

Colossians 4

Last week we talked about how Martin Luther valued his faith even more than his life

With joy, Luther believed and taught that salvation is a gift of God's grace, received by faith and trust in God's promise to forgive sins for the sake of Christ's death on the cross. This, he believed was God's work from beginning to end.

This however was not always the case

The beginning of his life were very different

Martin Luther's father owned a copper mine in nearby Mansfeld. Having risen from the peasantry, his father was determined to see his son ascend to civil service and bring further honor to the family. To that end, Hans sent young Martin to school. All that changed during a thunderstorm in the summer of 1505. A lightning bolt struck near to him as he was returning to school.

Terrified, he cried out, "Help, St. Anne! I'll become a monk!" His life was spared, but regretting his words, Luther kept his bargain, dropped out of law school and entered the monastery there.

Young Brother Martin fully dedicated himself to monastic life, the effort to do good works to please God and to serve others through prayer for their souls. Yet peace with God escaped him. He devoted himself to fasts, flagellations, long hours in prayer and pilgrimages, and constant confession. The more he tried to do for God, it seemed, the more aware he became of his sinfulness.

In ignorance Martin pursued a life in the shadow of truth

Chasing Shadows Colossians 2:6-23

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

- because of the marvelous work of salvation that God has done in them Paul is saying it is therefore natural that they should want to maintain their faith in him relying on his strength while always, always being thankful for the truth that he has revealed
- Paul is saying you can stand firm in your faith by ensuring that you are not persuaded to obey, follow or add to the teaching you were given
- the word for "captive" here in vrs8 is robbing
- thus the Colossians are allowing themselves to be robbed in the event that they considering other religious practices as necessary in order to be saved
- the gospel is founded on a dependency on Christ not on a dependency on our efforts or religious behavior
- to believe that it is to allow oneself to be robbed of the truth
- the term *principles* refers to the elementary rules and regulations that certain teachers were seeking to impose on believers according to the dictates of human philosophies.

-Paul's strongest indictment against the heretics was that their teaching was not according to Christ, and thus they were not walking with Christ

⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

-The Greek word for fullness indicates "plenitude" and "totality." The Gnostics used the word to describe the totality of all deities.

-Both Paul and John used the word to describe Christ, who is the fullness, the plenitude of God, for all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily.

-Since all of God's fullness resides in Christ, every spiritual reality is found in Christ. In Him, we lack nothing.

-The Greek word for *Godhead* is used only here in the New Testament and designates the totality of God's nature and person.

-All the fullness of the Godhead "dwells" or "permanently resides" in the body of Jesus, the God-man

-because of this Paul is saying you have authority

over your fleshly desires and passions they do not rule over you because Christ rules in you
2:11. Circumcision denotes a cutting off or removal.

-The **circumcision** in view here is not physical but spiritual, whereby the ruling power of the believer's **flesh** or sinful nature is broken or removed by Christ.

2:12. Buried with him in baptism: This is not water baptism, but Spirit baptism, by which Christ brings the believer into an intimate relation with Himself and with His people

-You are risen signifies that God has raised the Colossians from the sins, habits, values, and guilt of their unconverted life, not allowing them to remain in their old ways and iniquities.

-here as in other parts of the letter Paul is assuring them who they are

13When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

-before you came to the truth

-while you were living a life in opposition to God he saved you

-he cancelled rules and regulations outlined in the Law
-he cancelled the necessity to obey the ceremonial rules and regulations and with it the authority they had over us
-this was accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ
-The believer is no longer subject to the threat of the law's condemnation.
-the powers and authorities in this passage represent angelic and demonic powers

-Jesus' sacrifice that also removed not only the authority of ceremonial worship but also the authority of Satan and all powers that the Colossians would consider significant

¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. ¹⁹He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

-because of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice
-do not consider anyone's judgment of you in regards to you lack of religious ceremonial adherence to be significant
-it isn't
-these are a shadow, impermanent, insignificant, a mere reflection of what is true and important,
-those that uphold the need for and prioritize religious ceremonial worship are insincere, arrogant, confused and most definitely wrong
-you do not need to follow these religious practices or these rules and regulations to get right with God or to be acceptable to God because Jesus is God and because of your faith you are as acceptable to God as Jesus Christ
-the person who belongs to Christ, the bearer of true reality, does not have to submit to the judgment of others in these regards.
-religious ceremonial practices are not a means to draw near to God, belief in Jesus Christ is

20Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23Such 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.

