

Col 2.16-3.4 – Fullness & godliness in Christ not human religion Clint Le Page
Main point – Human rules & religion don't bring fullness, Christ does, so seek things above

Just last month, on Fri 16th Feb, 96,000 Taylor Swift fans gathered in and packed the MCG, (SLIDE) to see Taylor Swift perform live.-----

But outside and in the shadow of the MCG, thousands of Swifty fans, who didn't get tickets, gathered. (SLIDE)

They couldn't be inside for the real-deal, but wanted to be close.

I heard the fans left outside still heard the performance n' had fun, but they still missed out, and read many were depressed.-----

Left outside in the shadow, not experiencing the real thing.-----

A bit like that in our passage today, the apostle Paul speaks of some people focusing on shadows, and in danger of missing out on Christ, the real thing.-----

And it's not that they or anyone Has to miss out, as if tickets to heaven sell-out.

Anyone n' everyone who repents & clings to Christ in faith, will be saved.-----

But it seems some are happy outside focused on the shadows, oblivious to the fact that they could be inside, experiencing the real-deal, fullness & freedom in Christ.-----

I hope today's passage will help you never get focused on human rules n' religion, so you miss out on, or fail to enjoy the fulfilment, Christ gives.-----

We're going through this letter to the Colossians, (SLIDE) written to first century Christians in what is now Turkey, people the apostle Paul had never met.

Just a quick recap.----

Paul's expressed his thanks to God for their faith, love and hope, & that the Gospel has changed their lives.

He's prayed that they will keep living lives that please the Lord, persevering in faith in the Lord Jesus, who is God in the flesh, Lord over all, and reconciled us to God.-----

Paul said he's committed to making Christ known.

He wants everyone to know Christ and grow to maturity in him, ch1v28.-----

And last time in ch2 we heard that that maturity includes not being deceived by the false teachers who've come to the church.

The false teaching had Jewish and Greek aspects, and we'll consider it more today, but Paul made clear that the Colossians need to continue in Christ, v6.

He said, make sure no one kidnaps you with deceptive philosophies, human traditions, and demonic teachings.

Because, vv9-15, only in Christ comes fullness, along with freedom from the penalty of sin, and power of sin and Satan.-----

Now Paul focuses in-on some of the specific false teaching, that would draw them away from experiencing fullness in Christ. (SLIDE)

Our first of two points today is, Fullness is not found in human rules & religion.----

For the false teachers are legalists, imposing certain rules n' practices on people.

Look at **v16**, 'don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink, or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day'.

So there's legalists, likely of Jewish background, who are focusing on laws, about food and drink, festivals and days.-----

Now **Lev 11** outlines the food laws and what shouldn't be eaten by Israelites under the Old Covenant.

Num 10.10 talks of blowing trumpets each new month, and **Lev 23** about the festivals and Sabbath day regulations.

So the false teachers are likely imposing weekly, monthly and yearly observances, food restrictions, maybe even circumcision (v11).

All required if you want to be a really committed Christian, a mature person, who truly pleases God.-----

But certain food laws and rules about certain days is no longer required for God's new covenant people.

Spiritual fullness is not found in a return to the OT ceremonial law.-----

In **Mark 7.20** Jesus declared all food clean.

And Jesus is the fulfilment of the Sabbath, **Hebrews 4** says; so we don't have to observe the Sabbath the way OT Israelites did. (& Rom 14.5)

The Sabbath was a shadow of the real thing, the real rest we enter through relying on Jesus.-----

Since the book of Acts Christians started gathering on Sundays, remembering the resurrection.(Acts 20.7; 1 Cor 16.12)-----

Please don't stop meeting with God's people, which we do on Sundays, and during the week.----- (Heb 10.25)

And whether you do any work or play sport on Sundays, **Romans 14** says you shouldn't go against your conscience, and not be judgmental of others.-----

The false teachers were saying, "Don't handle, taste or touch", **v21.(SLIDE)**

But they were wrong; as are Seventh Day Adventists today, who say we should not eat meat n' unclean foods, and we ought to meet on Saturdays, the Sabbath.-----

There were and still are people who say Christians should not eat certain foods, or drink alcohol, or get married; or, if you don't have a one hour quiet time every day, you're a second-class Christian.-----

Yes there is still morality, and right n' wrong, and we'll come to that next chapter.

But Paul's point is don't go condemning others, or imposing on people things the Lord as not.-----

The rejecting of certain food and drink may also have come from an **asceticism**.

That severe self-discipline and self-denial, like monks do – denying themselves food, or enjoyable food n' drinks; staying celibate, fasting for long periods, praying for very long times.-----

The word 'ascetic' in **v18** is translated as false humility in **v23**.

So they're doing things which give an impression they're humble, self-controlled and committed, even treating their own bodies harshly.-----

It seems they're saying we're more serious, mature and God-honouring than you, if you want to be truly spiritual, truly full, truly please God, be like us.-----

And Paul is saying, NO! and what they're doing is useless, useless for restraining self-indulgence, and sinful desires.-----

So while Paul has rebuked self-made religion here, he's also saying that when you're united to Christ it'll change you, and turn you away from self-indulgence.-----

For nearly 20 years **Martin Luther** was a monk (**SLIDE**) and he used to whip himself, or fast for ages, and it was all for nothing, and never changed the heart.-----

If anyone could prove their devotion to God with their spiritual achievements it was Martin.

