

# Colossians 2:8-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you weren't here last week, just really quickly, I want to get you caught up. I know there's a lot of people who weren't here. These verses that we covered last week and the verses that we covered this week will really be taken as a whole.

And so we kind of have to do some piecing together, some combining of this week and last week. And I gave you an outline last week so that we can kind of see the overall picture of this text. And this is basically it, that we have a warning not to be taken by empty deceit, not to be taken by worldly, empty philosophy. And then we have a call to the sufficiency or the supremacy of Christ over worldly philosophy.

And then the outflow of that is kind of something that's going on in the background all throughout the book of Colossians that Paul is doing. And that is this thing called apologetics. It kind of naturally outflows from this idea that we shouldn't be taken by empty philosophy, that the supremacy of Christ reigns in our hearts, and the outflow of that is apologetics.

And we see this in Paul's letters as well as his preaching and his teaching. And so last week we defined apologetics in this basic form as knowing what we believe, why we believe it, and then being able to communicate that effectively to others.

[ 1 : 21 ] The last part is pretty important, right? So knowing what we believe, why we believe it, and then being able to communicate that effectively to others. And this is really what we see Paul doing throughout the book of Colossians.

And the core of his message is in Colossians 2, verses 8 to the end of the chapter, including our text this morning. And so we're going to see the core of his message here is really combating heresy.

It's really combating these unbiblical ideas that are making their way, these empty philosophies that are making their way into the church at Colossae. And there really isn't a better time to be talking about this than right now.

Nathan's already mentioned it before, but the travesty that took place this week with the Supreme Court ruling, I use the word travesty, not tragedy. It's not a tragedy for us as believers.

It's important that we understand this is very much a part of apologetics, how we react to cultural issues such as what happened this week. And should we care about the same-sex marriage ruling?

[ 2 : 25 ] Yes, we should. We should care about it. We should be concerned about it. Should we be concerned about the direction our culture is heading in terms of how it glorifies sin over Christ? Yes, absolutely.

We should be concerned about these things. But should we respond in panic and outlash?

Absolutely not. There's nothing to panic about. There's nothing that has changed in terms of the biblical definition of marriage.

But they're redefining marriage, right? No, they're redefining the law. They have redefined the law. Let's be clear here. Whose idea was marriage in the beginning?

It was God's idea. In Genesis chapter 2, God said that it is not good for the man to be alone. And so he created for Adam a suitable helper. And right then, in the very beginning, God defines marriage. Genesis 2, 24. It's his idea. It's his definition. We can't change that as humans. The Supreme Court can't change that. Our President of the United States isn't powerful enough to change the definition of marriage.

[ 3 : 37 ] So God defines it as simply as a covenant union. A lifelong covenant union between one man and one woman. That's what marriage is. God gets to decide what marriage looks like.

It's his idea. It's his definition. The Supreme Court has the power to do a lot of things, but they can't redefine biblical marriage. Genesis chapter 2 defines biblical marriage.

The Supreme Court might be able to change the law. This is important. Don't miss this. They might be able to change the law, but they can't put Christ back in the grave. It means, fellow believers, that we should respond as people who have hope, and we should be living out our faith as people who have hope.

It means we don't panic when the Supreme Court tells us something like they did this week. We live as people who have hope. It goes all back to what we talked about last week, that Jesus is the ultimate authority over all authorities, over all rulers.

We read that last week in our text. He is supreme over all authority. And yes, that means he is supreme over the Supreme Court of the United States. They might be the highest court authority, but they are not the highest overall authority.

[ 4 : 54 ] Jesus is. Let's not forget that. And let's not forget that every person outside of God's grace is looking for hope. They're looking for something to hope in, to place their hope.

And there's a lot of celebration right now in the homosexual camp because they think that they have found hope. They think that's what they've found. So don't alienate yourself from these people by pushing them away from the gospel.

Remember what we said last week. Apologetics is not the vindication of me. It's the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life. And so we're not out to win arguments. We're not out there to defend ourselves.

We're out to defend biblical truth. So don't push these people away from the gospel. Because when they finally realize that there's no hope in their lifestyle, it's going to be us standing there with open arms, ready to welcome them in to the fold of Christ.

