

Last Sunday, we delved into the mystery of Christ. We saw that the shadow of the Old Testament pointed to a reality, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It was a revelation that completely changed the way the Apostle Paul interpreted the Scriptures. It was in no way a diminishing of the importance or inspiration of the Scriptures, but rather gave them a new filter to understand where it was pointing. (Acts 26:22-23) It was not that they did not see it pointing to the Messiah, but rather that with the life of Christ, they could now see it with more clarity. They could correct their misinterpretations. Now a first and second coming of Messiah clarified what seemed to be conflicting predictions. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

But some wanted to stay with the shadow and pictures instead of moving to the reality. *16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.* All the regulations for worship and religious purity kept the nation of Israel distinct from the world around them. The dietary laws had a great deal to do with health. The religious festivals brought national unity and pointed forward in picture form to what God was going to do in the future. Now that the reality had come, the unity of the kingdom of God is no longer in what we eat (Romans 14:17) but the One of whom we partake, Jesus, the bread of life. It is not in our worship styles or rituals, but in the One we worship. (Ephesians 2:14-15) The shadows of the Law are cast by the body of Christ. Now that we have come to Him, we can still learn from the Law and how it points to Him. Whether we observe a ritual or not, our focus is the reality. The demands of the Law were met in Him. The Law said we are sinners, but Jesus said He came to give His life a ransom for us. (Matthew 20:28) In Him we have forgiveness of sins and become a part of the new creation. (2Corinthians 5:17)

The false teacher was telling the Christians in Colossae that they were inferior spiritually because they did not do God's will. You'll hear that today by those who put ritual and rules above a relationship. They will judge you because you are not doing what they are doing as if uniformity with their preferred actions earned you some favor with God. But never fear; they will pray for you, you poor, weak, immature believer. The works road to righteousness or sanctification will always compare their life with yours and count themselves more spiritual because they do certain things. They are quick to judge you as inferior. (Mark 7:5) That is the extreme of legalism. **Spiritual maturity is living in Christ and being led by His Spirit.**

Commented [Paul1]: Acts 26:22-23 (ESV)

²²To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass:
²³that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

Commented [Paul2]: Zechariah 9:9-10 (ESV)

⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
¹⁰"I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Commented [Paul3]: Romans 14:17 (ESV)

¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Commented [Paul4]: Ephesians 2:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility
¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,

Commented [Paul5]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Commented [Paul6]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Commented [Paul7]: Mark 7:5 (ESV)

⁵And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, The last verse encouraged the Colossian Christians not to feel condemned by the legalist's prideful judgments. Now he warns them to not be judged by the super-spiritual experiences of the false teacher's delusions. By depriving themselves of physical necessities, they induced hallucinations that they thought to be spiritual experiences. In these states of physical deprivation, they allowed their minds to imagine they were communing with God. They then let the so-called vision interpret the Scriptures on what they thought was a higher plane.

Paul is warning them to not give in to the desire to elevate oneself above others through works of self-deprivation like fasting or self-torture or any denial of the physical body's needs. It is common for the world to praise such actions that appear spiritual. Fasting is a spiritual discipline, but we must ask if it the leading of the Holy Spirit or is it a routine? Is it something you tell others about for respect? That is why Jesus suggested we not let others know if we are fasting. (Matthew 6:17-18) Then it remains only about your relationship with God.

Prayer is absolutely a part of our spiritual walk with our Savior, but if we deprive our body of sleep, night after night, we better be sure it is the leading of the Spirit and not spiritual pride or works. Let's face it! **Our old nature wants to be a religious giant, but it hates being a humble servant submitted to Jesus.** We have an ungodly appetite for ecstatic states of esoteric experiences. (Luke 23:8) That hunger opens us up to deception. It elevates us above everyone else and says we are special. Some of God's servants had such experiences but when it is from God, the result is humility, not pride. Whatever our experience, the objective truth of Scripture must be the filter through which we interpret it. (Isaiah 8:20) **Christ rather than experiences determines spiritual reality.**

