



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

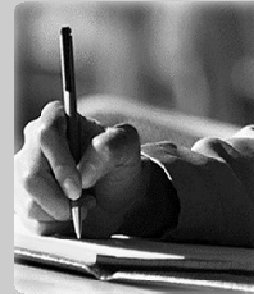


HG76: Living In Christ (3/6)
Christ Revealed In You

Colossians 1:24—2:23

Home Group Study Notes

14th October 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Just for fun - take the Pepsi challenge! Find three or four different varieties of Coca Cola from the supermarket. Blindfold someone in your home group and ask them to decide which drink is Coca Cola! Now, start thinking spiritually ... what is the real thing and how do we discern it?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: Paul (the Rector) introduced his sermon by highlighting some of the ridiculous rules that are still on the law books of the UK and USA. Paul suggested that, whilst most religious rules are not written down, many of us attempt to keep them, or expect others to do so in our churches today. See if you can list what some of these 'unwritten' rules might be.

2: If we abandon all rules, how can we know whether we are doing right or wrong? Does the Apostle Paul mean that we are not to submit to the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount? How can we decide which rules to obey and which to ignore?

3: What philosophies, past sins or difficulties are we as individuals prone to focus on rather than on the cross of Jesus? In what practical ways can we remember the cross of Jesus throughout the day? Share tips and ideas together.

Religious festivals were annual, New Moon celebrations were monthly, and the Sabbath was weekly. Since Christ has now come, special diets and obligatory days are no longer necessary because every OT feast looks forward to Christ. They were just, vs17, shadows of the reality that is fulfilled in Jesus. It's relatively easy to judge externally. If there's something you're not supposed to eat and you avoid it, then everything's kosher. If you attend when you're supposed to attend, then you must be doing OK. If you raise your hands in worship, then you must be close to God. We must ensure we're not evaluating what we're/others are doing according to external standards.

2. Reject false authority: 2:18-19. The word 'disqualify' vs18, means 'to declare unworthy of a prize.' It's a bit like a referee giving you a red card or an umpire calling you out, because you have not obeyed the rules. Paul describes these people in four ways: *They have a false humility.* They present themselves as humble and holy but in reality they are filled with spiritual pride and superiority. *They worship angels.* Their focus is on other spiritual beings rather than on Christ. *They have seen visions.* They love to give people the "latest word from the Lord." *They are puffed up with idle notions.* Their "inner secrets" gave them big heads but not burning hearts.

3. Renounce religious rules: If we want to pull the weeds of legalism, we must renounce religious rules. Vs21: "*Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"*" Paul is telling us that we don't get to heaven by following a list of do's and don'ts. And we don't live the Christian life that way either. 2:23a: "*Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body ...*"

According to church history, Anthony of Egypt, the founder of Christian monasticism, never changed his vest or washed his feet. He was outdone, however, by Simon Stylites (Simon of the Desert), who spent the last 36 years of his life on top of a fifty-foot pillar. He mistakenly thought that if he withdrew from the world then he would become more spiritual. Paul says that even though the rules that were being imposed on believers then (and now) often have an appearance of wisdom and even though they may look and sound good, these won't bring you closer to Jesus, 2:22: "*These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.*"

Conclusion: There is a huge market today in, what we might call, the 'self-improvement' area: CD's, DVD's, Books, TV programmes and, whilst you may end up looking better, feeling better, even years younger – it is no guarantee that your heart is right with God. So how do we stay connected? Not by rules and regulations or by falling into the trap of legalism, that's for sure!

This is one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith and is what the reformation was all about and what caused Martin Luther to nail his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral: Justification is by faith alone. We have completeness in Christ, we have new life, and we have been completely forgiven. He makes us free.

I was thinking about freedom in Jesus and thinking about Martin Luther and I began to think about Martin Luther King jr's crusade against the man made rules and regulations of segregation in 1960's America. As I began thinking about this I began to think about his 'I have a dream' speech that was given on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington on 28th August 1963. I wonder if you can you remember how it finishes?

"Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

And so we are, through the cross of Jesus.