It's going to be us as they begin to place their hope in the only one true and holy God, the only one true hope that we have. And we've got to be ready to give a defense for the reason, for the hope that we have, which is Christ Jesus.

[ 6 : 04 ] I left you last week with something to think about. And I don't know how many of you have actually thought about it. Hopefully most of you. But this is what I said. There's essentially 66 books of the Bible. We're not adding any more to that.

The canon is closed. Which means that there's a limited number of things that we believe, right? If there's only 66 books of the Bible, it can only contain a certain amount of truth in it. And that is what we hold to believe.

There's a limited number of things that we believe. And if that is true, if we have a limited number of things that we believe, that means there's a limited number of objections that people can raise up against our beliefs.

And also a limited number of objections that we must answer. And thirdly, we have those answers. God's given them to us in Scripture.

And so my point in telling you that is that you have the ability, as a believer in Jesus Christ, you have the ability to do this thing that we call apologetics. You can contend for the faith. It is possible for you to do this.

[ 7 : 05 ] This isn't just something for elite Christians. This isn't just something for the seminary professors and then the big mega church pastors or whatever it happens to be. This is something that you and I can and should do according to Scripture.

Contend for the faith. It may take some practice. It may take some boldness. It might take some courage. But you can do it. And so the first thing that we really need to know, practically speaking, when we're contending for the faith, is that I'm not responsible for defending what I do not believe. So we're narrowing it down here. We're even making it more simple, right? We don't have to defend what we don't believe. I'm also not responsible for defending heresy. If someone asks me about heresy, well, yeah, well, what about this?

Well, that's heresy. I don't believe it. I'm not going to defend something that I don't believe. I don't need to defend heresy. I just need to know what I believe. Well, it would be kind of like somebody walking up to you and just maybe saying, well, what about the way the Russians handle their foreign policy?

I don't know. Well, I'm kind of not a Russian, you know? I don't know why the Russians do what they do. Just ask one of them, I guess. I mean, I'm not a Russian.

[ 8 : 29 ] I'm also not responsible for defending assumptions in straw men. You know what a straw man is? A straw man is an argument that somebody is making or an argument that somebody is refuting that you didn't even make to begin with.

It's a really effective fallacy. It's an informal fallacy that people often will make in front of other people. If you have a group and you're doing a debate in front of people, they'll begin to attack an argument you're not even making.

And so it looks effective, but really it's a fallacy. You've got to call those out. It's a straw man. Well, you guys believe, and you can just fill in the blank with whatever, whatever we're being accused of, whatever horrible thing we're being accused of this week.

Well, you guys just believe this. I don't believe that. Do you believe that? I don't know anybody who believes that. In fact, I think you're making that up.

Paul doesn't entertain assumptions or straw men in his writing or in his preaching. There's a great example of it.

[ 9 : 34 ] You can go look it up later. I don't have time to go there. But Acts chapter 17, there's a lot of questions being raised to Paul. Does he entertain these straw men? No. He doesn't entertain them. He just calls it what it is, and he moves on.

We don't have to defend straw men or anything that we don't believe. So what do we do? We use the Word of God as your source of objections.

Why? Because it is your source for what you believe. It is your source for what you believe. If you can't defend what you believe from the Word of God, then it means it probably isn't in the Word of God, and therefore we probably shouldn't believe it.

So we use Scripture. It's important. The first thing that we need to know about these things is that it must be biblical. Our apologetics must be biblical.

Now at this point, some people will say, Well, Kyle, that's great if I'm talking to someone who believes the Bible, but what if I'm talking to someone who doesn't believe in the Bible? Then I've got to use something outside of the Bible to prove what I believe, because they don't believe in the Bible.

[ 10 : 42 ] Says who? Says who? They don't believe in the Bible, so I don't use my Bible? That sounds like their rule. Why would I do that?

You know what it sounds like to me? It sounds like if I'm a knight in medieval times, and I walk up to my opponent, and I say, Unsheath my sword. And my opponent looks at me and says, I don't believe in your sword.

Well, then allow me to speak about the science of the metallurgy, so that you may as well believe in my sword. No.

He's either going to believe in my sword, or he's just going to lose. Right? In fact, when we are arguing biblical truth with someone who does not believe the Bible, if we give up the Bible, then they've just won.

