



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Colossians 2: 16-23

Lesson 9 of 15

2018

"Stay Free"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Jim. We are in Colossians chapter 2 and we are going to finish up the chapter. Paul has been discussing Christ and His death and what He's accomplished for us: forgiveness of sins, the new creation of the new man in Him, and the defeat of the demons. And so, we begin with verse 16 through verse 23.

¹⁶Therefore 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 – ¹⁷things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions he* has seen, (*Speaker's note-Paul doesn't mean **he** is actually seeing visions, but the boast of the claim to have seen visions*) inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

²⁰If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" ²²(which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³These are the matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and the severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Colossians 2:16-23

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, You have blessed us greatly. We've just read about the things You have blessed us in. You've blessed us with new life in Your Son. We have died to the world; we have died to the old life; we are new creatures. And that being the case, it is foolish to go back to the old life; it is foolish to go to the world and its ways to find strength and the means to holiness—for the world has nothing to offer in that way. And yet we are tempted to do just that; just as the Colossians were.

So, we pray that we will understand who we are as believers in Jesus Christ: We are dead to the flesh; dead to the old life; dead to the world and all that it offers us. If there be anybody in attendance this morning, who is like Jim was at one time,—here, but not really joined to Jesus Christ, having never put their faith in Him,—I pray that You would convict them of their sin and their need to do that. And we who have, help us to realize that in Christ we have broken with the world, that we are dead to that; we are alive to You—And we are to live that way. Help us to understand that; to act upon it; and to know what a blessing that is. It is all based on what You've done—not what we've done. And we thank You for all that You have done for us—You have wiped the slate clean of our sins and guilt, and You have now opened up heaven to us. And we are to avail ourselves of that privilege by coming to Your throne of grace and praying for ourselves and for others. You have opened up heaven to us as our home to come; and the glory of it. So we look forward to that; and we should. Help us to look forward to that. Help us to become less enamored of the world and more enamored of Your Son and of our eternal dwelling place in the kingdom to come, in the New Heavens and the New Earth—all that is before us, world without end. It is something we can barely comprehend. You've done it all for us. Thank You. May we live in light of that. Bless us spiritually. Give us understanding of the things we've read this morning.

And bless us materially: We pray for the sick; we pray for those that are in recovery from procedures. I know there are members in our church that are going

through protracted difficulties, procedures, and healings, —and we pray for them. Bless others who are sick. And some are away on trips, and we pray that You give them safe travels and a safe return in good health.

Lord, we thank You for all that You've given us. Those that are in difficulty, we pray that You give them relief and give them encouragement. And those of us who aren't really in difficulty, we pray that You would give us grateful hearts for what we have in Your Son and for the good things You give us. Paul reminds us of that: we ought to be thankful for all the good things You give us and be joyful for that. Help us to be like that.

Bless us Lord now, as we sing our next hymn and prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship together. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

In his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington wrote of the first knowledge that he had that he was a slave. He wrote that 'early one morning, he was awakened by his mother fervently praying over her children, that Mr. Lincoln and his armies might be successful and that she and her children might be freed.' 'Fervently praying', that gives some sense of how intense the longing for freedom is for a person in bondage. And it illustrates what a great blessing the gospel is—because it brings freedom—the greatest freedom: 'Spiritual Freedom.'

Paul told the Galatians (5:1), that "It was for freedom that Christ set us free...". Now can you imagine: A slave being liberated—being allowed to leave the fields, where he had sweated and toiled—then to go out into the wide world of freedom—only to return and choose to be put back in chains and under the lash? This seems absurd—and it is! But yet, that is what Christians want to do—one of the first things they want to do is to give up their newfound freedom! So, Paul told the Galatians (5:1), "...do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

The same insanity, irrationality was in Colossae. Paul told the Christians there that they are '*complete*' in Christ. They have '*fullness*' in Him; they lack nothing. And that completeness includes liberty. But false teachers had come to town and were

telling them that they were not complete; Christ was not enough; they needed more; they needed the Law of Moses—And they needed the secrets that these teachers possessed. It was really a 'yoke of bondage' that they were putting on the necks of those Christians. And Paul exposes it; exposes this heresy in Colossians 2, verses 16-23.

