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Substance Over Shadows

Rooted in Christ Series

Colossians 2:16-23

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Part of my story is, years ago I was born into an incredible family. I wish I could take credit for it, but I didn't really do much. I just kind of showed up. I wasn't unexpected. They had been waiting for nine months for me to get there. But it wasn't really a lot I did; I just was there. And then, even for the first year or two, I didn't really carry my weight very well in the family either. I kind of just laid around, couldn't eat by myself. I didn't carry a very good conversation; I just cried a lot. But my family accepted me; they brought me in. Our family continued to grow older, and then in the early 90's, we had four other people move into our home. I was about 12 years old at that time. I remember it was a pretty incredible time. I remember them flying into the Omaha Epley airport, and before that time, I'd only seen them once before. They got off the plane; they got into our car, and they moved into our house. The interesting thing was they didn't speak any English, and we didn't speak any Spanish. I take that back. Actually, my older brother had taken one year of high school Spanish so he was fluent, of course, to translate for us. And so we had a lot of charades that year. Three girls, one boy, all part of a family, now adopted into our family. I remember my parents had done all the legal work. They'd gone to Costa Rica; they'd paid the fees, and they'd worked through that.

And at some point, we all gathered together—now a family of eight—and headed to the courthouse. I don't remember a lot about that time, but what I do remember is, at some point the judge looked at these four incredible kids, and he asked them, "Do you want to be a part of this family?" And each one of them said, "Yes." Now they hadn't done anything to join into that family. They were chosen, and they just accepted the opportunity to join into this family. My family didn't have any obstacle course setup that they had to go through in a certain time to get into the family. It just didn't happen. They didn't have a certain gluten-free diet that they had to maintain as they joined into our family. They didn't have to look a certain way. You didn't even have to maintain a certain GPA to stay in the family, which is good, because I'd be out of family, probably, if that were the case.

Now imagine if somebody came up to my brothers and sisters later on and they said, "Hey, you know what? Every Friday night our family, we have pizza. So if you don't have pizza as a family, you're probably not a part of that family." Or somebody else came up and said, "Hey, you know what? Our family, we don't eat meat. So if you eat meat, if you're not vegetarian, you're probably not a part of your family." What if they came up to my brothers and sisters and they said, "Hey, you didn't really do anything to get in that family; you're not really a part of that family." Well, after that, their big brother would step in and make sure they understood that they were fully a part of our family legally. But much more than that. In reality, in every way, I would turn to them and I would remind them of this, "There's nothing you could ever say or do or not say or not do that would make you any more or less a part of this family."

That's a little bit of what we want to talk about this morning. We've been in Colossians. We're getting to the end now of chapter two, and Paul is carrying on an argument that he's already started before. And when we get to the end of this chapter and get to chapter three, it's going to take a pretty significant turn. Paul is going to go from this foundational level of who Christ is, and things to watch out for, to this really practical level of what we should do to walk in Christ. But before we get there, we can't skip this part. Colossians chapter 2, verse 16. I'm reading in the NASB, and it says this:

> **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**— (*NASB, Colossians 2:16)

All right, before we go any farther in this, this isn't really language that we use a lot in our culture. So let's step back a few thousand years into the Old Testament culture. We know that, as we step back in the Old Testament life, the children of Israel were different. They're in a different time, a different place, and God had put them into a spot where he had called them out. They knew that they were in need of a rescuer. God had called them out to be a part of His family, set apart. Another way we could say that is *holy*; they were different. The reason He did this was because, in essence, He wanted them to be a light, to show the other nations around them who He was. And they could do that by the way that they lived so the nations around them could take note. And one of the ways He did that was He set up laws and systems for them to live by.

