

**Paul Rebukes Asceticism
Col 2:20-23**

I. Introduction

A. Today you will see the reason we teach Expository Sermons

B. What's "expository"? A: Explanatory

C. We "explain" the books of the Bible Verse-by-verse

1. JUST as they were written
2. JUST as their intended audiences read them

D. AND – we explain every part of the VERSE

1. Phrase by Phrase
2. Word by word
3. IN CONTEXT – both the SECTION and the BOOK and to Scripture

E. Today we finish Paul's POLEMIC – His arguments against the false teachers

1. We'll see how the VERY BEGINNING of the Section is pulled through to the end of it
2. We'll see how he begins a small section that will carry us through to the NEXT major section of Application!
3. And – we'll see a message that is CONSISTENT across Scripture!

F. My Greatest pleasures of Expository Preaching are

1. SEEING the same message of the Person of Christ and our Union with Him
 - a) Taught over and over
 - b) IN ALL the details
2. SEEING the amazing connections the Holy Spirit put WITHIN each book of Scripture
 - a) I can boldly say that you NEVER have to leave a BOOK of SCRIPTURE to teach the main message of that book!
 - b) And, if you commit yourself to that premise, the Holy Spirit OPENS the message of that book to you in ways YOU CANNOT see any other way!

G. TURN TO Col 2:8 and we'll work through it to v.23 TODAY!

II. REVIEW: Captive through Philosophy

A. Proposition: Study Captive through Philosophy vs. Complete in Christ

B. Col 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception.

1. COMMAND! = CONTINUALLY BEWARE
2. NOT to be taken CAPTIVE = taken like booty in a war
3. through philosophy and empty deception.
 - a) Grammar: these are the same thing! "through philosophy which is empty deception!"
 - b) = high sounding human knowledge and theory!
 - c) Wisdom / Philosophy that is "empty deceit"
 - (1) = root word is FISH HOOK!
 - d) Paul: ALL Human philosophy IS EMPTY / NO VALUE

(1) DOES NOT DELIVER – EMPTINESS at the END!

e) Q: What are the sources of this philosophy? (2 of them) = HOW they take you captive:

4. according to the tradition of men.

a) Paul: ALL Philosophies build on other philosophies OF MEN – not of God

b) Men have been passing down their views of God and the world SINCE THE BEGINNING!

c) Empty deceit built on Empty deceit UNTIL people say “People have always believed this”

(1) That alone is their foundation / proof of truth!

(2) Thousands of years of building error on error is just a bigger pile of error!

5. according to the elementary principles of the world,...

a) Literally = “things in a column or row” = a...b...c...

(1) “let me give you the abc’s on how to do...” = let me teach you the basics

b) in the physical domain – NOT even SPIRITUAL (by God’s Standards!)

c) BUT this stuff is just elementary school thinking

d) You have to TURN OFF YOUR BRAIN and PUT ASIDE mature biblical thinking to accept this human wisdom/philosophy

C. TURN TO Passage to read...

Col 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

III. Your Position Reminded

Col 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world

A. 20 If

1. “if” = SINCE!

2. =Greek 1st Class Conditional = Assumes ONLY a YES answer = “If, and I assume it to be the case!”

3. How often do you say “If that’s the case...”?

a) =based on what you just said (as true) then...

b) You say, “I’m a Christian”

c) I say, “If that’s the case, then why do you swear?”

d) I could’ve said “Since you are a Christian, then why do you swear?”

e) “If that’s the case” assumes a TRUE ANSWER!

4. Here “If you have died with Christ...” = SINCE you have died with Christ.

B. you have died with Christ

1. = your conversion

2. ALSO = your spiritual union with Christ!

3. Summarizes Roman 6

Ro 6:3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? **4** Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might (t/4) walk in newness of life. **5** For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, **6** knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would (t/4) no longer be slaves to sin; **7** for he who has died (t/4) is freed from sin. **8** Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also (t/4) live with Him, **9** knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. **10** For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. **11** Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but (t/4) alive to God in Christ Jesus.

- a) Do you see a theme here that Paul returns to Verse after verse after verse? ☺!!!
 - b) How many times does Paul have to say that SINCE you died WITH CHRIST that YOU SHOULDN'T SIN!
 - c) Do you think he might be saying the same thing back in Colossians? ☺
4. What's Paul's purpose of saying you died with Christ?