We read these verses, and we realize a little more clearly what was being taught in this city where he warns them – warns the Christians – against three aspects of the heresy. First, in verses 16 and 17, he warns against legalism—against coming back under the Law of Moses. And then in verses 18 and 19, he warns against mysticism. And finally, in verses 20 through 23, he warns against asceticism, (austere self-denial), "Do not taste; do not touch!" False teachers might have had slogans like "Knowledge is Power," and "The Truth shall make you Free". And Paul would have answered, 'Yes, all that's true, but that's not what you are teaching. You are teaching a lie; and you are teaching what enslaves.' He demonstrates this from their abuse of the Law of Moses, for they were imposing rules in the area of diet and days.

Paul begins verse 16 with "Therefore", which points us back to what he has just said. And what he's just said is that 'in Christ', through His sacrifice on the cross, God made us alive. We were dead, and through Christ's death, He made us alive. And so, we are dead to the old life and the old world, and we are alive to Him. He has forgiven us of our sins completely – past, present, and future. All of our guilt has been removed. We're absolutely forgiven. There's nothing we can do to add to that forgiveness: it's done; it's complete; "It is finished", as Jesus declared from the cross.

And not only that, He's defeated our greatest enemy—Satan and his angelic host: The powers that were against us, the demonic realm. In fact, Paul speaks of them as being led in a 'Great Triumph': And he pictures the cross as Christ's chariot with the demonic host being chained to that cross—That 'Chariot of our Lord' as He leads in victory. He has set us free!

Now, in view of all that, Paul says, 'Don't let anyone judge you in regard to food, or drink, or in respect to a festival, or a new moon, or a Sabbath day. You're free from

that.' Food and diet are very important in the Law – a very important part of the Law of Moses. Even today, a religious Jew will keep a kosher diet which is a diet that generally follows the rules of the Law—which involves a separation between clean and unclean animals, clean and unclean food.

Now, there may have been some health benefit in the diet that is prescribed in the Law of Moses, but that was not the point of the Law. The reason for the separation of food was educational and spiritual. It was to teach people holiness. And as you probably know, the basic idea of the word "*holy*" is separation – a separation from the world and a separation to God—a dedication to the Lord. And that's illustrated in the clean and the unclean animals. Some were declared unclean and others declared clean, and what is being illustrated and taught in those dietary laws, as well as in the laws of garments—not mixing materials like wool and cotton—is 'be separate'. 'Be separate in your life', which is to say, 'Be holy in your life.'

So, whenever they prepared a meal, or they sat down to eat, they were faced with the fact of purity and impurity. They were reminded, every time they ate, that they were to be separate; they were to be dedicated to the Lord. Food was a didactic tool. It was a means of instruction to remind the people to be set apart to the Lord God; to be a holy people. The fact that this was didactic and not hygienic, that it was for instruction and not for health, is clear from passages like Mark 7, verses 18 through 20, where Jesus said, 'It's not what a person eats that defiles him; it's what goes into the heart. That's what defiles.' And Mark then adds a kind of explanatory note. He says, "*Thus He* declared all foods clean." (vs20). So, all foods are clean.

Also, because He fulfilled the Law by His life and sacrifice, all those distinctions in the Law are abolished. That fact is clear from Acts chapter 10, when Peter had a vision: Remember; he's in the town of Joppa and he's on the rooftop around noontime. Suddenly there's this vision that he has of a great sheet coming down from heaven—and it's full of unclean animals. And God said, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" (vs13). Peter was repulsed. He said, "By no means, Lord..."(vs14). He'd grown up with this kosher diet of his ancestors, and it had been engrained in them, 'You don't eat certain things; it's an

abomination.' And now he's being told to, 'Get up, kill, and eat.' Well, you can imagine what was in the sheet: pigs, and dogs, snakes and bats, and lizards, maybe a horse. But it wasn't the creepiness of the cuisine that offended Peter, but his concern for the Law—what he lived by. It taught him that he couldn't eat a horse...so, he refused.

