***The Externality of Religion

Colossians 2:18-19

COL-472***

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This morning, we continue to direct your attention to our study of "The Error of Angelic Worship," segment number 29, in Colossians 2:18-19.

It did not take long, in the New Testament church, before false teachers, with satanically inspired false doctrines, began to be on hand. It is amazing how quickly this came about. Paul warned his associate Timothy of this in 1 Timothy 4:1, which says, "But the Spirit explicitly says that, in later times, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." And this happened, indeed, early on. These teachers had infiltrated the congregation at Colossae. And now these Christians were on the line to distinguish what was the truth, relative to what Paul had taught them of New Testament Christianity, and what was esoteric knowledge – false; what was legalism – false; and, what was actually undermining their privileges under the grace power system.

These teachers claimed to have spiritual insights beyond, and superior to, that of the apostles. These claims to spiritual superiority were not based upon the examination, and the grammatical, historical interpretation of the New Testament Scriptures. They were based on the arrogance of human viewpoint reasoning, which is always tainted by the delusions of the sin nature.

Paul, from his prison cell in Rome, gets the word of what's going on in colossi. So, he wrote this as one of his four prison officials to the Colossian Christians, to refute the false doctrines which are being taught in that city. The false teachers were condemning these church-age, grace-oriented Colossian Christians, for not practicing the Mosaic Law way of life.

The book of Galatians deals with that problem: where does the Mosaic Law fit into Christianity? And in Galatians two, the apostle Paul touches upon this in verses 15-16, where Paul says, "We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the gentiles." You recognize that the Jews are a special people with God, and they had special revelations from God, and they had special privileges and covenants from God. Then he goes on, in verse 16, and says, "Nevertheless, having all this, knowing that a man is not justified; that is, the word "justification" means declared absolute righteousness (qualified for heaven: "A man is not justified by the works of the Law (the ritualistic system of the Mosaic Law), but through faith in Christ Jesus; even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified (even we Jews) by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law" – not by the ceremonial, ritualistic, holy-day, special things of the Mosaic Law. That is a works system: "Since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."

So, the apostle Paul points out that the rituals and practices of the Mosaic Law, which was a true representation of the holiness of God, was a true picture of what God expected of a person to qualify for heaven. The problem was that it gave him no ability to be able to accept it, and to live up to the standard of that righteousness portrayed in the Mosaic Law.

So, Paul points out that all these rituals, and all the practices and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law, were but pictures of spiritual realities to be realized when the Messiah Savior had arrived.

So, in Colossians 2:16-17, Paul points out the background of verse 18: "Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival, or a new moon, or a Sabbath day." All of that is at the heart of the Mosaic Law. The false teachers in Colossae were saying, just as they did in the early church: "If your males aren't circumcised under the Mosaic Law, they cannot go to heaven – they cannot be saved. If you do not perform certain rituals, you cannot go to heaven." And Paul says, "Don't let anybody intimidate you with the ritualistic system (and the way of life – that's the term) of the Mosaic Law. It has nothing to do with grace Christianity."

Verse 17 says, "Things (all these ceremonies and rituals) which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to God." So, Paul says, "Everything in the Mosaic Law was picture language. It was portraying the ultimate reality that would be experienced by the Jewish people when the Messiah Savior came."

The New Testament makes it clear that no part of the Mosaic Law, in any way, is in force in this church, from the day of Pentecost to the day of the rapture. No part of the Mosaic Law has any place (has any force) in grace-age Christianity. It is, in fact, obsolescent. The whole Mosaic Law is an obsolescent system. It is amazing how hard it is for Christians and church groups to understand that. The problem goes back to the Reformation, because they didn't understand that.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, the apostle Paul specifically speaks about a part of the Law which was engraved on stones, identifying it, of all things, as the very heart of the Mosaic system, the Ten Commandments. 2 Corinthians 3:7 says, "But if the ministry of death, because that's all the Law produced" (it didn't produce life): "If the ministry of death in letters engraved on stones came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently on the face of Moses, because of the glory his face, fading as it was." When Moses came down from that mount with those Ten Commandments. His face was aglow with the glory of God, and it frightened the people. And they were very much aware that they were not holy, and they recoiled from looking at him. But now, if this glorious presentation of the Ten Commandments, the heart of the Law, came with glory, as well as the rest of it, how shall the ministry of the Spirit (that is, the ministry of the church-age by God the Holy Spirit) be even more glorious?

