

Colossians Chapter 2- John Karmelich

1. My title is "Explaining what Christianity is and isn't". Now there's an impossible task to do in one lesson. However, it happens to be Paul's main message of this letter. Let me explain: The main reason he wrote this letter to a church he didn't start, was he had heard first hand that the Christians there were threatened by false teachings about Jesus. This letter explains for example: Why Jesus is superior to human teaching and the fact He's God and the creator of all things. Paul has a Jewish background but explains why Christians don't have to obey the ceremonial aspects of the Jewish law. Yes, I'll explain in this lesson why God expects us Christians to honor "these" aspects of the Old Testament Law but not "those" aspects. For example, we as Christians are not to murder or steal as it makes us a bad witness for Jesus. On the other hand, Christians are not required to obey the Old Testament "food laws" as an example. When it comes to understanding the Old Testament, we can learn from any page of that book, but a lot of those specific laws don't apply to Christians. Again, I'm going to give details to those ideas in this lesson.
 - a) In summary, this little book wants to teach us, "Here's some things that God does expect us to know about Jesus. Here are the "man based" things Jesus is superior to. Then, here is why and how we Christians should obey God "knowing all of that".
 - b) In effect, Paul wrote this letter so that we as Christians could understand better who Jesus is, what that means and what we should do about it. It's Paul's little "now what" message.
 - c) The other factor to keep in mind is no single book of the bible is "all encompassing". Let's be honest, God gave us the entire bible as a tool to teach us not only about Him and what it is He desires of us, but also as a guide to how He expects us to live as a witness for Him. Teaching us how to be a good witness includes what to do and not to do as Christians. In this chapter, we'll get a bunch of "don't do that" or "that's a waste of time" messages on how God wants us to live. One doesn't have to be a bible expert to live as God desires. It does give us the "necessary tools" to live as He desires. That's why we study it!
 - d) If you believe you're going to live forever as I do, than I consider this life as a preparation course for how God desires us to live for Him. I'm not positive what we're going to do all day in heaven, but I'm sure we're not going to kick back on a couch all day watching some television shows. I suspect we'll be used for service for God then, just as we're called to be of service to Him now. My simple point is we should consider living out our lives as how we prepare to live for eternity. Yes, we can still enjoy life. Yes, we can relax at times. I'm just saying God created us with a purpose, and that purpose is to glorify Him by how we live out our lives.
2. OK John, nice speech and you can figure we believe that or we wouldn't be here. What does that have to do with the second chapter of Colossians? Thought you'd never ask! It focuses on who it is Jesus is, and what God expects us as Christians and equally what He expects us to avoid, while trying to live a life pleasing to Him. Yes the whole letter is that focus, but Chapter 2 in particular has some important things to teach us on that topic. Let me explain "subject by subject" what Paul brings up in this chapter and you can decide for yourself if you'd like to read more details that I'll give later in this lesson. Therefore, here's my chapter summary in a few paragraphs;
 - a) The first thing Paul states is in effect, "His (Paul's) heart breaks for Christians in that area", as they must deal with false teachings making the rounds in that part of the world. Paul wants to encourage them by explaining the riches that Christians have as believers. Yes, it is a big "encourage them to stay on the right path" speech. Yes, Paul says similar things in some of his other letters. He wants these Christians to know that even though they live off the beaten path, so to speak, even though he's never met them personally, God cares as much about them as any of the believers in the churches that he started himself! This is Paul's reminder that he's writing this letter as a source of encouragement, so that they, along with all readers will grow in their faith in just who Jesus is!

- b) That leads to the big "why" question. Yes, Paul honestly cares about these people, but why should we care? Paul's goal for them is in effect the same goal Christians should have for all believers, that we grow in our knowledge of Him, that our faith be strengthened so we can use our lives as a witness for Him! That's the greatest purpose one can have for living and the heart of what Paul's getting us. He wants us to be grateful for all those wonderful things God does for us, and with that gratitude comes joy we can share with others! That's the "why" of this section.
 - c) Then we get back to the heart of the message of this book. Dealing with false teachings making the rounds at that location back then. We should care because those same kinds of false teachings come and go over the centuries and we may face similar struggles in our lifetime. When we recognize what they are, it should drive us back to the "real thing". That's Paul's goal as he writes this section. OK, onto details:
 - d) Paul starts this section by reminding us in effect, "Jesus is above all things". Paul reminds us what God's done for us. He reminds us as believers that we're public witnesses for Him and uses baptism as a reminder of that public witness. As I state every now and then, the act of baptism doesn't save us, it's just a way to be a public witness for Jesus. Then Paul is giving us the classic reminder that since we're forgiven of every sin we'll ever commit, we can't earn our salvation by "trying harder". The purpose of being a good person is to be a good witness for Jesus, and never to earn God's favor! All that is implied in these verses!
