

Growing Up: Assurance in Christ

Goldstone Church – 21-Feb-16 10:30am

Colossians 2:16-23

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The English language can be used in so many subtle ways, and yet we all understand what is being said.

If you walk into a pub and a group of you are looking for a table, you might say, “Are you using that chair?” – What you mean is, “I want to use that chair”.

If someone is struggling to finish their plate of chips you might say, “Are you going to eat those?” What you mean is, “I’m going to eat those”.

If you’re in a meeting at work and you make a suggestion and someone says, “That is an interesting idea”. What they mean is, “I’m not at all interested in that idea”.

Christians can do it as well. They say things like this:

“Oh you’ve *never* been to Bible by the beach. Right, I see.”

“You mean you *don’t* sing Matt Redman songs at your church – gosh really?”

“Yes, I used to just read my bible and pray as well, but then I read Tim Keller’s most recent book and now I’m *really* connection with Jesus.”

What is behind each of these seemingly innocent statements? They are trying to say that you are somehow deficient, somehow lacking in your walk with Jesus.

The book of Colossians has been teaching us so far:

Jesus + Nothing = Everything

Jesus + Anything = Nothing

Don’t let ‘the religious’ judge you (Colossians 3:16)

I’m using the term ‘religious’ to describe those who had come into the church at Colossae and who were causing havoc by their commitment to saying Jesus is all very well but unless you... Can you really be sure that you are a Christian?

There are actually two thing happens in that verse.

There is the what you do – what you eat or drink – this couldn’t be much more topical could it? What with Lent happening.

What you do or don’t eat doesn’t make you any more or less loved by Jesus.

Remember that and the next time someone says, “Well, traditionally, you wouldn’t have eaten Chocolate during Lent”. Or, “Do you really think it is okay for a Christians to drink alcohol during lent?” Say yes and don’t let ‘religious people’ judge you.

But the religious people of Colossae weren’t done. As well as the not eating and drinking certain things, they were really keen that people did certain other things.... namely religious festivals probably yearly, a new moon celebration – monthly or a

Sabbath day weekly. These were the things that religious people said you had to do to be truly spiritual. To be a proper 24 carat gold follower of Jesus.

Paul warns the Colossians, don't let them judge you. He says, in Christ, you are free from rules and regulations about eating and drinking and holy days.

So fast during Lent if that helps you – but don't look down on those who aren't fasting. And if you have chosen not to fast during lent, don't allow anyone to judge you as if your eating habits. If you decide to go on a pilgrimage, attend that retreat, pray the daily prayers – they all sound very useful things to do - but if you do them, you are not more a Christians than if you don't. They don't make God the Father like you any more than He already does in Jesus.

Why (v.17)? Because they are shadows. The good and useful festivals which were given to God's people in the Old Testament were a shadow of the reality that has come in Jesus. Don't cling to the shadows – embrace the reality of Jesus.

Imagine a member of your family is waiting for you on summer's evening around the corner of a long wall. With the sun behind you, you approach the corner where you have said you will meet them. As you get nearer your shadow stretched round the corner and they get increasingly excited – because they know you are coming. They might even point and jump up and down – depending on their age. Then at last you arrive and they run to meet you and throw their arms around your shadow and start kissing it and saying hurray you've come. We'd think that we pretty strange wouldn't we? What we'd expect, is that as soon as you arrived, they would throw their arms around you and lose all interest in your shadow.

Paul says, don't let 'religious' people judge you, because they are still trying to kiss the shadow. The reality – the fullness – the thing that the shadows pointed to, is here at last. He is Jesus and he is all you need for a full and joy filled Christian life.

Paul goes on to say, it isn't just curiosity, it is dangerous. Why (v.19)? They have lost connection with Jesus the head – they are running around like headless chickens.

So it is with these people who are experts in the shadows, experts in being religious - but they have lost connection with Jesus the head of the Christian body and that is fatal. Because:

Jesus + Nothing = Everything

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There is real danger here. Humans are religious beings.