"For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed, what had glory in this case, had no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. The glory of the church-age grace power system is a glorious system, as you've learned. But if you compare that to the holiness from reflecting from the face of Moses, Paul says, "Church age glory far surpassed it." Moses was a candle compared to the church-age power system of grace, which is like the sun. The candle doesn't look all that good anymore.

"For if that which fades away." And what is it that's going to fade away here, by the way, folks? The Ten Commandments, as a code, not as substance. All of the Ten Commandments moral codes (except for the one about the Sabbath day) are still in force, but under grace context: "If that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

Then verse 18: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the spirit." We Christians, as we walk along in the Word of God, and as we are receptive to the instruction, and have it available to us (of expository teaching of New Testament doctrines) become more glorious people all the time. In God's eyes, some of you people are glowing brilliantly. But most people in Christendom are dull lamps. They do not have access to the power of a glorious lifestyle, and of the honor of coming into where God the Holy Spirit is living – the life of Christ through you.

So, here is the promise that someday in heaven, all that glory will be just like the glory that the apostle saw on Mount of Transfiguration, when Jesus temporarily put aside the shield of His humanity.

In the Middle Ages, the reformers of the Protestant Reformation, in the 16th century, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. And by the grace of God, they restored the true way of salvation, which was by believing the gospel of the grace of God – that all human sin had been covered by Christ on the cross, and paid for, and that now, totally apart from any human works or ritual qualification, ceremonialism, a person could accept that gospel, and he would be qualified to go to heaven.

Acts 16:31 puts it very succinctly: "Believe the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." The word "believe" means to trust. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it (this salvation) is a gift from God, not of works, lest any man should boast." It's all very clear. It's a gift system. And the reformers understood that. But Satan always is in the background to try to take the edge off of where he's being conquered. And this great conquest had the edge taken off of it by the fact that the reformers missed the fact that there was a great difference between Israel, as a body of God's people, and of Christians in the church, as a body of God's people. They did not understand that the church did not replace Israel. They did not understand that the church had nothing whatever to do with Israel.

As we have shown you, the Mosaic code is in abeyance. It is obsolete. It is no longer applicable. From the day of Pentecost, Jew or gentile are saved by the gospel of the grace of God. Therefore, by incorporating the Mosaic Law system into Christianity, they botched it up unintentionally, so that Christians (which was Satan's purpose) very rarely rise to the grace power system that is provided for them: the magnificent life of walking a Christ-like life (the real Christ-like life, not the emotional fakery); and, storing treasures in heaven.

So, today, churches, which have been descended from the Protestant Reformation, are still permeated with the Mosaic Law system – the very thing that Paul is talking about here in Colossians, saying, "Don't do that. Don't get entrapped by that system. They are shadows. They are pictures. Christ has come, so now we have the reality.

**Altars**

However, everywhere you look, what do you see? Well, you walk in churches, and, up front, you see an altar. Altars? Christ died once and for all. What is an altar for? An altar is for making sacrifices on. Well, Roman Catholicism says, "We make a sacrifice. We sacrifice Christ anew in the Mass." But there is no place for any more sacrifice. The book of Hebrews makes it clear. He did it once for, and it's not to be done again. Then you have a specialized priesthood. You couldn't approach God in the Old Testament. You had to go to Him through the priests. And in the New Testament, we're all the priests of God, and we represent ourselves before God. That's totally different. So, someone standing up before that altar gives the idea that we're still back on the Old Testament ground of a specialized priesthood.

**Holy Days**

We don't have any holy days. Come Christmas, churches are packed up. Come Easter, churches are packed out. Come my birthday, everybody stays home. Specialized holy days? Yeah. And they're still suddenly with us, but there is no holy day. Every day is the same in the church-age. They're all holy.

