadows of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Why settle for the shadow if you can have the reality? Imagine if I offered you a shadow of your house instead of your actual house, or the shadow of your wife or your husband, instead of the actual person, or a row of shadows instead of your children.

Would you be happy with that? Of course not. Then why settle for rituals now that Christ has come? Why dwell in the shadows when the light of the world has appeared?

Now you might say this is a problem from long ago of no relevance today. Well, it's still relevant among the Jews.

[14 : 26] Orthodox Jews will still insist on kosher food and all kinds of rules about the Sabbath. It's still relevant among Muslims.

Muslims. I went into a cafe recently and had a delicious cheese and ham omelette. And the girl who served me said she had never had a cheese and ham omelette because it was against her religion. She was a Muslim, of course, and couldn't eat pork. even in Christianity. I hope I'm not treading on any toes here, but in some churches it seems to be all about ritual.

I've been in churches where it's so important to have the right robes on the priests and to process in the right direction and to make the right signs and so on.

What's that but reviving ritualism in place of reality? And we always need to look in on ourselves.

[15 : 45] Maybe we have our own free church rituals. Who knows? Often we can't see ourselves, can we? We need others to point it out to us.

It's ten times worse when we judge one another over these matters. Jesus said, judge not that you be not judged. Let me repeat, I'm not saying that all rules are unnecessary.

The Ten Commandments are absolutely necessary. but Christ has done away with the rituals of the past.

Focus on him. That's the message. Not on the rituals of the past but on the reality of Christ.

Secondly, they were imposing rules of their own regarding asceticism and the worship of angels. angels. Verses 18 and 19. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 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.

[17 : 12] God. asceticism is defined in the dictionary as extreme self-discipline.

Now the Bible encourages us to be disciplined in our lives regarding food and drink and sleep and so on. We're warned against gluttony eating more than we should.

Maybe I need to learn a lesson from that myself. We're warned against drunkenness, drinking too much wine. We're warned even against sleeping the day away.

There is also a place for fasting in the Christian life. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, I discipline my body and keep it under control. The problem is when it's taken to extremes, as if it was some kind of virtue in itself to deprive ourselves of any kind of pleasure and to make our bodies suffer.

This was a problem in Colossae and it has been a problem ever since. Paul warns us in 1 Timothy 4 that in the latter days some will give heed to what he calls doctrines of demons, forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanks.

[19 : 00] Historically you can read about monks and hermits taking vows of celibacy, eating just a few morsels of bread a day, sleeping on the bare earth.

You wonder, haven't they read this passage? And even today there seem to be some who think depriving yourself of every comfort and pleasure is a virtue.

Paul's concern is not just that they were doing this, but they were judging others for not doing it.

They'd invented rules, not just for themselves, but for everyone.

Let no one disqualify you, he says. If the Bible doesn't require it, you don't have to do it. Worship of angels is even more exotic.

Angels are important in scripture. they're mentioned about 300 times. They're messengers of God. They're glorious beings, but they're not to be worshipped.

[20 : 15] When John is about to worship an angel in the revelation, the angel says to him, you must not do that. Worship God.

But these people in Colossae were worshipping angels and insisting that others should do so as well. Now this possibly has its roots in Jewish mysticism, which lay a great emphasis on angels. Possibly the visions that Paul refers to were visions of angels. Paul, who had real visions, dismisses that as nonsense.

Paul's answer once again is Christ. Instead of relying on their own self-discipline or angels or visions, they should rely on Christ.

Christ is the Lord of angels with authority over them. It says in Hebrews, let all the angels worship him. He's also the head of the church, and all spiritual life flows from him.

[21 : 26] He's already said that back in chapter 1 verse 18. He is the head of the body, the church. Here he goes further. Life flows down from the head so that the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows spiritually with the growth that is from God.

Any other kind of growth is worthless. The only growth worth having is the growth that comes from God. hold fast to Christ, therefore.

Let his life flow into you, and you will grow. These man-made rules achieve nothing. What matters is a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now again, we may ask, well, does this have any relevance today? Well, I don't know of anyone who worships angels. But the worship of Mary and the worship of the saints, that still happens, doesn't it?