-Since the gospel has freed the believer from attempting to gain heaven by self-effort, he should never **subject** himself again to such legalistic **ordinances**.

-why would you consider religious ceremonial practices useful when you are now in Christ and need to do nothing in order to be holy

-the practices look like they make one holy but they don't and can't and will disappear because they are based on man's standards and efforts not God's

-they are especially useless in helping one refrain from temptation

- In view of Christ's all-sufficiency, His abolition of the Mosaic Law as a means to justification, and His decisive victory over demonic powers, Paul urges the Colossians to resist legalism, angel-worship, and asceticism that was being forced upon them by the false teachers.

-Such exercises deny Christ's supremacy and sufficiency, rob Christians of their liberty, and **are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh**.

-It is not that the ordinances has been suspended, we have ordinance in regards to baptism and communion are not wrong to participate in

-but such actions like baptism and communion are wrong if we place them as being necessary to link us to God

-they become wrong when we prioritize the religious or ceremonial act as means to be

acceptable to God

-the act then becomes a substitute for Jesus Christ

In Ignorance People prefer a life in the Shadows

-Paul uses the word shadow in verse 17 to illustrate that the religious practices the Colossians were engaged in to appear holy are a shadow of the reality of holiness that we have in Christ

-We get our word *photograph* from the Greek word used here for "shadow." All the rituals of the Law in the Old Testament were like a negative or a picture—they were just pictures of Christ.

-Now that Christ has come, we have the reality.

-Why should we go back and look at a picture?

Eg shadow

-a shadow in this passage is a religious observance that becomes more significant for the believer than Jesus

-it can be a ceremony like communion, baptism or barking like a dog, speaking in tongues, having visions or witnessing or having spiritual experiences

-any experience that one feels one must have to be significant to God is a shadow

-People like living in the shadows

-people like the idea that they can do things that will make them acceptable to God

-The Colossians were led into the shadows of false teaching and useless religious worship

-They were not led kicking and screaming

-There was an attraction to living in the shadows to living legalistically

- There was an attraction that pulled them from the truth of Jesus' being supreme and their salvation being secure
- that, as we talked about last week, caused them to devalue their faith
- It seems curious that people would digress so far from the truth
- It seems strange that they would prefer, legalism, mysticism, false philosophy and ascetic living
- It is true that the Gnostics were clever in their arguments
- But ultimately their deception would not have gone very far unless there was something appealing to it
- People like living in the shadows
- people like living legalistically
- people like the idea that they can do things that will make them acceptable to God for four reasons
- 1. it's understandable
 - you are a sinful person
 - God hates sin
 - in order for people to make up for how bad they are you have to do good things or religious things
 - Eg working for money
 - because it is understandable it is comforting
 - you are comforted because...
- 2. it puts us in control
 - it enables us to believe that we determine our destiny all that is needed is to work
 - we can measure our holiness or our righteousness by how many things we do and how much stuff we do

- eg religion Hindu man standing for seven years and rolling to the temple
- 3. we can control others
 - you are in sin unless you go to church
 - you are in danger of going to hell unless you go to church and give me your money
 - eg pastor
 - if I can make you doubt your salvation I can control you
- 4. its popular
 - everybody is doing it
 - every religion the five pillars of islam, the five K's of seikhism, the 1100 hours of the JW
 - if your not you will be judged
 - Like the Colossians were being judge for not keeping Jewish tradition

Those that Live in the shadows are destined for destruction

- for non-Christians that's hell
- can you imagine their surprise after working so hard
- For Christians it's no peace, anxiety and a giving up on one's faith
- like the Colossians that were bound by the false teaching of the Gnostics** initially living in the shadows is comfortable
- Because it is understandable and popular and it puts control in your hands but ultimately it will lead to destruction
- 1) stress and frustration

You can't be good enough or do enough

-logically the end of legalistic living is frustration and self destruction

-Paul's suggestion to not let people judge you in regards to obedience to certain days of the week shows that others are starting to self-destruct

¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day

-one can never do enough as a result paranoia grows

2) insecure and judgmental

-the more we start to see how little we can measure up to these rules the more insecure we will feel and we will start judging other's actions in order to make ourselves feel better

-we will experience a lack of ability to love God or men

-one cannot love a God you are trying to please

-and when you are feeling guilt or condemnation how can you be kind and forgiving to other people

-when they appear to be doing well you will envy them

When they fail you will judge them

-eg we score keeping

*Eg Luther *Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who**

punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God

3) it does nothing to prevent moral failure

-because the focus is on self and failure is a constant

-how things look become predominately important rather than how things are

-the religious behavior is external not internal

-for this reason

-religious tasks **lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.**

-living in the shadows of false teachings means that we will never be at peace because our work is never done

-this was the life the Colossians were living as they closed themselves off to God's grace and opened themselves to man's rules and regulations

4) It leads to one abandoning their faith

-this would have been one of Paul's concerns

-No one ever gave up on their faith because they were sick of people loving them enough.