What a contradiction this is—God speaks to him; tells him to do something; and out of piety, out of a sense of holiness, he refuses the command of God! But the Lord answered Peter, (He's patient with Peter), "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unclean." (vs15). Dietary laws are no longer binding. Spirituality is not attained or measured by what a person eats or refuses to drink. Now, you don't have to eat pork, and you don't have to drink wine—You're not commanded to do that. If you prefer Perrier and foie gras, that's fine. But abstaining has no spiritual merit because it's all clean; God has declared it so.

We are to live appropriately; we are to live carefully; we are to live wisely; to be careful about what we eat and what we drink; about how we dress; how we behave—Everything we do is important. It reflects our walk with the Lord. It reflects on our profession of faith. The way we behave—from the smallest things to the greatest things—is a witness to one another and to the world. We are to 'do all things to the glory of God, from the simplest things like eating, to the greatest things like laying down our lives for one another – everything from the mundane to the sublime.' That's 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 31. That's what Paul teaches. Everything we do is to be done to the glory of God.

But we are no longer under the Law of Moses—That's 'Old Covenant'. We are people of the New Covenant. The Law is written on our hearts, not written on tablets of stone. God is done with religious diets: And it's the same with the religious calendar with the observance of the Sabbath and the feast days. There were three feasts that the Israelite had to go up to Jerusalem where the temple was: And there they were to worship every year—That was required. And then every week they were to observe the Sabbath.

Again, when Christ came, He fulfilled the Law; we're no longer under its regulations. Paul said that in Romans chapter 6, verse 14, "... for you are not under law but under grace." And then in Romans 7, verse 4, "...you also were made to die to the Law...". In fact, all of these things – diets and days – belong to the category of 'types' and 'shadows'—the types and shadows of the Old Testament. Again, they were instructive for the people of God; that was their purpose. Paul said that in Galatians 3, verse 24, where he describes the Law as a '*tutor*', as a teacher, or as a disciplinarian given to "...lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith." Its purpose was to alert us to our condition—our sinful condition—and our need of the Savior. And it was given to reveal the coming Savior. And it did that; it accomplished its purpose. That's what Paul says in Galatians chapter 3, so now we are no longer in need of the '*tutor*'; the teacher; the instructor.

And here in verse 17 he says much the same thing: That these 'things' (food, drink, and a Sabbath day), were a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Literally, this word "*substance*" is the word 'body.'—*Soma* is the Greek word— and it is the word for 'body'. And the picture that Paul is giving is that of a person 'casting a shadow'. A shadow is an outline of a person that gives a sense of that person and often goes before the person, indicating that he or she is coming. One sees the shadow cast and says, 'Oh, a person is coming.' These 'types' or 'pictures' in the Old Testament, (the special days and ceremonies of the Old Testament), is how they worked in that they gave a faint picture of the Lord, and they foreshadowed or predicted His coming.

For example: The sacrifice of the Passover, which celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt and its slavery there, pictured the Lord's sacrifice that delivered every believer in Him from God's judgment and from slavery to sin. And the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that followed the Passover, pictures the Christian life that Christ's sacrifice made possible. By the taking out the leaven, (which symbolizes sin), we are to live a pure life, (this is how Paul explains it in 1 Corinthians 5: 7-8).

And it is the same with the Sabbath. The physical rest of the Sabbath day pictures the spiritual rest of salvation. We have that in Christ now, and so we entered into our Sabbath rest at the moment of faith. And not only that, it pictures the future 'rest' of heaven—our hope. And that is what the author of Hebrews writes of in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 9. The Sabbath is a picture of spiritual rest; it is a picture of the place of rest—the future that we look forward to.

Now, there are Christians today—godly people—very good people—who believe that our Sunday is the 'Christian Sabbath', and that it should be observed as the Sabbath was of old, (that is how I was raised—to believe that Sunday is our Sabbath). I respect those people, they are godly people as I say, but I think they are incorrect. I think the very fact that these people are celebrating the 'Sabbath' (which is the last day of the week, the seventh day, our Saturday), on the first day of the week (Sunday), is an obvious contradiction. The Sabbath was 'a sign' of the Old Covenant. It was 'a sign' between God and Israel. That's what the Law says in Exodus 31, verse 13 (as well as other places, too). When the Old Covenant ended, 'a sign' of the Old Covenant ceased to be binding. A change had taken place. We Christians do observe Sunday, but we observe it as the 'Lord's Day' in remembrance of the resurrection, (and not because of Exodus chapter 20, verse 8, - the fourth commandment.) We are no longer under those rules.

