



ADVANCING
THE
GOSPEL

Colossians 2:16-3:4

Introduction

- Paul uses his main point from the previous section of verses.
- Because believers have died and been raised with Christ, because Christ is above all earthly power and authority, believers don't have to submit themselves to the rules and religious commands of the world.
- Paul encourages the Colossians not to listen to the false teachers of their day concerning how they should live their lives.
- Look to Christ and find rest in His work on the Cross, not in empty manmade religious practices.

Colossians 2:16-17

Legalism

- Paul wants to remind the Colossians what they gained through Christ: new life and spiritual freedom.
- Christ has done the work of complete salvation.
- Because Christ is all one needs for spiritual fullness and acceptance by God, don't let false teachers convince you there's more outside the Gospel.
- Christ is centerpiece of the Gospel, not tireless work to make yourself look better and feel better.

Legalism

- These false teachers wanted the Colossians to believe that abstaining from certain foods and drink was necessary for spiritual maturity, as well as observing certain festivals and rituals.
- The practice of observing ritual holidays and staying away from food and drink has parallels to Judaism.
- But perfection under the law was what Christ came to accomplish for the very men and women who are unable to keep such records. Christ is the Christian's hope.

Legalism

- Spiritual maturity means deepening one's dependence on Christ and trusting in Christ's sacrifice; not finding one's salvation in one's own works added to Christ's work.
- It doesn't make sense to trust Christ for new life this world can't offer while also feeling the need to supplement that life with worldly religious practices.
- If Christ was already victorious, why are Christians still working so hard to win what has been accomplished?

Legalism

- In verse 17, Paul says these practices are mere shadows of what is to come, but the substance, the true reality, is Christ.
- These false teachers sought religious experiences, spiritual visions, by swearing off certain physical pleasures.
- They thought the more they rid themselves of their desires and things of this world, they would experience a deeper spiritual encounter with the Divine.
- No worldly practice can bring you closer to God and into deeper intimacy with Him.

Colossians 2:18-19

Disqualify

- Just as Paul warned against being taken captive, he now parallels his warning with the admonition, “Let no one disqualify you.”
- The false teachers were not just criticizing the Colossians’ beliefs, but also convincing them of God’s judgment on their lack of self-denial.
- Paul says they are too concerned with the present world rather than the coming kingdom.
- Paul encourages the Colossians that what Christ has qualified and secured cannot be undone.

Disqualify

- These teachers put too much weight on severe self-discipline and abstention from physical pleasures
- By denying their desires, they sought spiritual visions, so much so that they worshipped angels.
- The false teachers practiced angel worship, looking to angels for physical protection. Angels do not provide the believer with anything that Christ doesn't already freely give.

Disqualify

- These visions produced spiritual arrogance. But these visions were in vain.
- The phrase “puffed up” “translates a verb that occurs in 1 Corinthians. Its basic meaning, “blow up, inflate,” suits beautifully to express the idea of “arrogance.”
- Paul warns against getting caught up with sensual experiences.
- That’s not how the Colossians learned Christ and experienced His power. It’s not about getting caught up in the moment; it’s about being one with Christ.

Disqualify

- Paul directs their attention back to Christ, who is supreme above all.
- Paul shows that spiritual health comes when one is attached to Christ, receiving life and provision.
- Just as the body doesn't work together when it's disconnected from the head, so, too, the Christian doesn't function rightly when he or she is disconnected from Christ.
- Paul wanted the Colossians to remember Christ's supremacy, but also His sufficiency. Spiritual growth and strength come from God alone.

Colossians 2:20-3:4

Self-Made Religion

- Paul begins with a question. If you have, in fact, died with Christ, why are you still attached to this world? If Christ has brought you freedom, why are you still living in bondage?
- Believers have been crucified with Christ and they no longer live, but Christ lives in them.
- Paul mocks how these teachers view the physical world and justified his position by: (1) The rules have to do with matters of this world, (2) The rules reflect human and not divine thinking; and (3) The rules cannot bring spiritual transformation.

