

# JESUS IS ENOUGH!!!

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

### *Free – Or Not?*

*Jeremiah 18:3-4 (ESV)* <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup> And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.

Do followers of Christ have freedom? Yes! Are we free? No! The Bible teaches that our choices are not determined; we make them ourselves. But, the Bible also teaches that God is in control of our lives. Freedom in Christ is being clay in the Potter's hands.

Paul's desire was to establish in the Colossians' minds that Christ was all that they needed. In order to do this, he warned against failing into the traps of legalism, mysticism, and asceticism.

This biblical truth that Christ is enough is just as true for Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was then. People often try to *add* to the gospel their own so-called revelations. Others try to *subtract* from the person of Jesus Christ making him less than God. You will meet people who want to *multiply* the requirements of salvation. And finally, there are those who are constantly working to *divide* the church. These "spiritual mathematicians" were busy in Colossae just like they are in Jacksonville.

Remember that the false teaching that threatened the Colossian church was made up of several elements: Oriental mysticism, astrology, philosophy, and Jewish legalism. Apparently, the false teachers insisted that their converts submit to circumcision and obey the Old Testament Law. Gnostic legalism was not the brand of legalism practiced by the Judaizers. The Jewish teachers insisted that circumcision and obedience to the Law were necessary for salvation. Gnostic legalism said that the Jewish Law would help the believers become more spiritual. If they were circumcised, and if they watched their diets and observed the holy days, then they would become part of the 'spiritual elite' in the church. Unfortunately, we have people with similar ideas in our churches today.

*Read Colossians 2:11 (ESV)* <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Paul makes it clear that we not subject to the Old Testament legal system. Jesus Christ **alone** is sufficient for our every spiritual need. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with the Jewish people which God first gave to Abraham. Even then, they were taught the spiritual significance. *Deuteronomy 10:16 (ESV)* <sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. A mere physical act could never communicate spiritual grace. People make the same mistake today when they depend on some religious ritual to save them—such as baptism, church attendance, walking a labyrinth, lighting candles. Someone has said, "Religion is what man does for God; salvation is what God does for man." It is not necessary for salvation or a relationship with God for the believer to submit to circumcision even though most believe it is a healthy

physical choice. It is our spiritual heart that the Lord is concerned with. **Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

Paul moves on to the ordinance of baptism. Keep in mind that in the New Testament, the word *baptize* has both a literal and a figurative meaning. The literal meaning is "to dip, to immerse," The figurative meaning is "to be identified with."

**Read Colossians 2:12-13 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.* <sup>13</sup> *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,*

Paul used the word *baptism* in this passage in a figurative sense. No amount of physical water can ever bury a person with Christ or raise him/her to newness of life in Christ. Water baptism by immersion is a public depiction of our spiritual experience. Going under the water pictures our death to sin portraying our burial with Jesus in spiritual baptism. Our coming up out of the water pictures His resurrection and how we like Jesus are raised to walk in newness of life. **(Romans 6:4)**

When a person is saved, he is immediately baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. Public baptism identifies the new believer with Jesus Christ. This identification means that *whatever happened to Christ also happened to us*. When He died, we died with Him. When He was buried, we were buried. When He arose again, we arose with Him. Contemplate this: The penalty of sin died with Christ on the cross! Hallelujah! That is what our Savior did for us. Death was promised to our ancestors in the Garden and through the blood of Adam we inherited that penalty. But, because of Jesus' willing blood sacrifice, the penalty of sin no longer exists for those who accept His sacrifice.

**Read Colossians 2:14-15 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* <sup>15</sup> *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

The sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross was not for the Israelites alone. His sacrifice was for the Colossians and all races and generations of people. However, when Paul wrote: *by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands*, he was most likely thinking of the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites. The KJV translates *by canceling the record of debt* as *blotting out the handwriting of ordinances*. Recall that the Ten Commandments were set in stone by the handwriting of God Himself. The Law reveals our sin to us. We are condemned to death under the law but Jesus' death and resurrection cancels the record of our sin debt when we choose Jesus.

Under Roman law when a criminal was executed by crucifixion, the law the criminal had broken or the nature of his offense was written on a placard, which was nailed above his head. When Jesus was crucified, Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross: '*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews*' **(John 19:19)**.