God initiated circumcision in the Old Testament as part of His covenant with His people (Abraham) in order to set them apart and identify them as true followers. One of the problems at Colosse was that the legalists were demanding that Christians should submit to circumcision and obey the OT Law (ouch!). These false teachers were suggesting that obedience to OT regulations would help them become more spiritual. Though circumcision was a physical procedure, it had deep spiritual significance. However, over the years it became a religious ritual that didn't change their lives. That's why Jeremiah 4:4 states that believers were to circumcise their hearts. When we put our faith in Christ, Jesus spiritually circumcises, or cuts away, our sinful nature in order to prove that we belong to Him. Paul goes onto use water baptism as a wonderful picture of an inner reality. When folk go under the water, they are symbolizing their burial with Christ, and when they come up, they become a picture of what it means to be raised to new life with Him.

3. He cancels our sins: Look at 2:13b-14. Here we see that we're not only complete and alive, but our sins have been cancelled: "*He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code [the Law] with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.*" Notice that Jesus forgave 'all' of our sins. That means every single one, even those that you have a hard time forgiving yourself for. Paul writes that our sins have been removed when Jesus only took our sins to the cross, He also took the Law and nailed it there, forever out of the way. No regulations or man-made rituals have power over us.

4. He gives us the victory: 2:15 is a wonderful picture of Christ's triumph over evil: "*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*" The word for "disarmed" is literally "stripped," as in stripping a defeated enemy of armour on the battlefield. The powers and authorities of this evil world stripped Christ of his clothing and popularity, made a public spectacle of him on the cross, and thought they had triumphed over him by putting Him to death. Evil no longer has any power over us because Christ has stripped Satan's weapons from him. He is disarmed.

The only power he has is what we give him when we allow him to deceive us and create fear in our lives. We don't have to follow false teachers and we don't have to succumb to sin or fear. Jesus is the victor and He has triumphed at the cross (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

The best way to avoid falling into the trap of legalism is to remember that we are complete, alive, forgiven, and that we have the victory in Jesus.

3) Reveal Christ Through The Grace He Brings: Isn't it true to say that, so often, the Church is known more for what we are against rather than what they are for? Which is why I've always tried to write positively about God and church on our website and publicity. Paul reminded the Colossians, over and over again, that everything comes to us by grace. We're saved by grace and we grow by grace not by rules. Colossians 2:16-23 gives us three warnings to enable us to be vigilant and to guard against legalism but, more importantly, perhaps, to show grace to others on a daily basis.

1. Refuse to judge externally: Look at 2:16-17: "*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*" Whenever the word "therefore" is in the Bible you should always ask what it's there for. Paul is drawing a conclusion based on what he has previously written. Since Jesus has done what was necessary for our salvation, don't let other people evaluate your spiritual life by external standards. Food restrictions, special diets, observance of ceremonies and holy days rose out of specific practices in the OT.

4: 2:16 talks about not judging others on their observance of a Sabbath day. What is the view of a Sabbath day in the OT and the Gospels? How does this shape your view of a Sabbath day? Is it important to keep Sunday special?

5: 'Do this in remembrance of me' said Jesus. Our Communion service is a religious observance, rightly treasured by God's people and commanded by Jesus himself. How is it different from the observances that Paul is warning us about? In what ways might Communion itself lead us away from Christ?

6: What areas in your life do you feel in bondage to? If you feel able, share these with your home group. Pray with and for each other, asking God to release you from 'the chains that bind' into the freedom that Jesus brings into our lives.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG76: Living In Christ (3/6) *Christ Revealed In You*

Colossians 1:24—2:23

Home Group Sermon Notes

14th October 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: As we read the book of Colossians, we see that Paul is very passionate about the church. He loves the church - there's no doubt about that - and he labours hard, 1:29, in order that the church can reveal Christ, 1:27: *the hope of glory*.

Verses 1:24 – 2:5 show us how Christ is revealed in us through: sacrificial service; understanding God's word; proclaiming the Gospel; and the love and unity we share. These are all big subjects and ones that we've looked at in some depth in the past and so this morning (especially as I'm standing in for Tom at short notice), I'm going to focus my thoughts on 2:6-23.

