

The Gospel's Freedom
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Colossians 2:16-23

Opening: When it comes time to board a plane, do you resent those “first class” and “Delta diamond medallion” flyers that have “status?” *“It must be nice to get to walk right past the common flyers. It must really be nice to get to sit in the comfy seats with special perks and treats.”* Then they call “Sky priority” and I feel a little smug as I stroll past the mere mortals waiting to board last. Question: What do the “first class” flyers and the person sitting in the back by the lavatory ALL have in common? If we got on that plane, we’re all arriving at the destination. Now, some enjoyed more comfort and “rewards” while others had to gate check their bag because the bins were full, but everyone got to the destination. What does that have to do with salvation and freedom in Christ? We’ll see that in this text.

So far in Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae we’ve learned several things:

- Christ deserves first place in the lives of His followers; He is “preeminent.”
- We can be transformed if Christ’s Spirit lives in us; He is “sufficient.”
- Last week: Jesus makes us a new person, gives us a new life, forgives every sin past, present, and future, paid our sin debt giving us freedom, and gives us victory over sin and death. When we consider what Jesus has done for us, we will love Him more and want to be more like Him.

In verse sixteen of chapter two Paul warned, *“Don’t let anyone (false teachers or Pharisees) make you think you have to earn salvation that Jesus paid for.”*

Every week I try to boil the point of the passage down to a concise statement I call “the truth that should change us.” This week I have three statements:

- Salvation isn’t about what we DO or DON’T DO. Jesus accomplished salvation for us, and no one can UNDO what He did on the cross.

- Nothing we DO can make Him love us more, but there is MUCH we CAN DO to make US love, trust, and obey HIM MORE!
- Therefore, we can rest in Him for our salvation and live based on His commands, NOT the opinions of people. That's "freedom in Christ."

Colossians 2:16–23 (NLT) — 16 So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. **17** For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality. **18** Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, **19** and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. **20** You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, **21** "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? **22** Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. **23** These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.

- The false teachers in Colossae were insisting that salvation required more than just trusting in Jesus; their formula was Jesus PLUS some rules. Paul indicates the rules and regulations they were promoting were things like restrictions on food and drink you shouldn't eat, strictly celebrating the Sabbath and other special days, denying yourself comfort and pleasure (asceticism), and worshiping angels as a pathway to God.
- The word "legalism" isn't in scripture, but people are familiar with it.
- *"Legalism - A doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth. Legalists believe in and demand a strict literal adherence to rules and regulations. Doctrinally, it is a position essentially opposed to grace."*

- Sadly, people who are not “religious” believe “religion” is just about rules and regulations or dos and don’ts that will “cramp your style.”
- What’s worse is some truly saved people have a similar belief that being saved means you have to keep a set of rules and regulations.
- Hold on! The Bible is filled with commandments including the “Top 10.”
- That begs question: Is salvation about “law (rules/works) or grace?”
- **Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV) — 8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [We are saved by grace not works]
- **Romans 6:14 (ESV) — 14** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. [No one can obey God’s law perfectly, so Christ died to give us grace – undeserved favor with God.]
- **Matthew 5:17 (ESV) — 17** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.
- So, are we saying the Old Testament law of Moses (i.e. the 10 Commandments) doesn’t matter anymore? No, they matter, but salvation isn’t about perfectly keeping them or any other command in scripture.
- Why did God give the law? **Galatians 3:24 (ESV)** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.
- Illustration: When your kids were toddlers you gave them very strict rules for their protection: “*Don’t touch the stove.*” When they were sixteen you said, “*Make your own breakfast!*” Let’s be more specific.
- “*The Law was given to separate God’s people from the evil nations around them and to define sin ([Ezra 10:11](#); [Romans 5:13](#); [7:7](#)). The Law also clearly demonstrated that no human being could purify himself enough to please God—i.e., the Law revealed our need for a Savior.*”
- “*By New Testament times, the religious leaders had hijacked the Law and added to it their own rules and traditions ([Mark](#)*

7:7–9). While the Law itself was good, it was weak in that it lacked the power to change a sinful heart ([Romans 8:3](#)). Keeping the Law, as interpreted by the Pharisees, had become an oppressive and overwhelming burden ([Luke 11:46](#)).ⁱⁱ

