

## *Self-Made Religion*

Colossians 2:18-23

### Brief Sermon Outline - Review and Compare Notes

#### 1. The Examples of Self-Made Religion

- Asceticism

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:1** Now <sup>a</sup>the Spirit expressly says that <sup>b</sup>in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to <sup>c</sup>deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of <sup>a</sup>liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> <sup>a</sup>who forbid marriage and <sup>b</sup>require abstinence from foods <sup>c</sup>that God created <sup>d</sup>to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For <sup>a</sup>everything created by God is good, and <sup>b</sup>nothing is to be rejected if it is <sup>z</sup>received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy <sup>a</sup>by the word of God and prayer.

- Mysticism

“If you have an approach to *the new* that leads you to believe your old Bible is boring, you have a problem.”

- Legalism

Dan Doriani (Covenant Seminary) describes four types:

1. Self-salvation, earning your way to get God’s favor
2. Good deeds are necessary to keep God’s favor and salvation.
3. They love the law so much they create new ones and require them of others
4. They so accentuate obedience and holiness and newness of life
  - ...that what is accentuated is a note of performance.
  - Everything they say is, in a sense, true, BUT the whole tenor of it is oppressive.

II. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

-*Westminster Confession of Faith--Chapter 20*

#### 2. The Emptiness of Self-Made Religion

- It builds on the wrong foundation
- It leads to all the wrong things

#### 3. The Elements of Real, God-Given Growth

- It “holds fast”
- It’s connected to Christ
- It’s connected to the body

## Introduction

The preeminence of Christ should be central in this week's discussions also. Reread thesis statement of the letter: Col 1:16-20.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 1:16-20** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Read this week's text:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 2:18** 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. <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.

Discuss how elements of each of these self-made religions have crept into pop-religion. More importantly, discuss your temptations and confess your failures in these areas. Make sure to discuss the emptiness of each pursuit.

## Discussion 1: Asceticism

### Related texts:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Galatians 5:17** For <sup>a</sup>the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, <sup>b</sup>to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [What do *you want* to do?]

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 9:27** But I discipline my body and <sup>a</sup>keep it under control, <sup>1</sup> lest after preaching to others <sup>b</sup>I myself should be <sup>c</sup>disqualified.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:5** <sup>a</sup>Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, **that you may devote yourselves to prayer**; but then come together again, <sup>b</sup>so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 13:1** *If I* speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And *if I* have <sup>a</sup>prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and *if I* have all faith, <sup>b</sup>so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> *If I* give away all I have, and <sup>b</sup>*if I deliver up my body to be burned*, <sup>1</sup> but have not love, **I gain nothing**. [What love is this?]

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:1** Now <sup>a</sup>the Spirit expressly says that <sup>b</sup>in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to <sup>c</sup>deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of <sup>a</sup>liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> <sup>a</sup>who forbid marriage and <sup>b</sup>require abstinence from foods <sup>c</sup>that God created <sup>d</sup>to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For <sup>a</sup>everything created by God is good, and <sup>b</sup>nothing is to be rejected if it is <sup>z</sup>received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy <sup>a</sup>by the word of God and prayer.



*What's the difference between asceticism and:*

- *self-control?*
- *denying your flesh for the sake of the Spirit?*

[What is the goal? Does it lead to growth in holiness or pride?]

*Asceticism--Is it around today?*

[You're going to find some cross-over with legalism as one naturally leads to the other. This is pretty popular among postmodern twenty-somethings. One popular author is Shane Claiborne (*The Irresistible Revolution* and *Jesus for President*)<sup>1</sup>.]

## *Discussion 2: Mysticism*

*Related texts:*

<sup>ESV</sup> **Deuteronomy 29:29** "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 55:8** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup><sup>a</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 John 5:13** I write <sup>a</sup>these things to you who <sup>b</sup>believe in the name of the Son of God **that you may know** that you have eternal life.

*Are you mapping out more than is revealed in God's Word?*

- **Do you "know" more about the end times or the anti-Christ than is actually revealed in God's Word?**
- **Do you have too much focus on angels? (or demons?)**
- **Do you have an unhealthy interest in the spiritual realm?**
- **Are you looking for secret personal messages in the Bible?**
- **Are you looking for secret coded messages in the Bible?**

*Are you too dependent, or wrongly dependant, on feelings to decide what's right?*

*Are you trying to discern God's will<sup>2</sup> by means of superstition?*

[Much of the popular "find God's will for your life" material today more closely resembles superstition or pagan divination than Biblical Christianity's walking by faith. Do you find yourself looking for "a peace about it", or "signs" ...etc?]

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<sup>1</sup> An extensive response to Claiborne's books on the web: <http://objectivegospel.org/iron/claiborne/>

<sup>2</sup> DSC's Decision Making and the Will of God course materials will be included in the wisdom section of the Ambassador's class and can be found here: <http://objectivegospel.org/training/DecisionMaking/>

*What's the difference between acknowledging mystery and postmodern agnosticism<sup>3</sup>? (postmodernism is the current culture--the very air you breathe! agnosticism is the insistence that you can't know things.)*

[Is it arrogant to study and understand *what has been revealed*? Or is it arrogant to claim that what God has revealed cannot be known?]

### **Discussion 3: Legalism**

Make sure everyone understands what legalism is. Basically it is saving yourself by being "good enough." We practice it in an endless variety of ways... a couple of categories:

- use God's Law as the standard--constantly failing and either denying it (self-deception) or living in constant defeat.
- create a standard to measure up to (*usually not quite as good as we see ourselves--our sins don't seem to be the important ones*)

### **How are asceticism and mysticism related to legalism?**

[What's the motivation for "severity to the body?" To earn God's favor? Do the practitioners think others should view their bodies, desires, and possessions similarly? Mysticism can be used to either add to the Law or nullify it ...]

### **Nice-ianity or Legalism?**

A very popular form of "Christianity" teaches essentially "think positive, be nice, and allow God to bless you" Is this "Law Lite"? What does it lead to?

[Those who practice this place their hope in what? A prayer they uttered once and their performance?]

### **"Pucker up or Duck"**

Compare notes and recall some of the misguided "watermarks of real Christianity" that people have elevated from preference to mandate.

[School, lifestyle, entertainment, Doing church: music style or volume, attire, programs, décor, passing the plate vs. offering box...

*Leaders--*This is a good time to confess and repent of our own legalism. Are there unconfessed fruits of this in your group? Gently confront it in love.]

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<sup>3</sup> Today you are considered arrogant to claim to know anything for sure, especially with respect to religion. Struggling with these topics? Take our Ambassador's class.

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*Asceticism--Is it around today?*

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