C. to the elementary principles of the world

1. Paul now focuses in on ONE aspect of what
 - a) Your conversion means
 - b) Your Spiritual union with Christ means
 - c) Christ in You, you in Christ, His Life in You, flowing through you!
2. Paul: You died with Christ "to the elementary principles of the world!"
 - a) = abc's = simple, elementary school teachings!
 - b) We're going to see them in a minute – "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch"
3. Paul referring directly back to 2:8

Col 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.
4. Paul: You've died to all the stupid, elementary teachings and rules that go with man-made religion!
5. How many of you in elementary school wouldn't step on a crack because you'd break your mother's back
 - a) Crossed your fingers to be sure something would work?
 - b) Or played child games – if you touch a girl then you'll get cuddies!
6. Paul – When you became a Christian and became united in Christ, you no longer had anything to do with all those elementary school things of man-made, false, human religion!
7. **of the world**
 - a) Key is that "the" isn't there

b) = world describes elementary

c) = They are of a kind as found in the world = man-made elementary principles.

D. What is Paul doing here?

1. Proclaiming and REMINDING you of your position!
2. You are a Christian
3. You are united with Christ!
4. By DEFINITION, since you are IN UNION with Christ, you have NO CONNECTION, NOTHING to do with man-made elementary worldly principles!

E. Paul, “So, if that’s WHO you are, then...”

IV. Your Practice Rebuked!

Col 2:20 ...why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, **21** “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” **22** (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? **23** These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

A. why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees

1. = good, old fashioned rebuke in the form of a question!
2. Greek = “why, as living, are you continually letting yourselves be subject to rules, etc.?”
3. = DIRECT CONTRAST to being dead from beginning of the verse!
4. Could translate: Why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?
5. why, as if you were living in the world
 - a) “world” = system opposed to God
 - b) When you were unsaved

Eph 2: 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, ...
 - c) “world” = world system / philosophy / the world order
 - (1) NOT = “physical world”
 - (2) = YOUR LIFE WAS DOMINATED / LED BY / CONTROLLED BY the fallen world system of your day and age.
 - (3) You value what the world values
 - (a) Approve / disapprove of what the world does
 - (b) Today = to think OK
 - (i) Divorce
 - (ii) Homosexuality
 - (iii) Living together outside of marriage
 - (iv) Take care of me first – self esteem
 - (v) Etc., etc.
 - (c) You look to that system for success, satisfaction, etc.
 - (4) Hoehner: “they go along with what is fashionable and acceptable and are not out of step with the rest of the world, hence, they embrace temporal values. They are concerned only with activities and values of the present age and are not

concerned with God and eternal values or with the judgment to come.”

- (5) = OPPOSITE to ANYTHING of GOD!
 (a) COMPLETELY EARTHLY, TEMPORAL
 (b) NOTHING to do with THINGS above / ETERNAL matters, etc.
 d) do you submit yourself to decrees
 (1) Interesting verb!
 (2) It's continuous, so implies ongoing, continually submitting
 (3) Also – it's not an active verb – it's passive = handing themselves over like slaves
 (4) “decrees” = rules, regulations
 (5) = They were willingly letting others dictate how they live!
 (6) Let's move on because Paul is now going to get specific!

B. 20...such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”

1. Do not handle.
 - a) Really means don't take for possession
 - b) =being told not to “have” or “own” certain things!
 - c) Don't the Amish do this with many things like cars?
2. do not taste.
 - a) = being told what NOT to eat
3. do not touch!”
 - a) = a close synonym to “do not handle”
 - b) = “don't even touch” certain things!
4. What's the point here?
 - a) All negative – things to NOT do
 - b) All absolute – strong rules without exceptions
 - c) All have the force of commands
 - d) Imply an attitude of COMPLETE SEPARATION from things – monasticism, asceticism
 - e) All of a verb form that makes them like a motto (one author – “watchwords”) of the false teachers
 - (1) By repeating this “catch-phrase” it SUMMARIZED a whole detailed lifestyle of asceticism
 - f) Also – Paul is quoting their motto in a ridiculing way to use it against them!
5. Now's going to go on and explain what's wrong with these decrees/rules/regulations...

C. Paul's Argument against Asceticism

1. Asceticism Perishes
2. Asceticism is of men
3. Asceticism fails

D. Asceticism Perishes:

22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)

1. “perish with use” = great translation

2. = merely material things that will get used up with no spiritual effect/value!
3. This is an IMPORTANT point!
4. A COMMON theme of Scripture here!
 - a) EVERYTHING not of God PERISHES
 - b) Everything OF GOD does NOT perish!
5. Just a sampling of verses:

Mt 6:20 “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Lk 12:33 “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfading treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.