Then we have candles to burn, and we still do that. That's a ritual in the Mosaic Law – incense to burn. That's from the Mosaic Law. And it had meaning. It was a very precious ceremony, the burning of incense, representing the prayers of the saints rising to God.

Then we use Mosaic Law terminology. All the Old Testament of the Ten Commandments are reiterated; that is, all the moral principles are reiterated in the New Testament under the power system of grace. Now you can do it; that is, except for one: the fourth commandment of keeping the Sabbath day (the Saturday worship) holy. That's not there, because that was God's special identifying day with Israel. In Christianity, we have a new special identifying day: the Resurrection Day – Sunday. That's our special day of identification with God today, as a body of church believers.

Well, we know that we don't worship on the seventh day, although some Christians are consistent and they do meet on Saturday. The church down the street here was all jumping and jiving yesterday. But we just change the terminology, and now Sunday has become our Sabbath day. That's what I was taught, till I realized that that cannot be. That's playing with words, and making them mean what we want them to mean.

**Liturgy**

We have these ritualistic procedures in a church service, liturgical that's right out of the Mosaic Law. We have the tithing principle right out of the Mosaic Law. In the New Testament, nine-tenths doesn't belong to you. It all belongs to God. And as His steward, you're expected to be faithful, and you go to Him and say, "What do you want me to do?" And He lays something upon your heart, and He guides you in your giving. Then He sees to it that your resources are reinforced, so that you can continue being a steward.

**Dietary Laws**

Then we have these dietary laws. I can eat certain things, and I can't eat other things. Now those have some merit, but they are not religious matters anymore. It is good not to eat certain foods, but that's because of health reasons.

**Circumcision**

Then circumcision was viewed as an act of salvation. Well, it never was. It was introducing the male to all the privileges that belonged to him, appertaining to his place in Judaism. But we substitute water baptism of Christians. And what do we do? We take something that, during the age of the Jews, you did this to a Jewish boy when he was 8 days old. So, the Reformers worked out: "Well, water baptism is substituted for that. This had no scriptural ground. No infant baptism is ever found in Scripture – as practice, it is not ever taught.

All of these, very subtly, were imposed because they didn't understand that there's been a break – a new beginning from the day of Pentecost. These Mosaic Law practices are never found in the New Testament, as applicable to the Christians of the church age. They're simply imposed by human viewpoint theology.

So, Paul is warning these Colossians Christians that they will pay a very great price if they follow the false teachers and say, "We must do the Mosaic Law." That was the first church conference in the book of Acts. They all had to get together. The legalizers were Christians, but they were saying, "The Mosaic Law is still all applicable. Christianity is just added to the Mosaic Law." Finally, they had a church conference, and they had all the big dogs there. And they concluded: "No, the Mosaic Law is now obsolete, and nothing of it applies to Christianity.

So, Paul tells them that if they insist on following these false teachers, and trying to live under elements of the obsolescent Mosaic Law system, they will be robbed of what Paul calls, in verse 18, "Defrauded of your prize." What is your prize? Well, we've gone over that in great detail. It is the capacity to be Christ-like – the capacity to live the life of Christ. Can you do that? No. Can the Holy Spirit do it through you? You betcha. And if you don't get away from emotionalism; if you don't get away from running with the crowd; and, if you don't get away from the objective standards of doctrine, Satan will rob you of your prize. And the greatest prize of all will be when you stand up at the Judgment Seat of Christ to be evaluated for the fulfillment of your mission of Ephesians 2:10: the works which God has foreordained that we should performed. Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." In the military, we call this the mission. This is the mission. And at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the only question is not going to be whether you're going to heaven or not. You're there. It will be to the extent that you completed the mission successfully. And to that extent you'll be rewarded. There's where the tears start rolling down the faces of Christians, as they realize what might have been, because they missed the boat of the authority of Scripture, and they had no deep things of the Spirit of God in their lives.

