

Sermon or Lesson: Colossians 2:20-23 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Questioned Why We Practice Humanistic Religious Rules That God Rejects

READ: Colossians 2:20-23, with vv.4,8,16,18a for context

BACKGROUND:

- - There are people in our churches who use "fine-sounding arguments" to effectively persuade undiscerning believers into believing and adopting false doctrines, that are deceptive, contrary to Scriptures, and destructive to their spiritual well-being. (v.4)
 - - To help believers thwart the adopting of false doctrines, God has provided us with the written Scriptures, and with internal spiritual regeneration to newness of life, through Christ. (vv.7,13; cf. vv.9-12)
 - - Philosophies about the things of God that are based on humanistic sources are not acceptable to God, particularly because they are not properly based on "Christ" - the key to understanding God because Christ is God Himself revealed in physical bodily form. (vv.8,9)
 - - True believers are to steadfastly focus on improving their internal relational uprightness with God, through the superior reality of "Christ in you", and no longer focus on merely conforming to outer religious practices. (vv.16,17; 1:27)
 - - Believers are warned to resist falling into false humility and the worship of angels, which will result in them losing spiritual well-being and becoming disqualified to receive blessings from God. (vv.18-19)
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vv.20-22 - READ

[Lesson Question: Discuss, analyze, and describe the contents of verses 20, 21, 22, and then correlate them together as a whole.]

SECTION POINT: God questions why we believers submit to humanistic religious rules, when we have been liberated from them by Christ.

v.20 - READ

- - God identifies, establishes, and regards true believers as having "died with Christ" in several ways spiritually, some of which are described in previous verses 11-14.
- - Here in verse 20 is added another way - true believers have "died with Christ to the basic principles of this world", which was referred to in previous verse 8. (see the sermon-or-lesson for Colossians 2:8 on this website for an in-depth analysis)
- - The instruction here is that when we become a true believer, we are no longer to follow the ways of the world but rather the ways of Christ, who is to have supremacy in all things. (v.1:18)
- - True believers are no longer a spiritual member of the world, but instead we are a member of the kingdom of the Son. (v.1:13)

- - So, we are not to be subject to the spiritual rules that originate from the world, nor are we to submit to those rules, nor practice them.
- - Through Christ, we are set free from religious law, regulations, legalism, and rituals, and from worldly religious traditions, philosophies, principles, commands, and teachings. (vv.2:14,8,20,22)

v.21 - READ

- - "Do not handle / taste / touch" are three examples of the religious commands that are pronounced by humans through their teachings of principles that are influenced by, corrupted by, and created from worldly thinking. (vv.21-22)
- - The nature of these three cited examples suggests that humans who practice these rules are attempting to acquire spiritual cleansing through physical cleanliness and restrictions.
- - However, God clearly rejects this approach because outer or physical cleanliness and/or keeping of restrictions do not equal, nor accomplish, nor contribute to inner spiritual cleansing and rightness with God.

v.22 - READ

- - Contrary to humanistic and natural thinking, instead of bringing spiritual cleansing and rightness with God, the practicing and "using" of these rules actually brings "corruption, decay, ruin, and perishing" of one's faith. (Strong's #5356)
 - - In other words, God not only utterly rejects the "using" and the intentions of these rules, but He furthermore allows and perhaps even inflicts adverse consequences of decay and ruin upon the faith of those persons who practice "all" rules like these.
 - - Specifically cited here, God comprehensively rejects these rules "because they are based on human commands and teachings" - corrupted by humanistic thinking, humanistic philosophy, humanistic wisdom, humanistic approaches, humanistic hypocrisy, humanistic laziness and rebellion against doing what God prescribes.
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v.23 - READ

[Lesson Question: Discuss, analyze, and describe the type, quality, and characteristics of the wisdom that is present in each of the cited regulations in verse 23, and why those wisdoms are defective and deficient.]

SECTION POINT: God warns believers that the humanistic wisdom that supports humanistic religious rules is defective and deficient.