In 2:6-8, Paul tells us to continue to live in Christ rather than listening to hollow, deceptive philosophy, which depend on human traditions. Paul could easily have been referring to recent books such as: *'The God Delusion'* by Richard Dawkins or *'God Is Not Great'* by Christopher Hitchens. Both of these writers seek to undermine Christianity mainly but religion generally.

As well as warning us against secular philosophies, Paul warns us against a dependence on outdated rules. Almost every country in the world has laws, still on their books that would surprise most of us. For instance, there's a 13th UK law, still in existence, that states that that all males, over the age of 14, should practise the Longbow for four hours a week, supervised by a priest. Another law that's been in place for over 100 years states that all London Hackney Carriages (taxis/cabs) must carry a bale of hay and a sack of oats. In Indiana, USA, citizens are not allowed to attend a cinema or travel on public transport within four hours of eating garlic. That seems like a good law. In Eureka, Illinois, a man with a moustache may not kiss a woman. So, sorry ladies - no more pecks on the cheek when you leave church!

We may laugh at these out-of-date laws as being absurd and ridiculous. But, if we were to list all the rules, expectations, and laws that are on the books in many churches today, the chances are we'd stop laughing pretty quickly (Canon Law). Whilst most religious rules are not written down, many of us attempt to keep them, or expect others to do so. That might be about whether someone sits in 'your seat' or whether or not you choose to raise your hands in worship!

1) Observations on Legalism

Legalism can be defined as a strict adherence to the law and, in a Christian context, is the human attempt to gain salvation by proving our inward spirituality by outwardly conforming to a list of religious 'do's' and 'don'ts.' However, we should also be aware that our growth in faith can be stunted, or even choked to death, by legalism. Before we take a closer look at our text, I just want to make some observations about legalism:

1. We're all capable of being legalistic: We're all guilty of judging others by our own standards of what is acceptable and what isn't. It's so easy to have little tolerance for people who do things differently than we do.

2. Legalism is highly contagious: While it's usually less conscious in our minds than it was among the Pharisees, legalism can spread like a virus through an entire congregation. That's why Jesus reserved some of his harshest criticism for legalistic list makers in Mark 7:6-8: *"These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."*

3. Legalism can take a vibrant faith and make it dull and lifeless: It can evaporate enthusiasm, throw out joy, and stifle spirituality. Instead of finding freedom through Christ, many believers can become burdened by the church.

4. Legalism produces self-righteousness, judgment and condemnation: It focuses on misguided sacrifice, urging its followers to evaluate their relationship with God on the standards and expectations of others.

5. Legalism makes us narrow and divisive: The legalist insists that everyone live up to their standard. In other words, everyone needs to be like you! When we think this way, we miss the delight, and joy, of diversity of the church family.

6. Legalism makes it impossible for people to see Jesus: There is nothing that pushes a seeker away faster than a list of rules and regulations. We inadvertently portray Jesus as a drill sergeant instead of a Saviour.

The weeds of legalism are under the surface in each of our lives. Our way of doing things can easily become the standard by which we judge other people's spirituality. If we're not careful we'll default to a performance-based discipleship. That's exactly what was starting to happen in the church at Colosse. Paul argues that if we want to pull the weeds of legalism out of the church, and out of our lives, and show to the world the value of our faith, we must do two things:

2) Reveal Christ Through The Freedom He Brings: The best defence against a performance-based faith is to remember what God has done on our behalf, and all that we inherit through Him. As Jesus said in John 8:36: *"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* It seems to me that, when we become a Christian, God's grace does four things for us:

1. He makes us complete: **Read 2:9-11:** *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."* The phrase 'lives in bodily form' means to 'dwell permanently.' All believers are filled with the fullness of Christ. If you have put your faith in Christ then there is nothing lacking in your relationship with God. You have everything you need because the fullness of God comes into your life when you receive Jesus.

2. He makes us alive: 2:11-13a establishes parallels between circumcision and our new life with Christ: *"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ."*