And, essentially, there were three different systems of laws that the children of Israel would follow. There were the *ceremonial laws,* and there were the *civil laws*. And then there were these *moral laws*. The *ceremonial laws*, the first one, in Hebrew the word that's referred to as the ceremonial laws, actually means *the customs of a nation*—the way that nation would live in their culture that would surround them. They would have their feasts; sacrifices would take place, and they were told what to wear and what to eat and what not to eat. All of these had a specific purpose. The feasts were to help them remember what God had done to bring them back together, to remember the faithfulness of their God, and all the ways that He had walked with them. The sacrifices were to remind them of their need for a rescuer. Also, at this time, to keep them in right standing with God: what to wear and what to eat, what they could not eat, and also how to reason, for it, too, seemed a little odd.

But if we had time this morning, we would go back into Leviticus chapter 11. And we would start to unpack this odd list of things they can eat and they could not eat. We can't go through all that but let me give you a little summary of some of the things. So, for instance, as you start reading through Leviticus chapter 11, you'll come across this. It says animals that have a split hoof and chew the cud, that's something you can eat. Okay, so a split hoof, chew the cud, so an animal like a cow. We could eat a cow. Got it, okay. Animals that chew the cud but don't have a split hoof, you cannot eat. That'd be an animal like a camel. Okay, I've never been tempted to eat a camel, so I guess I'm good with this list. Right? It will continue on: Animals that don't chew the cud but do have a split hoof, you can't eat. Don't chew the cud, but do have a split hoof, animals like a pig. Now we're talking bacon. This list is getting harder, right? It continues to go through fish and birds and all these things that you could eat and not eat. The whole point of this was to lead them towards something. It was to have them have a daily reminder of God's holiness, that God was setting them apart, and they were to live differently. And how more could you do that, but every day when you got dressed, there was a standard. In every meal that you entered, there was a standard. It reminded

us that God had these certain laws, these standards, and it would help them to look different. They would stand out.

I remember a while back when I went to India. We were in some of the remotest parts and were kind of traveling through these areas. And I don't know if you've noticed this about me, but I stood out a little bit when I went into India. I didn't look the same. I didn't wear the same clothes. Even the food I brought made people really curious about what this is. Even dogs, as I walked by them, would be like, tilt their head, like, this guy is not from around these parts. It made them curious; there were lots of questions they would ask.

The children of Israel were supposed to live different lives in a way that would intrigue the people around them. "There's something different about these people, and their God. There's something different about this God."

The second laws were these *judicial laws*, or these *civil laws*. They were things like you shouldn't kill or you shouldn't steal, or if you borrow money, here's how you should pay it back. And if this happens, here's the penalty for it. They were ways to govern their nation.

But the third set of laws were these *moral laws,* and these laws were timeless. They reflected much more of God's character, the essence of who God is. They often dealt with the "why". So, "Why should we not steal?" "Because God is a gift-giving God? Because God is a just God?" "Why should we not kill?" "Because God is the God that gives life, right?" These laws would give the "why" behind it. The moral laws often were repeated in the New Testament. So, as we'd see these laws, they would kind of come through, and you'd see them carry on in the New Testament.

So, as we look at this list of three laws, we realize the first two don't really apply to us today. The ceremonial laws.? Why? Because it was fulfilled completely in Christ. He was our sacrifice. He lived that perfect life that fulfilled all of those laws that we kept screwing up, that we couldn't quite keep. We couldn't quite do it. Christ fulfilled that for us. The second law were these government system laws, these civil laws, and those were much different than the nation that we live in. They lived in a theocracy; we live in a different government system. Israel, at that time, was directly governed by God. So when we look through this list, and we look through what to eat, not eat, and respect to festivals, new moon, this starts making a little more sense to us as we dive into this. We start to get the culture a little bit more.

