

Seek the Things Above

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[0 : 00] Well, happy Easter, everyone. Now, why is it that only the morning people respond to my exhortation?

So you guys are the toughest crowd here. The 8amers get more rowdy than you guys do, so I might want to work on that. It's Easter. Jesus has risen. If I was old school Anglican, I would say, Jesus has risen.

Works better when Paul does it. Obviously, I'm going to talk about the resurrection of Jesus tonight. I'm going to talk about it in a different kind of way, though, because we know that the resurrection of Jesus has brought us salvation. It's saved us from our sins. It saves us from the devil, from hell, from condemnation.

And tonight I'm going to talk about how it saves us from religion, rules, regulations, legalism, that's what I'm going to talk about.

[1 : 03] That as Christians, we're set free from religion, rules, and regulations. So if you came here tonight and you're a twice a year kind of guy and you come for Easter and Christmas to tick off a box, to do the religious thing, I hope you'll come out of here changed to see that Christianity, belief in Jesus, means wholehearted obedience in all of life.

It means new life. You're going to hear me say that a lot tonight. Being a Christian means being reborn, means having a new life. You're a new creation if you're a Christian.

I'm going to divide this passage up tonight into three different chunks. Normally I like to go just verse by verse through the passage.

I thought I'd just chunk it tonight in three different, and I've sort of got three different points out of this. So the first point is going to be about redemption versus religion or liberty versus legalism, how we're set free from religion and legalism in Christ.

Next I'm going to talk about how it is that we're supposed to live as Christians, as new creations, and then we're going to talk about what kind of person you need to be for Jesus to love you, what kind of person you need to be to be a Christian.

[2 : 20] What's the kind of people that Jesus loves most? So we'll do that in just a sec. Before we do that, I'd really like to pray for us, that God would be with us as we hear from his word.

So let's bow our heads. Dear Lord, we do thank you so much for your resurrection. We thank you so much for the Easter message, that you would die on a cross for us, that you would be raised for our salvation.

We thank you so much that you came to set us free from sin, set us free from Satan, to set us free from hell and condemnation, and also to set us free from endless rules and regulations and religion. Please be with us now. Help me to speak really clearly. I pray that these people here will come away from this changed.

The people who don't believe in you will become Christians. And those of us who are Christians will be encouraged to go on living the life that you've set before us. I pray this in Jesus' name.

[3 : 25] Amen. So just before we get into the passage, I want to look at a little bit of background in this book to the Colossians. So if you've got a Bible in front of you, I want you to keep it open and come through the passage with me.

The background, if you were here last week, you would have heard Chris preach on the chapter before this. And he touched on the fact that Paul had written this letter to a group of people, of believers, a church, the Colossians.

And these people tended to have a sort of inclination or a tendency towards religion, towards rules and regulations. And there was a particular group of people, false teachers in that church, who had come in saying, you've got to do this, this, this, this.

Yeah, you're saved by Jesus, but you need to do all this stuff as well just to kind of, you know, make sure that God loves you or make sure you get to heaven or whatever. And so in verses of chapter 2, verses 20 to 23, we read this.

Paul says to them, if with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? Why do you submit to regulations?

[4 : 32] Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. All these regulations refer to things that perish with use. They are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.

Paul is saying to them, you've been saved by Jesus. You've been saved by grace. There's no need to add on top of that these rules and regulations.

You've been set free from all of that. So the question has to be asked, if I'm so against religion, if this whole talk is about being set free from religion and rules and regulations, what's wrong with religion?

What's wrong with rules and regulations? I'll tell you a few things. Religion is about what we can do to make God love us more or to make God love us in the first place.

Religion is all about me. What I can do. That I might be able to do this, this, and this, and then maybe God will love me. Legalism is about what I can do to be a super Christian.

[5 : 55] How many boxes can I tick? Often it's man-made stuff. Traditions. And what religion does is it ends up doing two things.