Because we've agreed with them that there's a greater source than the Bible, and that we don't need the Bible for truth. The last thing you want to do is give up your Bible.

[ 11 : 44 ] Why on earth would I allow someone else to dictate how the Word of God is communicated? It makes no sense at all. It's alive and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword.

So when I choose to use something outside of the Bible, it means that I choose to use something that's not as authoritative, and not as powerful as Scripture. Therefore, I do not relinquish it.

Do not relinquish your sword. The Bible compares it, actually, to a sword many times throughout Scripture. So this is how this works. We're going to try to simplify this so that we can understand this a little better, and I promise we're going to get into the text.

This is all kind of work leading up to us seeing how Paul is working this out inside this text. So this is how this works. So first of all, it's got to be biblical, and second of all, it has to be simple, or else we're not going to do it, right?

If we don't make this simple for ourselves, then we're not going to practice this in our own lives. And so if you know seven or eight key characteristics of theology, and you know a couple of key passages, two or three key passages, where these things are discussed, no one will ever ask you a question that you can't answer.

[ 12 : 57 ] Because most of the objections that are raised against Christianity, they fall into one of these seven or eight categories. And if they do ask a question that you can't answer, more often than not, they're asking you about something you don't believe, and you don't have to defend it.

So every question typically falls into these seven or eight categories. So we learn these categories, and we can begin to defend what we believe. So the tools I promised you last week, I told you that we're going to have some tools that we can use.

The number one tool that we have, most of you have it in your hands right now, the Bible. Number one tool, know your scripture, know the word of God. It's the best and most reasonable thing, but it is large, it's hard to know everything that's in it.

So we understand that our apologetics must be biblical, but there are other tools that are really the training grounds for apologetics. What are these tools? Catechisms, creeds, and confessions.

Catechisms, creeds, and confessions. There are three C's, you can write that down in your notes, help you remember them, whatever you have to do. Catechisms, creeds, and confessions. Creeds are summaries of the gospel. They're summaries of the gospel.

[14:10] They are poetic in nature, so they can be easy to memorize. And there's several creeds out there. There's the Apostle Creed. And by the way, these creeds, they came out of heretical movements throughout history.

Offentimes they would call together groups of believers, and they would have what they called councils. They had the Council of Nicaea. On the other side of the Council of Nicaea, they met together to defend heresy that was going on during this time.

And so on the other side of that, we get the Nicene Creed. They come up with the Nicene Creed. It's used to combat heresy during this time. So these are very effective things for us to look at and to understand.

There's the Apostles' Creed. There's the Nicene Creed written to combat Arian heresy of that day. Interestingly, Jehovah's Witness, same heresy. That's the Arian heresy.

Meaning the Nicene Creed is a great tool for us. Only a few months ago, I had a JW knock on my door. Unfortunately, we didn't really have a great conversation. They weren't really ready to have a conversation with me, and we were trying to head out the door.

[15:17] But they showed up at my door, and we had a short conversation. It was a little bit awkward. But this is relevant to us today. The Athanasian Creed answers the Jehovah's Witness heresy as well.

How do we respond to Pentecostals? Same thing. Athanasian Creed. These creeds were written at times, not unlike in our passage today, where they were combating heresy and false doctrines.

So particularly effective. Here's an interesting thing, too. Our catechisms and our confessions were designed to fit into these categories that we're talking about. And so you already have the categories laid out within your confessions.

We already talked about catechisms some last week. They're questions that we ask our learners with a predefined response that the learner is supposed to say in answer to the question.

So catechisms were designed to help us learn our confessions. That's how catechisms work. And so we see that we have these tools that we have.

[16:25] And by the way, what's a good confession of faith? We have one at Christ's Family Church. Right? Every person who is a member should have read through this before they decided to be a member.

And so we already have one here at our church that outlines everything that we believe that falls into these categories. What's more is that we have Scripture that goes along with those categories.

So it's a great tool for us to begin to learn. It's really the training grounds for apologetics so that we can begin to understand God's Word. We can begin to understand these categories where people might ask a question, and then we have the biblical truth that shows where we get that truth from.