Self-Made Religion

- God's power, not our own works, is what we need to conquer sin in our lives.
- There is too much weight put on issues that do nothing for actual spiritual freedom and growth.
- These restrictions and regulations don't produce holiness. They don't produce Christlikeness.
- These rules and restrictions are mere "window dressing."

Self-Made Religion

- Not one of these stipulations does anything in stopping sin.
- Without inward transformation, performing outward spiritual acts is simply a religious facade.
- That's Paul's reminder in 3:1–4: Remember your life in Christ.
- Your life rests in Christ and it's the things of God that will bring true spiritual renewal.
- It's inward transformation that brings outward change.

Self-Made Religion

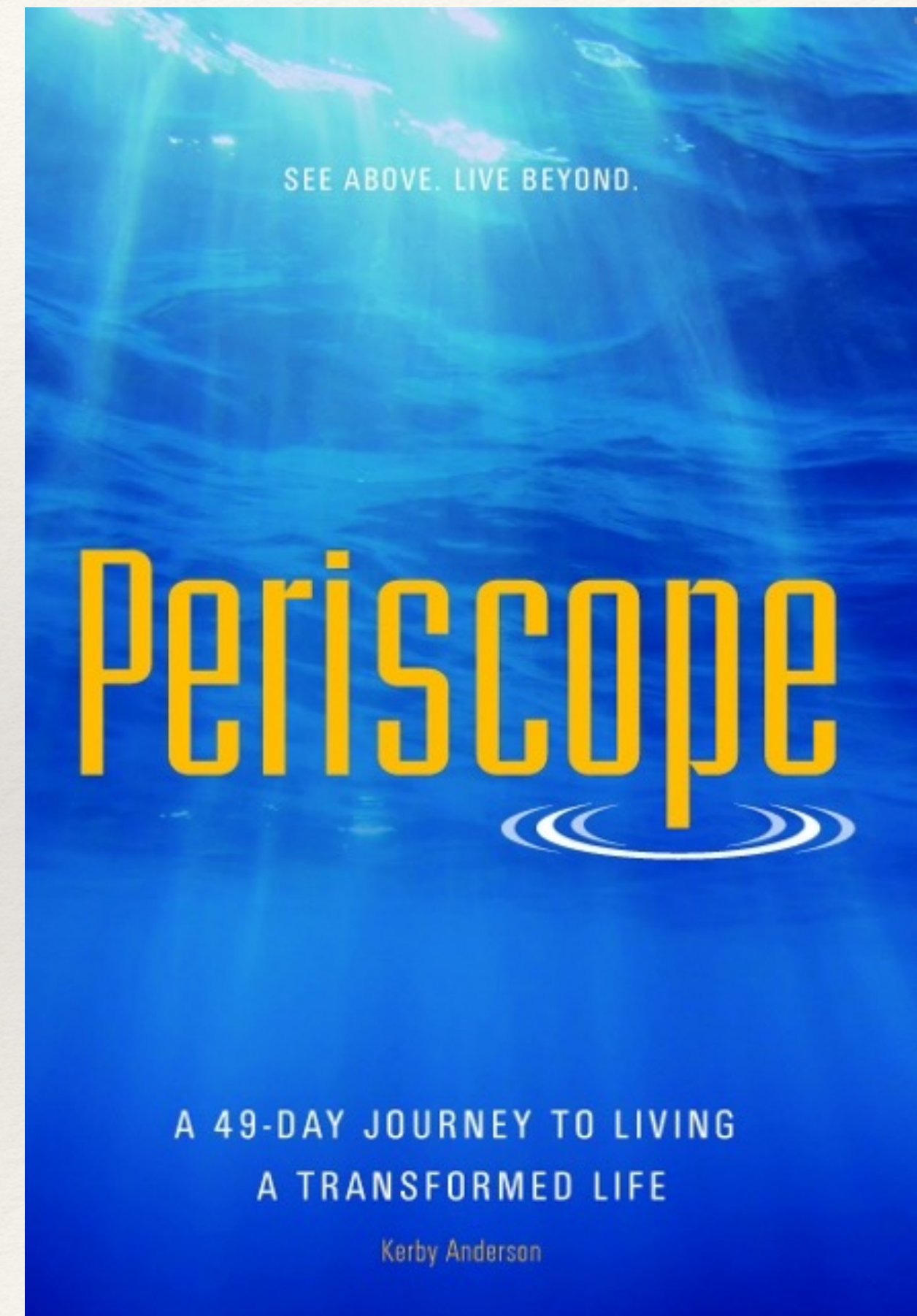
- One commentator says, “Their claim to offer a wise and comprehensive system of spiritual growth is nothing but a sham.”
- Paul wants the Colossians to understand that God has qualified them in Christ and there’s nothing this world can condemn them with.
- Jesus has won their victory and they can find peace in that.
- God’s Spirit is at work in them and for them.