We have had a number of these systems come through our town. One insisted the way to real spiritual breakthrough was for us all to stay up all night in prayer. Another insisted that we pray by pleading the blood of Jesus over everything. Another was sure that the power of Masonic Lodge had to be broken before Sedona would change. Another even directly contradicted our passage today by declaring that Jewish Feast Days are special times when the heavens are open for God's power to come down. And all of them judged the faithful believers here to be unspiritual if they didn't jump on board. And yes they had visions and special revelation that showed them something no one else had seen. Some things never change. That's because we are still dealing with life in Jesus or life in the flesh. It's the same throughout history and around the world. It is heartbreaking to see the body of Christ in in our town fall for it decade after

Commented [Paul8]: Matthew 6:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,
¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Commented [Paul9]: Luke 23:8 (ESV)

⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.

Commented [Paul10]: Isaiah 8:20 (ESV)

²⁰ To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

decade after decade. And the fruit of it is always a fracturing of the body of Christ. (Titus 3:10) If we don't learn from the past, we will continue to repeat the same mistakes.

Commented [Paul11]: Titus 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

Paul goes on to describe the real problem with the false teacher. ¹⁹ *and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.* The false teacher had lost connection with the Head, Jesus. He thought he had a direct connection. Instead of submitting to Jesus, he thought his special spirituality had made him the new avenue for truth. Everyone else was just too immature to see what he had seen, and now he and he alone must lead them into the full truth. To that, Paul reminds them that all the fullness of God is in Jesus! (Colossians 2:9)

Commented [Paul12]: Colossians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

By declaring he had lost connection with the Head, Paul was pointing out that even if he claims to be a Christian, his teaching showed him to be severed from the body. The Head nourishes the body and directs its growth. **It's the personal relationship with Jesus that knits us together and causes us to function as a body.** If we are growing and maturing, it should be together as a body, not separately from the rest. (1Corinthians 12:7) A body grows at the same rate or it becomes deformed. The false teacher deceived himself into thinking he had surpassed everyone else and become their superior in all spiritual knowledge. Paul is saying he's an amputee. If he's growing, it's not a godly growth but ungodly.

Commented [Paul13]: 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

When we all focus on Christ, we are knit together in love and grow together in Him. (Colossians 2:2) He is our nourishment, and He is the Word. We grow in a godly way which is love, true humility, and service to one another.

Commented [Paul14]: Colossians 2:2 (ESV)

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,

²⁰ *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?* Paul reminds them that they died with Christ. Since that is true, why would they go back to the old worldly ways? Why would they subject themselves to the demonic suggestion of works? Why would they think that keeping the shadow laws would somehow earn them God's favor when they have the reality in Jesus?

In verse 21 he appears to be quoting the false teacher. You shouldn't use certain things or touch certain things. You shouldn't eat certain foods. All these are perishable things that are temporal. Jesus addressed the issue when He said, ¹⁷*"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?"* ¹⁸*But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man*

'unclean.' ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. Matthew 15:17-19 (ESV)

Preoccupation with the world and its ways sidetracks us from the eternal issues of life. One extreme is luxury, living for bodily comfort and satisfaction. The other is to measure our spiritual growth by worldly references. Do I consider myself a spiritual giant because of the things I do or don't do? Do I measure myself by the distance I've put between me and my old life? **The only real measure of growth is Jesus.** Am I in Him? Is He Lord of my life? Do I act out of love for Him or the pride of being a spiritual leader?

All the do's and don'ts of religions are about appearance. Jesus' life transforms the heart. ²³ *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.* It looks like they are really spiritually dedicated. Consider some of the Buddhist or Hindu monks. They look very spiritual. But spirituality is not measured in denial of physical needs. You can actually feed the flesh nature while starving the fleshly body. Spirituality is measured by our relationship with Jesus, both the Head and the body. True growth in one affects growth in the other. Spirituality is not measured by your good works, no matter if they are good things, Biblical things, or church things. (1John 2:6)

All the good deeds and religious actions in the world can't change the heart. You can lash yourself with chains, fast for 40 days, refuse to watch TV or movies, pray through the night, and worship from dawn to dusk on every special feast day, new moon and Sabbath, witness to everyone you meet, while your heart remains unchanged. (Galatians 5:25-26) A relationship with Jesus is the only thing that changes the heart. **A love relationship with Jesus is the only way to really change your desires.**