So particularly effective. And by the way, if you need a copy of that, I'm sure Nathan can somehow figure out a way to get you a copy of our Confession of Faith. If not, in the meantime, it is based off the New Hampshire Confession of Faith primarily.

So you can go online, look up New Hampshire Confession of Faith, and you'll find essentially what is contained within Christ's Family's Confession of Faith. Am I denying that this isn't helpful to know science?

[17:35] No. It's not. There are helpful things, but what we have to get right first to make it simple and so that we can do it is to understand the biblical truth behind our answers.

And as we do so, then we can add some other stuff to it. Simply learning about fallacies and rhetoric can go a long way in understanding what people are doing when they make their

arguments.

And we can call them out on certain fallacies, and they try to use tactics to trip you up. And God bless you if you take that route. That's great. If you want to continue on, you want to get deeper in your study of apologetics, you want to get deeper in the way that you can combat these heresies and these other things, these objections people are raising, then more power to you.

That's really great. That's extremely beneficial. But if you want to make this simple, you're defending what you believe, right? You're defending what you believe. As far as doing apologetics, this is about you always being ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

And you don't believe what you believe because some philosopher told you to believe it. You don't believe what you believe because some scientist told you. You believe what you believe because of what's in the text. Is there a little work that needs to be done?

[18:51] Yes, there is. There's some work that needs to be done up front. And unfortunately, I can't give you all the answers in a 30 to 45 minute sermon. So it's not going to work that way. You've got to do some work yourself.

Come up with these ideas and understanding of Scripture. And then you can be confident and comfortable when answering these questions. Now, don't make this mistake because we make this mistake a lot as believers.

Here's the reality. It's that God saves sinners. Apologetics doesn't save sinners. God saves sinners. So don't merely use apologetics without sharing the gospel.

You've got to have gospel truth. The changing life message of the gospel. I was talking to a guy that works at UNG the other day. That's where I work.

For those who don't know, I work in the IT department. And there was a student worker that works there. And he's a real people person. He's a really good person to talk to. He asks a lot of questions.

[19:52] He really wants to get to know people. And I really love that about him. And over the course of our conversation, he found out that I have a seminary background and that I used to work on staff with a church and all these things.

And I almost cringe whenever I tell people this. Not because I don't want to share my faith. I love sharing my faith with people. It's because usually the walls go up and the conversation shuts down. And for those of you who have been in ministry in the past or you just happen to know these type of people, oftentimes these conversations just, they're squelched because they don't want to have a conversation with somebody who's a professional Christian, so to speak.

And he really surprised me because that didn't happen with him. It so pleasantly surprised me. This guy didn't act this way toward me. He really wanted to continue engaging in this conversation.

And he said, you know, I used to be an atheist and I hated the way Christians would force their faith on people. I just hated that. But now, I just say, if that's what makes people happy, then I'm, you know, more power to them.

[20:57] That's great. That's what makes you happy. And I said, well, I'm not really one to force my faith on anyone and I'm really not. I believe to really force your faith, you've got to try to make them believe what you believe and there's no way to do that.

It's impossible. You can't make somebody believe anything. They're going to believe what they accept as truth. Right? So I'm not forcing my faith on anyone. So I said, I'm not really one to force my faith on anyone but I'll tell you this, Jesus Christ has changed my life and I'll never be the same again.

And he said, that's really great. You know, that's what makes you happy. I'm happy for you. That's good. And I said, well, you know, it's way more than just making me happy. This faith that I have in Christ is way more.

Scripture tells us the wages of sin is death. And I was once on a trajectory that would have sent me straight to hell. But the gift of God is new life and that comes only through the sacrifice that Jesus paid on the cross.

And that just triggered something in this guy's mind and he said, yeah, well, this guy I used to work with, he told me that if I don't believe in Jesus and the people that don't believe in Jesus, well, they're going to hell.

[22:07] And if that's the kind of God that your God is and I don't want to have anything to do with believing in Him. I said, did your friend explain God's reason behind that?

He said, well, no. Since we're already talking about it, can I explain it to you? Let's say that there is a person, a serial killer who was caught and the evidence presented before the jury was overwhelmingly guilty.