And there are certainly people today who rely on their own visions. We need to remember where true growth comes from. We need to hold fast to Christ alone.

[22 : 50] Finally, Paul warns us of the danger and uselessness of all self-made religion. Verses 20 to 23. Begins with reasoning with us.

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, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they're used, according to human precepts and teachings.

Now, Paul's assumption here that we are dead might come as a surprise to anyone who isn't familiar with Paul's teaching.

But these Colossians should have understood. The Christian is united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

He's just said in verse 12, we have been buried with him in baptism. Dead and buried. He'll say again in chapter 3, verse 3, you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[24 : 02] He explains it more fully in Romans 6. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Here, the emphasis is on dying to the world. As he says in Galatians 6.14, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

This whole religion of rules and regulations is basically worldly. Ask a worldly person who doesn't know Christ to invent a religion and this is what they'll come up with, a whole long list of rules and regulations.

But we do know Christ. We've been delivered from all that. Why go back to it? Paul, the ex-Pharisee, must have felt this very keenly.

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. That was the religion of the Pharisees. And he'd spent years living like that. Don't handle that pot.

[25 : 25] It's been touched by a Gentile. Don't taste that stew. It's got unclean meat in it. Don't touch that leper. You'll be unclean.

Paul understood now that salvation is not through keeping rules like that, but by trusting in Christ who died for our sins and rose again.

Relying on rules and regulations is dangerous because it diverts you away from Christ. It substitutes an imaginary salvation for the real one.

But it is also useless. As Paul makes clear in verse 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.

You might suppose that extreme self-discipline would make a person more holy. But Paul says no. it doesn't work like that.

[26 : 39] And there are many who can testify to that from experience. In the fourth century there was a group of men known as the desert fathers. They lived out in the deserts of Egypt thinking that they could escape there from the temptations of the world.

And the church regarded them as heroes and treasured their sayings. Well, read their sayings. And you'll discover that they didn't escape.

You'll discover that the lusts of the flesh were still raging within them. Holiness, you see, is a work of the spirit, not of the flesh.

We need to be changed from within. The scripture says, I will give them a new heart and a new spirit. dealing with sin is like dealing with weeds.

We have a problem with weeds on our driveway. There are strong weed killers that you can buy to get rid of them. Or you can patiently scrape them out one by one.

[27 : 50] Or there's various things like salt and vinegar which are said to kill them off. these are known methods of dealing with weeds.

They work. But suppose I decide to ignore all of that and do my own thing. I'm going to take just a bowl of water out of the tap and I'm going to splash them on the weeds.

And that's going to kill them, isn't it? Well, of course, no. It will do nothing. that's how it is here with all these ascetic practices.

It will do nothing to deal with the weeds of sin. You need the Holy Spirit to clear away the weeds of sin. Man-made rules quite simply won't do it.

And the Holy Spirit, of course, comes from Christ. Everything here points us back to Christ. He alone saves His people. He sanctifies them.

[28 : 55] We need to be 100% focused on Christ. Paul gives his own testimony of this in Philippians 3, which we read earlier. Describes his own past there as the supreme rule keeper.

Circumcised the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal of persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

So Paul had kept the rules. And it got him nowhere. But now he had met Christ. And now his attitude is completely different.

Now all he wants is the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God that depends on faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings being made like Him in His death.

That's his aim. To be in Christ, to be like Christ. Is that your aim too? When people say Christianity is all rules and regulations, they have misunderstood it completely.

[30 : 18] Rules and regulations have their place, certainly. Our God is a God of order. But the heart of our religion, the heart of all true religion, as opposed to all self-made religion, is Christ.

If today you're relying on self-made religion, whether it's rituals, or whether it's your own efforts to live a righteous life, turn away from these things.

They will get you nowhere. Turn to Christ, who alone is willing and able and ready to save you.

Self-made religion aims only at our own glory, and it fails to achieve it. true religion aims at the glory of Christ.

May Christ be glorified in all of us. Amen.