 - e) The last half the chapter focuses on specific false teachings making the rounds. Remember that in that city there were false Jewish teachers saying things like, "If you'd really want to be pleasing to God, you'll observe the Sabbath and all the Jewish holidays described in the Old Testament". It's the constant false view that, "If we really want God to love us, we've got to do "this or that" in order for God to accept us!" The examples of Paul's day won't be the same as our day, but the principal is the same. For example, some churches may teach we aren't really saved unless we have a particular spiritual gift. People may say to us that unless we're volunteering to help "their way" we're not living as God desires. The point is people try to guilt us into doing "this or that" by implying God's not pleasing with us just as we are! No, I'm not arguing against volunteering to do things and as I point out many times, "The trash still has to be taken out". The simple point is we can't earn points with God by doing things. We're saved only because of our trust in who He is and what He's done for us. Doing good works makes us a good witness for Him, but it doesn't earn us "points" with God.
 - f) Yes in this lesson we'll get into some of the specific issues Paul had to deal with in his day. What I wanted far more, is for us to remind ourselves that we can't earn God's love by us doing "this or that" for Him. That's an underlying message of this book. In the meantime, it's time for us to learn more about our relationship with Jesus by studying the issues Paul brings up in this chapter about who Jesus is, what He's done for us and what we should be doing and not be doing in response to that.
 - g) With that said, time for the verse-by-verse details.
3. Chapter 2: I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.
- a) Since the original letter didn't have any chapter breaks, let's back up to see where Paul did leave off. The last thing Paul stated was that he "lived for" the desire to see all believers as they grow in their trust in Jesus to guide their lives! With all of the great accomplishments Paul could list in his life as he's lead millions closer to Jesus by his writings and preaching all over the Roman world, I don't think Paul's own life mattered that much to him. What I mean is what Paul lived for, was to see people believe that Jesus is God, died for all of our sins and trust Him to guide our lives. My point is what drove Paul was he truly cared for people and wanted to see all people who trusted in Jesus grow in that love as they live out their lives as a witness for Him.

- b) That leads to Chapter 2. Paul's writing to Christians he's never met. Colosse was a city in a valley in what is today Turkey. Another place that's biblically famous is Laodicea. It's a city relatively close to Colosse. The Gospel writer John wrote a "letter" to Laodicea as part of the book of Revelation. As best we can tell, Paul's never been to either place. Yet, we're reading of him writing this letter to that area. In Verse 1, he states he "struggles" for them. Ok, for a group of Christians Paul never met, why is he struggling for them? For starters, I think Paul means that he struggles for all believers as I said in the last paragraph, he has an overwhelming desire to see all believers grow in their faith and trust in Jesus. He can't stand not reaching out to all Christians and that's why Paul wrote this letter. With that understand, let's get into the specific's of Paul's desire for these believers:
4. Verse 2: My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- a) Let's start with the word "they" in Verse 2. Paul meant for this letter to be circulated. We know that because Paul said in Chapter 1 to share this letter with those in Laodicea. All I am saying is that when Paul says "they" he's referring to all believers in Jesus everywhere and at all times. My point is the "they" applies to us Christians as well as them!
 - b) With that said, realize we're reading a prayer here. It's similar to what he said in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. Keep in mind Paul never met the people he's writing to here. What he wants do is to encourage them to keep trust in Jesus and keep growing in His love. Let me explain what this is and isn't:
 - i) It doesn't mean that Paul wants Christians of every denomination to stop going to their church and all adopt the "same brand". It means that we trust in the key facts about Jesus, about who He is and what He's done for us. There's a classic Christian that goes, "Unity in essentials and tolerance in non-essentials". That is the essence of what Paul's preaching. Suppose you say, "I already believe the basics about the Christian faith, why should I care here?" The point is not what we believe, but the question of "What are we doing about it?" Let's face it, it is really easy to focus on our current issues of the moment. What all of us need constant reminders of is the fact that God created us, has a purpose for our lives and wants us to live to make a difference for Him! That fact leads me back to Paul's prayer. It's his desire that we grow in His love by understanding more and more about what God's done for us, so we can use our lives for His glory. That's the essence of these verses.
 - ii) That leads to the phrase "united in love". The Christian life is all about putting the lives of others as priority over our own lives. No it's not about giving away all we own and being poor. The type of love Paul's discussing is not physical, but caring in nature. It's about having an attitude that we're more interested in helping others grow in their faith and trust in Jesus than we are about our lives! Now, there is an impossible thing to do without God's love. It's only by trusting His love that we're even able to live that type of life, and that's Paul's point by that phrase!
 - iii) All of this leads to my next key word "mystery". As I explained the last lesson, the word "mystery" in the Greek, refers not to something that's still a mystery, but to a "thing" that's now been revealed so it's no longer a mystery. The big thing that has been revealed is that God's no longer working through the nation of Israel to bring His message of salvation to the world. All I mean by that is the Christian era is all about God bringing salvation directly to anyone who believes Jesus is God, that He died for all our sins and He's in charge of our lives, as opposed to God working through prophets to the nation of Israel. Yes, I believe Jesus will return and rule in some future day to the Nation of Israel. So in that sense, He's not done with them as a nation. In summary, the simple point of "mystery" is that anyone can be saved simply by believing those basic facts about Jesus!

