

The Hope of Glory:

An Exposition of Colossians

August 30, 2020

Sermon 10: Legalism & the Hope of Glory

Colossians 2:16-23

Opening Illustration: Swimming the ocean with sharks. Last week I had a great time at the beach in New Jersey with my family. We were swimming in the ocean while at the same time, mere yards away, people were fishing sharks out of the water. I can say before the Lord that I was not frightened in the least. You know why? Because I had no idea there were sharks in the water until AFTER we were safely back on the shore. You see? Just because we don't feel danger, doesn't mean that danger is not real. In the same way, legalism is an underestimated threat. If I were to poll the audience here, my guess is that many of you would say that the stricter the rules, the better. Is this true? Are we better off, the more rules we make for each other?

Our theme for this section: The Schemes of the world seek to plunder the hope of glory.

I. Introduction/Review

A. What is the basis for our hope of glory?

1. The Gospel is the basis for our hope of glory.
2. This means that anything that would seek to divert your attention from the gospel as a means by which to stand before God is not only wrong, but violent, insidious and wicked.
3. With that in mind, we will talk about legalism this morning and how legalism seeks to plunder you of the hope of glory.

B. What is legalism?

1. **Dictionary** [well, Google] **definition:** excessive adherence to law or formula. **THEOLOGY:** dependence on moral law rather than on personal religious faith.
2. Legalism: "A keeping of the law, particularly in a formal sense, and a regarding of obedience as meritorious."¹
3. Explanation: Legalism is the attempt or idea that we are to please God or please others on the basis of our observance or our obedience to a certain list of rules.
 - a. These rules can be stated or unstated.
 - b. These rules can be understood as necessary for salvation or just for sufficiency.
 - c. These rules are often good things.

II. Don't let anyone be your judge, but God vv. 16-17

A. In what? Ceremonial things

1. Special foods
 - a. The legalists of Jesus' time judged him about food and drink!
 - i. **Luke 7:33-34 33** "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!' ³⁴ "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"

ILL: How DARE you give your kids sugar!

ILL: "If I were dying of thirst, having walked through the desert." Once a fellow pastor told me that if he had just walked through the desert and was dying of thirst and the only thing anybody had to drink was wine, that he would die before drinking the wine. Doesn't that sound pious! I remember thinking that I would gladly step over his dead body and drink the wine.

ILL: I know a missionary (a good friend of mine) who lost support because he was working as a cook at Ethnos 360 and made cupcakes that had crème de menth in them, which I guess contains alcohol. One of his supporting

¹ Millard J. Erickson, "Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology," page 113

churches found out and cut his support. I asked him how many cupcakes it would take to get drunk, and he estimated that it would take dozens. How silly for the church to cut his support, especially in light of the fact that Ethnos had no problem with it!

- b. Jesus declared all foods to be clean
 - i. **Mark 7:18-19** And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)
- 2. Special days—Festivals, new moons or Sabbaths
 - a. Some believe that every day is the same, others believe that some days are special. They must become convinced in their own minds.
 - i. **Romans 14:5** One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

ILL: Maundy Thursday? A man from the church I was pastoring at a certain time came up to me and asked what I was doing for Maundy Thursday. I didn't even know there WAS such a thing as Maundy Thursday. I told him that, and he was a bit scandalized. "You're not?" He asked, with a dumbfounded look on his face. I had to simply admit that I didn't know that I was supposed to do anything on Maundy Thursday.

Point: Even days like Christmas are not commanded in the Bible. That doesn't mean that it is bad to celebrate Christmas or that it is bad not to. It's a non-issue, but it is something that must be resolved according to the individual's conscience.

B. Why not?

- a. Because these things are just shadows.
 - i. What does this mean?
 - a) This means that these special days in the OT were intended to and designed for pointing forward to Jesus. Now we have Jesus, so we don't need those things any more.
- b. Because Christ is the substance.
 - i. What does this mean?
 - a) Just like above, now that we have Jesus, the symbolic significance of these things has now been realized.
- c. Because our motives can be the same.
 - i. **Romans 14:6** 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 gives thanks to God.
 - ii. You need to remind yourself that the person who accounts all days the same and the person who values one day over another are both serving from an attitude of worship. That has to be valued and remembered.

III. Don't let anyone rob you of your prize vv.18-19

A. What is our prize?

- 1. Heaven?
- 2. Rewards?
- 3. Christ, the hope of glory.
 - a. This would obviously include Heaven and rewards.
 - b. This would transcend these things though. Our focus must be on Christ.