It either makes us arrogant or it makes us despair. Either we do all these things, don't drink, don't smoke, don't swear, you know, tuck my shirt in every day.

We do all these things that we somehow think makes us better Christians and it puffs us up, makes us arrogant. It turns us into an arrogant jerk.

Or it makes us despair. We can't do it. I can't keep ticking these boxes. I'll never be able to do all these things that I'm supposed to do.

I'll never live up to the, you know, the level that I'm supposed to attain. And so it either makes us arrogant or it makes us despair. That's what religion does.

[7 : 03] It's all about us. Whereas the gospel is all about Jesus. It's all about what we can do.

Whereas the gospel is about what Jesus has done for us.

When Jesus died on the cross and was raised to new life, as we remember this Easter, he accomplished it all for us. See, religion sees two types of people.

It sees good people and bad people. Right? And if you do this certain amount of stuff, if you tick these boxes, if you act in this certain way, then you're a good person.

You're going to heaven. At least you're better than that other guy who's behind you in the line.

You're kind of moving on up and he, you know, if it's out of you two, you'll get to go to heaven. He definitely won't make it because he's one of the bad guys.

That's what religion says. The gospel tells us that there's perfect people and imperfect people. And there's only ever been one perfect person and that was Jesus.

[8 : 04] The rest of us who have ever lived, everyone in this room, is an imperfect sinner in need of God's help. Completely helpless, needing God to help us.

religion makes us puffed up and arrogant or despair. The gospel gives us humble confidence in what God can do.

We're humble. We know that we're sinners. We know that Christ has done the work. We know that there's nothing we can do that's all a gift from God. But we're confident because Jesus Christ conquered sin.

He conquered Satan. He conquered death. And so we're confident in what he can do for us. See it in verse 1-4.

Let's read it together. Remembering that religion is all about what we can do on this earth. What we can do. How we can work. Paul says, So if you have been raised with Christ, see the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[9 : 17] Set your minds on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

These people have been told that they've got to tick the boxes. They've got to fulfill all these regulations and rules and live up to a certain standard.

And it's all based on earthly ladder climbing. And Paul comes in and says, You've been saved by grace. Get your mind focused on Jesus who is in heaven.

Get your mind focused on heavenly things. Have a heavenly perspective. Stop trying to climb the ladder to heaven and focus on Jesus who is in heaven. And when he comes, when he returns, you too will be with him because of what he's done.

Notice the sequence here. There's a sequence he says. It's kind of past, past, present, present, future.

[10 : 35] In verse 3 and 4. He says, For you have died. That's the past. You've died. Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

That's present. You're secure with Christ in God. And Christ is your life. When he's revealed, you also will be revealed with him. So you need to know that when you became a Christian, what Paul is saying, and he says this repeatedly, in some sense, you died with Christ when you became a Christian.

Just as Christ died on the cross and was raised to new life, in some sense, you died. You died to sin. You died to your old life, to your old ways. And then he says, in the present, you're hidden with Christ.

Not that we are hidden from other people or that we hide our faith, but that we are secure with him, that he keeps us safe with him. And then in the future, when he returns, as he is revealed, so we will be with him in glory.

He said in Romans, I think, Romans 6, you'll notice Paul does this quite a bit. Romans 6, 5, for if we have been united with him in a death like this, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like this.

[11 : 50] We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. So it's all about us being in a certain state before God, before we're Christians, in need of his help.

Then when we confess him as Lord, when he saves us, when his work on the cross is attributed to us, we die with him. Not a physical death, but our old self is crucified.

We're given a new life. We're made a new creation. He'll talk more about that in a minute. Religion is what we do on earth.

Faith in Jesus is about what he has done for us on the cross. rules. Now, if all of this is true, if Christianity isn't about rules and regulations, if it's not about meeting a certain standard, if it's not about speaking in a certain way and living in a certain narrow way that fits in with Christian culture, then I'm going to really have to earn my money in the next section because Paul kind of throws a curveball and gives us a list of what appears to be rules.