But what about this word, Sabbath? Where does that fit in? It's kind of a catchy word that we hear a lot in our culture today—that we should continue to keep the Sabbath. So how does that fit in? Is that a moral law or is that a ceremonial law that was a part of the 10 commandments? In fact, it's repeated all throughout the Old Testament, constantly used. And if you didn't keep the Sabbath, the penalty was and could be death. So this is a pretty significant thing. The word Sabbath actually means *to cease from work*. Throughout the Old Testament, God had a law set up to help them understand, literally and practically, how to Sabbath, how to cease from work. He created a rhythm of life because we were created, as His people, to work and to rest, and to work and to rest. And that principle continues to apply to us today. But what's interesting, when you look through the Old Testament, and you look through the 10 commandments, the Sabbath commandment is the only commandment that's not repeated in the New Testament. In fact, Jesus, in His own words, in

Mark, chapter 2, verse 27, said this, "**The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."**

Also in Colossians, it seems like it's sitting right next to these festivals. So let's dig in a little bit more and see the heart of what Paul is saying about this and how the Sabbath fits in. Now, there's one word that I didn't really focus on in verse 16 yet, and it's a word that we can never skip—the word **therefore**, right? Whenever you're in Scripture and you see, **therefore**, you've got to stop and see what it's trying to connect, what it's linking to, because the author is trying to get a conclusion. He's trying to get a point across to us. And so we have to go back and see what point he's carrying on. So, let's do just that in Colossians chapter 2. We know that at the very beginning, Paul is challenging us to be careful of the empty philosophy, the deceitful philosophies that are out there. And in verse 6, he reminds us that **you have received Christ Jesus, the Lord**. You've received that.

And then he goes on, and next in verse 10 he tells us that **you have been made complete in Him.** Your completeness is found now in Him.

And then he goes on in verse 13, and he says, **when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive, together with him having forgiven us all our transgressions**. When you couldn't keep the law, when you kept trying but you could never measure up, He made you alive.

Verses 14 and 15 go on saying, **…having canceled out the certification of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. And when he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them having triumphed over them through Him.** The food, the festivals, the drinks, what we should eat, the Sabbath—these were all issues of an old covenant, the physical ways for people to show their devotion and their dependence on God.

But now Paul is writing to Jews and Gentiles in Colossae. So, did the Gentiles need to start doing these practices to be a Christian? Did the Jews need to stop doing these, or should they continue? What does he say? It says in verse 16: **Therefore no one is to act as your judge**. Something has taken place, and this is an imperative. It's a verb passing unfavorable **judgment…no one is to act as your judge.** Why?

Hebrews drives the point home in Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 9 through 11. Listen to this:
There remains, therefore, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest.

See what he's saying. Rest here is not physical rest. This is spiritual rest, and the work he's talking about is not your job. It's the work that you continue to try to do to somehow make yourself acceptable to God. He's saying, "Jesus has done that for you."

Well, what we just went back and looked at in Colossians, chapter 2, verses 13 to 15, it's taking place. Therefore, you don't have to strive to try and gain acceptance there. You don't have to try to

do something to be in the family. God has done all of that for you, so you can rest. In fact, verse 17 goes on to show us what he's talking about, and that links right into this. He said, these things which we just read in verse 16…

> **…things which are mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ,** (Vs, 17)

The substance - It's a Greek word, Soma, meaning **substance** or *body*, or *reality*. The NIV actually translates it, *the reality is found in Christ*. We see the same word used in Colossians, chapter 1, verse 18. And later on in chapter 2, verse 19—the substance—it contrasts that with the **shadow**. And with the shadow, there is no substance. There's an outline, a picture of a form, but it's not the real thing. It's kind of like, I remember seeing a deck of cards, white cards with a black figure on it, almost looked like a shadow. I even asked a kid, "Hey, what is this?" And the kid would say, "It's a mailbox," but there are no features on the cards, just kind of an outline. "You're right, you're right. It's a mailbox, but it kind of looks more like a shadow of mailbox, not the essence of what a mailbox is. So what's this one?" "It's a horse, right?" If these were actual shadows, a shadow is not a horse, but I can see how you would see that that leads to a horse, that would be connected to a horse. It looks like the same shape, right? Or, "What's this one?" "It's a really tall guy." Sure. it's just the shadow of the guy. Maybe the sun is setting, and he looks really tall, but it leads to that. The shadow is not the substance, but it leads to something.