He went on a pilgrimage to Rome to dot every spiritual 'i' and cross every 't'.

One example was his ascent of the **Scala Sancta (SLIDE)** the holy steps of St John's Luteran.

They'd supposedly come from Pontius Pilate's palace and were the steps Christ walked up during his trial.

So medieval pilgrims would climb the steps on their knees.

That's what Luther did in 1510, saying the Lord's prayer on each step, in the hope that this would somehow release a loved one from purgatory.-----

But when he got to the top, he was plagued with doubts. 'Who knows whether this is true?' he wondered.

He soon became increasingly convinced of the futility of such acts, whether for himself or others. He realized the only hope we can ever have of being right with God depends on God himself... and receiving the grace of Christ.-----

Religious activity cannot change the heart, only God can through Christ.-----
 The Colossians need to know that, and we need to know that.-----

Abstaining from certain foods, celebrating certain days, **v17** says, are a shadow, and the substance is Christ.-----

Shadows can keep little kids entertained for hours, or the shadow of a bad-guy in a horror movie can loom large and strike fear.

But in relationships a friend's shadow is far less significant than the person themselves. Wouldn't it be odd if you're walking along the beach and your best friend or spouse comes up n' speaks to you(**SLIDE**) and you keep looking at n' talking to their shadow on the ground?-----

And we shouldn't stay focused on the shadow when we have the real-deal, the real person, the Lord Jesus.

He towers over human history. His colossal presence casts a cosmic and historic shadow over all history and peoples.

Even our years are numbered after him.-----

It's reported that **Napoleon Bonaparte** once said, (**SLIDE**)

'I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force.----

Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love and this hour millions would die for him...'---

Remember in Christ in the substance, and what matters.-----

The OT ceremonial laws were intended to be a shadow that pointed to the Lord Jesus.-----
 ----[Heb 10.1; Matt 5.17-18; Lk 24.44]

Remember, we get filled by Christ, we grow to maturity only in him, and 2v3 said, in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.-----(**SLIDE-blank**)

Man-made laws & made-up religion won't help you please God or fill your soul.-----

In **v22** just as your food gets used up, eaten up, all those human commands will perish too – they won't last, they are not what matters.-----

More than that, they are dangerous.-----

In **v20** Paul again mentions, from v8, the 'elements of this world', or as the ESV puts it, 'the elemental spiritual forces'.

They are behind the false religion being promoted, and have a demonic origin.-----

Which matches with Paul's point in **v19**, that the false teachers are not holding onto Christ, what they are teaching is not Christian, and will not help you grow.-----

It's reminiscent of Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for their false-worship & pushing man-made rules on people in **Matt 15(v9)**.-----

We leaders and teachers must be careful about what we ask others to do.-----

V18 also mentions the false teachers **worshipping angels**, but it could mean, worship like angels, or alongside angels.

And they were claiming access to a visionary realm.

Maybe they've been saying, we've had visions of heavenly worship n' entered God's presence, and you can too if you listen to us.-----

They are great pretenders, mystics claiming to offer people the secrets of the spiritual world.-

And the apostle says they are puffed up with empty and unspiritual thoughts.-----

Their thinking is not from God; not from His word; and not rooted in Christ.-----

But this danger is still something we must be wary of.-----

In the New Age movement, there's a term called "**Christ consciousness**". (**SLIDE**)

And I'd not heard of it until a sister in Christ mentioned it to me.-----

Christ Consciousness is the belief in a consciousness which pervades the universe, is exemplified by the life of Jesus, and is a state of consciousness in which a person has found self-realization and unity with the Divine.
It combines Christian language with Eastern religious and philosophical concepts.

In seeking Christ Consciousness, the idea is to transcend physical existence and experience one's own divinity and God-like nature. It's claimed as a path of love, peace, harmony and bliss, which leads to an understanding of the omnipresent higher power that connects all beings in the universe.-----

All that is not true.

Please don't be sucked into that.

It's surely from the devil.-----**(SLIDE)**

Col 2 is saying don't be insecure when people talk about how spiritual they are, how godly n' mature they are, because of their religious practices or experiences.-----

If your friends have spiritual experiences, have dreams or visions, or speak in tongues, or sense and feel God's presence or love, and you don't, don't be disheartened, don't lose hope in the Gospel.

You don't need to fear you're missing out.----- **No FOMO** needed.-----

There's often a **classic scene in thrillers** – one character gets injured and lies propped up against a wall, and the hero decides they must hunt down medical supplies, or get help.

So despite her comrade's pleas, she leaves him alone.

Meanwhile the baddies/ aliens/ killer bees or whatever, are at large.-----

The tension comes from the common fear of being helpless and left behind.-----

There are many days when we can feel God has done the same - perhaps he has better things to do than help us?-----

Or perhaps he is that celestial policeman, waving his baton or taser, waiting to bring it down on us for our failures.-----

Or we fear missing out on the great things God seems to give to others.-----

Fake news floating around Colossae seems to play on those fears, because it suggests that there are things we need to do, to ensure we don't blow it. We need to keep God on side, somehow.

