

Lesson 19
Colossians 2:20-23

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*** Start Recorder ***



Opening Prayer

Introduction

Read: Co 2:20-23

Discussion: What does it mean to die with Christ?

- Not Spiritual Death - To be spiritually dead is to be separated from fellowship with God. In regeneration, however, we who are “born again” from our spiritual deadness have died a second time through the death of the old man/self/heart/nature and the rebirth of the new man/self/heart/nature. You can see the relationship between spiritual death and the second death of regeneration in our text from a few weeks ago.
 - Co 2:13 “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him ... ”
 - 2Co 5:17 “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”
- Practical Second Death - We have been set free from our slavery to sin. The old man, with his old corrupt nature, sins willingly and naturally (according to his nature), and is a slave to sin. We who have been set free from our old man/heart/nature in regeneration have a new nature that sins unwillingly (against our nature/will), being tempted by the devil, the world, and the flesh.
 - Ro 6:6-7 “knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for the one who has died is freed from sin.”
- Symbolic Death with Christ - Symbolically, we identify with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection through baptism, the physical act of which symbolizes a death, a burial, and a resurrection. In this sense, we consider ourselves dead to the devil, the world, the flesh, and, thus, choose not to sin. This is the volitional act of the new heart/nature and is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

- Co 2:12 "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."
- Mt 26:41 "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation [giving in to the flesh's desire to sleep]; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Colossians 2:20 (NOTES)

- "If you have died with Christ" - If you have been regenerated, set free from slavery to sin, and have the ability and power to choose to live righteously, without the need of the OT Law, and all its rules and ordinances, why submit yourself to a new set of rules and requirements as demanded of the Gnostics?
- "to the elementary principles of the world" - The OT Ceremonial Laws (dietary and clean/unclean laws, sacrificial system, holy calendar of feasts, sabbaths, etc.) Our death with Christ (baptism into Christ) is death to the world. We have been transformed into a new regenerate existence, wherein the OT Ceremonial Law - dietary laws, sacrificial system, sabbaths, etc. ("elementary principles") can't offer us any benefits, because the pre-regenerate man that needed them to point him to Christ is now dead, having died with Christ, so-to-speak, in the death of the old man.
 - Ga 3:24-25 "Therefore the Law has become our tutor [to lead us] to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."
- To return to the world of the pre-regenerated self, where rules were used as tutors to lead us to Christ, is to deny Christ as though our death with Him (through regeneration's death of our old man) has not set us free of the need of such rules. The OT Ceremonial Laws, which were there to show us our need for Christ and how to find Him have become obsolete, once we have been born again in regeneration and trusted in Christ. The OT Ceremonial Laws were temporary; perishable. We have been transferred into the eternal. Don't go back.
- In Christ we have graduated to a higher state of life. The Gnostics offered an inferior state which was abandoned by true believers at their conversion. Ga 2:19-20

Colossians 2:21 (NOTES)

- “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” - Paul makes an allusion here to all the laws regarding ceremonial uncleanness, including not only the dietary laws, but also the laws regarding avoiding the touching of dead bodies and lepers, for example, and the ceremonial uncleanness of female menstruation. The Gnostics saw these laws as a partial means to salvation, which is further evidence of their lack of knowledge of the truth, and their inability to discern it, in their unregenerate condition.
- The dietary laws were rooted in God’s command in the Garden of Eden. Denying one’s appetites in preference to God’s will is the ultimate form of worship, for worship, at its core, is obedience, and all the more so in the face of fleshly desires to the contrary. Ge 2:16-17, 2Co 6:17, Ro 12:1
- But these laws, as stated previously, were only temporary and served as a tutor leading us to Christ. They are now obsolete. Once Christ arrived, there was no further need of the tutor (the Law). Col 2:16-17, Mark 7:19, Gal 3:24-25
- The Gnostics severely overstepped the ideas of self-denial in preference to God’s will, since it was no longer God’s will that they conform to the OT rules concerning cleanness/uncleanness and dietary restrictions. This became a means by which they fed their pride, deluded others, and added sin to sin. Asceticism (self-denial and self-harm) is essentially a manifestation of man’s pride. ‘Look at me. See how I can control myself and endure suffering. I do this to please God. We love God - Yes, we do! We love God, how ‘bout you?’ God hates this.
 - “Woe to the rebellious children,” declares the LORD, “Who execute a plan, but not Mine ... not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin;” Is 30:1
- Paul attacks asceticism directly. Asceticism saw the fleshly body as an evil enemy to be denied pleasure and punished. The Ascetics saw holiness as denial of all the body’s desires and appetites, no matter how mundane or benign, even the desire to be without suffering.
- Through the centuries, this false philosophy has led to misguided ideas such as the institution of the celibate priesthood and the practice of monasticism in Catholicism. These are doctrines of demons.

