

Jesus is the Real Deal

January 29, 2017

I want you to remember the joy of finishing high school. Some of you are not there yet, but you can imagine what it will be like to finish. Some of you can also remember finishing college or a vocational training program. Finally, after all the hard work and time, you were finished. You were free! You were free of all the reading, studying, term papers, and exams. What a wonderful feeling of joy you had when finally you were finished. Remember that feeling?

Well Paul the missionary, reminded his readers of something like that in his letter to the church at Colossae when he wrote to them of the benefits they had in Jesus. We looked at these benefits last week. I want to remind you of one of them today.

Colossians 2:13-14 (NIV) He (God) ... canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

That part about "canceled the written code" is referring to the Law of Moses. It is called the Law of Moses, but was not just one law. It included all of the 613 commands, prohibitions, and rituals. God gave these to Moses to instruct the Israelites in how to live with God.

Under the old covenant, the Jews were to relate to God by faith, through the Law, out of love for God.

They were to do everything God instructed. If they failed to live all of it, the Law condemned them to death. And in 1500 years of having the Law, not one person, except Jesus, was able to live it perfectly.

However, God had not given it to them to make them perfect. God had given it to them to show them their imperfection. God used it to teach them of their fallen, sinful hearts. God used it to show them they needed a Savior.

Now, their failure to live the Law perfectly created a tension in them. It was stressful, knowing they were not living it perfectly. Perhaps you have felt such a stress. You recognized your sinfulness and thought, "God could not love me." You felt the weight of your sin despite your efforts at self-improvement.

This is the tension of all who try to relate to God in their own strength. Despite our best efforts we keep sinning. Trying harder only makes us more aware of our sinfulness. I felt that tension for years before I learned all that Jesus had done for me. Then I became free. It was like the feeling on graduation day. Free, free, thank you, Jesus, I am free! I am still learning aspect of that freedom.

After 1,500 years God sent the Jews a Savior. Jesus is that Savior. And Paul is reminding them that in Jesus they have died to the old set of commands, rituals, and prohibitions. They are no longer under its demands.

True Christians relate to God by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus alone.

I say true Christians, because there are many who call themselves Christians who add to Jesus or take away from Jesus. And by doing so they maintain that tension in themselves, never knowing the freedom available in Jesus. They do not believe their freedom and blessing in Jesus. They do not believe what God has promised in Christ. If they did, they would not seek to add anything to Jesus.

In Jesus that old tension is gone. We are fully acceptable to God by faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing left to do to be right with God. We relate to God joyfully instead of with fear and doubt. We know we are fully accepted in Jesus.

Last week Paul's letter reminded us that we have been given fullness in Christ. We know we are not good enough, but Jesus was good enough for us. And by faith in Him we died to the Law. We have been set free! Praise God for your freedom! Thank Jesus for your freedom! Take joy in your freedom! Put a smile on your face and dance!

Paul wanted his readers to remember their fullness and freedom in Jesus. Then they would be ready to face the danger of the false teachers that were troubling them. Paul urges them, in this joyous time of remembering, not to be taken captive by anyone's list of rules and regulations. We pick up the reading in 2:13.

Colossians 2:16 (NIV) "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day."

The Law of Moses contained commands about what Jews could or could not eat and drink. They were commanded to observe 7 feasts divided among three annual religious festivals. Their calendar was centered on the moon and they celebrated a weekly Sabbath day when they could do no regular work.

But in Jesus they were freed from these rules. They were no longer under the weight of them. They had died to the Law of Moses in Jesus.

Now, this was really hard for many Jews to accept. After all, the Law of Moses had been established by God when He rescued them from slavery in Egypt. It prepared them to be God's people, Yahweh's people. It prepared them to live with Him in the Promised Land of Canaan. When Paul wrote this letter, the Jews had been living under this Law for 1,500 years. That is an awfully long time. So to believe that God had just pushed it aside was unthinkable to many of them. Instead of replacing the Law with Jesus, they added Jesus to the Law. And they taught Christians to do the same.