He is guilty. He's killed more than 20 people and he is found guilty overwhelmingly by his jury and he stands before a judge and the judge stands up and he says, your sentence is nothing.

You're free to go. Would that be just? Well, absolutely not. It wouldn't be just at all. He said, he deserves the full punishment of the law.

Right. And in the same way, if you commit one sin, one sin before an eternal God, you're infinitely guilty before Him. And he says that that requires an eternal death, a sentence of eternal death.

[ 23 : 25 ] But God in His love devised a plan from the very beginning. And that plan was to send His Son as a substitute for those who die, for those who believe.

Sorry. I mean, that Jesus died the death that I should have died and I said, that's why it can only be through Jesus. That's why. Because it's God's plan from the very beginning.

Because it was God's plan to redeem us from the punishment that we fully deserve. And He said, man, I haven't ever heard anybody explain it to me that way before. Never heard it that way. You'll notice, by the way, that I didn't shut Him down.

I wasn't trying to win an argument. I just spoke the truth to Him in love. And that is what we're called to do, believers. It's to speak the truth in love. This is what Paul does over and over and over again, by the way, in his letters.

He's firm in the truth, but he speaks the truth in love. And last week, we saw that we are complete in Christ. And this is something that's going to be really important as we jump into this passage this morning.

[ 24 : 32 ] Because being complete in Christ means that we need nothing else. And what we're going to see is Paul combining a series of heresies which said that we need Jesus and something else.

So as we jump into this, I want you to keep that in mind. This week, we're going to see Paul employing apologetics to combat particular heresies that the church was facing at this time. So we're going to jump right into this passage.

Colossians 2, verse 16. Colossians 2, 16. Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

This is standing directly opposed to the Judaizers of this day who were saying that we need to keep going, we need to keep up the Jewish ceremonial law. There was a lot of stuff they had to do.

There were certain things that they could eat. There were certain things they couldn't eat. There was a lot of law that was involved in this. And what Paul is saying to the Colossians says, look, these people are trying to intimidate you with legalism.

[ 25 : 36 ] With legalism. So this is right here, this verse, he is combating the heresy of legalism.

They're trying to judge you on what you eat or what you drink or whether you attend a Passover or whether you attend all these Jewish festivals, whether you make your sacrifice on New Moon or whether you prescribe to the rituals of the Sabbath day.

They're trying to intimidate you by saying you need Christ plus these man-made rules. They're saying it isn't enough to know Christ. You have to know Christ and keep the Jewish ceremonial law.

Legalism, by the way, is subscribing your spirituality to man-made rules. Subscribing your spirituality to man-made rules. Defining your spirituality by your ability to keep man-made rules.

Obedying God's rules, by the way, what is that? That's obedience. We get this confused too often. And we accuse people of legalism when they're really just being obedient to His Word.

There's a difference between obedience and legalism. Obedience, obeying God's Word, God's commands to us. Legalism, saying that we're required to follow man-made rules.

[ 26 : 53 ] There's a difference there. So don't give believers a hard time for being obedient. It's really important that we understand that distinction. Paul's not arguing against obedience here.

He's arguing against legalism. Remember that Paul uses the word therefore at the beginning of this passage, which means that we must reconnect this back to the previous thought that Paul had, which we talked about last week.

So in light of the completeness that we have in Christ, don't let people place legalistic judgment on you. Don't let people judge you for the things that God's Word hasn't said that we have to do.

In other words, don't sacrifice your freedom in Christ to circumscribe your life to a bunch of rules, a bunch of man-made rules. Christ has canceled the bondage of law.

We see this in verse 14. He canceled the record or the debt that stood against us with the legal demands. He nailed it to the cross. Galatians 5:1 is really helpful for us here as well.

[ 27 : 55 ] It says, For freedom, Christ has set you free. Therefore, stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. Don't go back to legalism.

It would be ridiculous to imagine that Jesus suffered what He suffered on the cross and to free us from the prison and the bondage that we were in prior to His suffering, only for Him to send us into another jail cell.

It would be ridiculous to think that. He has set us free to stay free. Now look at verse 17. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance, the substance belongs to Christ.

These are the shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. I love this verse. This is an incredible verse and I think that on the surface level we don't really understand what it means, so I hope I can help you understand that here.