The Holy Spirit empowers the Christian who is in temporal fellowship. That means that he's walking in the will of God, and he's in fellowship with the Father. When he steps aside, 1 John 1:9 kicks in, and he confesses; repents; gets back on track; and, all is well. Again, the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers the Christian to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the Mosaic Law. That's the beauty of the system. The Holy Spirit lives out the life of Christ in the church-age believer. What does that mean? It means you get victory over the sin nature. The sin nature is always trying to take you down: morally; socially; physically; and, in every way.

The evil world system of Satan – you beat it, and you beat the devil himself. Scripture says, "Resist Satan, and he will flee from you." How do you do that? You do things God's way, if you know what they are. We have shown you, in Revelation 3:20, that Jesus is knocking at the heart's door. In the picture, where the artist painted Christ knocking at the door, there's no handle and no latch on the outside. As the artist pointed out, the latch is on the inside. You have to open it. And it is not knocking for you to come to salvation. He's knocking there, saying, "Please let Me in, so that I can come in and sit down and have fellowship with you around a meal, and I can be in your life."

That's what the Christian life is all about. That's what the apostle Paul is trying to tell these people in Colossae: "Don't give up that prize of having Christ in your life – Christ running your life. This is where that intuitive concept, that I've been telling you about, comes about. And some of you are beginning to pick that up. We don't hear voices, but I assure you, that we hear His directions. He speaks to our mind. We become so sensitive. We have such a capacity to hold up; to know how to meet the crises; and, to know how to enter the battle, and fight it on to victory. He tells us the mundane things of life that we need to know. And after you get onto this, you never blow anything off. If that thought comes into your mind, you check it out. And, lo and behold, sure enough, God has spoken to you. That's what it means to be in fellowship, and to have the Christ-like life functioning.

Failure to do this will waste your lifespan. The way of religious self-effort; human good sincerity; and, religious ritualism is not the grace way. The more you hang around with large groups of Christians, who are on the emotional jag, you're in high danger. You're highly exposed to losing your way, while you think you're right on target? We all live our lives by a set of standards. That's it. We all live our lives by a set of standards. So, you have to understand that. We can do it by following the Word of God. We say, "There are standards of right and wrong. I know what they are. I read about them in Scripture. I'm going to go with that standard. If God says, "Don't do this – it's wrong, then I don't do this. And because I live in the grace power system of the church-age, I can actually do that.

During the age of the Jew, the Jew many times said, "I don't want to do that," and then he collapsed. The apostle Paul was bemoaning that in the book of Romans. He said, “This is what I want to do that's right, but I do what's wrong.” Then he comes to chapter 7, and he ends that chapter by saying, "Oh, man of sin, what can be my help (something like that)? What shall I do? Then he comes into chapter 8, and he says, "Praise God." And he tells about the power of the Holy Spirit system.

So, we live our lives by a set of standards: standards from God's Word; or, standard from the mind of man, as approved by society. We can live by truism, or by false wisdom.

In 1 Corinthians 1:21, the apostle Paul points this out: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world, through its wisdom, did not come to know God. God was well-pleased, through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who are believers." The world, by its wisdom will never arrive on how to go to heaven. You cannot reason your way. The mind of man will be distorted by sin, and you'll go to a works system. You cannot reason your way to the spiritual life. The mind of man (the sin nature system) will so deceive you, you'll go into emotionalism, and you'll think that you have the real thing. In the wisdom of God, God says, "The world, through its wisdom (that is, the mind of man), does not come to know the truths of God." These spiritual phenomena are not known by human reason: But God was pleased, through the foolishness of the message preached." That simple preacher who is explaining the Bible to the people of God – those are the ones He will save: those, specifically, who say "Amen" to what God has said; that is, they believe it.

In 1 Timothy 6:20-21, the apostle Paul says this to his associated Timothy: "O, Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you." You have to look back over all of our history here. We've been here at Berean Church over 50 years. To how many young people have we entrusted the wisdom of God? To how many young people have we entrusted the grace way of life: that spiritual power system. And how many of them have not esteemed it, and they have drifted off? And how often have their lives really been shipwrecked? How often will they look back with regret?

