

Colossians 2:6-23

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 June 2016

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] If you will, to Colossians chapter 2. Colossians chapter 2.! Four, because of the weather, there was no grape harvest in Cornwall.

So not surprisingly, when an inspector found a bottle of wine bearing the 1992 vintage, he was very suspicious. His investigations revealed that in order to save his business, Ted Jeffries, what he'd done was to make a home wine making kit, and brew up some tea plonk, which he passed off as the real thing.

When the whole case went to court, his defence was that none of his customers complained. They didn't realise that it was cheap plonk. And there's a similar problem in Colossae.

In this city, the Colossians, instead of holding to the vintage gospels, the real deal of chapters 1, verse 15 to 23, that vintage gospel, the Colossians were substituting it for another gospel.

And there were false teachers in Colossae who were peddling, cheek plonk, a false gospel. And they were passing it off as the real thing. And unfortunately, like many of Mr. Jeffries' customers, they couldn't tell the difference.

[1 : 39] So you remember, at the end of chapter 1, Paul has reminded them, isn't he, of the vintage gospel. Do you remember that mystery, verse 27? It's very simple.

And yet you never get to the bottom. Christ in you, for hope of glory. And Paul now goes on to warn them. So it's very interesting, as it says, Paul does what he talks about in verse 24.

He says, doesn't he, about him we proclaim, verse 28, warning everyone, teaching everyone. And that's what he does in chapter 2. Chapter 2 is a warning passage.

And he says three things in this passage. Or to put it another way, there are three groups of people that he warns them about. First of all, there are the kidnappers. So look at verse 8.

Don't let anyone take you captive. There are the kidnappers. And then there are the vigilantes in verse 16. Do not let anyone pass judgment on you.

[2 : 46] Don't let anyone judge you. Don't let anyone disqualify you. And then verse 18, there are the pretenders. Let no one disqualify you. Insisting on asceticism and worship of angels and going on and on about visions.

So three groups. Kidnappers, vigilantes, and other pretenders. So let me introduce you to these people. First of all, the kidnappers. Can you see it? Do not let anyone kidnap you.

Verse 8. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to the human traditions, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Now Colossae was very much like London. Many different beliefs in London today out there. And in Colossae it was pick and mix and match.

So if you pick up an old commentary on the book of Colossians, they will talk about the old Colossian heresy. But I don't think that's right. I don't think there was a particular teacher.

[3 : 48] I don't think you can get that from the book of Colossians. Colossians. I think it's a mood. It's an atmosphere. Just like the atmosphere in London today.

Where anything goes. Londoners are not atheists in the May. They are not non-religious.

Londoners, if you have a conversation with them, and according to the census, they still believe in God, a kind of generic God.

They are religious people, but it's a small sport, isn't it? It's a different kind of belief. So they mix and match. So you know what a smorgasbord is. You take a bit of this, don't you?

And a bit of that. And you mix it and you match it. And Paul warns here in verse 8, be careful. See to it. That no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to the human tradition.

According to the elemental spirits of the world. So at best, they're man-made traditions. But at worst, can you see that?

[4 : 53] They're demonic. And it talks about the elemental forces. I don't know if you're one of these people when you go shopping. When I go shopping, I like to look at one thing.

I like to buy it and get out as quickly as possible. But there are people, aren't they, that they feel they've got to look at everything in the shop before they buy. I'm not like that. Maybe you are. Or maybe you go for a meal. These people are even more infuriating, aren't they? They go right through the menu. I send people to my greasy spoon around the corner. And they go right the way through the menu.

It's exactly the same dish whatever you get, isn't it? I don't know if you're like that. I don't know if you're like the person who they order on the next table and you're always wishing that you'd order that. So how do I stop myself being seduced by this kind of heady mix of different beliefs?

So much on offer today, isn't there? You've got the Jewish synagogue up the road. You've got the Sikh temple, haven't you? You've got the Hindus around the corner.

[5 : 53] The Roman Catholic Abbey. The mosque. How do you stop yourself being seduced? How do we protect ourselves as a church from being taken captive, from being kidnapped by religiosity and all these different beliefs?

Well, Paul says two things here. He says this is out of cult proof of yourself against empty demonic philosophies. Number one, recognise your fullness in Christ. And then number two, recognise your freedom in Christ.

Let's look at those two things. Recognise your fullness in Christ. Verses 9 and 10. Alan Redpath used to ministering to see Richland years and years and years ago, but he tells the story of a prominent South African businessman who bought a Rolls-Royce.

He bought the vehicle and the man liked it so much that he later asked the dealer how much horsepower did his car have? Back in the old days, Rolls-Royce never disclosed that information. Not even to the dealers. But because the buyer was such a prominent businessman, the dealer sent a message to the Rolls-Royce plant in Derby, setting out the exact specifications of the engine and asking them to reply with the exact horsepower.

[7 : 03] And the reply came back, the horsepower of the Rolls-Royce is adequate. That's the one that much up, isn't it? That's Paul's point in verses 9 and 10. Paul's message to the Colossians that are surrounded by all these different religions and beliefs and philosophies and competing worldviews and alternative spiritualities.

Look what he says in verse 9. For in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority.

He has no rivals. He is more than adequate to meet your needs. You can look elsewhere by all means. You can examine all the spiritualities that are on offer. But can you see that?

In verse 10, you are complete in him. And not only that, he is the head over every ruler and authority. So when you come to him, you go right to the top.

And the Colossians had this idea, as lots of people do today, they had this idea that God was too great to be able to come to too directly. That you had to come through some kind of intermediary, whether it was an angel or a priest or the Virgin Mary or a saint, that you could not come to God directly.

[8 : 23] That you had to go through some other agency. And there were all sorts of human and angelic mediators that you had to go through. It's what the JW's believe. That Jesus was just one of those kind of roots mediators.

One of the intermediaries. And Paul says, no, in Christ, you go right to the top. In him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. And you are complete in him.

And in Christ, you go straight to the top. So why waste your time going to someone else? Jesus is not some guru with interesting things to say. He is the one. He is the word made flesh who dwelt amongst us who was full of grace and truth.

And if you haven't discovered that for yourself, please, please take a gospel. Read a gospel. See what kind of person he is. He is the word. He is God made flesh.

So to protect ourselves from the pluralism and the syncretism that is in our society, we need to realise the fullness that we have in Christ is more than adequate for us.

[9 : 29] And we need to recognise our freedom in Christ. in the verses 11 to 15, that's what they're all about. Do you remember, when they crucified Jesus, if you're familiar with that, the story of the crucifixion, Jesus was stretched out on a cross and they put a sign above him which said, King of the Jews.

And the Jews were very upset by that. They said to Pilate, don't say King of the Jews, say he claims to be King of the Jews. And that's why he was crucified, humanly speaking, it was treasonable as far as the Romans were concerned.

So he was crucified as a subversive. And it was common practice when you crucified a criminal to put the charge sheet above the head of the criminal on the cross. And so do you see what Paul is saying in these verses?

Look what he says in verse 14. He says, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside nailing at the cross.

Occasionally, I get asked to be a guarantor for something. Like a flat for somebody's renting. And I have to sign papers that I am that guarantor for these people.

[10 : 41] I don't particularly like doing that. Because if they don't pay up, I'm liable for the cost, isn't it? And there's something that is written down in the state agent's office that could be used against me.

Policemen say that, don't they, Ollie? Whatever you say can be used, isn't it? Written down and used. No, they don't say that. On Juliet Bravo, they used to say that. It's not a comfortable thing, is it?

To think there is something written down that someone has against you. Well, I wonder whether you realise there is something written down. There is a written charge sheet.

There is a record of debt of your sins, your debt towards God, and it could be used against you. You see, guilt, people, you look at confused about guilt. I'm not going to lay a guilt trip on you, we say. And we understand guilt in that sense, and that is right. We don't like to be made to feel guilty. And there are aspects of guilt which are very, very unhealthy when people are made to feel guilty.

[11 : 44] But there is a difference, isn't there? A very important difference between feeling guilty and actually being guilty. We need to understand that. I was going to preach somewhere, and there was horrific traffic, and I thought I'd take a shortcut.

I cut up a side road, which I didn't know was one way, and there was a policeman in his car who stopped me. And he wrote my details, my details in his little book. But I didn't feel guilty.

In fact, I thought he should have let me off. I was only visiting the place to preach, for goodness sake. I didn't feel guilty at all. But I was guilty. I was guilty. And regardless of whether you feel guilty, the reality is that God exists.

And this is a moral universe. And when we break his law, we incur guilt. So whether you feel guilty or not, that is irrelevant. You and I are guilty. Although there is something written down.

It is the record of our sin and guilt. The things which we've done that we should not have done. The things that we haven't done that we should have done. There is a record of that written down. But you see what Paul is saying. The record of my sin and guilt.

[12 : 56] The things I should have done. Things I haven't done. That record of my sin and guilt. He has taken it out of the way. He has nailed it to the cross. And he has said, put that down to me. I'll take the punishment for that.

That is the reason why Jesus died. He didn't die as a subversive to the Romans. He died as a substitute for sinners. We'll sing at the end of our series.

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord on my soul.

And when you look at the cross and you see above the cross the charge sheet, you know that your debt has been paid. I have a debt I could not pay. But Jesus took that debt away.

Isn't that the gospel? I have a debt I could not pay. But Jesus took that debt away. The debt he didn't know. The debt I couldn't pay. He's cancelled that debt.

[13 : 55] He has erased the certificate, the record of debt with all its obligations against us and opposed us. He's taken it away and he's nailed it to the cross. This old shop in the village next door where I grew up Twin Radio and you would go in and you'd have a slate.

And you would go in and you could get batteries or whatever it was and you you kind of get it on the check whatever it is. But when you went into pay there was a spike on the on the shelf not shelf

counter.

And when you paid the debt the piece of paper with your record of what you owed was put on the spike and the stamp is paid.

And that's what's happened. That record of debt that stood against us has been put on the spike. It's been put on the cross. How good is that?

Can't you see why you don't need to go anywhere else but to Jesus? What other religion offers you that? There's a lot of good in other religions aren't there? They don't misunderstand me. There's lots of things in common. But in the end they are just self-help techniques.

[15 : 09] They're just good advice. You need a saviour. You need a rescuer. You need to be put right with God. And that is exactly what Jesus has done on the cross. To free me from sin and guilt and it sets me free from the power of Satan.

Not only has he cancelled sin but look at verses 14 and 15. The world's empty philosophies and traditions well they're just a con really.

They promise so much but they deliver nothing. They promise fullness but they are empty and hollow and they've got nothing to offer. They promise freedom but they take people captive so watch out for the kidnapers.

And then beware of the vigilantes. That's the second thing here. It's in verse 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 or holy days.

You're not judged by someone. It's not a very nice feeling as it. Sometimes you can feel judged by other Christians whether intentionally or unintentionally. and they can rob you of your satisfaction in Christ you feel second rate you feel somehow less of a Christian than you ought to be.

[16 : 24] Have you ever been in that position? Or you're a Christian? Do you speak in tongues? There's a man at Eden Broadway who said that to Charlotte last thing the other day.

He's there quite regularly like a throttling. Have you ever had that conversation with anyone? We'd love you to join our church but we're a Baptist church. And were you fully immersed? Did your nose go under the water?

Or to put the boot on the other foot? If you were truly reformed you'd have been children baptised. So we judge one another don't we? And we allow ourselves to be judged by one another.

And that's what's happening in Colossae. They were judging one another about diet. About days and food and festivals. Notice what Paul says in verse 16. Don't let anyone pass judgment on you on these things.

Don't let anyone question the validity of your faith because of these things. These things are trivialities. They may be important in their place but these are not the things that really matter.

[17 : 25] Don't let people judge you about these things. Therefore what is the therefore? Therefore it is to point you back to what he's just said doesn't he? What has he just told you?

Verse 9 For in him in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you've been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority in him you have fullness.

It's not 75% fullness or even 25% fullness but you have fullness in him. I hear people say things like this and I felt disqualified and judged.

You know people sometimes say that I feel much more of a Christian now I've had this dot dot dot experience and you think well I haven't had that experience.

What does that say about me? How can someone be more of a Christian? Anyway it's like saying I took my wife up for a meal the other week and I'm more married now.

[18 : 30] You're either single or you're married. Aren't you? You're not more married because you're enjoying your marriage. That's what Paul is saying. If you are in Christ and if you are in Christ you don't have 25% and you have to add a couple of things on like special days and diets and forms of baptism and whether you speak in Chinese.

No. In him you have fullness. You have 100% fullness and don't let anyone rob you of that. Don't let anyone judge you. Or look at verse 11.

This isn't for the squeamish. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision.

of Christ. I don't want to go into the gory details of that but the point is you can't be half circumcised can you? Don't think about it too much.

But your eyes are circumcised or you're not. So don't let anyone tell you that you're only half a Christian. You were circumcised Paul says the foreskin was removed the old sinful nature was surgically discarded by the death of Christ on the cross which is the same message of baptism. [19 : 47] That is what he's saying that's the illustration. The old sinful nature was surgically discarded put off by Christ's death on your behalf. Therefore he says don't let anyone judge you.

In Colossae they were judging one another in terms of the calendar. Do you keep this feast day or do you keep this holy day and food laws? I know you're a Christian but do you keep the feast of such and such?

what about this kind of special Sabbath? You don't eat pork do you? That's the kind of thing. Paul says don't let anyone judge you. These things are a shadow. Days and food are a shadow of what was to come.

The substance is Christ. Christ. See what he says in verse 17? If we're to escape the vigilantes that patrol around churches like ours we need to understand the fullness and freedom in Christ.

[20 : 55] We also need to understand shadow and substance. Me and my shadow. Me and my shadow. Wherever you go there's two of you. There's you and your shadow.

And your shadow to an extent is a reflection of the real you isn't it? On these sunny days you see your shadow scratching out in front of you. My ears are very big aren't they?

They don't look that big. It's a reflection of you but it's not the real you is it? It's not real. When the sun goes down your shadow disappears.

And Paul is saying here the sun has gone down. The sun has well and truly gone down. When it comes to food rooms and special days and feast days. That age is gone. The new age is here. All these things have now gone because Christ has arrived. Christ is the substance of these things. They were only pointing to. So don't go back into the shadows of a bygone age.

[21 : 55] Don't let anyone take you back there with their pretense of spirituality. These things are a shadow of the things to come. So when I go away I have a photo of Claire and the kids on my phone.

But when I come home I forget about that. What kind of fool would I be if I were to kiss the photo of my wife as I come into the house and say hi Claire and kiss my phone.

It would be the most ridiculous thing when the real thing is standing there glaring at me with their arms that welcome me home. It's ridiculous. That's what legalism does.

It's what mere religion is. It's bizarre isn't it? It's shallow it's superficial it's artificial the reality is sent in his Christ incarnation his death and his resurrection that's the reality.

Don't major on the minors. Let the main things remain the main things. Don't be robbed of your assurance by trivialities. Now I don't want you to misunderstand me. There are things that will disqualify you on the day of judgment.

[23 : 03] If you don't acknowledge that Jesus is God come in the flesh you cannot be saved. If you don't understand the cross if you don't understand the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus you cannot be saved ultimately because that is the way of salvation.

But if you don't fast in Lent or if you do fast in Lent that's entirely up to you. It's a religious observance isn't it? It's nothing to do with your salvation.

So Paul is talking about that. Drink will damn you. Whether you have a beer or not or a glass of wine or not or whether you're to eat or that's up to you.

But drunkenness will damn you. Know that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 that the righteous will not inherit God's kingdom. Don't be deceived. No sexually immoral people.

No idolaters. No adulterers. No people who practice homosexuality. No thieves. No greedy people. No drunkards. No verbally abusive people. No swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

[24 : 07] That's what some of you used to be. He says but you were washed. You were justified. You were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of God. So drink won't damn you but drunkenness will unless you repent of it.

Nor will any idolater or sexually immoral person or anyone who continues in such things will inherit the kingdom of God. But that's not what Paul is talking about in Colossians chapter 2.

He's talking about judgmentalism. So don't be a vigilante. Don't ride with the vigilantes. Don't let them ride all over you either. And I hope, I really hope that people don't feel judged when they come to IPC.

There is a difference between being convicted and being judged. And so I hope that every time you come and hear a sermon, every time I preach you feel convicted.

My job is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. That is my job. That's what the Bible should do. And I would hope every time there's a sermon somebody's challenged by the word.

[25 : 18] But I hope you don't feel judged by me or by the church. I hope we're not vigilantes. I hope we're not judgmental people. Let's watch out for kidnapers. Let's beware of vigilantes.

And lastly, let's not get taken in by the great pretenders. Verse 18. Do not let anyone disqualify you. Insisting on asceticism or worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by a sensuous mind.

Think of some of the most outrageous claims you've heard in your Christian lives floating around the church. People do make the most outrageous claims and Christians are so gullible that they believe this rubbish.

Paul knows about this and he says don't let anyone disqualify you in that kind of way. Sometimes people say to me, if you're one of those people that loves to sing kind of worship songs, someone said this to me the other day, I can't wait to get to heaven to sing these songs over and over again.

Don't you feel like that Paul? No I don't actually. There'll be more to heaven than that. For me.

There's other things that I look forward to more than singing. People say that sort of thing.

[26 : 38] I feel I'm not very spiritual am I? There are these great claims. Let me give you a couple of examples. Here's a lady she's called Catherine of Siena.

She lived in the 14th century. Three times a day she would whip herself with chains for an hour and a half. She managed to reduce her sleeping for about 90 minutes every other night. And of course being so safely she slept on a wooden bench.

Her diet was very strange. She was famous for eating only a spoonful of herbs a day. Sometimes she would spice things up by eating the pus of a cancerous sore. It was to teach her not to be afraid of death.

If she had to eat anything else she was well known for shoving twigs down her throat to bring up the food that she couldn't bear to have resting in her stomach. She was and still is revered for such holiness.

In inverted commas. By other aspiring saints who copied her behaviour and continue to copy it around the world. You won't be surprised to hear that she died of starvation.

[27 : 43] In her own words it was all about, let me tell you what it was all about, she said she was suffering to atone for the sins of the church. What a claim to make. What a bizarre life.

That has absolutely nothing to do with the Lord Jesus. Take Simon Stylitis he's a monk in the 5th century and he got into fasting in a big way in the early age.

He could hold out for the whole of length 46 days without food imagine that. In addition he would wrap palm fronds around his waist so tightly they would cut into his flesh and the wounds grew over it.

But that is not what he is famous for. Aside from these acts of obvious holiness the world remembers Simon for something even more bizarre. One day he climbed up a pillar and he stayed there for 37 years until he died.

This was in Syria. People brought in bits of flatbread and goat's milk while he endured 37 Syrian summers and winters. He never came down alive and yet he spawned a whole movement of copycats called the Stylites.

[28 : 51] Many others embraced such suffering as they thought it is a path to true holiness. It's bizarre. Do not let anyone disqualify you by such rubbish, such claims to holiness.

Look at what he says in verse 20. They are brilliant verses. If with Christ you die to the elements of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all parishes used, according to human precepts and teaching. These are indeed, they've got the appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they're of no flesh stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

So whether it's in the dark ages, the first century or the 21st century, resist the temptation to beat yourself up for God, whether figuratively or literally.

how many of us think that the holy life boils down to do not handle, do not taste, do not touch? It's bop it, isn't it? I've used this illustration before.

[30 : 02] Very many, few of my illustrations are original, but this is original to me. Don't copy it. It's bop it, isn't it? You know bop it, isn't it? You play the game, bop it, touch it, bang it, twist it, pull it.

Now people think that's what the Christian life is like. So what they think is like, verse 21, how do you live the Christian life? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. And it goes right back to the beginning.

What's the best illustration of this? The best illustration of this is in the Garden of Eden. It's a place, what was Eden like? The Garden of Eden was a place where there weren't any rules. The world has never been as free as it was in the Garden of Eden.

Do you remember what God said to Adam and Eden? There in the garden, he said you can eat of all the trees except for the one in the middle, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That's the only restriction. You can eat from all the trees in the Garden.

There was no keep off the lawn signs. There was no trespasses will be prosecuted signs. There were no forbidden areas. It was freedom apart from that one restriction.

[31 : 07] And then Satan came along and you know what he said to Eve, you remember what Eve says to him? Satan comes and he tries to distort God's character. He's says, did God really say you shouldn't eat of that tree?

What a spoils for, what a nasty mean little God trying to make things difficult for you. Did God really say that? Yes, he did say that. Remember what he says in Genesis 3? The woman said to the serpent, God said you may eat from the trees in the garden, but God did say you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.

But God didn't say anything about touching it. There's no record of that in Genesis 2. You see, she's making up the rules now. And that's what human nature does, of course, isn't it?

It adds rules. We want to wrap rules around the law. That's the essence of Pharisees. That's what they did. That's why the Pharisees said 613 extra laws, because they wanted to be really holy, so the Bible wasn't enough.

And God's word wasn't enough. They had to add rules and wrap themselves around with rules, like you put a bumper on a car to protect the car. And they did it for good reasons, for right reasons, but it was disastrous.

[32 : 21] Do not touch, do not handle, do not taste. And maybe they thought that adding a rule would help them obey God, but it didn't. Multiplying rules never works. And humanity ever since has been trying to do that, to reverse the curse by legalism.

and religion, trying to gain salvation by religious rituals and practice, obeying the rules. And such regulations, those kind of rules, they've got an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, and their false humility, and their treatment of the body, but they lack any value.

They don't stop the indulgence of the flesh. change. It's like asking a question in a maths class and getting a historical reply.

Or vice versa. What's the square root of 53, Henry VIII? It doesn't make any sense, does it? Rules are not the answer. Rules are actually a massive part of the problem.

External discipline cannot bring about inward change. What can wash away your sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[33 : 38] You cannot be set free from sin by washing your hands. You can't pray by lighting a candle or turning a wheel. These are external things you see. You can't cleanse your heart by washing your hands like the Pharisees thought.

You can't pray by lighting a candle or turning a wheel. You died with Christ to these things Paul says. It's past.

It's a past. You died. You died with Christ. I remember seeing a cartoon on that verse. There's a Bible study group discussing that verse and one woman says I haven't actually died to sin but I did feel kind of faint once.

No, you've died with Christ to these things. So the children don't play anymore. They don't play cowboys in the years. Bang, bang, you're dead.

Lie down, you're dead. The trouble is we don't lie down because of what Jesus has done on the cross. You have died. And you've been raised to new life in Christ.

[34 : 44] So don't go back there. Don't listen to the voices. Don't submit to the rules. How do you survive a time like this in a culture like ours which is relativistic? How do you protect yourself from the spiritual seduction?

Well you realise your fullness in Christ. And you recognise your freedom in Christ. And you refuse to be judged by others. And you refrain from chasing spurious experience instead. What do you do? Verse 6 and 7. It's a brilliant verse of the Christian life. Therefore as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him. Rooted and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding and thanksgiving. As you received the Lord Jesus, so walk in him. Continue where you began. Return to Christ. Remain in Christ. He is more than adequate. Let's see.