Maybe this would make it a little clearer. Imagine a kid at the airport, and he's been waiting for his dad to come home. It's been a long time. He's in eager anticipation, and he's at the airport, just excited. And minutes go by…all of a sudden hours are going by, and he's starting to get a little bored, started getting antsy. It's hard work for kids at an airport, right? All of a sudden his legs are kicking. He finds himself squirming around in the chair and laying on his stomach, looking down at the floor, just thinking, "I can't wait till dad gets here." And all of a sudden, this figure comes on the floor. There's a shape of a head and shoulders, and it's leaning outward. And as soon as this kid sees that figure, he jumps off the chair. And what does he do? Jumps on the floor to hug that shadow, knowing that shadow leads to something? No! He gets up and he follows that shadow to his dad who is walking towards him, and he runs and he leaps into his arms. That's the substance, the reality that is found in Christ. These things were to point us to Him.

Hebrews chapter 10, verse 1 says it this way: **For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.** The Law can't do it. The substance—the one, the body, Jesus, the head—He's the one that has done it.

Gresham Mencken said it this way. "A low view of Law leads to legalism in religion; a high view of Law makes a man a seeker after grace." Beautifully said! What he's saying here is, "When I think that I can somehow achieve it, I set a low bar, because I can't ever achieve it. So I set up all these rules and regulations that I think I can kind of fulfill, and then I want to get other people to fulfill these same things, because somehow I've taken the posture of God. But instead, when I see the holiness of who God is, and all the perfection that is found in Him, and I look at these laws, I realize there's no way I could ever cut it…and I'm so grateful for His grace.

Notice that Paul is not forbidding them from these special days or from these feasts or from Sabbath. He's just making it clear that these things cannot and will not and do not save you. So there's no reason that you should ever force these things on another person, or allow another person to force them on you. He goes on to verse 18:

> **Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and worshiping angels and taking a stand on visions he has seen inflated without cause by his fleshly mind and do not hold and not holding fast to the head from which the entire being is supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments grows with a growth which is from God.** (Vs. 18-19)

Paul's giving another warning here, another thing for us to look out for. He uses the word **defrauding**. Maybe your translation might say *disqualifying,* literally meaning to act as an umpire against you. Paul is setting up this word picture, this athletic metaphor, to get his point across, that they're being robbed of a prize.

So it immediately reminded me of a middle-school basketball game I had. We traveled to a small town, and you could tell there was a ton of hometown pride there. It was a small gym, and the refs kind of seem like best friends with the other team. We started up the game, and it was just ridiculous. I've never seen such horrible calls in my life. By the time we were at half, over half of our team was in foul trouble—and they didn't have one foul yet. We're trying to, like, stay ten feet away from each defender, and not even look at them, so it didn't get called. That was one of the few games that I got fouled out of by the end of it. In fact, we had a lot of guys fouled out, so much so we were thinking, "Are we going to have enough guys to actually finish this game?" It was horrible. It was like that ref was coming in and making these calls that were stealing the game away from us. And you've seen those games. We've blamed refs for calls in games that've taken something from a team.

But Paul is taking this another step. He's saying it's like this: You're at that very same game, and all of a sudden somebody from the crowd comes down from the crowd onto the floor, and they brought their own whistle. They start blowing the whistle, and they're making up their own rules. Before you can score, you've got to pass the ball ten times. You sit there going, "That's not a part of the rules. Are you really a basketball player? Do you want to be in this game? Do you want to try to win?" They start making up these other rules. There's a three-seconds lane, both on offense and now on defense for you too, and they start blowing their whistle. They start trying to think that they have all the answers, and they're going to start forcing them on you. They're going to try and steal your prize. What prize is he talking about? Paul is trying to say, "Hey, don't let anybody deny you of your claim to be a Christian. Don't let anybody say. 'Hey, unless you do these things, or have these experiences, you're not a Christian.'"

