

Dangerous Religion

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¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. ²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations- ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)- according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Colossians 2:16-23 ESV

Two Ideas in Conflict in this Passage : Religion and the Gospel

1. "Religion," as seen in this passage, is a set of rules or practices intended to give us the 'inside track' with God.
2. Historic Christianity, in this sense, is not a religion. It is a relationship in which we draw close to God because of what Jesus has done on the cross—the Gospel. Spiritual health and growth comes from the Gospel changing us.

"Religion" is dangerous. It is the enemy of Gospel-living and ultimately unable to bring about authentic spiritual change.

"Therefore" Shows us he is building upon v.9-15 (sufficiency of Christ over all).
"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" Reference to the O.T. Law and keeping the Law.
"These are a shadow of the things to come" These practices were a pointer to Jesus.
"but the substance belongs to Christ." What the shadows pointed to has come—Jesus.

Religion: Leads to judgment of other people based on external standards.
Gospel: Leads to freedom because Jesus fulfills all the standards.
Clarity: This freedom is not for us to do what *we* want, but what *God* wants.
Am I living out religion or the Gospel? Am I using my freedom to do what I or God wants?

"Let no one disqualify you" Imagery of acting as an umpire, who's in/out.
"insisting on asceticism and worship of angels" This false teaching included elements of radical, unbiblical self-denial and the unbiblical practice of worshipping angels.
"going on in detail about visions" Unclear on exact meaning. Seems he is "harping" on.

Religion: Leads to 'umpiring' on who has the 'inside track' based on legalism or mysticism.

Legalism: (Jesus + Good Works) Seeking to achieve or maintain forgiveness from God and acceptance by God by obedience to God. Eg. We can work our way to heaven, or get God to love us more if we are "really good."

Mysticism: (Jesus + Experience) Belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth or Ultimate Reality can be gained through subjective spiritual experience. Eg. We need some additional spiritual experience to make us complete.

Where am I 'umpiring' based on legalism or mysticism? Am I truly thankful for and living out of what Jesus has done for me?

Gospel: We have the 'inside track' because of what Jesus has done, not what we do.

"puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind" Language of pride and arrogance.

Religion: Leads to pride (which is damaging on many levels).

Gospel: Leads to great humility.

Am I walking in religious pride or Gospel humility? What needs to change?

"and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." They are not in touch with Jesus, so there is no way they can grow in Jesus.

Religion: Drags us away from Jesus and true spiritual growth.

Gospel: Keeps us connected to Jesus and grows us spiritually.

Am I trusting in religion or the Gospel to get me in, keep me in, and grow me in the faith?

"If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations- ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)- according to human precepts and teachings?

Religion: Puts us back under man-made rules that unnecessarily restrict us.

Gospel: Frees us to live under God's rules that lead to freedom.

Am I living under any unnecessary man made rules? Am I living under God's good rules? Am I wisely exercising my freedom in love toward my brothers and sisters?

"These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." The truth.

Religion: May look like wisdom, but is ultimately unable to restrain sin and bring about real spiritual change (Why? Outside – In).

Gospel: Is able to restrain sin and bring about spiritual change (Why? Inside – Out).

What am I leaning on to try to restrain sin and bring about spiritual change? Religion or the Gospel?

The Gospel is our only hope for authentic spiritual change.