1 Pe 1:4 to obtain an inheritance *which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,*

1 Pe 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Co 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

1 Co 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

 - a) EVERYTHING we are to TREASURE is IMPERISHABLE!
 - b) Paul’s Point – This ISN’T the stuff YOU WANT to DO – IT PERISHES!

E. Asceticism is of men

— in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

- a) =This stuff is just the overall, general teachings of MEN.
 - b) Commandments and teachings cover EVERYTHING false teachers say – from SPECIFICS to GENERALITIES
2. Not a lot needed to be added here!
 - a) Paul is REAL STRAIGHTFORWARD
 - b) BUT sometimes the obvious needs to be pointed out for its profoundness and stupidity!
 - c) You hear preachers all the time talk about the “world” and “things in the world”
 - d) Now you see God’s analysis of it!
 - e) It’s NOT from ME – it’s from men!
 - f) It’s NOT Eternal/spiritual! –just going to decay/ perish!
 - g) Have you ever been in the store checkout line with your kids or heard someone else’s kids want to buy some junk toy hanging there to entice them while waiting captive for checkout?
 - (1) Immediate response is what?
 - (2) NO, we don’t buy that stuff
 - (3) It’s just junk, will break, etc.
 - (4) Save your money for something good!
 - h) Paul – Don’t you get it? This stuff is junk/worthless compared to what you have in Christ!
 - i) ALL man-made religion is going to perish – be gone – therefore is worthless

3. Listen to Jesus!

Mk 7:6 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’

F. Asceticism fails

23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

1. Paul moves directly to rules/decrees themselves – they fail!
2. 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, appearance of wisdom
 - a) Matters = the rules of these false teachers
 - b) “appearance of wisdom” = something with no substance to it = Promises wisdom but no reality there
3. “self-made religion” = Man’s creative idea of wisdom – NOT GOD’S IDEA of WORSHIPPING HIM!
 - a) Idea of self-choice, self-styled, self-creative with ingenuity!
 - b) Sounds like a lot forms of worship today!
 - c) HIGH on creativity, LOW on God!
 - d) Paul – ALL of these decrees of “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch” ARE MAN-MADE RELIGION – creative ideas but not of God!
4. and self-abasement
 - a) = “mock humility”
 - b) All of these decrees to not handle, taste, touch – are done in a FALSE HUMILITY
 - c) Truly humble people SHUN /AVOID these things!
 - d) BUT – all FALSE, SPURIOUS, meant really to bring attention and pride to the doer!
5. and severe treatment of the body
 - a) Sounds like ANY diet I’ve ever been on!
 - b) =severe and hard-on-the-body way of life!
 - c) This is what we most think of asceticism
 - (1) Monks hidden away in a monastery
 - (a) Room with no furniture
 - (b) Wooden floors, no possessions, sleep on a mat
 - (c) Days of prayer, solitude, silence
 - (d) Eat little...
 - (2) Or the guru in the mountain cave!
 - (3) Or Bill on a diet! ☺
6. Paul – these ascetic practices appear to be
 - a) WISE BUT they are not
 - b) RELIGIOUS but are just man-made
 - c) HUMBLE but are just pride masquerading as humility- false humility

- d) And – are VERY HARD on the BODY – WRONGLY SO
 - e) Many authors believe that ALL of V.23 consists of Paul taking a slogan of the false teachers and using it against them by negation!
7. SO – what’s the bottom line here?
- [but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.](#)
- a) Asceticism fails!
 - b) Phrase is actually very debated!
 - c) Paul
 - (1) Asceticism NOT ONLY DOESN’T TAKE AWAY/DEFEAT the desires of your flesh
 - (2) Asceticism ACTUALLY feeds and satisfies the Flesh!

G. Have to think about this one!

1. What is the “flesh”? A: All of your humanness apart from your redeemed soul
 - a) Your redeemed Soul is incarcerated in your “flesh”
2. Scripture teaches that Your FLESH FIGHTS AGAINST your NEW NATURE
 - a) It wants to sin
 - b) It doesn’t want to do Godly things!
 - c) Peter: [1 Pe 2:11](#) Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.
 - (1) Literally: “fleshly lusts whose nature is to wage war against the soul”
 - (2) Flesh fights your redeemed soul!
 - (3) Paul to the Galatians: [Ga 5:16](#) But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. [17](#) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.
 - (4) Flesh fights the Holy Spirit!
 - (5) Have to yield to the Holy Spirit to NOT do what the Flesh desires!
3. So, now stay with me!
 - a) TRUE Christianity =
 - (1) Satisfying God / Pleasing God
 - (2) NOT satisfying the Flesh!
 - (3) NOT pleasing the Flesh!
 - b) Therefore, by DEFINITION, the Ultimate goal of false religion is what?
 - (1) NOT satisfying/pleasing God
 - (2) AND PLEASING the Flesh!
 - c) BUT do FALSE TEACHERS say this? NO!
 - d) That’s whole rebuke here!
 - (1) Asceticism (or any false religion) LOOKS like GOOD religion
 - (2) Looks like Humility
 - (3) Looks like it AGAINST the FLESH
 - e) BUT ultimately
 - (1) It has NO BENEFIT AGAINST the flesh