However, we are not to be casual about Sunday. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 25, tells us not to do that. There is this warning that is very clear: We are not to be "...forsaking our own assembling together, as is the practice of some...", he says. Well, that tends to be the case in the best of times and the worst of times; people will find a way not to come to church on Sunday. We are to always be here. We need this. We need to be in fellowship with one another, under the ministry of the Word, and encouraging one another. Sunday is necessary, but it's not the Sabbath.

And it's never called the Sabbath. And Paul makes it clear here that it has ceased.—The Sabbath has ceased. He says that 'no one is to be your judge in regard to a Sabbath day. (vs16). No one is to be allowed to enforce it upon you.' He could not say

this if the Sabbath was still in effect for us. But it is not in effect for us. It is "a mere shadow" he says. —It has passed away. And all the Jewish days have. They foreshadowed the Lord's coming, and they illustrated His person and His work, but they are to Him what a shadow is to a body—a faint outline. The body is the '*substance*'; it is the reality.

Now this being so, since Christ is come and the believer possesses the reality of 'Christ in us'; (that's the '*mystery*' that Paul talked about in chapter one) – since that is so and that is what we have—we don't need the shadow. So, why live in the shadows when we have the reality? Why hold on to a dim sketch when we have the person Himself? There's no reason to, of course. So Paul was saying, 'Don't let people judge you as being incomplete, and don't let anyone put you under the heavy yoke of the Law. Christ has fulfilled the Law and set you free. **So, live free!**'

One reason the false teachers were able to have an influence over the Colossians was that they quoted the Bible. That's obvious for they were talking about 'the Law of Moses'; they knew the Bible and they quoted it. And that seemed to give credence to their teaching and made them persuasive. But all heresy claims to be biblical.

Satan knows the Bible and he is a skillful theologian: That is why he is able to disguise himself. Paul describes this disguise in 2 Corinthians 11 and verse 14, "...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." He does that, as well as his ministers do that, by knowing the Bible and using the Bible; twisting it of course into their heresies; but they know the Bible. And the only way to overcome these heresies is by knowing the Bible. So if we do not know Scripture and how to use it, then we will be defenseless. The only way we can overcome error is with Scripture. And we know that because Christ did that. He is the great example of that when He met the devil in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry. Satan tempted Him three times to test Him. And every time He answered the temptation that Satan gave, (and Satan tested Him on the basis of Scripture by quoting Scripture), Christ quoted Scripture back at him. He dealt with Satan's errors with Scripture. That is how we are to do it. And that's how Paul refuted the heretics here. Scripture is our sword, and we need to know how to handle it.

But these men afflicting the Colossians had something more. They had a claim to authority beyond the Bible. They claimed to have 'visions'. Their heresy had a mystical aspect that gave it more weight and appeal. If someone could point out to them, 'Well, what you're saying contradicts Scripture.', they could say, 'Ah, but I had a vision; I had a dream.' They had this mystical aspect. And it's this mysticism that Paul warns about in the next verse, verse 18, and exposes it as a hoax, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."

Mysticism is basically 'experiencing God directly', apart from the Bible, through visions and/or through 'ecstatic experiences'. These men claimed to have had personal experience with angels and God. —They had had 'direct communion with them.' There were Jewish mystics around, at this time, who believed that by practicing the details of the Law and ceremonial cleansings, that their souls could ascend into heaven and to God's throne. And that may be the very thing that Paul was dealing with here: Jewish heretics who have this mix of the Law, as well as some gnostic ideas and mystical ideas. They claimed to know the way to a higher spiritual plane and to deep spiritual experiences, and to being initiated into sacred mysteries. Now, that's impressive stuff, and people can be taken in by it.

That's what Paul warns against: not letting these people take them in, not letting these people defraud them by these boastful claims, which Paul dismisses as. "inflated without cause". 'There's nothing to these claims they're making; it's false what they're saying to you.', is what Paul is saying. Being under the influence of such people, who are self-proclaimed prophets, is slavery itself. Because those under their persuasion are dependent upon them for understanding and dependent upon them for direction.