The Colossians we're dealing with two sets of people that were coming in, the Gnostics—Gnosticism—and Asceticism. The Gnostics were persons who considered themselves to have inside information, that knowledge beyond the ordinary, beyond what the typical person has. And that gave them some kind of a status, something of an allure that could draw the people in. Asceticism was a Greek word meaning to exercise, or training, or practice. Essentially, it was someone that believed that strict self-denial or some sort of practice would bring about this higher

spirituality in life. And we're going to see that throughout these next several verses, as we finish up the chapter.

So what kind of practices are they talking about here? They talk about the **worship of angels** and of **visions**. But notice, first, what kind of standard they're putting up with this notice, or this worship of angels. It's set in this **self-abasement**. Your translation might say *delighting in humilit*y. The NIV actually says *false humility.* I'll just tell you this. If somebody is proud that they're humble, they're probably not humble. It's somebody that's coming in, trying to gain something. The thing that they're setting up is for them, but they're coming in in this false sense of humility for it. To start out with is this **worship of angels**. It's kind of interesting how this phrase is put together. It could be translated two different ways. The first way would be *angels as objects of worship*. The second way would be *worship that the angels are offering*. So that second form, if it were translated that way, it would be this idea that somebody comes in with this knowledge, this insider information that, "Hey, it's good to worship with your church, but what if you could actually start worshiping with the angels? I know how you can do that. Just get my book; it's $19.99". Then there's a way that you could elevate your worship, to be worshiping with the angels. Now, because of what Paul is saying about humility, it's probably the first form. The other form, and that would be that our worship is, "Who am I that I could worship God? I should just worship the angels, and they could carry my worship to God." Either way that you look at this, there's nothing biblical about that framework. Somebody has drawn up their own imaginations, and they're starting to get maybe a following, or they're starting to get some kind of self-satisfaction out of this false notion.

Of these **visions**, it says he's **taking his stand on visions he has seen**, going on and on about something that he can't prove. This vision of this thing, taking these stands on visions, **inflated without caused by his fleshly mind**. You can go all through YouTube and see these people talking about these visions and everything that they've accomplished, and how you can have these too. Now it's not to say that God hasn't used visions. I'm so grateful that God gave a vision to Peter that the gospel should spread beyond the Jews to the Gentiles. It's a way that God could connect with Peter and get him a message that Peter would understand, a way that Peter could grasp. It's not that God can't do that. But all of a sudden, these guys are starting to say that unless you have this experience, unless you have this vision, are you really a Christian? Can you be sure that you're a Christian if you haven't had this? It all goes back to their inflation—the flesh inflation—a lot of how the message paraphrases that there is a lot of air, hot air, and that's all that they are. There's no substance. It's an empty box. They're just pretending.

There was an article that was written in the LA Times about Coach Kerr. Now I told you, as a child of the 90s, I was a Bulls fan. This isn't Steve Kerr; this is actually Johnny Kerr, and he's going into the game, trying to figure out how to really pump up his team. So he said this, in Coach Kerr's words:

> *"We had lost seven in a row, and I decided to give a psychological pep talk before a game with the Celtics." "I told Bob Boozer go out and pretend that he was the best scorer in basketball. I told Jerry Sloan to pretend that he was the best defensive guard. I told Guy Rodgers to pretend that he could run an offense better than any other guard, and I told Mueller to pretend that he was the best rebounding, shot-blocking, scoring center in the game."*

*"We lost the game by 17. I was pacing around the locker room afterward trying to figure out what to say when Mueller walked up, put his arm around me and said, 'Don't worry about it, coach. Just pretend we won.'" **

You can't manufacture Jesus. Jesus is the substance. He's the real thing. He doesn't need you to try and put some kind of experience together that He needs to fulfill. What He needs you to do is run to Him, to follow Him, to pursue Him, not the other things that other people put up as standards that you need to accomplish, or you need to have, or you need to follow. He says the growth stays by being connected to the head. It's a way that we grow by growing with Him, staying connected to Him, abiding with Him. He is the source of growth. Verse 20 goes on to say:

