



Colossians 2:20–23

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-im-

posed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Reflection

From the outside many people often mistake Christianity for a collection of rules designed to sap all the fun out of life. ‘Don’t do this, don’t do that, or that, and especially not that; but do do these things, a whole lot of them; every single day for the rest of your natural life.’ And, truth to tell, the amount of rules, traditions, and practices that tend to creep into Christian communities over time often don’t much help this image. But God’s design for his church and his people couldn’t be further from a set of life draining rules and com-

mandments.

That's why I love chapters like 1 Corinthians 10 which remind us of our freedom in Christ. 1 Corinthians 10 teaches us that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it; and that the only real restriction we have as believers in this world is to do all for the glory of God. Galatians 5 similarly simplifies the Christian faith. It is for freedom that we have been set free by Jesus Christ from slavery to sin – but we should never use our freedom as a cover-up for evil. Rather, and so simply, we should serve each other humbly in love, because the whole Old Testament Law, all of those commands and principals, have at their heart an attitude of love for God and one another. And so far from rules, rules, rules – we have great freedom in Christ as we approach every-

thing in life for the glory of God, and in love and service of each other. Which is so liberating, especially when compared to all the other religious practices in our world which amount to nothing more than rules and traditions made up by man. Or at the deeper spiritual level, these rules and traditions of these religions originated by demons and bent on leading whole nations and people groups away from Jesus. Think the New Age movement, think Mysticism, think the Occult, even Islam and Hinduism at their roots, or in the case of the Colossians in the first century, the Gnostic heresies that were threatening the faith of this young church. Again today, Paul attacks the false teaching that is threatening the Colossian church in the passage in front of us – rules, rules, rules where there should only be grace and fruit. Reading today's

passage, Colossians 2:20–23,

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Paul has just reminded them of the gos-

pel and all the benefits that are now theirs in Jesus. In Christ they are a new creation, the old is gone, the new is here. They're saved by grace, through faith, not by works, so that no-one can boast. They've been chosen by God, they're his handiwork, united with Christ, created in Christ to do the good works that he alone has prepared in advance for them to do. The same Christ by whom, and through whom and for whom all things were created and in whom all things right now hold together. The one who in everything has the supremacy. So why ever would they regress into their former pagan ways of life? Why ever would they continue to submit themselves to the rules of these pagan philosophies that in addition to making your life miserable only amount to death?

21 ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

Don't listen to these hollow and deceptive philosophies that depend on human tradition! Don't listen to their fine sounding arguments and be deceived! Don't be taken captive! Don't regress! Verse 23,

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Even within the Christian church there is a long history of adding all manner of practices to Scripture that are not prescribed in Scripture, and, while they may even be well intentioned to begin with, end up overburdening believers and driving many away from the faith. Under the guise of holiness and purity in church history Christians have regularly withdrawn from the world into monasteries, or lived in caves like hermit, or in strict societies like the Amish with all manner of rules and regulations designed to keep out the world and keep sin at bay. But Paul cuts to the heart of all of this,

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in restraining sensual indulgence.

Lifestyles like this turn the joy of believing into misery, and, in the end they simply don't work – Paul teaches us that they're of no value in restraining sensual indulgence. Withdrawing from society, restraining from all forms of pleasure, setting up strict rules and boundaries simply does not work in our battle against sin, in addition to being completely out of step with Scripture.

'Do not, do not, do not' isn't the language of the Christian faith, it's the language of a works based religion. If you're thinking about Christianity in those terms then you have everything backwards. Christianity isn't about what we do, it's about what Jesus has done for us. Sure – we respond

in kind, our lives change, and we live increasingly in a manner worthy of Jesus, in response to what he's done for us. And it can be difficult at times, but Jesus said, 'my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' Far from 'Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!' the Bible teaches us to embrace all of God's good creation to his glory. Listen to Paul in Philip-
pians, 'brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.'

Think & Pray

Consider your walk with the Lord today. Are you feeling burdened by sin? Perhaps

you're feeling boxed in, constrained, forever tripping up and regressing into old patterns of life that you know aren't consistent with God's will for your life. It's like there are rules everywhere and the thought of all you have to do is grinding you into the ground. If so, why not simplify your outlook on your faith? Why not try this? Put all those rules back into the draw for a moment and instead concentrate today on two things. Firstly, 1 Corinthians 10:31 'whatever you do [today] do it all for God's glory. And secondly, live today out of love for God and love for your neighbour. Shape today around God's glory, and your love for him and your neighbour. 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light', says Jesus. Pray today that this would be true in your life as you bring glory to our God and express your love for him in the

way you live and in the way you love others. Glory and Love. Try it today.