People will look less to the Bible for their knowledge of God, for His instructions to them, and for the direction that He gives us in life when they have a 'prophet' to look to. I mean, 'Why look to the Bible when you've got a prophet?' And, 'They know a prophet who has direct communication with God; so, there's no need to study the Scriptures: In fact, anything I could learn from the Scriptures can't compare with what

the prophet knows.' They will just defer to him. But when they are dependent upon 'their prophet' or 'their leader' or 'their guru', he can defraud them. —Or as the *New International Version* puts it, "...disqualify you for the prize..." (vs 16). The idea here is of being an umpire and making a ruling like an umpire. The 'mystic' is the authority, and he or she will make judgments; or issue decrees that will put people on a false path and lead them into error and to terrible spiritual loss by leading them away from the truth and into falsehood. —And by so doing, they defraud these people.

This is not unusual. There have been people like this, charismatic types, down through the history of the Church. In the second century, a generation or two after Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians, a man named Montanus came along with two women—'two prophetesses'—and they moved through this very region where Colossae was located. They had large influence within all of Asia Minor. Montanus was a forerunner of the modern-day charismatics. He came and he prophesied the coming of the 'Paraclete', (which is the Holy Spirit). But his 'paraclete' was a mixture between the Holy Spirit and Christ, and he was making predictions that caused people to follow him. They were 'captured' by Montanus and his two prophetesses.

Martin Luther had to deal with something very similar to this with a group, who camped in Wittenberg, called the 'Zwickau prophets'. They arrived there while Luther was hiding in Wartburg Castle, just after the Diet of Worms, and while he was translating the New Testament into German. They were revolutionaries who believed that they had received 'special revelation' through dreams and visions. Luther, who advocated *Sola Scriptura*, (Scripture alone), as our authority, came out of hiding and dealt with these men; and managed to drive them out of town. There will always be these kinds of people and there will always be people who are drawn to them. 'Visions' are impressive and there is the allure of 'special knowledge' to be a part of a 'select circle' of people— to be a part of an 'elite' group.

C. S. Lewis wrote about this 'allure' in an essay titled "*The Inner Ring*" and the desire that people have to be part of it. I think the background for what he was writing was his experience at Oxford and Cambridge among the academics—among this circle

of men who were 'really in the know'. But he says this same 'allure' applies to the workplace, the neighborhood, at school, or wherever. It is man's desire to be 'on the inside' in what Lewis speaks of as "the terror of being left on the outside." "It's a desire," he said, "that is very dangerous." It is also a type of slavery—that desire to be 'in the know' and be 'one of the elite'. It's bondage to pride; it's bondage to self-interest. But there's nothing to it. In fact, as I recall, Lewis talks about '*experiencing* this allure' is like 'peeling an onion'; you keep getting into this 'inner ring', and then you realize, this isn't really the 'inner ring', 'it's just another ring'. And pretty soon, just like peeling a real onion, you come to the end of it...and there's nothing there. And so it is with "The Inner Ring"; there's nothing there. And there was nothing there in this 'Ring' that the mystics claimed for themselves that Paul exposes here. They were men of a fleshly mind. They were unregenerate men—unbelievers—and so they were unconnected to Christ.

That's how Paul describes them in verse 19, "...not holding fast to the head..."—not 'united with Christ'. And he illustrates this by using the human body, with all its parts being joined together by its joints and ligaments. And it only has life, it only has growth, when it's connected to the head. If you separate the head from the body, there is no life—And so, too, with the Church. As believers in Jesus Christ, we're all connected to one another, but we don't give life to each other; we're not the source of life. We are being given life through our head, the Lord Jesus Christ, because we are 'in Him'. And because we're connected with Him, we have vitality and we have growth. These men, for all of their grand claims to have had 'visions' and 'know the law of God', were outside of Christ. They had no spiritual life—so there was no reality to their claims.