- c) All of that leads to Verse 3: Let me repeat it here: "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." One of the big topics in this chapter is a comparison of the what we can learn from "the world" versus what we can learn from God. Let me start with the obvious, the bible doesn't teach us all we need to know about our job or even the things we may need as we go through our day. Let's begin by realizing God created us with a gift to learn and remember. For example, we don't have to relearn how to walk every day as once we learn that we get it. We need knowledge about life in order to live. God's not anti-knowledge and wants us to learn about life as well as say the practical things of what we may need for our job or even running a household. Now that I gave that speech, it is time to talk about what Paul actually meant in Verse 3.
 - i) To answer that, first consider the question why did God make us in the first place? What's in it for Him? If God by definition doesn't need anything, why did He want to make people? As I state pretty regularly, it's because He's full of love and wants "things" to express that love upon. God then wants what He created to be grateful for His love, acknowledge He's God and trust Him to guide us. The big question is how do we do that? How do we live a life pleasing to God? That's the knowledge and wisdom that God gives us. Everything we need to know about how to live as being pleasing to God is written in the pages of Scripture. The reason the bible's so thick isn't just to learn the redemption story of our life. It's also a manual on how it is God desires for us to live! That's why I love to teach it! Over and above that, we have a built in nature that teaches us murder and stealing is wrong. All I'm saying is God gives us the wisdom and knowledge to live as He desires.
 - ii) The problem of course is human nature. We naturally want to rebel and live how it is we desire to live! That's a key reason why the Holy Spirit exists. Think of Him as the way God expresses His power within us to live as He desires. It's God's way of saying we can live as He desires and He works within us to live that way! That is what living the Christian life is all about!
 - iii) Hey look, there's a Verse 4. Let's check it out!
- 5. Verse 4: I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.
 - a) Now for the big question: Why is Paul getting into all of this? Why is Paul lecturing them as well as us on the fact that God desires a relationship with us and gives us all the power we need to live as He desires? What's the problem? The problem is we're easily deceived by "fine-sounding arguments". A lot of non-godly wisdom has "grains of truth to them". I am saying a lot of the things that can turn us away from living as He desires do seem like good reasoning. Paul's going to get into some of the specifics of those bad arguments later in this chapter. For those who've ever taking a philosophy class at college, there is endless debate one can learn about how we're supposed to live life. While it can be interesting, in the end it can also draw us away from how God wants us to live, and that's His point!
 - b) Paul is writing in a world that's been influenced for centuries by Greek philosophers. The teachings of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and the Greek philosophers of Paul's day "made the rounds". There were the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers mentioned in Acts 17:18. Then there were local Jewish residents who taught Christians must keep every Old Testament law to please God. My point "competition" existed to bible teaching. It existed then, just as it still exists today! That's why Paul's emphasizing that God provides us with all the knowledge and wisdom we need to worship Him and live as He desires. All that other philosophy is interesting, but in the end it's all "man-centered" versus God centered! In effect that's what Paul was getting at in Verse 4.
 - c) Verse 5 is simply the fact that Paul's not there in person to set them straight. So he wants to preach via his letters as it's his desire to see all Christians grow in their faith in Jesus.

- d) One thing we as Christians tend to forget is that Paul's not the kind of guy who says, "OK, now you're saved. Good luck with your life as I'm moving on to someone else!" Instead it is obvious that Paul is interested in believers growing in their faith and trust in Jesus. That is why Paul writes letters like this. This letter is not meant for nonbelievers to read about Jesus and think, "OK, I get it, I'll follow Jesus". Yes I'm sure some of that occurred, but this is mainly written for believers so that we grow in our faith and trust in Jesus! My point is simply that Paul was far more than an evangelist, he also had the desire to see Christians grow in their faith and not be deceived by non-biblical teaching! Thus this letter. Speaking of which, let's get back to it.
6. Verse 6: So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
- a) Speaking of "I believe in Jesus, now what", that's Paul's key point in these two verses. We can see that Paul has a strong desire to not only see people get saved but to grow in that faith. OK, time for the "why" question. Let me assume we believe Jesus is God dies for all our sins and we believe He's in charge of our lives. What's the motivation for us to do the things listed in these verses? What's in it for us? Why is it necessary for example for us to strengthen our faith and "overflow with thankfulness"? Don't we all got enough to worry about as we go through our day than having to focus upon God as we going through life? Why bother with all of this? So glad you asked!
 - b) The answer comes back to the question of why did God create us in the first place? What's in it for Him? He created us to glorify Him. God expect us to use the time and resources He's blessed us with to make a difference for Him. That's the point of living! Of course, I know the "trash has to go out and bills have to be paid". My point is while we do all that, we need to remember why we were created in the first place, to glorify God by how we're living out our lives! That's why God wants us to grow in Him, continue to trust Him and use our lives for His glory. The amazing thing is once we let go and live that way, we will discover we'll have far more joy than if we only live to please ourselves! That's why Paul mentions the thankfulness at the end of Verse 7. Paul wants all believers to be full of joy! It's the best way to go through life! That's why he's preaching to a bunch of people that he has never met! What Paul lives for, and what we should live for, is to see all Christians grow in their faith and make a difference for God.
