

## KEEP LOOKING UP! Colossians 2:20-3:4

I'd like to sponsor a "Most misunderstood passage contest"

People twist passages to say opposite of what the Author intended.

Among those at the top of my list I'd put Col. 3:1-4.

People use this passage to *contradict* what Paul's trying to tell us.

\* **Not talking about avoiding "nasty worldly things"!**

**2:16-23** Paul tries to turn us *away* from such prohibitions!

\* **Not talking about sitting around thinking about heaven.**

Paul's considering life in *present*, not the future.

\* **Not talking about setting hearts on eternal treasure, as opposed to material treasure.**

Paul's urging us to think about what Christ has done for us  
If you don't "go with the flow," you'll never understand 3:1-4!

\* **HE'S TALKING ABOUT LIVING TO PLEASE GOD.**

Doesn't change topic. **Connective: "then"** –logical conclusion of topic!

**PRINCIPLES FOR GODLY LIVING:** Already shown us 2:

1. Walk by faith—as you received Him by faith  
**2:6-7**

2. In Christ we're complete; we lack nothing.  
**2:9-10**

**IMPLICATIONS OF PROVISION IN CHRIST 2:16-4:6**

If we're complete in Christ, *HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?*

Paul answers from several perspectives. 1<sup>st</sup> **NEGATIVE:**

## **SPIRITUAL LIFE IS NEVER RESULT OF LEGALISM 2:16-23**

For many people, Christian living = keeping a list of rules.

“Following Christ takes all the fun out of life!”

For Paul, spiritual life = life in Christ– NOT legalism,  
NOT list of rules.

Paul issues 3 warnings:

**DON'T LET ANYONE JUDGE YOU 2:16-17** *“Therefore do not let any-one judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.<sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”*

Legalists delight in religious ritual.

**Rigorous religious routine** inflates egos; makes us *feel* self-righteous.

Jewish traditions are a **shadow** of what's to come.

When I come home from trip, **I don't want to hug a shadow.** I want Helen!

**Legalists are “hugging a shadow;” the real thing has come!**

It's time to let go of the shadow and take hold of the reality.

**DON'T LET ANYONE DISQUALIFY YOU 2:18-19** *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.<sup>19</sup> 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.*

Referees watch competitors to be sure everyone plays by the rules; they disqualify players that don't.

Ritual religion makes rules to **disqualify** people who don't play *their* way!

In true *spiritual* competition, one rule for success:

**Remain "In Christ."**

People who take away our prize distract us.

They focus on asceticism, experience, arrogant attitudes.

Result: their followers lose their prize.

**LEGALISTS CHEAT US OUT OF THE PRIZE;  
ROB US OF JOY OF GODLY LIVING**

**DON'T SUBMIT TO MAN-MADE RULES 2:20-23**

[ 3 REASONS we reject man-made rules: ]

**We reject them because we died with Christ 20-21**

*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:<sup>21</sup> "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?*

Those who trust Christ are identified with Him in His death.

Since we died with Him to principles of world, we shouldn't submit to its rules.

**"Basic principles of world"**—we think it focuses on "worldly" lifestyle.

***Who lives by world's principles?***

NOT people who participate in pagan activities

BUT, people who DON'T participate!

Legalism is a **"giant backward step"** "Mother may I?"—"giant step backward!!!"

We have *liberty* in Christ; everything's made *new* in Him.

WHY would we go back to slavery to legalistic system?

**We reject them because: based on man-made standards 22** *These are all destined to perish with use,*

*because they're based on human commands and teachings.*

The rules deal with things that are **temporary**.

They don't come from God; they **come from man**.

**We reject them because they don't provide power to keep them 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.***

They look good. But rules can't provide power to obey them.

When we try to lose weight by rigid diets, what happens?

**Same's true with other desires.**

**Denying a desire won't overcome it; it makes us want more!**

**MAIN PROBLEM WITH LEGALISM:**

**IT DOESN'T PROVIDE POWER TO KEEP IT!!**

Paul starts with **NEGATIVE** side of issue. **2:16-23** Why we DON'T play by rules

Then he presents **POSITIVE** side. **3:1-4** How we DO live: "Since, then, you've been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.<sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.<sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.<sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Contrast: if we don't submit to world's rules, what DO we submit to?

## TWO COMMANDS:

### 1. SET OUR DESIRE ON THINGS ABOVE 3:1

*"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."*

**Why place our focus there?** When we look there, . . .

We see Christ seated at right hand of Father—reminds us **He IS seated.**

He's not working—the job is finished. Relax!—He's done it all.

*What's significance of fact **He's at the right hand of God?***

God has accepted His work. He intercedes for ME!

When accuser brings up *MY* name—guess Who's there?

### 2. FOCUS YOUR THINKING ON THINGS ABOVE!

3:2 *"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*

Focus on things above

**–NOT on what's going on down here — on earth.**

If we're going to focus on something, shouldn't be what's happening on earth,

we shouldn't be thinking about what WE achieve,  
rather on what One seated with Father has done.

*Think about Him!*

Our position before God is *never* based on what we achieve, rather, on what Christ did for us.

*What do we think about when we focus on earthly things?*

*... our efforts, our failures!*

Don't focus on our efforts—however noble—however miserable they may be!

Think about what JESUS has done

## **SET YOUR SIGHTS ON HEAVENLY THINGS 3:1-2**

Focus on what's above —NOT what's on earth.

### **2 reasons for concentrating on heavenly realities:**

**3:3** *“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”*

#### **1. PAST REASON:**

**You DIED; your life is HIDDEN**

**... with Christ ... by God**

We're identified with Christ in His death; we're dead!

*Our* life is hidden together with Christ by God

**Gal. 2:20**: *“I am crucified with Christ; I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”*

Proprietor of dry cleaning business hung sign in his window:

***“We dye to live, and live to dye; the more we dye, the more we live; the more we live, the more we dye.”***

We're united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

#### **2. FUTURE REASON: When He Who is our life is revealed, WE'll be gloriously revealed with Him. 3:4**

*“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

Looking ahead, we realize: Our future isn't based on *our effort* either.

It's based on what Christ has done. **He** is our life.

Play on words: Our life, which has been hidden together with Christ, is going to be revealed with Him.

*It's going to “come out of hiding” when He does!—together with Him.*

**Knowing about our appearance with Him  
should motivate us to be like Him now.**

**WHAT DOES PAUL WANT US TO DO?**

Spiritual life *isn't* conformity to list of rules and prohibitions.

Godly living comes from focusing on God's work for us

We walk daily, thinking about what He's done,

waiting for His coming, that God might accomplish His will in us.

**True spiritual life isn't found in prohibitions.**

**It's found in One who's already SEATED!**

**We're complete in Him**

*What more do we need?*

Instead of submitting to man-made rules,

walk with **eyes fixed on Christ.**

**Stop focusing on ourselves,**

**whether we see good or bad!**

**Focus on what Christ has done... & our hope in Him!**

The song writer caught the Spirit of Paul's thought:

***"Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art;***

***And Thy love, so pure, so changeless, satisfies my heart."***

**Look back**      You died with Him

                                 You were raised with Him

**Look ahead**    You will be glorified with Him

**Therefore,    Seek Him                      Set your mind on Him**

                                 Not on yourself      Not on earthly things

Take your eyes off things around you—

*"Touch not ... taste not ... handle not..."* things.

True spirituality is focused on "the seated One!"

We're complete in Him

*What a wonderful thought!*

*I don't have to focus on myself; beat myself up; get discouraged!*  
*God wants me to focus on HIM! **KEEP LOOKING UP!***  
***THAT'S CAUSE FOR A REAL THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION!!!***