But they were not only convincing because of their apparent 'knowledge' of the law and impressive because of their claims of 'visions' and 'contact with angels'—they also appeared completely dedicated. They practiced asceticism, which is an austere life of self-denial, of abstaining from material pleasures for the purpose of 'enlightenment' or 'gaining God's favor'. And I imagine that they had a look of piety about them: pale, gaunt men who spoke of 'all that they denied themselves' with the same show of

humility that they had when they spoke of the visions that they had seen and their encounters with angels.

Paul will expose the error of their lives, but he begins by telling the Colossians that they have died to all of that. They have died to the elementary principles of the world, to the Law, and to human religion. That is their old life. —and they ‘are dead’ to that—so, they can't go back to it. A Christian’s life isn't ‘we die and then we start living that old life again’. No—You're dead; you're dead to it! You can't go back to it. You can attempt to, but it's foolish to do that. We're dead to it, and that's his point. We can't go back...and the Colossians cannot go back.

Then in verse 21, he gives the rules and regulations that they cannot go back to but that they were hearing about, —the regulations of the “elementary principles”. For it is all joyless; it's all negative: "...Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"...". This is human religion which is the idea that negative rules are the means to spiritual growth. Or, that God is pleased when we beggar ourselves—when we impoverish ourselves.

This is the opposite of what pleases God! Who invented eating and drinking and comfort? Who created all of the stuff that we consume and that nourishes us? —The Lord God created it. So obviously, God can't think it bad when we eat and enjoy it. He created it for enjoyment.

Paul would later warn against this kind of thinking in 1 Timothy 4 when he criticizes men who forbid marriage and commanded to abstain from foods that God has created to be gratefully received by believers. He wrote, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude...", (1 Tim 4: 4). Now this is not to say that we don't need to practice some restraint or to say that we don't need to lead a disciplined lives—Of course we do. It may be a matter of health—Or it may be part of a witness in some way. So, the Bible teaches moderation — it does not teach overindulgence. Therefore, we need to be a disciplined people.

But rejecting certain foods for religious reasons is wrong to Paul, (like ‘vegetables are ‘more spiritual’ than a box of pizza or a bowl of ice cream’, or ‘it is wrong to enjoy the pleasures of a meal’). To Paul this attitude is showing ingratitude to God—and it is

false religion. In fact, in verse 22 Paul shows the absurdity of forbidding eating and drinking by stating that that is the reason God made food and the reason God has given it. 'These are things', Paul says, "...destined to perish with use..." They have been designed to perish with use. So, in other words, food was created to be consumed and support life. It fulfills its destiny when it nourishes the body, satisfies the appetite, and brings joy. Food is not bad. —It is good. And the mature Christian, eats with pleasure and thanksgiving.

When the Israelite sat down to eat, he was to be reminded that he is to be separated unto the Lord; there is to be separation here; there is to be holiness in your life. And while we are not under the Law today, we can read these restrictions in the Old Testament and be instructed by the Law. We too, are to be holy. —This is how the Law still applies to us. We learn from it. I think that when we sit down to eat and enjoy a nice meal, the message being delivered is—God is good! He gives us much; He has abundance for us. And this should give us great gratitude and thanksgiving, —we should appreciate the goodness of God.

Now, this exposes the error of **asceticism**—this notion of spirituality through self-denial. And it does so in two ways: First, **asceticism** contradicts God's design for life. It contradicts God's providence. God has filled this world with life – plant life, animal life – so that it is so abundant and constant that it sustains billions of people every day. Think of that: There is so much life and so much food available that it feeds a planet every day! This world is a food-producing, life-promoting machine. As far as we have found, there is nothing like it in the galaxy, (and I don't think we're ever going to find anything like it in the galaxy). Planet Earth is unique. So, it is an insult to God and His common grace, to reject it as bad. It is 'false religion'.

Secondly, things destined to perish can have little or nothing to do with spiritual things that are lasting and eternal. The immaterial soul is not fed by material things or touched by them or harmed by them. Jesus said, 'It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth that defiles the man.' It's not what goes into the stomach and is eliminated that is defiling; it's what goes into the

heart and the mind that's defiling. And then, what comes out of the mouth is false teaching—it is error. This is what pollutes; this is what destroys.