 - c) This isn't an "ego" thing for Paul. It's not a "This is how I live and to reassure I'm right, I'd like all of you to live the same way!" It's the realization that this is how God wants each of us to live, a life full of joy by putting the needs of others before our own! What's amazing about all of this is once we let go of our own desires, God will often give us our desires if we're willing to put others first! It's an amazing thing to watch in life, but it does work as it fills us with joy as we watch others be filled with joy by them growing in their faith! All I'm saying is the best way to live life is to put other's needs as a priority over our own. It's the best way to live life and gives us far greater than joy than just trying to fulfill our own desires in life! OK enough lecturing on those verses. Let's move on to the next ones!
7. Verse 8: See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.
- a) Paul returns to his main point in this section of the letter: Comparing the philosophy we can learn about how to live life from biblical principals versus what the "world" teaches.
 - b) We're about to get lectured through the bulk of this chapter to understand key differences between the two. The bible is not meant as an encyclopedia on every possible way we can turn from God. The bible focuses on the truth of how we're supposed to live so we'll learn by example of what to avoid! Many people spend their lives studying philosophy of what the world teaches! Much of it can help in dealing with our problems. The real question is does all that philosophy get us to live as God desires we live? If we'll live forever with the God who created us, I'd say it's important now, to learn to live as He desires!

- c) Anyway, Paul will teach us how to avoid what is false, by primarily focusing upon what's true in life: That Jesus is God and by continuing to trust in that fact, we can live as it is He wants us to live, a life full of joy by having love for other people!
 - d) Let me put it this way: Learning nonbiblical philosophy helps us to see how other see the world around us. I don't want to "throw the baby out with the bathwater". There are lots of good things that can be learned from philosophy! The word "philosophy" essentially is about the study of what makes you wise. Paul's point is if you're really interesting in what will make us wise in the eye's of the creator of the world, we study Him, and not what the "world" teaches. The real issue of philosophy is does it end up drawing us closer to God, or further away from Him? Since God desires we draw close to Him, that thought has to be kept in mind as we study "worldly" stuff!
 - e) Confused? Good. Paul is now going to focus on God's truth for the next seven verses. It's another example of "we can learn to spot the fake by spending time with the real thing!"
 - f) OK, let's begin, Verse 9:
8. Verse 9: For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.
- a) The simple point of Verse 9 is, "Hey you want to know who God is? Trust in Jesus as He's God in human form". OK, how do we know that for sure? If the miracles aren't enough to convince you, how about the fact that all of the apostles were tortured and killed refusing to deny that Jesus was resurrected. How about the fact that every aspect of Jesus life and death is predicted in detail hundreds or in some case over a thousand years before he ever came on the scene? My point is the bible gives tremendous evidence that Jesus is who He claims to be.
 - b) Returning to the Colossians, they did not have a complete bible. How could they have all that assurance? I'm convinced God worked miracles in their world and gave them enough evidence to reassure their faith and trust in who Jesus is. The church there thrived until if the historical evidence is correct that an earthquake destroyed that city completely. Why did it get destroyed? Don't know. We just know the full location of that city is debated today as it was destroyed so completely. It's one of those questions we'll have to ask God when we get to heaven.
 - c) Meanwhile, one of the aspects Christians accept is that Jesus was both fully God as well as fully human. To deny either one is to deny who Jesus is or was. The amazing thing to me is the fact that a fully human "deity" sits at the throne of God! That's what Paul's trying to teach us about the "fullness of the Deity" lives (present tense) in bodily form. Ok, even if we grasp the idea that Jesus is fully God and fully man, what's that mean for us? So glad you asked? Let me explain:
 - i) The interesting thing Paul says is that we (yes that's you and me) have been given the "Fullness of Christ". No, it does not mean Jesus will "just pay our bills" or He'll just make our pain magically go away. It means He'll give us all the comfort we'll ever need through whatever life throws at us! The point is whatever it is we must deal with Jesus takes up residence inside of us, as that's why God created us in the first place to have an intimate relationship with us! Paul's getting into all of this as the Christians living there were in danger of turning from that love to do things to try to "prove their worth" to God. That'll be the big topic of the second half of this lesson. Until I get there, I need to finish Verses 9-11 which explain exactly what it is Jesus did for us as well as who He is. If you grasp these essentials, it'll help us to deal with the false ideas of what Christians "don't have to do" that we'll get into in the latter verses of this chapter. First, I need to finish Verse 9.
 - d) Paul's making the point that Jesus is greater than all that is created. When I talk to Roman Catholics who want to pray through Mary or a "saint", ask, "Why bother with the "created deities" when we can pray directly to God Himself?" We don't need "middle men" to pray!