The message of Scripture is that of the restoration of the relationship of man with God. It is not about ritual or modified behavior. Eve ate the fruit because she wanted to be exalted in position and knowledge. (Genesis 3:6) She put her desire before her relationship with God. God doesn't just want a people that will be obedient to do's and don'ts. He wants a bride for the Son that will act based on a relationship of love. Out of relationship comes the works that God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Don't let me tell you what you are supposed to do. That is God's calling on your life and it comes out of your relationship with Him. What He calls you to do will be Spirit empowered and will bear fruit that remains. (John 15:16) It will be a part of the growth of the body.

Commented [Paul15]: 1 John 2:6 (ESV)

⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Commented [Paul16]: Galatians 5:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Commented [Paul17]: Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Commented [Paul18]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [Paul19]: John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Last week I had the blessing of sharing the chapel session with the Indian Bible Mission in Flagstaff. I had no time to really prepare, so I shared with them the tabernacle message that we shared when the model of the tabernacle was erected here. I thought it would be a good teaching for them and inspiring, but I wasn't really expecting the Holy Spirit to grab hold of my heart and remind me again that it's all about restoring what was lost in the fall. God wants to walk with us again. But what we inherited from Adam is so evil, so self-centered, that it took the cross to restore such an enormous breach, not so we would obey, but so that we would truly love again.

These religious things that come along, legalism and hyper-spiritual experiences are all about "me". They don't really bring us closer to Jesus; they just boost my ego, my pride in my spiritual condition. My head knowledge may have increased, but the gap is still there. The only way back is through the brazen altar of the cross where the Lamb of God spilled His blood to pay for my sins. (Ephesians 2:17-18) Then I can see in the Laver my true condition and wash in the water of the Word. (Ephesians 5:26) I can enter into the tabernacle and feast on the Bread of Life and be illuminated by His Spirit and join in His prayers. But He wants me to come all the way in to His awesome presence. (Psalm 16:11)

There, in the Holy of Holies, I am not puffed up in pride, but broken by His the gracious love that comes from His awesome holiness. I am humbled by the vision of how far I have to go, undone, unraveled. (Isaiah 6:5) I have no desire to boast about the experience, for it was devastating, but wonderful. I just want to share of how gracious He can be to anyone who will come to the cross. I don't want to share that out of duty, but because it overflows from my heart.

The dietary rituals and feast days were to bring Israel together in the Temple to worship God. Jesus is the Temple, and all believers are the Temple of the living God. (1Corinthians 6:19) Jesus' sacrifice brings us in unity and qualifies us to come into God's presence to worship Him. We share the joy and freedom that come in knowing we are accepted in Jesus. Spiritual freedom is being free from do's and don'ts and joyfully acting only out of loving cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Now, when someone comes along and judges you because you don't do this or that, don't let them get away with it! Tell them the Lord is your righteousness. (Jeremiah 23:6) And if they try to tell you that you need to have a certain spiritual experience, tell them you had the greatest spiritual experience, your sins were nailed to the cross of Jesus. And when Satan tries to get you under condemnation that you aren't doing this or that, first check your relationship with Jesus. If you are loving Him and living in Him, waiting on His Spirit, then tell Satan to get behind you! You died with Christ!

Commented [Paul20]: Ephesians 2:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.
¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Commented [Paul21]: Ephesians 5:26 (ESV)

²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

Commented [Paul22]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Commented [Paul23]: Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)

⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Commented [Paul24]: 1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

Commented [Paul25]: Jeremiah 23:6 (ESV)

⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

The new you is right with God because you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. You are growing with His body, and He is transforming your heart. That is true spirituality that you were created to possess. That is true freedom in Christ.

Questions

- 1 What was the function of the Law?
- 2 How can we describe spiritual maturity?
- 3 What was "spiritual" to the false teachers?
- 4 What is "spiritual" to our old nature?
- 5 What is the result of being connected with the Head?
- 6 Why is our death with Christ a death to the Law?
- 7 How do "do's and don'ts" sidetrack us?
- 8 How do our desires change?
- 9 What is the message of Scripture?