The food or clothing in the Law that was either promoted or prohibited did not have spiritual life or death in them. They were, as I have said, for instruction only, for they illustrated spiritual truth. They didn't impart spiritual life or spiritual death. But as Paul says, in verse 23, these 'false' prohibitions on the good things God has given us – prohibitions on the pleasures of life – have the appearance of wisdom. —But in reality, are all just self-made religion. And self-made religion is false. It is all about earning favor with God. It's an exercise in pride. Kent Hughes put it well when he wrote, "Asceticism feeds the flesh by starving it."

George Whitefield discovered this by his experiences when he was a student at Oxford: He began to have religious convictions. He became friends with the Wesleys, and they formed a club called the 'Holy Club'. It really wasn't holy at all, but it was all about this kind of thing. They began to live a very strict life and Whitefield became an ascetic; and a mystic; and practiced a religion of self-denial. He wrote about it in his journal: He wrote, "I always chose the worst sort of food. I fasted twice a week. My apparel was 'mean', (meaning 'my clothes were crummy'). I wore a patched gown and dirty shoes and resolutely persisted in these voluntary acts of self-denial." It was when he began reading the Scriptures and praying over the Scriptures daily, he said that he received "fresh light and power from above." That's when he was converted. Then he understood what he described as "the glorious liberty of Christ's gospel" and never again turned to asceticism, legalism, mysticism, or views on Christian perfectionism.

That is the only way to escape any kind of enslaving error—through the light of God's Word. That's how Paul instructed the Colossians. He reminded them of what Christ had done for them. He asked them, in verse 20, 'If they had died with Christ'? Because if they had died with Christ, then they had died to their old life and to any form of 'works' religion. They had died to the Law and its regulation. Why would they want to return to that? Why indeed?

And yet, we are all faced with the temptation to believe all kinds of errors: To 'conform to the world' or to be under rules and taboos, (forms of legalism). The temptations are there daily, and it is a disparate kind of thing. It's 'conform to the world' and its ways, its immorality (or its dishonesty). —Or go the opposite direction and become men of the Law and become legalistic.

That is why we need to constantly remind ourselves of who we are in Christ: Because of His death for us, we are a new creation. We died to the world and its ways; and now we have His life within us: We can never go back. And why would we want to? It's like a freed slave returning to the fields and the overseer—or going back to the chains at the oar of a slave ship. No one would choose to do that.

I think of Mr. Washington's mother fervently praying over her children that they would be free—And I see the apostle Paul praying for his spiritual children that they would stay free. This calls for earnest, fervent prayer for ourselves. We need to pray for ourselves, and we need to pray fervently for one another. And it calls for an earnest study of Scripture. Jesus said, 'The truth will make you free' (Jn 8:32), and it will allow us to stay free. So, we must continually remind ourselves of who we are in Christ.

Romans chapter 6, verses 11 and 12: "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies..."

All the fullness of deity dwells in Christ, and He dwells in us. —The mystery! We are complete. —Nothing can be added to what we already have. —We must reckon it to be true; consider it to be so, —And live by faith. That's the challenge; and we can do that by grace alone. That is what we are to pray for.

So, this is the full life; this is the free life; this is the wise and joyful life. The Christian life is to be a joyful life—But it begins with faith; begins with faith alone by believing the good news that Jesus Christ is both God and Man, and that He came into this world to die for sinners. He bore the penalty of sin in our place so that all who believe in Him would be saved.

If you have not believed, let me tell you this: you are in the worst kind of slavery and doomed for all eternity. Don't dismiss that. Flee the wrath to come! Believe in Jesus Christ; He receives all who do. And then, by His grace, live joyfully in His freedom. God help you to do that. Help all of us to do that. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for the freedom we have in Christ. We thank You for what You have done for us in Him. You have broken the chains of bondage that is sin; You have broken the power of it. We still have the principle within us; we still fail; we fail every day, fail every moment—But sin isn't the master any longer. And in the power of the Spirit, we can live obediently and victoriously, and we can gain victory and freedom from error – error like this that would enslave us to all kinds of rules and regulations that have nothing to do with our relationship with You.

Help us to be wise. Help us to be men and women that study Your Word, gain wisdom, and know how to live well and live rightly. Again, we do that by Your grace. We pray for Your grace and Your mercy that we might live lives that bring honor and glory to You. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)