- i) Paul's getting into all of this because the Christians living in Colosse were getting into worshipping other "deities" thinking that's the way to please God. Just as we have Christians today "praying to Mary", so the worship of lower deities was just as much an issue then as it was today. OK, I've beaten that point to death, let's go to Verse 11:
- 9. Verse 11: 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, ¹² 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.
 - a) Here, we get into probably the two most prominent rituals of Judaism and Christianity: A requirement of Jewish boys when they're eight days old circumcised. (Leviticus 12:2). The point Paul's making here is not a requirement for Christians to perform that ritual. Realize Paul stated in 1st Corinthians 7:8 effectively that the act of circumcision itself doesn't save us. Let me explain that better. The idea of cutting the foreskin of the flesh was a symbolic way of saying, "We as God's people reject living for the world (the flesh is a symbol of the world) and we'll live for God"! The point is that ritual is pointing the way to God, but it's not a requirement for salvation. Paul even taught in Romans Chapters 2 and 3, the act of circumcision is nothing in comparison to whether or not we've given our hearts to Jesus!
 - b) That in effect is Paul's point here in Verse 11. My point is Paul's being consistent through all of his commentary on this point. I suspect the reason Paul's getting into this is because the Christians living there were being influenced by the local Jewish residents who falsely were claiming, "If you want to be pleasing to God, "yes you got to do that ritual". Paul is arguing against the ritual itself to say in effect, "The heart matters" not the ritual!
 - c) Before I leave this topic, I happen to be "pro- circumcision" not because I think it is needed for salvation, but I think there are health issues that benefit us. Since I raised daughters, it was never an issue in my family. OK, enough on that, let's move on to baptism!
 - d) First, let's explain what baptism is and isn't. I'll argue it isn't a requirement for salvation as Jesus said to the thief on the cross that he'd be with Jesus in heaven! I've always viewed it as a public witness for Jesus. Baptism is a way of identifying ourselves with Jesus and we accept His complete payment for our sins. Baby baptisms don't bother me, because I see it as the parents committing their lives to raising their children to obey Christ. A baby who's being baptized has no idea what's happening. Hopefully, the parents are committing to a life of raising their children to obey Jesus, so for the most part, I'll accept it as such!
 - e) With that speech out of my system, notice Paul throws a "twist" on our baptism. He states that we've been "buried with him in baptism". All that means is we accept what Jesus did for our sins. This would be a good time to bring up the "Three aspects of salvation". What I mean by that is we're saved, past tense, are being saved, present tense and will be saved future tense. The "past tense" is when we first gave our lives to Jesus. The "present tense" is we're trusting Jesus to guide our lives and are growing in our faith. The "future tense" is the moment we actually die in this life to be resurrected the same way Jesus was!
 - f) The point is simply when we get baptized as adults, we're making a public statement that we identify with the truth of what Jesus did, we desire to make Him Lord of our lives, we desire to grow in Him and trust in Him and finally it's about our trust that we will also be resurrected to eternal life Him. Paul's pounding the point here that baptism doesn't save us, but it's a public act of identifying with what Jesus did.
 - g) I suspect Paul's getting into all of this, as the Colosse Christians were confused as to what was required for Christians as far as circumcision and baptism. Paul's point and my point is simply that the rituals themselves, are just that simply rituals! We aren't saved by doing any specific ritual, but by trusting in Jesus for our salvation, and believing He is God and He did die for our sins! Do I believe Christians should be baptized? Of course, but not to earn salvation, but only as a public witness for Jesus. Which leads perfectly to Verse 13:

10. Verse 13: When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.
- a) The last few verses led to the Gospel fundamentals, that's the key point here. Remember again, why Paul wants to get into all of this. The Christians living there, didn't have a full bible to study. They were dependant upon good bible teaching and letters like this to tell them the truth about Jesus. As I said in the last lesson, "The more time we spend knowing the "real thing", the easier it is to spot what is false". Therefore, it's necessary to go over a few of the fundamental issues about the Gospel so when Paul starts preaching on what is not trust about Christianity (beginning in Verse 16), we can spot the "true from the false" based on the fundamental's being preached here.
 - b) Let me explain by telling a little about Roman history. When someone was in debt, there was a principal of "paid in full". What I mean is once a debt was paid off, a written notice was given publicly proclaiming that debt was paid. The people Paul's writing to here are familiar with that principal, he's using it as a teaching principal. Let me explain:
 - i) I'm sure none of us think we're perfect, or if we do, we're lying to ourselves. The Old Testament law is God's standard for perfection. As the old joke goes, there are two ways to get to heaven: The first is to never sin once as an adult. The other is to trust in Jesus full payment for our sins. As to children who die, I'll leave that up to God as to how He deals with that issue. I suspect heaven will be full of those who died as children and never got the opportunity to trust in Jesus for their sins.