He's making it hard for me. Check it out with me in verse 5 to 7. He says, So what's he saying here?

[13 : 44] He seems to be saying contradictory things. He's told us not to be absorbed in earthly traditions, rules and regulations. And now he's given us a list of things that he doesn't want us to do.

See, many of you probably would have been quite happy if I had to finish the sermon at the end of the last point and you could have gone out from here and said, that's great, John has just told us we can do whatever we want to do. There's no rules and regulations.

If I'm a Christian, I can just sin up a storm because Jesus has died for me and I'm free. There's no religious hold on me. I don't need to tick the boxes.

That would be great. Maybe. That's not what Paul says, is it? So how is it that he can say you're free from regulations and then give us a list of what might be construed as regulations for Christians?

Christians? Well, the first thing to notice is that this isn't actually a list of rules. He's not giving us a list of rules here and you'll see another list coming up soon about anger and wrath and malice.

[14 : 52] He's not giving us another list of rules. He's just told us that it's pointless following rules and regulations. And in many of your Bibles, the most popular translation in Australia, everyone's got one.

I won't mention it. But the heading to this section is called rules for holy living. And I just hate it. Why did you have to say rules for holy living? Even in our Bibles, the next bit is rules for Christian households.

Could you just think of another word? Remember, the titles in your Bible are not given by God. They're not the infallible word of God like the rest of the Bible. They're titles given by the editors to help us and quite often they're helpful, but sometimes they just screw it up. And so here they've said, in some translations, rules for holy living. I don't think there are a list of rules for us.

I think what Paul is saying, I think he's making an if-then statement. I want you to think about this. You'll notice this happens right throughout his letters and right throughout the Bible.

[15 : 55] He's saying, if it's true that you have died with Christ and been raised with Christ, if you are a new creation in Christ, if you've put your faith in Christ, if that's true, then this is how you should live.

You shouldn't live like you used to before you knew what it was to sin, before you knew who Christ was, before you were given a new heart, before you were given the Holy Spirit.

You should live in a new way. Your life should be changed. The way that you live should change. And many of you have experienced this.

I know many of you were saved, laid on in life. And you can see the difference between your life before God gave you his Holy Spirit, before God reached down and saved you from death, and your life afterwards.

And he's given you new desires and a new heart and a new hope. And that's what Paul is talking about here. He says it in verse, most acutely in verse 9, second half and 10.

[17 : 12] He says, don't do all these things, don't do this list of things, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourself with the new self, which has been renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

That when you are saved, God clothed you. That's a great metaphor, isn't it? He clothed you with a new self. Gave you new desires.

And that should inform the way that you live now. Not a list of rules, not a list of regulations, but a whole new creation. This is much bigger.

Remember Jesus? He kind of upped the bar. He said, not only do you it's not about keeping laws, it's about your heart. It's not enough not to commit adultery.

You shouldn't even think lustful thoughts. This is kind of the same thing. It's not just about rules and regulations. It's about a whole new way of living. See it in Ephesians 2 8-10.

[18 : 30] I love this verse. This illustrates it maybe even better than our verse. Ephesians 2 8-10. He says, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast. So you've been saved by grace. It's not what you've done. It's not religion. It's not rules. It's not regulations. God has done it. It's a gift. And then the next, very next verse, for we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

That's exactly what he's saying here. That God has done the work to save you. You don't need to do it. That it's God who keeps you safe as a Christian, hidden in Christ.

You don't have to tick all the boxes. But that he has given you a new life to live with new desires, a new way of living.

[19 : 30] I've preached this before to youth. And it's funny. I can see the parents coming to me afterwards.

They got me in their sights. It's normally parents of youth. And I've had parents up in arms that I've taught this. It doesn't matter if it came from the Bible. They're up in arms because if you tell youth, if I tell you guys that it's not about religion, it's not about doing these things.