This was one of the false teachings Paul was addressing with his letter. This caution is still relevant to us today. It is relevant for us because there are some who teach that Christians are to follow some of the Law of Moses.

For example, the Law of Moses had a weekly Sabbath day when no regular work was to be done. This would be work associated with your job or career, or farm. The Sabbath was from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. There are some, who claim to follow Jesus, who believe that Christians are bound to obey a Sabbath. I am not one of them. Paul tells us here not to let others condemn us for not observing a Sabbath.

Neither Jesus nor His apostles commanded us to observe a Sabbath. They did not move the Sabbath to Sunday. There is no Christian Sabbath. Beware of anyone teaching you to legalistically observe one.

Any attempt to maintain a right relationship with God through the Law of Moses is to go backwards. Any such effort negates Jesus. You are already complete in Jesus. How do we know that we are complete in Jesus? Because...

Colossians 2:13-14a (NIV) He (God)... canceled the written code...

The books of Acts, Romans, Galatians, Colossians, and Hebrews speak of our freedom in Christ from the Law of Moses. Anyone who will study this subject and decide to obey the Law of Moses is misreading or ignoring a big part of the New Testament.

But someone may object with a question. "Aren't some of these observances given to us by God to remind us of truth?" Yes, but the truth they point to is Jesus.

Colossians 2:17 (NIV) These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The Law of Moses was never meant to be permanent. It was not God's last word on His will for them. The Law of Moses was temporary. Paul describes its commands as shadows.

Maybe you saw the video on Facebook a few weeks ago of the person who was casting a shadow of a hand puppet on the sidewalk and barking. His dog thought it was something real on the sidewalk and started barking at it and trying to bite it. The dog did not know what a shadow was, did not know it was not a material object. If you could give the dog that knowledge, he would have left it alone. He would have ignored it.

Paul is saying that these old things were shadows of the reality to come. They served their purpose. Now that the reality is here, they are no longer needed. So don't pay attention to them. Don't give yourself to them. Don't limit your freedom in Christ by them.

Jesus is the real deal. Jesus is the reality that the Law of Moses was a shadow of. Our focus is now to be on Jesus. We relate to God by faith in Jesus alone.

Don't enslave yourself to the shadows.

Listen, if you keep these shadows after the reality has come you destroy your participation in that reality. You negate what Jesus did for you. You make it of no effect.

Jesus is now the focus of our life in God, not the Law. Focus on Jesus. That will be Paul's conclusion to this section as he begins the next section of his letter.

Colossians 3:1-2 (NIV) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Set your mind on Jesus. Put your focus on Jesus. Trust in Jesus alone. Depend on Jesus. Pray in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the real deal that the shadows were preparing for. Focus your heart, your mind, your will on Jesus. Paul's warning is that you not let anyone spoil Jesus for you. Don't let anyone make you a slave again to the Law of Moses or other such restrictions and practices, rules and rituals.

All that God has for you is to be found in Jesus. God's will for you is first to believe. Believe in all the promises God has made to you in Jesus.

I knew a man some years ago who was surprised that he had survived World War II. He had flown bombers from England over Germany during the war. Ninety percent of the planes that ran those missions were shot down. He was one of the few who flew 30 some missions without being killed or captured. Many times he said to me, "If God kept me alive because He wanted me to do something, I wish He'd tell me what it was."

Several times I tried to tell this man that what God wanted him to do was believe. God wanted him to believe the promises God makes to us all in the Bible. He wants us to believe that we need a savior and that Jesus is the savior God sent.

More than anything else, God wants you to believe that Jesus died for ALL of your sins.

If you do not believe that, then nothing else will help you. There is no other answer to sin other than the death and resurrection of Jesus. You can take nothing away from Jesus. And you can add nothing to Jesus. Those who insist on adding parts of the Law of Moses to Jesus are not trusting in Jesus alone and are not saved of their sins.

Do not be one of them. Put your faith, your trust, in Jesus alone.

Yes, repent of your sins. But do so out of gratitude that Jesus died for all of those sins. Your repentance wins you nothing. Jesus paid it all on the cross. Believe it. Believe it and live in joy with Jesus.