B. How is this normally done?

- 1. On what basis is it done?
 - a. Self-abasement
 - b. Supernatural experiences
 - c. Self-righteousness
- 2. In what manner is this done?

- a. By direct, blunt overt statement.
- b. By subtle, snarky remarks or humor.
- c. By silent condescension in their hearts—you can't really do anything about this.

C. How would these things rob you of your prize?

- 1. By changing your focus.
 - a. If you spend more time worrying about how a judgmental guy in church thinks about you than you do about what Jesus thinks about you, you have gone wrong.
 - i. **Galatians 1:10** For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

ILL: Charles Spurgeon and cigars. Why were more people worried about what Spurgeon thought than what Jesus thinks? Why are we so worried about what other people think?

Point: There are dozens of reasons not to smoke, but one of them is not that the Bible says you can't. There are dozens of reasons not to drink, but one of those reasons is not that the Bible says you can't. There may be many reasons to do anything that people think is good to do. That doesn't mean that your (or their) opinion is authoritative.

- 2. By changing your values.
 - a. By leading you to attempt to earn what can only be freely received.
 - i. **Galatians 5:2-3** Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

IV. Don't submit yourselves to a list of rules! Vv. 20-23

A. What is being commanded here?

- 1. Strictly speaking, it is not a command, but instead a rhetorical question.
- 2. What, then, is the point?
 - a. If you died with Christ, why are you letting other people control what you do?
 - b. If you died with Christ to the law, why are you still trying to keep the law?
 - c. If you have been born again by faith, why are trying to grow by legalism?
 - i. **Galatians 3:2-3** This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

ILL: A game on my Ipad. I enjoy playing this game, and the game was free. However, you can buy advantages for 99 cents here or a 1.99 there. You get the game for free, but you have to pay to really excel in it. Is Christianity like that? Do you enter into a relationship with Christ by grace only then to give your life to the same rules that you were unable to live by before?

B. Why not?

- 1. Because you died with Christ.
 - a. What does this mean?
 - i. This means that you were died to the law (Romans 7:1 and ff.)
- 2. Because submitting to rules is worldly. (v. 23a)
 - a. A checklist looks like religion and it seems reasonable to the human mind. In fact, if you "turn over a new leaf" or "try to be the best you," the world will applaud you for it, so long as you don't expect them to do likewise.
 - b. The problem is that this is what every religion except for biblical Christianity tries...and fails at.
- 3. Because submitting to rules will not have the desired result.
 - a. A checklist of rules WILL NOT MAKE YOU HOLY! (Say it again).
 - i. You could observe every rule man might make for you.

V. Conclusion—What SHOULD we focus on, then?

A. Jesus Christ

1. See Colossians 3:1-4

B. Jesus Christ is a sufficient sacrifice for you, and only He can make you holy:

1. Regardless of your haircut.
2. Regardless of the clothes you wear.
3. Regardless of whether or not you watch movies or television.
4. Regardless of the type of music you listen to.
5. Regardless of what your cupcakes are frosted with.
6. Regardless if you work on Sunday or not.

Closing ILL: My first Sunday at First Southern Baptist Church in Powell, WY. A few weeks into my college career, I found out about a local church and I really wanted to go. The problem was that I had long hair down (almost) to my waist, I didn't have any dress up clothes, I smoked, and I was still a little bruised from the bait and switch that I experienced in the church that I got saved while attending. So I decided to put this church to the test. I wanted to know if they would really love me, really accept me. So, I put on my favorite Megadeth t-shirt, my leather jacket, wore my hair down without pulling it back in a pony tail, popped a cigarette in my mouth and stood right outside the church until I was ready to go in. Once I was done with my cigarette, I walked into the church building and noticed this church lady across the room. Not only that...she noticed me, too. She started making her way to me and I didn't know what to expect. Her first words to me were, "Hello! I am so glad that you are here!" and she hugged me. Now, when I say that she hugged me, I mean that she HUGGED me. No questions, no gimmicks, no insincerity...no games. She loved me the moment she saw me, and I knew it. Her name was Barbara Bryan and she was the Pastor's wife. That was 26 years ago, and the fact that I still remember it leads me to believe that her grace had a more profound effect on me than any of the stern, stuffy legalists who told me to quit smoking and cut my hair. Over the next 2 years, I would learn a lot about grace from Mrs. Barbara and her husband (Brother Ed.). I praise God for them. More, though, I praise God for the grace He has on all of us that leads us to love people because they are God's people!

May we live, act, think and love to the praise of His glory,
Amen