If it's not about rules, then you're just going to go out and just tear up the town. You know, before you know it, you'll be pregnant, you'll be drinking all day, smoking up a storm.

My response always is, is that really what would happen? If we freed our youth, if we freed ourselves from rules and regulations and religion, would we really just go crazy?

Would a Christian really do that? I don't think so. Could someone who truly understands what Jesus did for them on this cross at Easter, could someone who's seen Jesus on the cross dying for their sins, for their sins, for our sins, God's?

[20 : 59] So for someone who's put their faith in him, could they see all that and believe all that and then go out and sin all the more? Would you guys do that?

Would you guys who believe and confess that you're Christians really do that? I don't think so. God's faith in God. Because you understand what a gift it is that God has given you, this faith. And you understand what Jesus did on the cross for you in dying for your sins, not just the pain and the suffering that we see on the passion movie, not just the blood and the gore, but the separation from the Father, the wrath poured out upon him, condemnation, taking the punishment that we deserve.

You can't believe that that's true and then go out and sin blindly because of Christian liberty. And I don't believe that you will after you hear this message.

I believe if you're a Christian, you will glory in the fact that Jesus has died for you and that you don't have to do anything to earn his love. Isn't that a sick thought?

[22 : 09] That you need to do something to make God love you? As if God just hates everyone and you've got to do certain things to make him love you. That's just sick. Imagine if that was how it was with my wife.

I just, default mechanism was to hate her and then if she did the right thing, kind of things that I like her doing, like ironing my stuff and making my meals and cleaning up after me and pretty much doing everything in the house.

If she didn't do that, wouldn't it be sick if I just hated her because she didn't do what I wanted her to do to please me? God's not like that.

He loves us. While we are yet sinners, Christ died for us. God loves us even before we become Christians, even before we come to follow Jesus.

It's my wife's birthday today and I just look to her in the eyes. I love doing this and I say, who am I? And she says, you're my husband. And I say, and what do I do?

[23 : 14] And she says, you love me all the heart all the time. And I get all misty. And that's how, that's a poor representation of what God does to us.

He loves us despite who we are. We don't need to force his hand for him to love us. Let's look at verse 7 to 10.

It says, now you must get rid of all such things, anger, wrath, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourself with new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

You're a new self. If you're a Christian here today, do you believe that? You're a new creation.

That's not how we experience things all the time, is it?

[24 : 22] Our past, our dark past, our sinful past haunts us. I know it does for me. I say this as someone who hasn't been pure my whole life.

That I've lived sinfully, very sinfully, without remorse, for a big chunk of my life. I know that these things can follow us around, but Paul tells us an incredible truth here.

If you're a Christian, you're a new creation. That old self, haunted by sin, dirty, dark, stained, that's gone. It's been cast off and you've been given a new self, clothed with a new self.

Which means two things. We're no longer defined by our sin and we're no longer confined by our sin. By that I mean we're no longer defined by our sin.

That's not who we are. We're not sinners in need of redemption. We are sinners who have been redeemed. We are new creations. And we're not confined by our sin.

[25 : 31] We're not trapped by it. We've been set free. Christianity is all about freedom. We've been set free by Jesus.

New creations. Sure, there's still consequences for our sin and our past sin. If before you became a Christian, you know, you used to smoke up a storm like I used to do and you got cancer, by becoming a Christian, it doesn't get rid of the cancer.

Do you get the point? The consequences are still there, but the condemnation is gone. The condemnation is gone.

Not because you ticked a few boxes, but because you put your faith in Jesus, who is able to save, mighty to save.

Praise the Lord. I want to look at the last verse, the last point. What kind of person does Jesus love most? What kind of person best suits the Christian life?

[26 : 39] What kind of person do you need to become before you can become a Christian? Verse 11 says, What kind of person do you have to be for Jesus to love you?