Application:

Three Major Worldview Errors

Overview

- Legalism (Colossians 2:16-17) - Chapter 17
- Mysticism (Colossians 2:18-20) - Chapter 18
- Asceticism (Colossians 2:21-23) - Chapter 19



Legalism

- Notice that what is listed in these verses are not instructions on purity or righteousness. Rather they are specific Old Testament practices that were given to Israel before the coming of Christ.
- While the deliverance of Israel is significant, consider how much more significant is Christ's death which provides us with deliverance from the slavery of sin and separation from God.
- The previous feasts and festivals are no longer necessary now that we have Christ in our lives.

Legalism

- When we give people an ever expanding “to-do list” that is uncoupled from God’s power, we wear people down and ultimately drive people away from the gospel.
- Paul warned Timothy that in the last days there would be people “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5).
- Not only does it drive people from the gospel, but it is the reason for so many church splits.
- It also encourages people to pick and choose what they do.

Islam

- Every Muslim must follow the Five Pillars of Islam:
 - Shahada (creed), Salat (prayers), Zakat (almsgiving), Sawm (fast of Ramadan), and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).
- In addition, there are at least 60 important rules from the Qur'an and Hadith that every Muslim must follow.
- Islam (like so many other religions) is a works-oriented religion that is full of legalistic rules that must be performed in order to merit salvation.

Mysticism

- Paul was writing to a church that was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles.
- Many were young Christians and may have brought their pagan ideas into the church.
- These Christians also lived in a culture where many claimed they were receiving visions from the gods.
- If these young Christians did not have discernment, they might actually believe that someone who has these visions was spiritually superior to them.

Mysticism

- Throughout church history, certain churches and denominations have brought mystical rituals and practices into their worship experience.
- They may take the form of chants, icons, or prescribed practices not found in Scripture but part of a tradition that borrows heavily from mystical ideas.
- And many of these practices are found today not only in North American churches but in churches in other parts of the world.

New Age Movement

- *In The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne teaches “the Law of Attraction.” She believes that thoughts become things. She believes we create our own circumstances and therefore can change our circumstances with our thoughts.
- Eckhardt Tolle, author of *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, teaches a version of Eastern mysticism that teaches that we are all part of the universal life force to which we should desire to return.
- Marianne Williamson, author of *A Course in Miracles*, offers a year-long course of study on this book that was channeled from a demon. You will see her this week in the Democratic presidential debates.

Asceticism

- Asceticism is the belief that we need to live a life of extreme self-denial or self-abasement in order to release our soul from bondage in our body.
- This philosophy was found among the Jews (the Essenes) and among the Greeks (Stoics) at the time when Paul was writing to the Colossians.
- Some of the false teachers of that day promoted the idea that since human beings are material, they cannot approach God because He is spirit.
- They saw angels as these intermediaries. That explains why many of them worshipped angels.

Angel Worship

- We are not to worship angels. We are only to worship God (Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:13-14). This is an important biblical principle to remember as we live in a culture that promotes false views about angels.
- Paul says if “an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).
- Notice how many religions (Islam, Mormonism) and false teachings (*Course in Miracles, Life after Life*) started because of contact with angels or other spiritual beings (demons).

Showdown with Iran