> **If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world…** (Now we talked about that last week. Remember the ABC's of this culture, thinking, "I can do it. I can make myself more spiritual. What I have in Christ is good, but it's not good enough. I still need something more." But remember what we have learned in this chapter. *You died with Christ*. The you is now found in Him, and He now lives in you. You are complete. You have everything you need. I was born; I was adopted, but it wasn't because of anything I did. It was because of something that was done for me. We are also with Christ because of what He's done for us.) It goes on to say:
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> **…why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion, and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.** (Vs. 20-23)

What's going on here is he starts to give them another list of all these do nots: Do not handle; do not taste, do not touch, all of these things you cannot do. Some of them think that he's doubling back to the ceremonial laws, this legalistic system that's been set up, although now there's freedom in Christ. It kind of reminds you of Jesus back in Matthew 7, when all these people were so worked up that Jesus' disciples weren't ceremonially washing their hands before they ate. Jesus looks around at them, saying, "Okay, these guys are so concerned about the ceremonial actions, and yet in their very own homes, they're evading their own responsibility to care for their parents. They're worried about eating this food that somehow would be defiled because they didn't do a ceremonial washing, and that would go into their bodies. But yet, the thing that they needed to really be worried about is their heart, because the actions they're actually living out, are far from Jesus, far from His kingdom way of life.

In fact, Mark chapter 7, beginning in verse 18, says this: **Do you not do not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him. because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and it's eliminated. He thus declared all foods clean.**

*https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-12-08-sp-14993-story.html

He was saying that which proceeds out of a man is what defiles; it's the way we live. But it's not to form some kind of standard to give achievement to us, or somebody else, or for God. If I'm trying to gain that kind of approval, I'm going to be missing it. It's also maybe thought that he was giving into pagan asceticism. So, there are people who may be thinking that if I don't eat these things, if I stay away from these pleasurable things, that would somehow make me more holy. It would show my sacrifice. Or if I would treat my body in these extremes—these horrible, harsh conditions—that would just somehow show my devotion to God. There's nothing biblical about it. If I would just not eat fish on Friday, that would show my devotion to God. And people have told me I'm not supposed to eat that, so I'm trying to achieve something through that. Or, if a Christian *should not* be at this event, or a Christian *should* be at this event…or a Christian *should not* vote this way or a Christian *should* vote this way… a Christian *should not* dress this way, or Christian *should* dress this way. What's the motivation that I'm operating all these things with…to achieve some kind of status, to gain something by my own fleshly power? He's saying such rules are merely human teachings that deteriorate as we use them.

But I can make up these rules, right? "I'm not going to eat steak. I'm sacrificing steak." But what he's saying is, "Steak still has a purchase-by product date on it. It's going to still go bad whether you eat it or not." It's not the steak that makes you holy, because then we start adding other layers. "Why I'm not even going to look at steak. Well, look at how holy I am. And I'm not going to actually be around people that eat steak." This is the same kind of thinking, like one of the monastic types of thinking that drew people away into these extreme conditions, apart and distant from the world, trying to, on their own, achieve some kind of holiness, apart from Christ.

Paul is not saying that, in our freedom, there are not things that we could do to grow in our discipline and practices that we can use. There are absolutely Bible study methods, and prayer exercises, and daily habits, and apps, and all sorts of things that we can use as we grow towards the substance. But if our focus becomes on the shadows, we miss it all. Paul is saying, "Am I doing this to try and gain approval and acceptance from God or some person? Or am I doing this because I am free to love and pursue Christ, who is the substance of life?" It's not about a license to sin. It's not saying you can go do whatever you want; you've got freedom. He's also reminding us, too, that I can be the one that is doing the judging, that is setting up these standards that other people have to keep. And that makes me think, just for a second, "Are there people in my life, that I have put a standard on, that there's no way that they can know Christ, or that Christ could accept them because of…this?" I'm now in the same boat. A Christian has to continue to lean and follow Jesus, and he's going to get practical when we get into chapter 3. But for now, he wants us to understand who it is that we have our identity in, and how we know that we are a Christian.