Anyone? Any kind of person? Any kind of person? That's what this means. There's no Greek and no Jew. It means racial distinctives don't matter to God.

It doesn't matter what race you are. Circumcised and uncircumcised. It doesn't matter what tradition you've come from. What kind of background do you have? Barbarian and Scythian.

It doesn't matter what kind of social context you're coming from. Barbarians didn't know Greek. Weren't too bright. Scythians were just scum of the earth. You know, low socioeconomic status. No one thought that they could be included in any kind of religion because they wouldn't understand. Slave and free. Same thing. Slaves at the bottom. Some free.

[27 : 56] It could be anyone. It could be a king. What Paul says here is that it doesn't matter who you are. These distinctives don't even exist when it comes to salvation.

The great thing is that they do exist in the church. There are distinctives. And God meant there to be distinctives in the church. But it doesn't determine whether you're saved or not. What kind of person do you need to be to be a Christian?

What kind of person do you need to be to give your life to Jesus tonight? It can be any kind of person. The sad thing is, is the church sometimes looks very monocultural, doesn't it?

Let's just be honest. There are some churches, if you walk in with a shirt untucked, they're kind of wondering whether you're a Christian or not. You know what I mean? Some churches have a very narrow scope, economic scope or social scope.

Maybe you're here tonight and you're not a Christian and you only come to church once or twice a year because you just don't think you fit in. Maybe you like working on cars and actually getting dirt under your fingernails and swinging a hammer every now and again.

[29 : 14] Maybe you like chainsaws and you just feel like you cannot fit into a church. Because it's all filled with mummy's boys wearing pastoral colours.

I praise God that this is a kind of masculine looking church, by the way. This is a good church.

A lot of dark wood and stone and there's no pink. Very few flowers apart from the cross today. Do you know what I'm getting at?

If you're here tonight and you feel like you just don't fit into church, don't let that be a hindrance to you coming to Christ tonight. Don't feel like you've got to be a certain kind of cultured person to be a Christian.

Church should be full of every different kind of person there is. Because Christ accepts every kind of person there is. If you're here tonight and you're not a Christian, I want you to know that you don't have to work to get God to love you.

[30 : 25] And then when you become a Christian, you don't have to tick this many boxes. You don't have to wear this certain kind of clothing. You don't have to speak in a certain way to be a Christian.

Being a Christian doesn't save you. Jesus saves you. And he'll save you tonight. If you come to him now and you say to him, I know what you did on the cross.

I know that you were raised to new life for my salvation. I know that you can deliver me from my sins.

If you come to him, he promises to invite you in. He promises to grant you salvation. And as this passage says, when he is revealed, when he comes again, you will be with him.

You'll be revealed with him and you will live with him and us for eternity in heaven. No works, no tradition, no rules, no regulations, no legalism, just Jesus.

[31 : 32] I want to leave you with him and us for eternity in heaven. I want to leave you with that thought. I'd like to pray for us before I finish. Lord, on this day, we do thank you once again for the cross.

I pray that it wouldn't be a once per year act. That we would only thank you once a year for the cross.

But that we would thank you every day for dying and for being raised. Lord, that our sins might be forgiven.

And that you might be able to grant us salvation. That you will grant us salvation. Lord, many of us are coming here tonight dark and stained, feeling dirty, dragged down by our sin.

I pray that we would know that if we put our faith in you, sin doesn't need to define us. It doesn't need to confine us or trap us. But that we can be set free from that.

[32 : 46] I pray for those of us who have been brought up to think that we need to be a certain person. That we need to do certain things before you love us. Help us to know that you loved us before we did anything.

And that you died even for your enemies. Jesus, please encourage us Christians away from ticking boxes, meeting regulations, living in the narrow Christian cultural mould.

Please rather encourage us to live new lives, as new creations. living holy lives that please you, because we acknowledge what you did for us. I pray all these things for Jesus' sake, our great God and King.

Amen.