Down the street here, on 6th street, for years, there was a magnificent magnolia tree. I thought of this yesterday, as I passed that location again. And it would have those white magnolia blossoms on it, periodically, at this time of the year. But it went all the way to the ground. You couldn't see any trunk. And somebody decided to give it a trunk. So, they cut the limbs off all around. Then it was six feet or more off the ground. But every place they cut that trunk, there is a great big wad of a scar.

That's how we play the religious of Satan's world system. Eventually, we have to break off things. And there is forgiveness, and there is sometimes an ugly scar, and sometimes it's a fatal scar. I couldn't help looking at that tree again: how lovely it was when it had all those branches; and, now how many scars that are on that tree. Christians look back and say, "How could I have done that? How could I have been so foolish? How could I have been so blinded?" Well, you moved with the wrong crowd. You got out of the principles of church-age power. And pretty soon, you're back on your own.

"Oh, Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter, and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed, and thus gone astray from the faith." Hi is saying again what he said earlier in the book of 1 Corinthians: "Man, by wisdom, does not know God." The only way you come to know the spiritual phenomena is out of the Bible. And the only way you get to know Him out of the Bible is if you walk into a church where the preacher stands up; he knows what his job is; he has the gift to do it; he's been trained to do it; and, he explains what God says. Then you will know. The Lord Jesus Christ has made all this possible for us.

However, here in Colossians, all of this is being threatened for this group of Christens by these false teachers. So, Paul gives them the warning not to let the legalism of the old Mosaic system rob them of their spiritual prize. And, how is that done? How is that going to happen? In Colossians 2:18, he says, "It happens by delighting in self-abasement." The word "delighting" looks like this in the Greek, just to help you to understand what this is: "thelo." This word actually means "to wish" or "to will."

**"Something More"**

So, he says, "Let no one wish or will to lead you to find satisfaction in something." These people were trying to find satisfaction in something. So, this word is translated as: "this is what they delighted in." This refers to sincere people, but misguided. They have an enthusiasm for the teachings of false teachers in Colossae. These Colossians teachers are unsaved, and they're full of their human viewpoint selves. And Paul is saying, "Be careful of people who delight in something that they should not be happy about." That should cause them to recoil, and say, "Just a minute." Is this of God? Teachers who have been deceived by their sin nature, in all sincerity, think they possess superior spiritual knowledge to that of the apostle Paul. They said, "Oh, yeah, what Paul did, that's good. But we have something more." And they felt free to pass judgment on these Christians who said, "No, we think Paul is right. We go with grace. We do not incorporate the legalistic system of human works as was characterized by the Mosaic Law."

Unsaved people and carnal Christians are blind to the arrogance of their intellectual attitudes. So, it makes them think that they have some superior thoughts. And what is it that they're so proud about? Well, they are proud about self-abasement. This is one of those nice Greek words that goes on forever. It's like "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious." That's a nice word, too. Well, this one is: "tapeinophrosune," but it has a simple meaning. It connotes an attitude of humility – a lowliness of mind. There is nothing wrong with this word. It has significant views here in Colossians 3:12, for example: "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility (same word), gentleness, and patience." That's a good "tapeinophrosune." That is a good humility there.

This word is also used in Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from self-confidence or empty conceit, but with humility of mind (there it is). Let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look on your own personal interests, but on the interests of others." Do not, then, operate from empty conceit (the opposite is the humility of mind). That's using that word in a good way.

However, here in Colossians, the apostle Paul is using this word to mean a humility which is a false humility. This is a humility that these people wanted to put on. This is a humility that they actually had great pride in. This was not a humility that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Charles Dickens, in his novel, "David Copperfield," has a character called Uriah Heep. Uriah Heep is always going around showing how humble of a man he is. And in one place, he says, "I am well aware that I am the humblest person going." That was Uriah Heep. And I heard of the congregation whose pastor, they thought, had shown such a great spirit of humility. And they esteemed him for it. So, one day, they had one of the representatives award him a medal. That is something that has never happened here, and not likely. They gave him a medal for his humility. And he very graciously received it. The next Sunday, he wore it on his lapel, and they took it back for his pride. So, you can very quickly lose your humility medal if you're not careful.