But remember from ch1, Christ is fully God and fully human.

And we have been brought into Christ, we are 'in Christ' and have his fullness.

So there's no need to go elsewhere to meet God, as if there's some portion of the deity Christ doesn't have.

When it comes to encountering God there's nothing more to add.-----

And v19 is saying when you stay connected to Christ, the head, you will grow.

Because as Paul says in v20, and as we heard in v12-13, we died with Christ, and we have new life in him, we have everything in him.-----

In Christ you are secure.

In Christ you have fullness.

You don't need moving spiritual experiences to verify you're saved or prove your maturity.-----

Resist any accusing voice in your mind, or condemning voice from others.-----

Repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus is what saves, and we grow to maturity and fullness by continuing in him, staying rooted and built up in him.-----

Fullness is not found in human rules and religion, and not found in seeking spiritual experiences.-----

So point 2, more briefly, You have life in Christ, so seek things above.-----

Remember from last time **v12**, you were raised with Christ through faith in the work of God which raised Christ from the dead.

And God made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses, **v13**.-----

Now in **ch3** Paul returns to this truth, and his tone changes.-----

‘if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.’
Remember, the old sin-ruled person you were died, died with Christ, and by trusting in him, you’ve received new life, and you’re joined to him.
That’s what **v3** tells us, your life is hidden with Christ in God.-----
People don’t see it, and we don’t see it, with our eyes, but our lives are united to Christ by the Spirit, and our life is concealed with Christ, in God.
It’s amazing!-----
He is our life, and our life is in him.-----
Christ rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, to the right hand of God the Father.-----
And we are joined to Jesus, so spiritually we are there too.
We don’t see it, or feel it, we’re not there physically, yet.
But it’s a mind-boggling and wonderful and joyful reality, that we have new resurrection life in Christ now.
And so heaven is our real home, our true home.
And Christ is our identity, at the core of our identity.-----
That’s why instead of focusing on the things of this world we should seek, set our hearts on & desire, things above.
So what does it mean to seek and set our minds on things above?-----
It is to daily hold fast to Christ, as v6&7 told us.----
It is to keep God and his Son as the centre and source of all our joys.
It is to remember what matters and what lasts.
And focus on doing what the Lord asks.-----
It’s going to include us not focusing on amassing our wealth here now, but building up treasure in heaven (Matt 6.21).
Seeking things above will mean striving to be holy because God is holy – rejecting sin, and curbing your self-indulgence [2.23] – whether things you look at, eat or drink, touch, or dream or fantasize about.
It’s Not seeking those 6 P’s we considered in ch1, (**SLIDE**) the Pay-check, Postcode, Possessions; Prominence, other People, & Pleasures; even adding seeking a profession or power over others, as what you care about most in this world.
But remember what matters, and who the God is we worship and serve.-----
It’s not that we are to forget everything to do with this world, and quit our jobs and flee to a monastery to read and pray, and eat - not much.-----
It’s not that we should escape this life or ignore this present world.
But keep heaven on our minds.-----
And a heavenly focus makes an earthly difference.
Being heavenly minded will be seen in a holy life, careful use of our resources;
in godly parenting and loving marriages; in a united congregation;
in a situation at your work where you something of Christ,
and in effective witness to the outsider;
all part of living a life that pleases the Lord.-----
On Monday-Saturday does your mind regularly go up to Christ?-----
And what he asks of you today?-----
And to what will last?-----
And to what is to come?-----
And that he’s coming back one day.
That’s where **v4** finishes, with the reminder that we will appear one day with Christ in glory.
And while many missed out on Taylor Swift tickets, you don’t wanna miss out on being with Christ that day; and you don’t have to.
Clint to Him in faith, and treasure him now; for you’ll soon see him.-----

There is an inspiring story about the preacher and Archbishop **John Chrysostom**, nicknamed, gold-mouthed. (**SLIDE**)

John Chrysostom was hauled before the Byzantine Empress Eudoxia in 5th C. She was frustrated by his independence and resistance to her authority, so she threatened him.

She first tried to scare him with banishment and he replied:

'You cannot banish me, for this world is my Father's house'.-----

'But I will kill you' says the empress.

'No, you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God', said John.-----

'I will take away your treasures'.

'No you cannot, for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there'.-----

'But I will drive you away from your friends and you will have no one left.'

'No you cannot, for I have a Friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to harm me.'-----

Can you see John's logic?

She could punish him with grim and difficult things, but belonging to Christ puts everything into perspective.---

As we sing in the great hymn, Before the throne of God above:

One with himself I cannot die,

my soul is purchased with his blood;

My life is hid with Christ on high, my Saviour and my God'.-----

Remember where you belong, who you belong to; and what matters most.-----

Don't get focused on human rules, n' religion, or seeking spiritual experiences.

With a heaven focus, know you are joined to Christ, you have fullness in him, and he is coming.-----

In Christ we are secure. In Christ we have n' will have, everything.-----

Let's pray.