This is really referring to the eating and drinking and the festivals mentioned in the previous passage. All these rules, all this Jewish ceremonial law, these were things that they had to do. These were things that were the shadow of the One who was to come.

[ 29 : 08 ] That's what this passage is talking about. These laws, these regulations, all these things that they had to follow, the sacrificial system, this is but a shadow of the One who is to come, and the One who is to come is here.

He's arrived, and His name is Jesus. All those other things were the shadow that went before Him. And so we see that this Jewish ceremonial law, it was there, and if you read the book of Leviticus, if you can make it all the way through the book, then that's really awesome, because it is really, really tough to read straight through the book of Leviticus.

We have a lot of narrative in Genesis and Exodus, and we get to Leviticus, and man, it's like the narrative shuts it down, it's really difficult to make it all the way through, and that's really great.

You think you should understand the book of Leviticus, because it teaches us what was in the Jewish ceremonial law primarily. And it also teaches us that there is no way.

If you look at the rules, the regulations, all the things that they had to do just to atone for sin alone, it's unbelievable. We can't accomplish this as humans.

[ 30 : 22 ] Okay? Christ had to accomplish the work on the cross for us. And so, the Old Testament, in a lot of ways, shows us our need for the gospel, our need for Christ.

Those things were the shadow. Paul says, the one cast in the shadow has arrived, and this is Jesus. He is the true substance. We no longer need ritualistic food and drink.

Jesus is the bread of life. He has come to fulfill the law. Moving right along, Paul reaches the second issue. He addresses legalism, then he moves right into discussing mysticism.

So, before we get to verse 18, what is mysticism? Simple definition is a deeper or higher religious experience based on personal intuition. So, this is some higher level of spiritualism that we're not going to find in scripture.

Right? So, it's very subjective. A very subjective, experiential type spirituality. There's nothing connecting it to the word of God. There's nothing that we can connect it to anything objective.

[ 31 : 30 ] And so, this experience could be anything for anybody. And so, this is what Paul says about this. Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and the worship of angels.

Going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind. These people, he's saying, are puffed up by this experience that they had where there's nothing objective about it. Don't let anyone make you think that you're missing something based off of unbiblical principles or based off of principles that aren't found in scripture. In this case, it's mysticism and asceticism.

You haven't understood until you have understood the worship of angels. This is what these people say, you haven't had the right visions, you haven't properly caused yourself enough suffering in this world like I have.

They inflated themselves in their own minds because of their experiences. All the while, the one thing that they're not doing is holding fast to the head.

[ 32 : 34 ] Who is who? It's Christ. There in verse 19, and not holding fast to the head. So this version of heresy is Christ plus my visions, plus my experiences, plus my deeper experience, sorry, my experiences with angels, plus my deeper experience.

The first heresy is Christ plus rules. This all goes back again to last week. When Christ is sufficient for our grace, we don't need anything else but Christ. But these people, the heresy they're making is saying, you need Christ plus these other things.

And that is the heresy. As a believer, do you know what you need? You need Christ. Do you know what else you need? Absolutely nothing. He is all that you need.

You don't need rules. You don't need mystical experiences. You don't need anything else under the sun. You just need to hold fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with the growth that is from God.

You just hold on to the one who's holding the entire church together. Capital C Church, which means broad spectrum, whole world, capital C church, the church of Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 51 ] Not just this church, but all the churches who are gathering right now and with one voice worshipping God all together this morning. That's what we're talking about. He holds the church together.

Don't be intimidated by the world and all its empty philosophy. Don't be distracted by other people's mystical experiences or their man-made rules. Peter tells us, you have received all things pertaining to life and godliness.

You have already received it. You don't need anything else. You have Christ. Verse 20. If with Christ you die to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. He says, your union with Christ and his death has caused you to die to the elemental spirits of the world, which means you have essentially died to the philosophy and everything else that exists in this world.

He's primarily speaking to asceticism here, which is following a set of man-made rules to gain higher favor with God.

[ 35 : 03 ] It's asceticism. Let me explain this further for you. Typically, what this looked like during Paul's time and what he's addressing is the removing of earthly comforts for a higher level of spirituality.