 - ii) The point for you and me, is the amount of our sins as adults is immeasurable. All we can do is trust in Jesus for that payment. God desires obedience not to earn His salvation, but simply because it's the best way to live life and it makes us a witness for Him based on how we live our lives. That's the issue here.
 - c) With that said, let me discuss "powers and authorities" as stated in Verse 16. At one time in my life, I used to think that Satan was happy when Jesus was crucified. Satan saw it as a victory because Jesus then can't rule over the world "since He died". I don't think he got the fact it was his greatest defeat when it occurred. When Jesus was on the cross, a bunch of people made fun of Jesus at that moment. I ponder if Satan was behind that ridicule as if to say, "Hey Jesus, You're God, why are You bothering with all of this? Why bother with this ritual?" My point is I don't know if Satan was trying to talk Jesus out of the cross, of if he was accepting Jesus fate as being Satan's greatest victory! Either way, that single event turned out to be Satan's greatest defeat and that's what Verse 16 means! I have to admit it is amazing to consider that one single event gives us eternal life. Remember that another event, (Adam sinning) caused sin to enter this world. Whether we like it or not, "That is how the ballgame works". Therefore, the necessity of accepting Jesus payment comes in!
 - d) I always try to keep in mind that I'm writing these lessons to devout Christians who know all of this. The big question for Christians themselves is not the Gospel basics, but what it is we should be doing with this information? Paul's going to spend the last nine verses of this chapter (as well as the next chapter) to teach us what to avoid because we're trusting in Jesus complete payment for our sins.
 - e) In other words, preaching the Gospel basics are not needed because of doubts in faith, but to remind us of what's important and what's to be avoided. Here is where it's going to get a little complicated. The rest of the chapter is going to describe some of the more trivial of the Old Testament laws as if to say, "they're no longer necessary". This will naturally lead to the question of "OK, then, which laws should we obey?" Yes, I'll get into that, but I have to start with the simple fact that some laws still apply (e.g., we shouldn't steal or murder) but some laws don't apply to Christians today. With that said, time for some specifics.

11. Verse 16: 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.
- a) Here is where the book starts getting interesting. Yes I'm going to get into the specifics of these references, but first we need to discuss "the big picture". The issue isn't judging our lifestyle or whether or not one is a vegetarian. The issue is judging one's salvation based on say what we eat or what rituals we follow. It's the false idea of thinking, "If you really want to be pleasing to God, we must do "this or that". I've always liked describing my life as a Christian this way: "As a Christian I'm free to drink say all the alcohol and take all of the drugs I want. The question is, how much do I want to?" The issue at hand is Paul will describe things that do not make God more pleasing with us. But John, I thought you said the purpose of living life is to make a difference for God by living as He desires based on a life of gratitude. That's true. For example I'm positive God doesn't want us to murder a person or steal from them. Yes, we can do those things and still be saved, but we won't be a good witness for Him, if we're not living as He desires.
 - b) So what's the difference between "Not stealing" versus observing the Old Testament laws on doing church on Saturday or eating kosher? The simple point is about "freedom". As a Christian we're free to do whatever we want. To steal or murder doesn't affect our eternal destiny but it makes us a lousy witness for Jesus. To eat "kosher" as an example, is making an effort to try to please God "by observing rituals" versus being a witness for Him.
 - c) Let me try this another way: Let me explain some of these Old Testament laws and then I will try to explain why they don't apply today. The food laws were written before we had refrigeration and they were done to help people healthier lives. When I wrote about all of the animals Jewish people could and couldn't eat in Leviticus 11, I discussed how all those animals were symbolic of our relationship with Jesus (hint, hint, for extra credit!). To be a good Christian doesn't require us to observe those food laws as we have Jesus Himself to guide our lives and the symbolism of say, those food laws is no longer needed.
 - d) The next issue is religious festivals and "new moon's". The Old Testament required Jewish people to observe certain days of the years as specific religious festivals. There were also big meal gathering on the darkest night of the month, (when a new moon appeared) as it's stated in Numbers 10:10 as an example. Celebrating a Jewish festival or a family gathering is not a bad thing! If you've got religious Jewish friends and they invite you to one of their holidays, join them and learn about their culture. People aren't interested in what we have to say unless we care about them and their world! The point is God is not "more pleasing with us" because we observe one of these rituals.
 - e) So if that's true, why did God ordain them in the first place? Because these rituals pointed the way to what Jesus did or will do at His Second Coming. They all have symbolism that is tied to Jesus. Yes, those rituals help to keep our focus upon Him. The simple point is all of those rituals are not necessary to be a good Christian. I've had the pleasure of going to a few of them in my life. I've learned things about Jewish religious cultures by going to an event like that and again, it's not a bad thing. It is simply not a requirement for Christians to be a good witness for Jesus by observing those rituals.
 - f) Now the controversial one, "observing the Sabbath". There's a Christian denomination we call "The Seventh Day Advocates" and this is their pet peeve. They argue that we must go to church on Saturdays and not Sundays. At one time they argued Christians are going to hell if they worship that way. My first question is what about religious soldiers, police, or even doctors who need to work on those days to protect others? First "responders" are the big reason we can sleep well at night as people are protecting us.