It's a chance to remember the Bible is not a behavior model, with a list of what to do and what not to do, to make God happy. It's a story of God's plan and redemptive desire for us to be with Him. We're going to talk more, and the book will move on to practical things, but don't miss that. The Bible is not a story about these lists of "to-dos" and "not to-dos" to make God happy. The Bible is a story of God's redemptive plan and desire for us to be with Him because of everything He's done. So, I've got to ask you this morning, "Where do you sit in this? What are you trying to do, to somehow gain others' approval? Or to gain God's approval? Why is it that you're setting up standards for others that God Himself has not set up? Is it that you're trying to prove your worth?

Let me remind you of this. You were sought out and chosen by the supreme King of the universe. He came after you. Was it somehow to gain God's approval? Colossians has reminded us that He justified you and He told you that in Christ you have been made complete; not might be, or will be, or should be. You have been made complete. Are you getting that? Do you see that the fullness of Christ is there for you? Is it to gain someone else's approval? Paul is specific about that in this chapter, isn't he? Don't let anybody else judge you. Don't let anybody else disqualify you from your standing with God. Are you trying to prove something to yourself, that you are good enough?

Let me remind you of this. We are more sinful and broken than we will ever fully realize. (Thanks, Josh. Glad I came to church this morning to hear that.) Already this week, all week, I've been thinking, I'm not good enough. I've never been good enough, and I will never be good enough. Let me say it again. "You are more sinful and broken than you will ever even realize." But it doesn't stop there. Because of Jesus and His work, get that—His work— not your work, His work, you are more chosen, more accepted, more adopted, more complete than you will ever fully understand. And you have the fullness of Christ in you. It's true. It's true last week when you thought you weren't good enough, and you'd messed up again. It's going to be true this week when those doubts come into your head, saying, "You're not good enough; there's still something more you need to do." It's true when someone comes alongside and says, "Hey, if you were a true Christian, you would be doing this." So, for some of us in this room, we need to know. "Hey, Josh, I've heard this. I know it." Then accept it; receive it. There are some in this room that are continuing to somehow try to gain God's approval through something you can do. This morning is the morning to say, "Jesus, I accept Your approval because of what You've done, and I know that I will never do enough to gain a status with You. It's all because of You." So, Church, stop striving for acceptance, but don't stop striving, pursuing, running after the One true substance in life…Jesus!

God, thank You for messages that just remind us of Your incredible grace, the work that You've done in our lives. And the way that we continue to walk and grow in You, is not still through what we do. Why is that, so often, we come before You and we say, "God, there's nothing I could do to ever gain Your acceptance or favor. It's only by what You've done." We accept You as our Savior, and yet from there, we say, "I've got this; I can do it from here." God, help us to continue to claim to You, our head. Help us to continue to run after You and not somebody else's ideas or notions or standards. God, we want our eyes focused on You. This week, remind us that we are Yours, fully complete, fully adopted into Your family. And let us walk in the joy and goodness of that with You, I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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FALL 2022 // WEEK 6

Life Group Questions

Colossians – Rooted in Christ // Oct 15-16, 2022

Substance Over Shadows // Colossians 2:16-23



During this month we are focusing on loving our neighbors, one way to do this is to **Change Your Patterns**. This can look like going on a walk as a family and stopping to talk with the neighbors you encounter. Or not driving into your garage and going straight into the house, go back outside and engage with your neighbors. Try this as a way to love your neighbor!