What Paul was talking about is these false teachers putting out this front of humility in contrast to genuine humility. For example, here is genuine humility in Colossians 3:12: "And so, those have been chosen by God: holy; beloved; the heart of compassion; kindness; and, humility," as we had in Philippians 2:3. This is genuine humility. There is nothing wrong with this word or this idea. It is a Christ like quality. We may add 1 Peter 5:5: "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders, and all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

So, here it is. When you're young, you really tend to have a very swelled head about yourself. To the younger men: "Listen to those older guys. They really are smarter than you in experience. They may not have any better IQ, and they may not have any better education, but they have a walk with God, and they have an experiential knowledge that you should consider. And this kind of humility, the apostle Paul recommends and commends.

**Feelings**

The Colossian false teachers took pride in a different kind of humility. They had a mystical religious. It was all based upon their subjective feelings. It was apart from the objective content of doctrine and Scripture. It was all disconnected from thoughtful processes. Everything was touchy-feely – how they felt.

This is characteristic of many religious groups today. They're seeking the deep things of God by an emotional looking into themselves. This is driven by the sin nature, not by the Holy Spirit. You look in yourself, and you'll find nothing, but you look into the Word of God, and you'll find Christ. And when that's in you, you have your frame of reference. False teachers in Colossae claim to have a special insight from God. That was something more than just churches Bible doctrine from the Scriptures.

I remember a very prominent entertainer – a pretty good singer man. All of you would know him. He got into the charismatic movement, and he was interviewed on TV one time. And he said, "Before I got into the charismatic movement, all I had was doctrine. Now I have something more." What he had something more of was how he felt about things: the emotionalism; and, the kicks. And what a loss that's going be. That is like a movie I saw recently of myself quite a few years ago, when I was real trim, and real slim, but that was nothing. Now I gave something more. A lot of these Christians have something more that they can do without, and yet they think they have something more advantageous.

So, the Colossians are subject to the hazard of being robbed of their church-age grace prize, and with that, their eternal rewards in heaven. That subjective, emotional card is characteristic of religious groups today.

**Angel Worship**

There is also something else that's the problem here. This deceit is a combo. These Colossian false teachers are telling these people things. First of all, they're coming at them with a certain false humility – a self-abasement. Normally it is a good thing, but in their case, it was not a good thing. It was being used by them to do something that the sin nature wanted to do, and that is that they wanted to worship angels.

The word "worship" looks like this in the Greek. It's the Greek word, "threskei." You wouldn't understand what this word "worship" really means, but the Greek word gives us the clue. This is worship, which should be "love; allegiance; and, submission to deity. The old English word was "worthship." When you worship God, what are you doing? You're recognizing his worthiness. But this word in the Greek refers to the external aspects – the ceremonial features of religion. It is actually the practice of religion. It is all the externals that are meaningless in religion.

So, these people say, "We're going to be really humble. We're not worthy to approach God, and we need somebody qualified to approach God. And angels are the thing. That's where we're headed for. The worship of angels. They can give us a point of contact with God." Jesus Christ can't do that?

**The Externality of Religion**

This word is used in Acts 26:4-5. I'll give you a little idea of the externality of religious practices. Paul says, "So then, all Jews know my manner of life, from my youth, which, from the beginning, was spent among my own nation and Jerusalem. They have known about me from a long time previously, if they are willing to testify that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion." And there's the word. Whatever the religious practices were of the externality of being a Pharisee, Paul said, "I was number one. None of my compatriots of my age came anywhere near my faithfulness in doing the rituals and all of these systems of externality.

James 1:26-27: "If anyone thinks himself to be religious." Some people say, "Yeah, on a holy day, I go to church. You betcha. Come Christmas, or come New Year, or come Easter, I'm going to be in church. I go through religious rituals of one kind and another. And I do these religiously, because God is pleased if I do this: "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion (his externalities of practice) are worthless, meaning nothing.

Verse 27: "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and father: to visit orphans and widows in their distress; and, to keep oneself unstained by the world."