And so, the way this played out was typically a monasticism or what we would call the monks who are trying to gain a higher level of spirituality by adding more rules to their life and taking away earthly comforts.

So, this is what the monks would typically do. They would remove comforts anywhere from shelter all the way to comfortable clothes. They would wear fabrics, oftentimes such as burlap, in order to make themselves more uncomfortable in this life.

And that was somehow supposed to ascribe more spirituality or this higher experience with God.

Some of them would even go as far as to wear cotton robes over their uncomfortable garments underneath, their burlap or whatever they wore underneath, so that they didn't get favor from men, thereby not receiving more spirituality from God.

This very strange religious thing. Early monks would remove themselves from the general populations, you know, thinking that, hey, we should just completely remove ourselves from the world and that we should go and live secluded lifestyles, some of them living in caves, abandoning the traditional homes and things like that, things of that nature.

[ 36 : 38 ] Some of them would even go to this, there's one particular place that a lot of them went to where there's these natural stone pillars and they would make their way up to the top of the stone pillars and that's where they would hang out, days on end.

And they would live in solitude, that way nobody can bother them. And then, naturally, people see this as a spectacle and people by the hundreds, often times would come out to this place and they would just gaze upon these men with a higher calling in life and just gaze up at them, like, man, what a spiritual person for sitting up there on that column.

I just, I don't get it. And I'm sure that the laughter is because you don't get it either. That makes sense. Some of these monks even consider it sinful to take a bath.

That's just wrong. Gotta be clean. And of course, those things don't bring about godliness. They don't bring about godliness.

These things are works-based and they are in accordance with human precepts and human teachings, according to verse 22. Then verse 23.

[ 37 : 58 ] We have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

He says they are of no value. All of these things, this legalism, mysticism, asceticism, they all have the reputation of wisdom. wisdom. They all, in other words, they look like wisdom to the world. You look at them, they keep all the rules, they have these higher visions, they apparently go up on pillars and sit alone all day, praying to God. They take away all the comforts that are available to them.

And this looks good to the world or to the untrained, unthinking mind. It looks good because they are attributing these things to spirituality. spirituality. It's a godless religion because they're really doing this for who?

They're really doing it for themselves. They're really doing it so they can obtain some higher level of spirituality. And in the appearance of humility, they are nothing but a mask of spiritual pride.

[ 39 : 09 ] They did this for their own spiritual pride. Now, does this mean that we should just all go and indulge in every worldly comfort that is out there as believers?

Should we indulge ourselves in everything that is out there? No. Because a lot of these earthly comforts are sin. One of the prerequisites to following Christ is denying yourself.

Denying yourself. These people, these ascetics, these people who are doing these different things that are attributing higher righteousness to themselves, they're not doing this for righteousness.

They're not doing it to follow Christ. They're doing it for a higher level of spirituality. They're doing it for themselves. So Jesus said in Matthew 16 and 24, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Self-denial is key. But asceticism is not self-denial. It's the practice of self-righteousness. And when we try to attribute righteousness to ourselves apart from God, we end up in sin.

[ 40 : 12 ] It's an attempt to make the self look better, and therefore, it is the opposite of self-denial. If Christ is supreme, if Christ is sufficient, we don't need the world.

We don't have to have all the comforts in the world. Is it okay to wear cotton clothes? Yes. That's fine to wear cotton clothes. But we need Christ. And that is all.

That is all. And we see Paul here, heresy after heresy, stepping through, combating it with biblical truth, with biblical understanding. And so Paul argues, you don't need extra man-made rules.

You don't need asceticism. You don't need mysticism. You don't need worldly philosophy. What you need is Christ, and Christ alone. And in light of our culture that seems to be increasingly celebrating sin over Christ, that's exactly what we need to give the world.

There's a picture of Him. we need to give them the gospel. And in our words, and in our actions, and our example, and the way that we engage people that are around us, God has given you an influence.

[ 41 : 21 ] No matter who you are, you know people, and God has placed you in this influence that you have to be able to talk to people. You have the ability to communicate with these people, and you have the ability to communicate God's truth.

So let's be confident and work toward understanding what we believe, why we believe it, and the ability to communicate to others effectively.

God's Word. Let's pray together.