Colossians 2:22 (NOTES)

- “(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)” - These "things" are food under the dietary laws. They perish with use in two ways:
 - First, food is perishable. Eat it, or don't eat it, it will perish. Eat it and it goes away as it is put to use within the body. Don't eat it, and it decays and disintegrates.
 - Second, eating certain foods and abstaining from other foods under the OT dietary laws was a temporary system, that when used as intended, as a tutor to lead us to Christ, became obsolete at the point of one's being led to and accepting Him. Food was relieved of its restrictions by Christ who is the substance of what the dietary laws were merely a shadow.
 - Col 2:16-17 "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a [mere] shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."
- The purpose of the dietary laws was to show that God declares what (and who) is clean and what (and who) is unclean, and that He can make clean whatever (or whomever) He wills. The determination of spiritual cleanness is sovereignly and solely within the purview of God.
 - Mr 7:18-19 "And [Jesus] said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” [Thus Jesus] declared all foods clean. (See Peter's Great White Sheet - Ac 9).
 - 1Ti 4:1-5 "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 [men] who forbid marriage [and advocate] abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer."

- “in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men” - These ascetic (self-denying of pleasure and enjoyment in life, self-harm) Gnostics were not only overly concerned with outward temporal things (what one did or didn’t eat), which resulted in the neglect of the inward eternal things, but they were completely out of touch with the realities and implications of the coming of Christ, which made those laws obsolete. Luke 11:42, Mr 7:18-19

Discussion: What is wrong with “all roads lead to God”, or “it doesn’t matter what you believe, so long as you believe it sincerely”, or “I can worship God any way I want to”?

- The ascetic Gnostics’ so-called religious system was man-made, rather than God-made. The Pharisees committed the same sin. In adding to God’s laws, they corrupted their own system of faith and rushed headlong into more sin. Anything man adds to God’s plan, system, will or Word, flows out of a heart filled with pride. Humility is conforming to God’s plan, system, will and Word. Such so-called worship isn’t worship of God; it is self-worship. These ascetic rules are strictly man-made.
 - Mr 7:6-8 “And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ 8 “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”
 - Is 29:13-14 "Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned [by rote, 14 Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed."

Colossians 2:23 (NOTES)

- “These ... have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion” - They are really a pretension to wisdom through a made up (concocted), self-imposed religion. The Gnostics immersed themselves in such fanciful pursuits in the hopes that they would somehow gain favor with God. Favor with God comes not from inventing one’s own way to Him, which much of the world believes, but rather in submission to the instruction of His Word and in the leading of His Holy Spirit via the call to repentance and faith in Christ, and then in obedience to His commands. 1Ti 4:7-8, Rom 8:5-8

- Ro 8:5-8 “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able [to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”
- the appearance of wisdom in ... self-abasement [false humility] and severe treatment of the body [asceticism]." The religion of the Gnostics was full of spurious (disingenuous) humility, but lacking any authority from God.
- “but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” - They are of no value against curbing the sinful desires of the flesh. The Ascetics rules merely masquerade as wisdom. Asceticism “while parading under the guise of humility, actually panders to human pride” – A. C. Gaebelien. Christianity is not a set of rules to live by in order to gain favor with God (the root of such thinking is pride), but rather is a relationship with God within which Christians are evermore being shaped by Him through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit as we apply His Word to our lives in denial of our sinful desires and as we submit to the leading of His Spirit. these are those things which have true value against fleshly indulgence.
 - Ro 8:14 "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."
 - Ga 5:16 “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

Application: Were there any new concepts you picked up today? Is there anything you're having trouble accepting in these doctrines? Did anything stand out that may prompt you to do further study? Do you feel confident that you can explain the doctrines of deity and trinity to your family, other believers, nonbelievers?

Closing Prayer

Small Groups