Introduction

Last week we recognized the idea that we were rooted in Christ at salvation and that God is continuing to establish and build us up in Him. Our responsibility is to walk with Christ. In this week's passage, Paul begins to describe what that walk looks like and argues against the false view that a person must obey certain human rules (specifically rules that would identify one as Jewish—kosher laws, celebration of Jewish holy days) in order to be part of God's family. Rather, commitment to Jesus is the only requirement to enter God's family.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1) Take a few minutes to discuss ideas for Loving Your Neighbor. **Has anyone had an opportunity to show to love to a neighbor? How did it go? What was the result? If you have not already done so, look at the suggestions at the end of this document and discuss ways you could Love Your Neighbor as a group or individually.**

2) **How do you think you will most change as you get older?**

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:

    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) What impacted you from the sermon this week? How do you see it connecting to the idea of being rooted, established and built up in Christ?

2) In *Colossians* 2:16-19, Paul tells his readers not to let anyone lead them to believe that they are not Christians because they do not follow certain Jewish practices. What are some current false ideas people have about what makes a person a Christian?

   What is it that actually makes a person a Christian? Give reasons for your answer.

3) Has anyone ever questioned whether or not you are a Christian because you didn't conform to their idea of what a Christian is? What was your response (if you didn't respond or if this has never happened to you, what would your response be)?

   How do you interact with people who claim to be Christians but don't follow all the standards you accept or believe all the things you believe?

4) Paul seems to come down very hard on keeping or submitting to rules. **Do you think Paul is opposed to rule-keeping, or does he only forbid certain kinds of rule-keeping? Defend your answer.**

From what Paul says in this passage, do you think he believes following dietary laws and observing Jewish holy days are wrong? If so, why? If not, why does he seem to oppose them?

At the end of each Life Group Question study guide, we suggest some practices to help you grow spiritually. Do these suggested practices violate what Paul teaches in this week's passage? Provide reasons for your answer.

5) In verse 19, Paul claims that those who propagate the view that one needs to follow rules determined by humans in order to be a Christian, have become unconnected to the head (that is, Jesus). In verse 20, Paul states that a person who has died with Jesus is not subject to the requirements made by humans. **How do these ideas provide a corrective to the false teaching that Paul is addressing in this passage?**

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. **Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.**

Scripture: Carefully read and then reflect on *John* 3:16 and *Romans* 10:9-13 to remind you of what is necessary to become a Christian.

Confession: Spend some time examining yourself and confessing any attempts you have made to add conditions to salvation (beliefs, rules, practices) that go beyond what God has already established (as we see in *John* 3:16 and *Romans* 10:9-13). Ask God to help you to not judge others as non-Christians or disqualify others from being Christians because of your own ideas about what it is to be a follower of Jesus.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?

Next Week: Read Colossians 3:1-11

Loving Your Neighbor

Ideas & Resources

Loving your neighbor doesn't have to be complicated or hard – it can even be fun!
All it takes is a willingness to change our patterns or plan ahead.
Here are some ideas and resources to get you started.

As a Life Group

A great way to build community as a Life Group while also impacting your neighborhood is to serve your neighbors together. We know that many of you will not live in the same neighborhood, and that's okay! Pick a neighborhood (perhaps the one you meet in) and love those neighbors.

1. As a group, take a prayer walk around the neighborhood.
2. Drop off treats (baked goods, candy, etc.) at 5 neighbor's houses on the street.
3. Hand out candy together on Halloween.
4. Fill up the neighborhood pantries in your area.
5. Pick up trash and debris around the neighborhood or in the neighborhood park.
6. Write uplifting Scripture in chalk in the driveway together to encourage those who walk by.
7. Throw a neighborhood block party/backyard party – click here for resources

Individually

If you're not in a life group, or if you want to serve those in your own neighborhood, here are some ideas!

1. Offer to mow a lawn or do some other outdoor/household chores.
2. Chat with your neighbors while outside doing chores.
3. Pray for your neighbors individually.
4. Meet a tangible need.
5. Give holiday gifts (Halloween is coming up!)
6. Take walks outside in the neighborhood – stop and say hello to your neighbors.
7. Check to see if there's a Facebook Group or join the Next-Door App & interact with your neighbors
8. Learn about your neighbors – Are there elderly or disadvantaged people that need help or community?