However, what Pilate had written on the placard that was nailed to the cross of Jesus was not what God saw. God saw the sin debt we owed under the law being cancelled by *nailing it to the cross* through the sacrifice of Jesus. God saw that all our sins have been paid for. All that is left for us to do is accept the payment and live for Him.

**Read Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *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.* <sup>17</sup> *These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Apparently, Jewish legalism had worked its way into this Gentile church family. Wiersbe says, “This is no surprise, because human nature thrives in "religious duties. The flesh is weak when it comes to doing spiritual things. but it is very strong when it comes to practicing religious rules and regulations. Somehow, adhering to the religious routine inflates the ego and makes a person content in his self-righteousness.” Paul spoke of food, drink, festivals, new moons and the Sabbath being a shadow of things to come. McGee provides the following illustration:

“I remember that during the days of World War II, I performed the wedding ceremony of two wonderful young people here in Pasadena. This young fellow was sent overseas, and while he was gone, his young bride carried the biggest purse I have ever seen. In that purse she carried a huge photograph of him. Most people carry a little bitty picture with them, but not this girl; she carried a photograph that you could have hung on the wall. She was everlastingly drawing it out and showing it to people. She'd say, "Isn't he handsome?" Then the day came when the war was over, and he was coming home. She went all the way to Seattle, Washington, to meet him. Now what do you think she did when she saw him coming down the gangplank? She hadn't seen him in a couple of years. Do you think she took out that picture and looked at it? Do you think she looked at the picture and said, "Isn't he wonderful?" I don't think she even had that picture with her! She saw him and when she saw him, she didn't need a picture -- she threw her arms around him...Let's stop carrying around a faded photograph when we have the reality -- "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The Jewish people had lived under dietary restrictions for centuries. Many foods to them were unclean. During the time of the Old Testament Law, such matters were important. Jesus “fulfilled the law” through His righteous life and paid the penalty of sin. Our entrance into God’s kingdom does not depend on what we eat or drink. **Romans 14:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.* What we eat or drink is a matter of Christian liberty.

It is likely that God's instructions about foods given through Moses had *physical* reasons behind them as well as spiritual. If a man feels he is healthier for abstaining from certain foods, then he should abstain and care for his body. But he should not judge others who can eat that food, nor should he make it a test of spiritual living

**Read Colossians 2:18-19 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,* <sup>19</sup> *and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

Some were falsely teaching that man was too unworthy to approach God through Christ directly. They were teaching that man should approach God through the mediation of angels. People still think like this today. As a child growing up in a Catholic Church, John was told to take his daily prayers to the Virgin Mary because Jesus was too busy to be concerned with smaller problems. This is in direct contradiction to what the Bible says in: **1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

The person who worships God through angels or saints in heaven does not prove humility but is prideful for substituting man-made traditions for the Word of God. “Religious mysticism” fascinates and attracts many people. But the true Christian glories in Christ. He follows the Word, led by the Holy Spirit – seeking experiences that relate him to the Head of the body, Jesus Christ.

**Read Colossians 2:20-23 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—* <sup>21</sup> *“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”* <sup>22</sup> *(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?* <sup>23</sup> *These 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.*

Ascetics practice rigorous self-denial and even self-mortification in order to become more spiritual. Ascetic practices were popular during the Middle Ages: wearing hair shirts next to the skin, sleeping on hard beds, whipping oneself, not speaking for days (maybe years), going without food or sleep. Paul was warning them not to think they were spiritual because they obeyed certain rules and regulations that applied to the body. A narrow-minded Christian can be just as big a hindrance to the spreading of the gospel as too liberal of a Christian.

I have a long-time Christian friend who is a Missionary Baptist. And, I am not saying that all Missionary Baptists think this way but she does. Once when I told her that my aunt came to our church to take the Lord’s Supper with us, she said, “You mean to tell me that your church let’s somebody from another congregation take the Lord’s Supper with you?” I said, “Yes, she’s Baptist.” She says, “That doesn’t make any difference. We don’t do that. If you let someone take the Lord’s Supper that is not a member of your church, you don’t know what their standing with God is.” Humm – sounds to me like a person’s standing with God is between them and God.

We are free in Christ, yet we are His servants. We are to follow the rules but not be consumed by them. We are to learn to pray, “It really doesn’t matter what you do with me, Lord, just have your way with me.” **John 8:36 (ESV)** <sup>36</sup> *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*