- (2) AND – in fact – IT FEEDS and SATISFIES the FLESH!
- (a) How so? When you focus on Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch – WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?
 - (b) A: On the flesh! On things of the world! Your focus is on wrong thing!
 - (c) Paul to the Romans:
[Ro 8:5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.](#)
 - (d) These false teachers are getting you to focus on your FLESH and NOT on the things of the Spirit!
- (3) That’s the whole argument here – you ARE SATISFYING the FLESH when you do this stuff!
- (4) The flesh LIKES this STUFF and is SATISFIED by IT!
- f) IF you want to DEFEAT the FLESH, what do you do?

[Ga 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.](#)

[Ro 8:12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.](#)

4. Stay with one more minute!

- a) To the Galatians Paul said the RIGHT way to live is: [“walk by the Spirit” \(Gal 5:16\)](#)
- b) To the Romans Paul said the RIGHT way to live is : [“by the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body” AND “being led by the Spirit of God”](#)
- c) Now go back to our text in Colossians!
 - (1) Col 2:20-23 is the FIRST Part of a SECTION!
 - (2) First part begins “SINCE you have died with Christ” as the key phrase
[Col 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 \(which all refer to things destined to perish with use\)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.](#)
 - (3) Now remember I said that the first part of this section began “SINCE you have died with Christ”?
 - (4) Now continue into Chapter 3!
 - (5) We have another one of those “IF”s that means “since”
 - (6) Here’s the other part of the section
 - (7) Col 3:1 [“Therefore, SINCE \(not “If”\) you have been raised up with Christ”!](#)
 - (8) Do you see it?
 - (a) [2:20 Since you have died with Christ](#)
 - (b) [3:1 Since you have been raise up with Christ!](#)

- d) And Remember what I just said was Paul's wording to the Galatians and Romans on the RIGHT WAY to live the Christian Life?
- (1) To Galatians Paul said the RIGHT way to live is: "[walk by the Spirit](#)" (Gal 5:16)
 - (2) To the Romans Paul said the RIGHT way to live is : "[by the Spirit putting to death the deeds of the body](#)" AND "[being led by the Spirit of God](#)"
- e) How does he say it to the Colossians?
- [1](#) Therefore [SINCE] if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2](#) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. [3](#) For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4](#) When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

H. Do you see the consistency?

1. NEVER focus ON ANYTHING earthly, worldly, man-made TO BE SPIRITUAL
2. ALWAYS focus on "things above"
3. AND – what is ABOVE?
 - a) NOT rules and regulations
 - b) BUT CHRIST – who is your spiritual life
 - c) WHOM you are in SPIRITUAL UNION

I. The WRONG ANSWER is ALWAYS rules and regulations

1. EVEN the COMMANDMENTS of SCRIPTURE are the Wrong WAY if that's all you focus on
2. Christianity IS NOT RULES and REGULATIONS or COMMANDS
3. Christianity is A PERSON – Jesus Christ
 - a) Christ IN YOU – the Hope of Glory
 - b) Christ WHO IS YOUR LIFE
 - c) How do you become more "Christ-like"
 - d) FOCUS on HIM and KNOWING HIM and BECOMING LIKE HIM.
 - e) Look PAST the commands to SEE the PERSON
 - (1) See how doing the commands helps you KNOW HIM MORE!
 - (2) Helps you BECOME MORE LIKE HIM!
 - (3) That is the message of Scripture!

J. Let's close by hearing JOHN say the same thing! Turn to 1 John 2:3

[1 Jn 2:3](#) By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. [4](#) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; [5](#) but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: [6](#) the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

1. You're goal is to come to KNOW HIM who is in you
2. How do you know if you have come to know Him? IF you keep His commandments
3. The focus is KNOWING HIM
4. The means is Keeping His Commandments

K. We will come back to this next week as we begin Colossians 3!