- The Pharisees in Jesus' day had added "extra" rules to "religion."
- We have some Pharisees even among Christ's followers today.
- "You must not be a Christian if you don't do this (fill in the blank) like I do." What are examples of things people think a "real Christian" MUST do?
- Someone might say, "I'm confused, almost every week you tell me I should spend personal time in God's presence, in His word, in prayer, and come to church. Aren't those things important?" Yes! After you're saved they will help you to love Jesus more and want to be more like Him --- BUT they don't determine your salvation or make Jesus love you more.
- Illustration: "Mama loves me the most! You must be adopted!" We all are!
- Don't let anyone question your salvation if you don't have as many quiet times as them, as big a Bible, or know as many verses by heart.
- Those are the "dos" what about the "don'ts" legalists harp on?
- Verses 20-21: ²⁰ You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, ²¹ "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"ⁱⁱⁱ
- "You must not be saved if you do this (thing they think is wrong.)"
- Do we need to make a list? We know the favorite "don'ts" of legalists.
- "You'd better not do THIS! A REAL Christian won't do THIS!"
- What does scripture say? Romans 14 helps us understand the truth.
- In Romans 14:1 Paul refers to "disputable matters" or "opinions."
- Some things are sin (scripture says so) other things are matters of "personal conviction" (scripture is silent but I may believe it's wrong or unwise.) Scripture may not specifically prohibit a

certain thing but my conscience might make it wrong for me even if it is NOT wrong for you.

- In Romans 14:3 Paul said don't "look down on" or "condemn someone over something that isn't identified in scripture as a sin.
- Don't let someone question your salvation because you don't have the same personal convictions on "disputable matters" they have.
- Aha! I can be saved and do whatever I want if it's not prohibited in scripture. Not so fast. Paul said in Romans 14:13-15, *"¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, [food sacrificed to idols] you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died."^{iv}*
- Enjoy freedom in Christ but not if it would cause someone to stumble.
- Okay, that covers "disputable" things not specifically cited as sin.
- What if a professing follower is violating something clearly prohibited in scripture? Did they lose their salvation? Were they never saved?
- Thankfully, only GOD is in charge of that situation, not you or me!
- Back to my illustration of flying on a plane. If we went to the front and said, *"I know the person in 26-D and he shouldn't be allowed on this plane!"* They'd say, *"Take your seat, you're not in charge of who has a ticket!"*
- Instead of saying they shouldn't be "on the plane," pray that they ARE!
- One day in Heaven we'll be surprised who was and wasn't on the plane.
- So, you're saying if I'm saved I can live any way I want? Not exactly.

- Paul addressed that in **Romans 6:1–2 (ESV)** — **1** What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?
- Jesus said if we love Him we will keep His commandments (John 14:15.)
- We said things like prayer, worship, time with Him, and obedience to his commands don't make Him love us more or make us more saved, but they WILL make us love HIM more!
- Writer Kimi Harris: *“Obedience is how Christians should live, not how they are saved.”*^v
- Good works do not save us, but if we're saved there will be good works.
- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Paul warned the Colossians and us, *“Don't let anyone (false teachers or Pharisees) make you think you have to earn salvation that Jesus paid for.”*
- Warren Wiersbe writes, *“Legalism is a popular thing because you can “measure” your spiritual life—and even brag about it! But this is a far cry from measuring up to Christ! (Eph. 4:13)”*^{vi}
- Salvation comes by trusting in what Jesus has done, NOT anything we do. False teachers and Pharisees want to convince us otherwise.
- Nothing we DO can make Him love us more, but there is MUCH we CAN DO to make US love, trust, and obey HIM MORE!
- Therefore, we can rest in Him for our salvation and live based on HIS commands, NOT the opinions of people. That's “freedom in Christ.”
- This week let's enjoy the freedom we have in Christ and obey His commands out of love and not because we're trying to earn His approval.

ⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/law-vs-grace.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/law-vs-grace.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Col 2:20–22). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ro 14:13–15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^v <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-legalism-definition-and-examples.html>

^{vi} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 129). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.