- - These religious practices or "expressions" of religiousness do "indeed" have wisdom, albeit humanistic wisdom, as referred to in previous verse 22, but this humanistic wisdom nevertheless fatally lacks divine composition, divine purity, and divine approval. (Strong's #3056)
- - "Self-imposed worship" has wisdom, "voluntarily imposing piety on oneself that is arbitrary and unwarranted". (Strong's #1479)
- - Self-imposing "humility" has wisdom, "delighting" in making oneself humble and modest. (v.18)

- - Self-imposing "harsh treatment of the body" has wisdom, voluntarily engaging in "unmerciful and severe" physical disciplines. (from Strong's #0857 - "unsparing", "austere" (AHD))
- - By definition, wisdom is 'knowledge applied in beneficial ways'.
- - However, these wisdoms "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" or "fleshly" "gratification". (Strong's #4561, #4140)
- - Humans who practice these expressions of religiousness intend and assume that these expressions bring spiritual improvement, but instead these expressions actually bring decay, ruin, and perishing upon one's faith. (v.22)
- - Thereby, the humanistic wisdoms that are present in these expressions of religiousness are proven by God to actually be spiritually foolish. (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:19-20)

- - The "self-imposed worship" "appears" useful and beneficial, but in actuality it is not.
- - The self-manufactured religious "humility" "appears" authentic, but in actuality it is false and not useful or beneficial spiritually.
- - The self-imposed "harsh treatment of the body" "appears" to be spiritually productive, but in actuality it accomplishes nothing of spiritual benefit.
- - All of these expressions of religiousness contain wisdom - humanistic wisdom, but in actuality they all are devoid of "any value" spiritually.

- - By proper implication then, this section of verses promotes the unadulterated teaching of the Word of God - taught raw, nothing added, nothing supplemented, nothing modified, nothing that corrupts its purity, nothing cooked or refined to alter its presentation, meaning, and application.

- - Verses 20, 21, 22 are a question, asking believers why we choose to engage in these kinds of spiritually foolish and destructive religious activities.
- - Colossians chapter 2 gives us believers plenty of reasons and explanations for why we should not succumb to believing and engaging in these various kinds of false religious doctrines, philosophies, regulations, and practices, as we live out our faith.
- - May each one of us "continue to live in [Christ], rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as [we] were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (vv.2:6-7) - contented, willing, and satisfied to live in a manner that is "worthy of the Lord" and "pleases Him in every way" (v.1:10).

BIG IDEA: God questions believers and warns them to remain liberated from practicing humanistic religious rules, which by their nature are defective and deficient, being based upon wisdom that is faulty and foolish.

APPLICATIONS:

- - This is now time to self-analyze: Do you practice any humanistic religious rules, regulations, legalism, rituals, traditions, philosophies, principles, commands, or

teachings? If so, start compiling a mental list of them. (PAUSE - give your listeners a few moments to process this)

- - Do you practice any humanistic religious rules in an attempt to acquire spiritual cleansing or spiritual improvement, perhaps through physical cleanliness and restrictions? If so, add those rules to your mental list. (PAUSE - give your listeners a few moments to process this)

- - Now, keeping your mental list in mind, if you are a true believer, do you agree with God that through Christ you have been liberated from following those humanistic religious rules on your list? (PAUSE)

- - Do you agree with God that Christ is to have supremacy in your life, and those humanistic religious rules on your list are not to have any place in your life? (PAUSE)

- - Do you agree with God that your practicing of those humanistic religious rules on your list actually brings decay, ruin, and perishing upon your faith? (PAUSE)

- - Do you agree with God that those humanistic religious rules on your list are defective and deficient because they are based upon wisdom that is faulty and foolish? (PAUSE)

- - Are you now ready to turn away from those humanistic religious rules on your list - turn away completely and without any reservation? (PAUSE)

- - If so, express this to God now, perhaps through this prayer: (PAUSE after each phrase in this prayer to give your listeners time to capture and repeat this to God)

"Dear Lord, I confess to You that I have been practicing these humanistic religious rules on my list, that are counterproductive to my faith.

I have been focusing my devotion to these humanistic religious rules, which have displaced my focusing on Christ.

Right now, I turn from these humanistic religious rules on my list.

And because I believe that Christ died to pay the penalty for my sins on the cross, I thank you for forgiving me for practicing these humanistic religious rules that You reject.

Also, please remove any spiritual problems that I may have acquired from my interaction with these humanistic religious rules that are on my list.

I commit to henceforth strive in pursuing Christ, as stated in verses 2:6 and 7, to "continue to live in [Christ], rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as [I am being] taught, and overflowing with thankfulness".

As stated in verse 1:10, I will be contented, willing, and satisfied to live in a manner that is "worthy of [You] Lord" and "pleases [You] in every way".

I pray this in the name of Christ Jesus, who is my Savior and my Lord who liberated me, amen."

[Additional Lesson Question to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - List other humanistic religious rules that are practiced by people in our faith.]

Works Cited:

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