

Beware Man-Made Righteousness

December 30, 2018

I have a bag of candy here. It has not been opened. It is a COMPLETE package. Let this bag of candy represent all that you have been given by God as a follower of Jesus Christ. Every spiritual blessing that it is possible to have in Christ is yours when you become a Christian. God has made you rich in spiritual blessings. Let me remind you of some of those spiritual riches.

Our spiritual riches “in Christ” include, redemption, forgiveness of ALL our sins, regeneration, adoption, Holy Spirit indwelling, justification, sanctification, peace with God, reconciliation, a future resurrection body, an inheritance of glory with Christ, and more.

This bag of candy represents the complete package of benefits that are yours in Christ Jesus. And in fact, there are no others. **There are no spiritual riches not already yours in Christ.** There are no other spiritual blessings to add to what you already have. Your salvation is complete. And it is all yours. Jesus paid for it all.

How sad it is that some people fail to understand this. They try to add to what Jesus did.

Let me remind you where we are in our study of the letter of Colossians. We have been camped for several weeks on one part of this letter. Paul has warned the Christians in Colossae about those who would deceive them into believing that Jesus' death did not provide all of God's salvation blessings.

Colossians 2:3-4, 8 (NIV) (I want you to fully know) "**Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.**

... See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

This deception commonly takes two forms.

1. They take something away from Jesus. They may deny His deity, his humanity, his resurrection, or his sinless life. Paul, the missionary writer of this letter, goes in to much detail about Jesus, like the one in verse 9.

Colossians 2:9 (NIV) For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...

He is referring to the incarnation, God made flesh. Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. Paul reinforces this doctrine in his letter because some were teaching that Jesus was not fully God and fully human. Some taught that Jesus was spirit only, whose body appeared to be a real physical body, but really was not. They denied the humanity of Jesus.

If Jesus was not human then he did not die on the cross. And if he did not die, there was no atonement for anyone's sin. We are still under condemnation.

Some pushed the idea that Jesus was just a really good man. They denied the deity of Jesus. All such teachings deny some aspect of who Jesus is. And in so doing they deny that Jesus won for us all of these (bag of candy) spiritual blessings. If Jesus was not God, he could not have lived a perfect life and would have died for his own sin, not ours.

2. They add something to what Jesus did. They say Jesus' death won us only the beginning of our salvation. Now, through our own efforts, we have to add to what Jesus did.

If we go back to the bag of candy, they argue that Jesus only won for us some of the bag's contents. The rest you have to earn in some way. They say that Jesus did not pay for 100% of our salvation with his death. Jesus only paid for part of our salvation and we have to earn the rest in some way. It is these other ways that we have been looking at in the last couple of sermons on Colossians. We took a two week break for Christmas.

So far we have looked at two things that some teach must be added to earn complete salvation or additional blessings.

1. Some argue for submitting to some or all of the Law of Moses in addition to your faith in Christ.

The Christians of the first century fought this fight over and over again. There were Jewish Christians who just could not believe that after 1,500 years God was no longer requiring obedience to the Law of Moses. But it was true. God had ushered in a new covenant that did not require the Law of Moses.

Today there are still those in God's church who teach that God requires some of the Law of Moses to be right with God. They require observance of the Sabbath and/or the Tithe. Paul warned his letter against such teaching.

2. Some argue for seeking some supernatural power beyond the Holy Spirit.

They pursue such power in astrology, magic, witchcraft, angel worship, pyramids, and other such activities. All of these are made to appear as if there is an inanimate power that people can control. They are made to appear like this by demons, who use their power to deceive and eventually control the people involved in these activities.

Listen! All the power you need to experience your full salvation and drawing close to God is already yours by faith in Jesus Christ. He paid the full price for 100% of your salvation, for all of the spiritual benefits God has for you.

This week we look at a third teaching of something to be added to what Jesus did.
Some argue for the NEED of ascetic practices.

Note that I put the word need in all caps for emphasis. These people teach such practices as a requirement. Paul addresses this in his letter. Let's finish reading chapter 2.

Colossians 2:20-23 (NIV) Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body...

He is writing about asceticism.

Asceticism is the practice of self-denial in an attempt to draw closer to God. The word asceticism comes from the Greek word *askésis*, which means "training, practice, or bodily exercise".

Asceticism involves rules of physical self-denial. It may include such practices as fasting, celibacy in marriage, avoiding certain kinds of food, wearing yourself out to the point of physical exhaustion, wearing simple clothing, wearing uncomfortable clothing, poverty, sleep deprivation, and in extreme forms, flagellation, and self-mutilation.

Some teach such behavior based on John the Baptist, who lived in the wilderness, wore a camel hair garment, and lived on locusts and wild honey. It should be pointed out that John was under the first covenant. He was not a Christian.

Many Christians through the centuries have made such practices a lifestyle, even to removing themselves from society in monasteries. Many Amish communities practice a form of asceticism, denying themselves such things as electricity, cars, and modern clothing to discourage pride and worldly desires.

In theory, asceticism is supposed to remove worldly obstacles between the believer and God. Such practices are intended to get rid of greed, ambition, pride, sexual desire, and other sinful appetites.

Such arguments can sound good. They sound logical. After all, to Americans, who have been grounded in the idea of self-creation, it makes sense. You can pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Nothing is impossible. That is what the American who walked across Antarctica said a few days ago. We, more than most nations, are geared to that message. Paul says it sounds logical.

Colossians 2:23 (NIV) Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom...

But look at the flaw in such thinking.

Colossians 2:23 (NIV) ...they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Denying the body its desires merely arouses them, as is well known by many who have tried to lose weight by giving up foods they very much want to eat.

Through such ascetic activities, you might gain some control over your sinful desires and appetites, but you will never rid yourself of those desires and appetites.

The Holy Spirit is working to replace these desires with godly desires.

Rely on the Holy Spirit to replace these desires with godly desires.

Some ascetic practices are not bad in themselves. For example, there is nothing sinful about fasting. You may find it helpful to fast and pray instead of just praying. But Fasting does not win you points with God.

1 Corinthians 8:8 (NIV) ... food does not bring us near to God...

You might choose to skip a meal in order to pray during that time. But God welcomes your sacrifice as an act of thanksgiving only. It does not gain you more blessings.

No ascetic practices make you more deserving of what you already have. By faith you already have all there is to have (shake bag of candy).

You might choose to engage in some ascetic practices. But...

When you start thinking you have to do ascetic things in order to please God, stay right with Him, or earn more blessings, you have strayed from the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our voluntary acts of self-denial do not complete our salvation. In, and of, themselves, they do not draw you closer to God. If you practice them, do so with the Holy Spirit, as acts of gratitude. Take no pride in them. Do not think you are more holy or pious or spiritual than other Christians because you practice such things. Do not think that they earn you anything. They don't. Jesus, on the cross, paid the entire price for all your spiritual blessings.

Invitation

Today, you can have all that God has for everyone. Jesus paid the price.