James 1:26-27 is biblically inconsistent with the religion of the world. The Holy Spirit works of mercies and moral purity are characteristic of a godly person. True worship of God is characteristic of loving God, and of having a godly lifestyle – not the externalities of what you do. God's emphasis in the worship is on him: not on religious rituals' unrighteous living; and, not on one's conduct.

When I was in the Marine Corps, on a visit to Peking, I had an occasion to be on a tour with another officer. And we had a guided who was very good. His name was Buddha. And one of the places he took us into was a kind of a dim place. When we walked in, I thought there were two huge posts there. And when my eyes got used to it, I looked up, and there was a giant Buddha standing there, looking down. What do you think was on the table in front of the Buddha? It was a table full of votive candles, just like in Roman Catholic Churches – to light a candle to get this favor from God – to get this externality.

Now, the Buddha took a taper and lit it, and said, "Lieutenant, you light this candle, you have long life. This is the Buddha of long life." So, he gave it to me, and I said, "No, I already have long life." So, he gave it to my friend, who was a Catholic, and he knew just what to do with it. He took it, and lit a couple of them. I wonder how things are with him today, and the promise related to lighting that candle – the externality to get a favor from God. Is that how it works?

You might say, "Oh, no. I wouldn't do something like that." Yes, you would. You just do it with more subtlety, and with more finesse. And you do it because you have the encouragement of other people all around you to do it. But when it comes down to, say, "Looking at the Word of God and the practice of Scripture, I'm not there." And in some churches, it's very hard to rise to the Christ-like life. You have too many currents going against you. And it is tricky to give the challenge even from the pulpit.

**Rituals in the Catholic Church**

Now, these externalities developed in the medieval church over a period of time. And every one of them is what Paul is talking about. This being proud of a certain worship which is in externals. And what is it, specifically? It is the worship of angels. Please, notice this (a quick rundown). In the medieval church, which eventuated in the Roman Catholic Church, prayers for the dead were introduced in 310 A.D. The lighting of candles became a ritual in 320 A.D. The worship of saints became a ritual in 375 A.D. The Mass was adopted in 394 A.D. The worship adoration of Mary began in 430 A.D. The priest began to assume distinctive robes in 500 A.D. The doctrine of purgatory was introduced by Gregory the Great in 593 A.D. In certain circles, he is viewed as one of the great all time evangelists of the Christian church. Worship in Latin was mandated in 600 A.D. That has since been repealed. The claim to papal supremacy took firm hold in 606 A.D. The Pope, when he speaks from his throne, speaks for God. Feasts in honor of the Virgin Mary began in 650 A.D. The custom of kissing the Pope's foot was introduced in 709 A.D. When I was in Rome, they had a statue of Peter. And I noticed that Peter's foot was really smooth and clean. People were coming up and kissing it.

The worship of images and relics was authorized in 788 A.D. The invention of holy water was in 850 A.D. The canonization of saints was formalized in 993 A.D. The feasts for the dead were introduced and 1003 A.D. Celibacy of the priesthood was declared in 1074 A.D. The dogma of papal infallibility was announced in 1076 A.D. Prayer beads were introduced in 1090. The doctrine that there were seven sacraments was introduced in 1140 A.D. The sale of indulgences began in 1190 A.D. The wafer was substituted for the loaf in the Lord's Supper in 1200 A.D. And that wafer then became around, because, coming from Babylon, that was the sign of the sun-god. The dogma of transubstantiation was adopted in 1215 A.D. Confession was instituted in 1215 A.D. The adoration of the wafer began in 1220 A.D. – lifting it up instead of the body of Christ, as the priest does. The Ave Maria was introduced in 1316 A.D. The cup of wine was taken from the laity in 1415 A.D. I think that has been changed also. Purgatory was officially declared in 1439 A.D. Roman tradition was placed on the same level as Scripture in 1546 A.D. The Apocrypha was received into the canon in 1546 A.D. The Immaculate Conception of Mary was announced in 1854 A.D. – that Mary was born sinless. The doctrine of the temporal power of the Pope was proclaimed in 1864 A.D. And the physical presence of the Virgin Mary in heaven was declared in 1950 A.D.

All of these are what Paul was talking about – the periphery of ritualism. If that's all you have, you have nothing.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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