 - g) Just thinking about it logically, do you think God cares about what day of the week we're going to church, or the fact we're worshipping Him? Paul Himself taught that some will think of one day of the week as more special and others think every day of the week is a day to worship God. (Based on Romans 14:5-6).

- h) OK, I just spent a page discussing the fact that some Old Testament laws are "still on the books" (i.e., we're a bad witness for Jesus if we steal or murder) but Christians don't have to observe Jewish rituals in order to be a good witness for Jesus. If we observe any of the rituals for health reasons or to be a part of a Jewish culture, that's fine. The simple point is that we're not closer to God if we do or don't observe these rituals!
12. Verse 17: These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.
- a) Paul summarized in one line what took me a whole page to explain! The fact that all those Old Testament laws about rituals God required the Jewish people to observe do not apply to us as Christians. So why would God have "one set of rules" in the Old Testament and another in the New? The answer is we're looking at it wrong. All those laws about rituals and ceremonies to perform were designed to get people to focus upon God. Since Jesus is living within us, our focus is on Him to focus on Jesus and in that sense, all those laws are no longer necessary. Is there anything wrong with observing them? Of course not. What the issue comes down to is, "necessity versus gratitude". The basic view of Judaism is we have to "prove our worth to God". The basic view of Christianity is we can't ever be good enough for God, so we live in gratitude for what He's done for us. I hold the simple view that God is perfect. If He's perfect and His standard is perfection, we could never be good enough to please Him. Therefore, I choose the "gratitude" route versus trying to prove my worth to Him. In effect, that's why I don't eat "kosher" or observe Jewish holidays. When I spend time with my Jewish friends, I never condemn them for doing that. I simply argue it's not necessary to please God by performing such rituals. That's Paul's point here.
- b) The reason Paul's getting all of this, is there were Jewish people living in Colosse who did believe in order for one to be a good Christian, "one has to do this or that". Paul's response is in effect the same as mine: I'm free to do whatever I want as a Christian. My question is what do I want to do? If the purpose of my life is to glorify God, why would I want to act in a way that's displeasing to God. Am I perfect? Far from it. But I do understand that to have joy in life, is based on my trust that Jesus "did it all" and I don't have to earn my way to heaven by doing "this or that". That's Paul's underlying point. OK then, Verse 18:
13. Verse 18: Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. ¹⁹ He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.
- a) These verses are in effect examples of what Paul was talking about in Verse 17. The first is the idea of "delighting in false humility". This reminds me of the old joke of someone who won an award for being the most humble person alive. When that person accepted it, it had to be taken away! What Paul's getting at here, is the idea of thinking if one acts all humble, that means God must be pleasing with us because we're acting that way. Of course there is nothing wrong with acting humble. God desires we put interests of others ahead of our own. That's what Christian love is all about. The mistake is when we think "we're something special because we're humble". That's Paul's point here.
- b) The second one is "worship of angels". Angels are created beings, designed to serve God and carry out His will (excluding demonic angels). However, we're never to worship an angel because of what they are. A good example of this is near the end of Revelation. At that point the apostle John, who wrote the book was so grateful that an angel showed him all those visions, that John started to worship that angel. The angel rebuked John and said "I'm a fellow servant of God (as hopefully all of us are) and we should worship God alone and not angels". (Revelation 22:8-9.) In effect, that's Paul's point here. People can make a claim that "They've heard from angels" and say and teach things contrary to what's taught in God's word. It's also thinking "we're special" because we've talked to angels.

- c) This leads perfectly into Paul's next point. I need to talk a little about "Pentecostals". I'm not condemning such churches. I'm saying when people claim they got special messages from angels or God that deny what the bible teaches it should be ignored! I don't have a problem with worshipping God with "passion". I have a problem with people who claim "they got a special message from God that we should be doing "this" when the bible says we should be doing "that", or it's ok for them to do "this" because an angel said so! That's the type of false teaching Paul's warning against here!
 - d) It may seem strange, but it connects well to Paul's next point about Jesus being the head of the church. Paul's trying to use the analogy of the human body as all Christians as a single entity. The simple point is "Jesus is in charge, deal with it". It means He is the head of the church, not the local pastor or priest. It is His church, not ours. It also implies that all that worship of angels and false ideas about visions taking precedent over God's word is false and we should take such visions with a "grain of salt".
 - i) Let me explain that one a little better. If someone says God has a vision for me, the first thing I think is, "What has God lost my phone number?" Then we should ask how does that "vision" line up with God's word. That's why I tend to be leery of a "special vision" as opposed to what the written word teaches about how we are to worship God or denies in any way shape or form, that Jesus is not only God, He is "head of the church".
