

Sunday, February 14, 2021—Colossians 2:20-23 Why Are Ye Subject to Ordinances?

Colossians 2:20

- **Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,**
- The first thing I want you to notice about verse 20 is that it is part of a sentence that ends in verse 22. Second, notice that it is a question. Paul is asking the Colossians to think about something.
- **Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world**—“wherefore” or on the basis what was just said. In these last four verses of the chapter Paul is seeking to connect or apply what he has been talking about in this chapter.
- “If ye be dead” is the factual or logical use of the word “if.” The verb “dead” following the condition “if” is in the indicative mood. Therefore, Paul is not calling anything into question in verse 20, rather he is seeking to logically apply the truth taught in this chapter. “Ye” is a second person plural pronoun and refers to all the believers in the church at Colossi.
- Colossians 2:11-13—established the fact that believers were buried, risen, and quickened together with Christ, “through the faith of the operation of God.”
 - Romans 6:3-4
- Colossians 2:14—upon the cross the Lord Jesus Christ satisfied all the righteous requirements of the law blotting them out and taking them out of the way.
- Colossians 2:8—warned of the spoiling capacity of the “rudiments of the world.” The English word “rudiment” carries the following means according to Noah Webster:
 - A first principle or element; that which is to be first learnt; as the rudiments of learning or science. Articulate sounds are the rudiments of language; letters or characters are the rudiments of written language; the primary rules of any art or science are its rudiments. Hence instruction in the rudiments of any art or science, constitutes the beginning of education in that art or science.
 - The original of anything in its first form. Thus, in botany, the germen, ovary or seed-bud, is the rudiment of the fruit yet in embryo; and the seed is the rudiment of a new plant.
 - To furnish with first principles or rules; to ground; to settle in first principles.
- Rudiments are the elemental first principles upon which everything else is based. So, what does Paul mean by the “rudiments of the world.” He is talking about the base principles upon which God founded and set things up. He is talking about the Mosaic Law.

- Galatians 4:1-10
- Hebrews 5:12
- Colossians 2:20—when believers endeavor to follow the Mosaic Law, they are willfully subjecting themselves to the base elements of the world. So, the first part of verse 20 establishes the fact that believers are in the present “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.”
- **why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances**—here we see the application of the logic. If “ye” are “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world,” why are you subjecting yourselves to ordinances?
- Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* defines the word “ordinance” as follows:
 - 1. A rule established by authority; a permanent rule of action. An ordinance may be a law or statute of sovereign power. In this sense it is often used in the Scriptures. Exodus 15:25. Numbers 10:8. Ezra 3:10. It may also signify a decree, edict or rescript, and the word has sometimes been applied to the statutes of Parliament, but these are usually called acts or laws. In the United States, it is never applied to the acts of Congress, or of a state legislature.
 - 2. Observance commanded.
 - 3. Appointment.
 - 4. Established rite or ceremony. Hebrews 9:1. In this sense, baptism and the Lord's supper are denominated ordinances.
- Exodus 12:14, 17, 24, 43; 13:10; 15:25; 18:20—“ordinances” were clearly part of the rudimentary system of the law.
- Colossians 2:20—therefore Paul’s question, if you are dead from rudimentary things why are you subjecting yourselves to ordinances which were part of that system.

Colossians 2:21-22

- **(Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?**
- Notice how the rudimentary ordinances are negative admonitions i.e., they identify what people should not do or how they should not behave.

- Colossians 2:16-17—messing around with these ordinances is playing around with the temporary shadowy things. They are not part of holding Christ as the head of the body.
- Colossians 2:8—Paul also warned about “the tradition of men.” The traditions of men are based upon the rudimentary principles of “touch not, taste not, handle not.”
 - Matthew 15:1-9
 - Mark 7:1-13
- Colossians 2:22—why if you are dead to these things “with Christ” would one subject themselves to rudimentary ordinances and the doctrines of men? If doesn’t make sense to do that.

Colossians 2:23

- **Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.**
- Paul acknowledges that these things do indeed have a superficial appeal i.e., they have “a shew of wisdom.”
 - will worship—literally means worship in which the will is involved. This is a false worship that exalts one’s ability to control their will.
 - humility—this is the “voluntary humility” of verse 18.
 - neglecting of the body—is a reference to ascetism or man’s effort through self-denial and self-torture, to discipline himself in order to reach a higher state of spirituality.
- Your flesh wants and desires to perform. There is no honor in these humanistic endeavors, but our flesh is stratified by them.
- This what Bill Gillham in his book *Lifetime Guarantee*, calls “the devils’ biggest weapon;” performance-based acceptance (PBA).
 - “It works like this. If you perform (act) as I want you to, I’ll accept you; if you don’t I’ll reject you. In other words, I realize that I possess something that you need—love. So I’m going to use my “supply” to control you. . .

Every religion from Mormonism to voodoo is based on PBA, humanity’s seeking acceptance from God by earning it. Christianity, however, is relationship, not religion. God reaches out to us with grace (unmerited favor) through Jesus Christ’s finished work. This relationship is not for sale. Jesus bought it with His life. It cannot be earned through PBA. You don’t earn a gift, you gratefully accept it.

The world system, on the other hand, is based totally on PBA, whether you're trying to get the acceptance of peers in the jungles of the Amazon or the jungles of Harlem; whether you're reared in a Mafia member's home or a pastor's home. Performance is the name of the game. Perform well and you can earn your love supply out your environment, even in your church." (Gillham, 45-48)

- II Corinthians 5:14-16—our motivation is love and appreciation for all Christ has done for us.