GK Chesterton brilliantly observed, *"When a man ceases to worship God he doesn't worship nothing, he worships anything."*

People don't often say, "I worship something", but they'll say something like, "I live for Saturday nights" – which translates as, "I worship whatever I do on a Saturday night". "I live for my family", "I live for my career, my wife, to retire at 50".

These are all worship statements.

We all worship something, and so our hearts are naturally drawn to religion.

Paul doesn't say, praying the rosary, or going to Hillsong can be helpful – which I think is what I'd say. Instead he says, doing religious stuff can be fatal.

If the Colossians allow the opinions of religious people to sway them from their worship of the Jesus and him alone, then they too run the risk of losing Jesus.

Don't let the 'holy' impress you (Colossians 2:20-23)

The problems with these people is that they look good – they look pious and godly and 'holy', and the Colossians were being tempted to think: to be a proper Christian then maybe I need to look a bit more like they do.

(v.23) Going without food – 'no I won't today I'm fasting', avoiding certain places, never go to an certificate 18 film, and not touching certain things – these all look really good. Our immediate reaction is to be impressed, to think maybe this is the way to make sure that my prayers are heard and that I receive the full blessing that there is in Christ.

Maybe not going to Pubs, or cinemas, or dances was the kind of Christianity that you grew up with. There may be very good reasons for Christians to avoid certain places which might be a particular temptation to them. But not doing things, just doesn't deal with the problem. Sin doesn't come from the outside in, it comes from the inside out. So my biggest problem is not where I go, but what my heart says about where I go (v.23).

We are always impressed with harsh treatment of the body. We live in a western world of such comfort and luxury, that someone who gets up early to pray for 4 hours before the sun comes up seems very holy and impressive - and just a little bit of me wants to be like that. But these man made rules don't deal with the problem. I could never set foot in another pub, club or bar and still be so full of the sin of pride at my own superiority that I'm no better off.

I could be so convinced at the amount of sexual material available, that I get rid my mobile, my laptop and my TV - and still lust horribly after my neighbours wife. I could make sure that all the food in my house was fairly traded and ecologically sustainable - and it wouldn't change the fact that I am an angry and bitter man.

All these things looks good on the outside, but fail to deal with my heart.

So (v. 23end) my heart is my biggest problem. If I'm a Christian, then Jesus has dealt with that and is dealing with it more and more each day. Only his Holy Spirit can give me the desire and the power to change – to become more like him.

So the next time some one tells you that they found their relationship with God really taking off after they... gave up smoking, or walked the pilgrims way, or started eating only vegetables, please don't be impressed. Why (v.22)? They aren't dealing with the

main issue, which is their Heart. And they are forgetting that, in Christ, they have all that they need for life and godliness, the fullness of God dwells in them. He dwells in all Christians – not because of what they avoid, but because of who Jesus has made them.

How then should we live in the light of these verses? Can I ask you to be sceptical?

Sceptical of anyone who claims to have discovered a new way; especially if the new way is something that the ancient church used to do.

Please be sceptical of any book, DVD, podcast, conference or preacher who claims to have discovered a new ancient way of experiencing more of God. Of supercharging their Christian walk, of revolutionising their prayer life or receiving more from God. Can I ask you to raise your eye brows and say, “Really?”

Be ready because people who say these kinds of things look very good – on the outside - and they will be impressive. They will have a long list of people who approve of their ministry and they will have spoken to 1000s of people in 100s of locations. And when you raise your eye brow and say, “Really?”, they’ll not like it very much.

They will look down on you and your trusting Jesus promises, reading your bible, saying your prayers and coming along to church faithfully, and they say something like, “Oh, yes, I used to do that. But it wasn’t until I - started using a rosary, or got into Gregorian plain chant or became a 21st century monk - that I found all that I was missing out on.” And at that moment, you’ll be tempted to think, ‘Oh, no, I’m missing out on something!’

Remember, be sceptical. As you are in Christ, then you cannot be any closer to God – you life is hidden with Christ in God. Do you really think giving up chocolate is going to get you any closer? Don’t let yourself be hoodwinked by anyone who looks holy and sounds religious, suggesting that there is more of Jesus that you are yet to unlock.

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Let’s pray that God would encourage us to stick with Jesus and enjoy everything he has for us.

Amen