 - e) Finally, Paul makes a few points about "ligaments and sinews". It's a fancy way of saying the muscles and joints in our body. Just as those aspects of our body grow when we grow up, so we as Christians grow in our trust in Jesus. We also grow in our love for each other and help fellow believers grow in our faith. That's why Paul likes the human body as his comparison to all believers. As we mature, we help others to grow in their faith and work with other believers to make a difference for Him, never forgetting that He's in charge and we're not, period. OK then, four more verses to go for this lesson:
14. Verse 20: 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: ²¹ "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? ²² These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.
- a) I'd like everyone to pause for a moment and let "Since you died with Christ" sink in for a moment. I don't know about you, but I mess up all the time, so I struggle with the idea of me "dying with Christ". So were the Colosse's some sort of "Super-Christians"? Hardly, I am sure they, like us had internal and external struggles with different issues. Ok now we know that no Christian is perfect, what did Paul means by us "Dying with Christ"? When we give our lives to Jesus, it literally means that we make Him "in charge" of our lives. It's not that we accept Jesus so we can go jump off a cliff! It's the idea that we accept He's God and it should be our primary desire to do as He desires.
 - i) OK we'll bite, what does He desire of us? It's different for every believer. Some are called in the "professional" ministry. Some of us volunteer at our churches but not as "paid professionals". A church I used to belong to had a great sign at the end of the driveway that read, "You are now entering your ministry". That summarized it pretty well. The simple point is it should be the desire of all Christians to want to be a good witness for Jesus in all that we do. As specifically what God wants us to do, pray and ask. Tell God, "My time is Yours. What is it you'd like me to do". It's usually what is obvious. It usually involves say, keeping our job and trying to do whatever is the right thing and whatever is logical. OK then, back to the verses.
 - b) The next phrase says we died with Christ "to the basic principals of the world". If one is not interested in pleasing God, who's left to please? Ourselves or other people who could be of benefit to us! It is the idea that if we don't care about pleasing God, then we only do care about pleasing our interests, whatever they may be at that given moment!

- c) It comes back to the question of "Who do we believe is in charge of our lives at this given moment?" When we believe it's Jesus we just naturally want to act on that! That's how we turn from the "basic principals of the world" as it's translated here.
 - d) That leads to Verse 21 that says, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch". Verse 22 is a commentary on what Paul means by that. The simple version is many people falsely think that in order to be pleasing to God, they must obey the following rules and regulations! I said some pages back that as a Christian I'm free to drink all the alcohol I want and do all the illicit drugs I want. The question is "how much do I want to"? That's the key to living a life based on gratitude for what Jesus did for us differs from trying to prove our worth to Him in the first place.
 - e) Since we're taking about "rules and pleasing God", let me ask a related question. What if the church we belong to requires us to do "this and that" as a church member? If we think that church is still a good bible teaching church and Jesus is the head of it, and it does not bother you to take that vow, it's ok to do so simply by remembering we're volunteering to do so not to earn our way into heaven, but simply to respect the rules our church has laid out for its members. The same can apply to a work commitment. Obviously if our boss is asking us to steal, then we have to question if we're obeying God or man? However, if the job we have says "No discussing religion at work", it's something we should respect as we should be doing our job, not discussing God at it. Yes we're free to discuss it after work if the situation arises. My point is simply that rules that don't violate biblical commands are not a bad thing if it's reasonable and something we chose to do, not to try to earn our way into heaven, but simply to respect the structure of that environment.
 - f) Meanwhile Paul's concerned about people making "rules" in order to convince us that we can't be saved unless we obey them or in order to "really please God" we must obey! It is that type of argument he's focusing on here. Paul continues in Verse 23 of this topic:
15. Verse 23: Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.
- a) Often setting rules about Christian behavior "sound like the right thing to do". It can seem like we're doing the right thing when all we're really doing is trying to prove our worth to God by our behavior. I'll close with a famous cliché from a few generations back: It went, "Christians don't drink, smoke or chew, and don't go out with girls that do!" It seems like good advice. Alcohol and cigarettes are well known vices. The issue isn't what we can or can't do. The issue is are we being a good witness for Jesus if we do those things. When I am with a group of Christians who are don't drinking alcohol, for the "sake of conscious" I won't indulge. I can also have a moment with others, where I may have a glass of wine in a private setting. I'm not trying to encourage bad behavior. Paul's just saying that trying to do thing as to earn our way into heaven or think, "Wow God must be pleasing with me because I quit a specific bad habit", misses the point! God loves us because He does! None of us can earn His love by doing or not doing specific things. Yes, we should strive to be a good witness in all we do, but the issue should be "gratitude" and not "earning salvation". If you got that, I'd say you get one of the key points about Christianity. With that said, let me wrap this idea in my closing prayer.
16. Heavenly Father, First, we accept the idea that You chose us, simply because You did, and there is nothing we can do, or will do to earn that salvation. Help us never to waste the most valuable asset you've given us, our time, to make a difference for You. Lead us by Your Spirit as to what it is You desire of us today. Lead us down the path You desire of us, so we can use the time as well as the resources You've given us to make a difference for You both as a community of believers as well as individuals. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.