-They have given up because they were living in the shadows of legalism they have been broken by the crushing burden of trying to be good or trying to be good enough to earn God's acceptance

-eg George had been blind for most of his life due to a diabetic condition. He had endured several operations and his fragile physical health was always a burden but wasn't the source of his greatest struggle His greatest pain was emotional

coming from his belief that God had rejected him. Error was causing terrible pain to a sensitive and lovable man who had enough burdens in his life, without adding to them with false teaching.

At his church there was a great emphasis on faith “If you have faith you can do anything” was the attitude continually expressed. George’s pastor would stand in the pulpit and say things like “If you get cancer and die it’s your own fault! You just don’t have enough faith!”

These pronouncements didn’t stop here. Week after week as George entered the church service someone would place a hymnal in his hands deliberately. And they would say to George Maybe today George you’ll have enough faith to see. Maybe today you’ll have the faith for God to heal you. But no matter how hard George tried to work up a lot of faith, he was never healed.

After not having enough faith to see for many years George was a beaten, hopeless man. After all he was taught that the size of your faith that determined God accepting him

Conclusion

One can only reject the Shadows when the Reality of Christ is understood

the Colossians were bound by the lies of the Gnostics

-They were saved

but they were living in the shadows by worshipping

angels, living ascetically, legalistically, and following false philosophy

-Paul was giving them the reality of Christ in hope they would use this to escape the bondage of living in the shadows

-the reality of Christ is found in understanding of the supremacy of Christ and one’s share in that inheritance

-faith in it is the key

-It was this faith that Paul was drawing his readers to have

1-Faith is not a feeling

-Feelings are reactions from what we are thinking

-Faith is not intellectual agreement with doctrine

-faith is not the power to manipulate God

-There is no power in faith

-The power is god

-that power was demonstrated in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

-Faith is only that which connects the power of God to our humanity

-that’s why the size of our faith is not an issue but rather whether we have faith or not

2) You and I are not responsible for producing the Christian life

-We aren’t able to produce the Christian life

-If we try our motivation will be fear and our tasks legalistic

-Only Christ can produce it

- Our responsibility is to maintain a dependent, receiving attitude
- It comes from an attitude that says Lord, I can't-but you can.
- it starts with faith then leads to surrender
- Time and again Jesus emphasized that he was living a life of total dependency upon his father John 12:49
- The indwelling life of Christ is released in our daily experience when we live as He did, by faith
- that is with total dependency
- A life of faith is our love for God resulting in dependency upon God, resulting in obedience to God
- This was the life that Paul was pointing the Colossians to
- Apart from a heart that is truly learning to love God will have no motivation for obedience other than abject fear of punishment

3-One of the most fundamental things that we are surrendering to Christ is all claim to personal rights.

- That is things we demand from life like to be happy, to be noticed, the right to be appreciated, the right to be respected, the right to get my own way, a demand to be healed
- One cannot hold onto these rights and maintain a thankful spirit because there will be things that don't go our way
- we surrender our rights when we desire what God wants more than what we want

-George made a decision to give thanks in total surrender to the Lord who loved him and promised to cause even his blindness to work together for good. He died 18 months later and his mother wrote that the last 18 months were worth it all because George had learned about the reality of Christ Through placing his total dependency upon Jesus Christ, George found him to be all that he claimed to be the answer to every need of the human heart.

Christian maturity is not Starting out with Jesus then graduating to something better or continuing in religious legalistic tasks to get closer to god .The Christian life is starting with Christ then spending the rest of eternity discovering more and more of what we already have in Him more and more of the wonders of what we already have in him

-Will we embrace God's definition of the true objectives of the Christian life, or will we pursue our own man-made definitions of success in the Christian life?

-In other words we will be chasing shadows or live the real life through Christ by prioritizing our faith and not our deeds in order to be right with God. The choice is ours

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness

