



The Sermon

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Colossians 2:16-19

"The Substance Belongs to Christ"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, it is such a great privilege to be with you this morning. And we have arrived to Colossians chapter 2 this morning, verses 16-19. If you are visiting with us, we preach God's word verse by verse, book by book, and we have reached a very critical point in Paul's epistle to the Colossians. If you've been here over the last several weeks you know that we are smack dab in the middle of the apostle Paul addressing the Colossian heresy. And Dr. Lawson set forth the Colossian heresy several weeks ago. It's an amalgamation of, really, four things; but the main things are Gnosticism and Jewish legalism. And he broke it down into four parts. A couple weeks ago he covered verse 8, which is secular philosophy; we looked at that. Today we'll look at Jewish legalism in verse 16. In verse 18, it's the heresy of mysticism. And then, Lord willing, next week we'll look at verses 20 and 21 with asceticism. So let's read God's divinely inspired word together. I'm going to start in verse 16.

"Therefore 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 - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let 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, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and 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." Let me pray.

[Prayer] Dear heavenly Father, we thank You for bringing us here this morning. We have come to worship You and to give You the glory. Lord, we pray that Your word would go out with boldness. I pray, Lord, that You would attend Your word with Your Spirit, that it would have its proper effect on these critical verses in our minds. Lord, I pray that we would sit at Your feet and You would teach us. Lord, may these words sink into our minds, in our heart, and cause our feet and our hands to move in a way that's pleasing and acceptable to You. Lord, You have made us the sheep of Your pasture through Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the most blessed among people. Help us again, yet again this morning. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

Well, I have titled this sermon "The Substance Belongs to Christ." When I was younger and unsaved, I was a perfectionist. I struggled with this quite a bit; it was my view of life. Things were either right and perfect, or they were lacking and they were wrong. As a matter of fact, when I was a young child I remember walking down the hallway, the one hallway in the simple, little house that we lived in; and the bedroom door, my parents' bedroom door was closed, and I heard a conversation between my father and my mother that I probably wasn't supposed to hear. And my dad was expressing frustration to my mom that everything in my life was black or white, that there was no gray area.

That's how I considered the world. Everything was either right or wrong, black or white in the world that I lived in. And because of this point of view, I gravitated to, and I love math. Math is pure, it's clean, it's perfect. It has a beautiful symmetry that one side of the equal sign is equal to the other side. The equation is always balanced. Math does not change. It's sure, it's reliable, you can trust math. Math always stays the same. Three plus four will always equal seven. People will tell you that there is new math. It's a lie. Math always stays the same.

Well Paul, in a greater sense, in this epistle in chapter 2 is giving us a math lesson in his epistle to the Colossians. It's Christian math, if you will. It's biblical math, it's Pauline math. And this Pauline math has two main laws, and these laws are critical for us to understand. There are two formulas in

Paul's math. Law Number One: "Christ equals everything. Christ equals everything." This is Paul's antidote to the false teachers in their message. This is Paul's answer to this heresy. This is Paul's singular message. This is a divine message. This is the message that God gave Paul to preach.

If you're in Colossians 2 and you go back to the very end of verse 2, Colossians 2, at the very end of verse 2, Paul writes, "Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Go to verse 9 that Dr. Lawson looked at last week: "For in Him" - Christ - "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete."

God's plan for His people is Christ. Christ is everything. And if you know anything about math - and you probably didn't know you were coming to a math lesson this morning - if that is true, the inverse of that is true, and the inverse of that is, "Without Christ, you have nothing." No Christ equals nothing. Christ equals everything, no Christ in Christian math equals nothing.

Think about it for a minute. There's no wisdom, there is no knowledge without the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never be complete or fulfilled without the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never be what God has created you to be without the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never be glorified. You will never spend all eternity with God in heaven if you do not have Christ. That's Law Number One.

There's a second law, and Paul tells us the second law is, "Christ plus anything equals nothing. Christ plus anything equals nothing." And this is so critical for us to understand. This mathematical formula really summarizes the heresy that Paul is addressing. If you add anything to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are left with nothing. Christ plus anything, with respect to salvation, equals eternal separation from God. You cannot add anything to the Lord Jesus Christ and still have everything; no, you've lost everything.

Go back to Galatians 5. This is a theme that's been going on in all the churches amongst the Gentiles. It's this conflict in these first two verses that is between the Judaizes who are holding on to their Jewish heritage and the Gentiles that have come to faith. So in Galatians 5, starting in verse 2, it says, "Behold I, Paul, say to you, if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."

What is circumcision? I know what it is physically, but what was it to the Jewish mind? It was a work. It was something that you had to do, you had to do it. And so look what Paul says. The language is strong: "Behold I, Paul, say to you, if you believers receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law." That's the very thing that we can't do. We can't keep the law, we're sinners.

Verse 4, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace." Let me net it out for you. Let me put the cookies on the bottom shelf. Christ is either sufficient, or He is not. He is either the God-man, or He is not. He is either the Sovereign Creator, or He is not. He is either the second Person of the Trinity, or He is not.

Christ has completely purchased salvation at the cross with His blood for His people, or He is not. Christ was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, or He did not. Christ even now is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for His people, or He is not. If you add anything to the Lord Jesus Christ, you completely nullify Him.

Christ equals everything; if you add anything to Christ, you lose everything. If you understand this, you understand biblical truth. If you understand this, you understand everything. If you understand this, you know the Lord Jesus Christ. If you understand this, God knows you, and has loved you, and saved you. That's the only way you can know this, this is supernatural.

And you probably are looking at me going, "Wow, this is pretty simple, this is basic." I know that. Yes, this is simple, it's not difficult to understand. I am telling you that water is wet; I know that, I know that. Christ is everything; if you add anything to Christ, you have nothing.

So here's the question: Why are you here this morning? Why are you at Trinity Bible Church of Dallas today? Why have you left some other church – because I know you didn't grow up in this church – why have you left some other church to come worship with us? What's the reason? Well, according to the applications, 80-plus percent of you are here this morning because your last church failed somewhere in this simple math. Here's the narrative. We hear this all the time: "We were at church, this church; they started doing X. X isn't biblical. We were at a church and they substituted something for the word of God, fill in the blank, and we are no longer at that church."

This message is not difficult to understand. As a matter of fact, the elders, as an elder, we were often asked, "What are you doing at Trinity Bible Church of Dallas to attract so many people to come every Sunday when you're such a young church?" and the answer is something like this: "We're doing something really unique. We're doing something cutting-edge. This is so different than anybody else. Let me tell you what we do. We pray, we sing a couple hymns, often out of a hymn book. We preach verse by verse for 50 to 60 minutes. We sing a hymn, and we pray."

"Well, what's your program?" "The Bible, God's Word." Well, what are you doing to attract people to Trinity Bible Church of Dallas?" "We're not trying to attract people to Trinity Bible Church of Dallas, we're here to worship and honor the Lord. If people come, praise God; if nobody comes, we'll worship alone, praise God. We are here to honor and worship the Lord." Do you get that?

I don't know how well you know the elders, the other elders of the church. The three guys are great; I love them dearly, I know them very well. But in all honesty, these three men, the other men, are not clever enough to come

up with a message to draw people to Christ, to preach Christ, other than what God has given us in His word. We're too simple. God has said, "This is my word, it is sufficient. This is My Son, He is sufficient." That is our message.

So I've broken these verses down in Colossians 2. into two sections: verses 16 and 17, "The bondage and yoke of legalism. The bondage and yoke of legalism." Let me read verse 16 again: "Therefore" - Paul writes - "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." There's a very critical word that Paul starts out verse 16 with: "Therefore." Paul is saying, "Keep in mind what I just said. With reference to what I just said, let no one act as your judge." So the question is, "What has he just said?" Lawson taught on it last week. He has told us about the sovereignty and the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Go back to verse 9, I'll read it again: "For in Him" - Christ - "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." That is the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God-man. He is all God, and He is all man. "In Him" - Christ - "you have been made complete." That's the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, in Him is everything we need for a life of godliness to please the Lord.

In other words, Paul is saying, "With this in mind, with the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food, drink, with regard to a festival, a new moon or a Sabbath," as the ESV translates it. Christ is enough." That's Paul's message: Christ is sufficient. Paul is looking at all these other things - food, drink, festivals - and by the time he writes this, this has become external religion. There is no reality behind it. It does not have the heart and the spirit of Christianity. The Judaizers have followed the message. They followed the gospel of Jesus Christ into Colossae, and they have propagated this message that Christ is not enough. It's not enough to believe; you still need more. You must live as a Jew. You must be circumcised. You must follow the traditions and the customs of the Jews.

This word "judge" here in verse 16, or to pass judgment, is *krinō* in the Greek. It means to divide, separate, make a distinction; and in the negative, it means to condemn. These Judaizers had come into Colossae and put the yoke of the law on these believers, and the result of that is bondage. You can't keep the law. This is external law-keeping, it's legalism. Ironically, they're judging the people. There's only One (capital O) that will judge. There's only One (capital O) that will condemn. We will all stand before Him at the end of the age, and it's not the Judaizers.

There is a Dutch reformed Princeton theologian, Geerhardus Vos, and he defines legalism in this way. He says, "Legalism is a particular kind of submission to God's law, something that no longer feels the personal divine touch in the rule it submits to." Let me read that again, this is so important to understand. It strikes at the very heart of it: "Legalism," Vos says, "is a particular kind of submission to God's law, something that no longer feels the personal divine touch in the rule it submits to." In other words, legalism is simply separating the law of God from the person of God. That's dangerous. That's how Sinclair Ferguson describes it.

Vos goes on to say, "Legalism lacks the supreme sense of worship; it obeys, but it does not adore." It's external. It's a list of rules and regulations. It strikes deep, because legalism has all the trappings of true religion, but it lacks the very essence of Christianity, because it does not worship God; and when you don't worship God, ultimately you're worshiping yourself; and the worship of self leads to pride. So the legalists lose God in their efforts to obey, the legalist is not even trying to please God, and this perfectly describes the Pharisees in the day of Christ.

Go back to Mark chapter 7. Jesus has an encounter with the scribes and the Pharisees in Mark chapter 7. External versus the heart. No spiritual reality or spiritual reality. All right, Mark 7: The Pharisees and some of the scribes" - verse 1 - "gathered around Him" - Christ - "when they had come from Jerusalem, and when they had seen some of His disciples that were eating bread with impure hands," - that is, unwashed - "(for the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands,

thus observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they have cleansed themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and copper pots.) The scribes and the Pharisees asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the traditions of the elders,' - there it is - 'but eat bread with impure hands?' And He" - Christ - "said to them, 'Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINE THE PRECEPTS OF MEN." Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

Now when we read this, we've got to be real careful how we approach the text. We sort of have this - we live in this COVID mindset, and you read it and go, "Well, it's not a bad thing that they wash their hands. I mean, we don't want them to spread germs. Don't you want to eat dinner with clean hands? I mean, they probably under the prayer tassels had a little bottle of Purell hand sanitizer, and they were just making," - like the one I have in my car.

That's not what is going on here. This is a ceremonial, this is a ritual washing. As a matter of fact, by all accounts, the amount of water that they typically used to wash their hands was not even enough to totally clean their hands. This is all a ritual. This is elevating the traditions of man above the word of God. They had separated God from their obedience. They were seeking to please themselves and not God. This legalistic falsehood of the Pharisees transferred right into the church.

Go to Acts chapter 15. Christ has already been raised. Paul has been sent out as the apostle to the Gentiles. The Lord is using Paul, Barnabas, Titus to establish churches in Gentile lands. And then Acts 15:1, "Some men came down from Judea" - these are Jews - "and began teaching the brethren," - the believers - 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" Have you ever met somebody today - they're not going to tell you this, but they said, "Okay, well you believe. Have you



been baptized? You must be baptized to be saved." Baptism doesn't save, it's a public testimony of what God's done in your life.

Verse 2, "And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some of the others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders concerning this issue." Skip down to verse 5, "But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed," this is where it gets dicey. These are religious leaders who have been saved, they're believers, and they have fallen into the trap of legalism. You and I can fall into the trap of legalism. "But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.'" This is wrong. This is false.

Verse 9, Peter is speaking, and he says, "and He" - God - "made no distinction between us" - the Jews - "and them," - the Gentiles - "cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" This is the bondage of legalism. If you're going to try to live your life by law-keeping, you're going to fail, you're going to get discouraged, and it is going to be a weight upon you that you're not going to be able to bear. And that's what Peter's saying: "We couldn't keep it, you couldn't keep it. Why are we asking them to keep it?"

Verse 11, "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are also." To believe, Jew or Gentile, you are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; He's created a new heart within you. But the issue is, we, man naturally desire to build fences around God's word, adding to God's word, and we seek, we do this, we think we're protecting ourselves, and the problem is that once we made these man-made fences, we seek to apply them to the lives of other people. We seek to restrict other people. And the fences we build are often because of our background, our upbringing, our family, our lack of spiritual maturity, and maybe even our sin.

When my dad was growing up, he went to a school, they thought they were Christian, and there was a saying, and you probably have heard the saying, that sort of expressed this idea of how to live the straight and narrow, and the saying was, "Don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, and don't go with girls who do." That's a great slogan for the American Heart Association. That has nothing to do with Christianity, the heart of Christianity, or saving faith.

Go to Romans chapter 14. Paul sets forth how believers are to live with one another, even if we aren't doing exactly the same thing. And here's the point: the mature believer in this argument understands that there is liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ. The weak believer is still seeing this life of sin and everything paganism in this day, everything that was behind them, and they can't do certain things because of their past life. And so Paul is saying don't pass judgment on each other.

Look what he says in Romans 14, starting in verse 1: "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." He's telling the more mature brother not to pass judgment on the weaker brother. Verse 2, "One person has faith" - this is the more mature person - "on person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another?" That's what we want to do; that's what we shouldn't do, but that's what we do naturally.

"To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." In other words, the Lord may have convicted you, your

conscience may convict you to constrain certain activity in your life; and you are doing that by faith, and that's good. But if that is not expressly written in God's word, you can't apply your own convictions to someone else; you're not the judge.

At the end of my life, I am going to stand before the Lord and answer for everything that I've done; and there's a lot. I'm not going to stand before the Lord and answer for what you've done, I've got enough to worry about with myself. So if the Lord has laid it on my heart and it's not a biblical principle, I can't apply it to you. The more mature in faith understands that there is liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ; but that liberty is to be used to build up other people, to serve the Lord, to do His bidding. That's how we are to view it.

First Corinthians 10:23 says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify," build the other up. "Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor." If I know that you're a recovering alcoholic and we go out to dinner, I'm not going to order a glass of wine. I'm not going to do that, because I'm doing what is best for you. That's my liberty. This takes wisdom, it takes maturity, it takes a lot of wisdom to correctly appropriate the liberty that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. But at the same time, we cannot tolerate the false doctrine of legalism.

Go back to Galatians 2. Actually, if you're in Romans, go forward to Galatians 2. Paul had Timothy circumcised, he had Timothy circumcised for the ministry. But he also had another one, he had Titus. Titus was a Greek. And look what it says, verse 3, I'm in Galatians 2:3, "But not even Titus, who was with me," - Paul - "though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage." That's what legalism does, it's false religion. Verse 5, "But we did not yield in submission to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you."

Back to verse 17 in Colossians 2, "things" - the food, the drink, the festival, new moon, the Sabbath day - "which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." The Old Testament prophesied, foreshadowed, and pointed us to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He is the central character of the Bible. The Old Testament is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the substance.

And so the question is, "If you have the substance," that word "substance" in the Greek is *sóma*, it's contradicted against shadow. It means body. It means the reality of. The body, the reality, the substance of Christianity is the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you have the Lord Jesus Christ, if you've been sealed with His Spirit, why would you go back to the shadow? The shadow is passing away. It's all pointing to Christ.

I don't often talk about this. My day job, one of the functions of my day job is I sell packaging, and I work with a lot of customers that introduce new products. And when they invent a new product and whatever, come out with a new product, it is the greatest thing since sliced bread. It's their baby. And in order to get it from the factory to the consumer, you've got to create packaging.

And so typically, I'm working with a marketing person, and they want their packaging to be second to none; and being a recovering perfectionist, I get that. And so we make samples, we pull color swatches. Well every once in a while you get to the fifth sample and the fifth color swatch and you realize, "I'm not going to satisfy this person. There's nothing that I'm going to be able to do that makes the head of marketing satisfied for their new product."

So then we have to have the talk, and there's two points to the talk; and the talk goes something like this: "When little Susie buys the greatest thing that's ever been invented, and you ship it to her house, you have to put it in a box; and on that box there's going to be a 4x6 FedEx or UPS label that's white, black print, and it's ugly; and whatever you meant it to be, that label is going to take front and center. "Okay, I understand that." I said, "There's

one other thing you need to know. When little Susie pulls the substance, the product out of the box, they're going to throw away your box in the trash. They're not going to frame it. The box is the shadow, the product is the substance."

Have you ever met somebody, I'm sure you have, said, "Hey, I've got the latest iPhone"? Do you want to see the box? There's only one person in the room that cares about the box, it's me. I know what the box looks like. You know, it gets a little ugly at Christmas. You've unwrapped the presents, and there's the box, and the box hadn't been open, and there's a small child across the room who said, "Stop, hold, on I need to see the box." Not a good time to do it, okay.

What's the point? What is the point of all this? The Lord Jesus Christ is the substance. There's no reason to hold on to the shadow. You can tell me everything about your Christian life. You can tell me everything that you do as activity in your Christian life. You can tell me about your quiet time. You can tell me about your mission trips. You can tell me about your Christian fraternity that you were at your Christian college. You can tell me about your parents' faith. The question is, "Do you know Christ?" That's the substance. Better yet, the question is, "Does Christ know you?" That's the heart, that's the very essence of Christianity.

Legalism is a great danger to the church, it's a great danger to our church; and I want to talk about two things that we have to be very critical to guard against. One, legalism is an assault against God's word, against the sufficiency of God's word, and against the character of God. That's what legalism is. It's an affront against God. It started all the way back in the garden.

Go to Genesis 2. God has made Adam, He's placed him in the garden, and He has given him bounty. There is plenty, there is generosity. It reveals God's most gracious provision, Genesis 2, starting in verse 15. What's interesting when you read this passage, if you go back to Genesis 2:7 and you go all the way to Genesis 3:1, Moses uses the term "LORD God," LORD

(capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D). That's what we get Jehovah. It's a tetragrammaton. It's Exodus 3:14. It reveals the covenant-keeping nature of God. It's the word that we translate Lord in the New Testament. From 2:7 to 3:1 he uses that term ten times. When Satan repeats it, when the serpent repeats, it he's going to drop that, okay.

Look at verse 15, Genesis 2:15, "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely. We got all the trees; there's a variety, there's a plenty. You can eat to your heart's desire, eat as much as you want.'" This is the gracious provision of the LORD for His people.

Go to chapter 3, the last time that this is used in the narrative, chapter 3:1, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the beasts of the field which the LORD God made. And he" - the serpent - "said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God' - he's dropped LORD - "Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden"?" So Satan takes the words, he manipulates them, the serpent does, ever so slightly, omits the word LORD, and what he does is he flips the gracious provision of the LORD upside-down. Now God is no longer gracious. He says, "You can't eat from any of these trees?" It is an attack upon God's character, it's an attack upon His word. He's going to call Him a liar. He's going to tell Eve that "God is just trying to hold you down, He doesn't want you to be like Him."

Verse 2, "The woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the tree of the garden we may eat.'" She omits the word "freely." God had told them not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had given Adam all this bounty, and He gave him one prohibition. The way that the fruit is described on that tree, it's no different qualitatively than any of the other fruit; it was a rule to foster the obedience and the faithfulness of Adam to God. And now all of a sudden Eve has omitted the word "freely." God's provision is under attack.

Verse 3, "But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" Now when the Jews would read through the Old Testament and they got to the word YHWH, that we pronounce Yahweh, they wouldn't pronounce it. They would substitute the word "Adonai," which is another name for God; and the reason that they would do that is, if you don't say the LORD's name - to ever say the LORD's name, then you can't take it in vain. It's a fence, it's a manmade fence. I can almost hear myself as a father saying this: "Don't eat it, don't touch it, don't even look at it, because if you don't touch it, how can you eat it?"

And so again, this fence, this artificial fence, manmade fence has been put up: "You shall not eat from it, or you shall not touch it," and here comes the blasphemy. Here is the blasphemy against the LORD and His character and the lie. "The serpent says" - verse 4 - "to the woman, 'You shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. God doesn't want you to be like Him.'" So this manipulation of God's word any, manipulation of God's word by addition or subtraction denies the sufficiency of the word of God.

Think about that for a second. If God's word needs anything to be added to it, or it needs anything to be taken away from it, then it wasn't perfect and sufficient to begin with. By manipulating God's word, it's an affront to the sufficiency of God's word.

Second point: "Legalism does not equal true spirituality." Being able to follow a set of manmade rules, a list of religious, a checklist, does not require a regenerated heart. Remember Vos the theologian said, "Legalism lacks the supreme sense of worship. It obeys, but it does not adore."

So think back to the Pharisees. This is how Saul viewed himself, this is how the Pharisees viewed themselves. They were external law-keepers, but the heart was dead. You can be a legalist and have all the trappings of looking

like a believer. You can fool everybody. The Lord knows those who are His. The Lord regenerates the heart. And so that's the danger of legalism.

Go to Matthew chapter 23, Matthew 23. Look what Jesus says to the scribes and the Pharisees. Man looks at the outside, God looks at the heart. Verse 27, Matthew 23:27, Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so, you too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." That's the danger of legalism. Legalism gives this false sense of eternal security. It gives pride of accomplishment, and God detests both. God detests pride. The natural man cannot please God.

Second point, mysticism, verses 18 and 19, "the deception and danger of mysticism, verses 18 and 19: "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, and 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."

Paul follows this similar cadence between verses 16 and 17, issuing the warning and verse 18, and giving the cure: the warning against mysticism, and the cure in verse 19, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. The warning is that you will be cheated out of your prize, defrauded from your prize. It takes away your reward, and it's being taken away by something that is not real. You must, in this case, add mysticism to the Lord Jesus Christ. And this thought and this movement has completely washed over the evangelical church that we are a part of in the time that we live.

According to the mystics, according to mysticism, Christ by Himself is not enough. That's what the false teachers say. You must have a deeper and greater spiritual experience. You need a higher, more supernatural existence. You need to ascend to a different plane of mystical piety. You



need a further anointing. It is not enough just to have Christ, we must have an experience that goes beyond that, that is added to the Lord Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur defines mysticism this way: "It is a deeper, higher religious experience based on personal intuition." You know what it really is? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Mysticism is nothing, it is just something that you think is something. It is not what you think it is; and yet people think it is what they think it is. That's what MacArthur says. It's nothing. There's no spiritual reality behind it.

The phrase "delighting in self-abasement" means proud humility, proud humility. Isn't that nice? Isn't that what you want, proud humility? There's nothing Christian about this. The worship of angels is not of God. What are the angels? The angels are created beings. The angels are created beings like we are created beings. They're not the subject of our worship, God is.

This has become commonplace in our society. We live amongst a people that worship the creation and not the Creator. If you want to find the craziest people in the world, go to the most beautiful place. Go where there's a rainbow, go where there's a waterfall. There will be people bowing down, worshiping the creation. What did Paul say the response to that is? Romans 1:24, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

At the end of verse 18, Pandora's box is opened. He says, "These false teachers, this mysticism takes his stance on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind." I like the way the ESV translates it. He says, "going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensual mind."

Years ago Marilyn and I used to go to another church, and she reminded me when we were talking about this that the pastor used to say, "If you have heard God speak to you in an audible voice, if you have seen an angel or a vision, it might just be the pizza you had last night." There's no spiritual

reality behind it. It is the pride of a deceived man, that God has given this person a greater revelation, more spiritual revelation, that God has given them a deeper anointing. We've all been anointed by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ. The ground at the foot of the cross is level, we're all one body. There's no objectivity when this happens, it is whatever you want it to be. God is whatever you want it to be, and the word of God is relegated to just another revelation among many revelations.

The objectivity of who God is in His word has melted into subjectivity. Trust me; when you stand before the Lord, He's not going to ask you who He is; and you're going to know who He is. And it isn't going to be what anybody else says; He is who He says He is, and He says it in His word. It's a thinly veiled attack on the Lord Jesus Christ. It denies the sufficiency of Christ, that you don't need Him, that you need more. It's a license to steal, it's a license of foolishness; in the end, it will be judged by the wrath of God.

Two verses I want to go to John 1:18, "Who is the Lord Jesus Christ? Who is the Lord Jesus Christ?" I've said He's everything. At the end of the prologue in John 1:18, John writes, "No man has seen God" - God the Father - "at any time; the only begotten God" - the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity - "who was in the bosom of the Father, He" - Christ - "has explained Him." Have I been with you so long, do you not realize that if you've seen Me, you've seen the Father?"

Hebrews 1. Hebrews 1. Mysticism is an attack on the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1, starting in verse 2: "In these last days, God" - verse 1 - "God has spoken to us in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." Here's the point, verse 3: "And He" - Christ - "is the radiance of His" - the Father's - "glory and the exact representation of His nature." The Lord Jesus Christ is the great and final theophany: God With Us.

So here's the question: "If what God through Christ revealed to us wasn't enough until He comes again, until we're in glory with Him in heaven, being

the Sovereign God who created all things, why didn't He just give it all to us?" He gave everything to us, that's the point. It's foolishness to think that in any way, shape, or form, you need more than the Lord Jesus Christ. No, you need more of the Lord Jesus Christ, that's the point.

So, in verse 19, Paul gives the antidote to this mysticism: it's the head, it's the head of the church, it's the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, "They" - the mystics, verse 19 - "are not holding fast to the head, from which the entire body," - the head and the body that he's talking about, the head is Christ, the body is the church. The church is the body of Christ.

I had a cruel football coach in high school, in junior high, and he used to when he wanted to get our attention, he would grab us by the face mask. The helmet's on. Where the head goes, the body follows. The Lord Jesus Christ is the head, we are the body; we are to follow Christ.

So I started this sermon off by telling you that when I was unsaved I was a perfectionist. When I was a perfectionist, I also loved sports; I played sports all the time. And as a perfectionist, there's only one reason to play sports, and that's to win. If you're not playing to win, why are you playing? The difficulty is is that when you are in a game and you get to the point of the game where you can't win the game. There's six minutes left in the fourth quarter, the other team has the ball, you're down by 28 points, you're not going to win the game. And at that point, with that point of view, hope disappears, despair sets in. All you can think is, "How am I going to make it to the end? I just want to walk off the field and quit. I can't win, I have no hope."

Paul is saying to us in Christian math: Christ is everything; without Christ, you have nothing. You're like the perfectionist playing the game. There will come a point in your life where hope will dissipate, despair will set in, and you're going to try to figure out, "How am I going to keep marching my right foot in front of my left foot?" The answer is cling to Christ, run to Christ, trust in Christ. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And may the Lord give you the ability to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is sufficient.

Well, let me close this in prayer, and then we will be finished with this service.

[Prayer] Dear heavenly Father, thank You for Your word. I pray, Lord, that Your word would be implanted in our hearts and our minds, that You would draw us closer to Yourself. Lord, we want to worship You the way You want us to worship You. Lord, it isn't about us, it's about You. So I pray, through the indwelling of the Spirit through our conscience, that You would lead us into truth. Lord, use us for Your bidding, use us for Your glory. We are unprofitable servants on the Master's estate; but it's the best estate to be on. Bless us this day. Bless us as a church. Bless this week in front of us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.