*Grace Group Study Guide*

*Greater* ***>*** *Week 16*

*Colossians 2:20-23*

We’ve dealt with quite a bit of deceptive philosophies in the last several weeks that can be quite destructive to the believer if not realized and corrected. I want to take our time this week, however, and discuss why we gravitate towards these behaviors, and also the mindset that helps us to combat them. Hopefully, you’ve picked up on the idea that one of the reasons we gravitate towards lists of rules and do’s and don’ts is because it’s a tangible list of things we can complete and check off. I don’t make physical lists, but I do compile mental ones, and I love it at the end of the day when I can check off those “to-do’s” that I’ve accomplished. It gives me a sense of fulfillment and it’s much more specific than thinking to myself, “I got a lot accomplished today.” In the same way, many of us on a spiritual level love to sit down at the end of the day or week and say “Ok, I did this and this and that and I bet the Lord is incredibly impressed with me,” rather than reflecting on a day, or week, and saying “Am I abiding in the True Vine?”

It’s easy for us to get wrapped up in all sorts of “spiritual things” and completely neglect the things that God has actually called us to do.

I say that because I want to speak to us that have played the part of the legalist or gnostic or ascetic. I think that 9 times out of 10, we’re coming from what we think is a place of good intentions. We see someone else struggling, and we think we have a solution for them so we share it but in reality all we’re doing is putting even more expectations on their spiritual life. We see a new believer floundering and we want to share a bit of knowledge with them. Even good intentions can get us and others into trouble. Let me share some examples with you from the Old Testament that I picked up from John MacArthur.

In the first part of Numbers chapter 4, there are very explicit instructions on how the Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be moved. Let’s relate that to specific instructions in the Scriptures on how believers are to live. So we’ve established a clear word from God on a certain thing. Now, fast forward to 2 Samuel chapter 6, where we read about David and his quest to move the Ark. Again, there were specific instructions on how to do it and we read in 2 Samuel that instead of doing it how God said it was to be done, David constructed a cart for the Ark. Read further down and you see that everything is going well until one of the oxen pulling the cart gets a little spooked, and nearly tips the cart over. Uzzah, who is one of the people overseeing the transport, reaches up to prevent the Ark from falling, and touches it (big time no-no!), and God immediately strikes him dead.

Both of these men had great intentions. David sought to bring the Ark back to its rightful home, but neglected to do it the way God intended it to be done. Had they carried it the way it was meant to be carried (with poles on the shoulders of the Levites), Uzzah would have never been put in the situation he was in (also coming from a place of good intentions). But, as it was, one person made a bad decision based on good intentions, and it cost another their life. And herein lies a tremendous principle as we deal with the ins and outs of our walk with the Lord – God desires obedience. More than our adherence to lists of strict rule and regulations. More than our clever and innovative methods of worship. More than our refraining from the pleasures of this earth. More than all of these things that make us look so spiritual. God wants our obedience.

There is another very specific example in 1 Samuel chapter 15- we see Samuel come to Saul with very specific instructions from the Lord. The instruction was this: rid the world of the Amalekites – ALL of them. And for the most part, he followed orders, except he took Agag, king of the Amalekites captive. Not only did they spare the king, they kept the best of the animals, which was another direct act of disobedience against God. God said, “I’m grieved that I set Saul as king over the people” and Samuel wept profusely over this act of disobedience. The next morning, Samuel sets out to meet Saul and when he does, Saul is head over heels proud of himself and says “I’ve done everything God said to do.” Samuel then reminds him of the fact that there are all sorts of animals and one Amalekite king that weren’t utterly destroyed. Saul has the best response to that – he says “Yeah, I kept the best of everything so we could make a sacrifice to God.” He disobeyed God, but it was in the name of worship!

Well, that was a solid answer if there ever was one – but Samuel’s response is one of the most insightful things into the heart of God that we see in all of Scripture: *“has the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord. Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams.”*

Great intentions all around, but again, God wants obedience. These people in Colossae might have had great intentions but their methods were all wrong. Once we get a little bit off track, a derailment is imminent. Sometimes our actions only affect ourselves, but oftentimes, they also affect others.

There’s another account in 1 Kings 13 of a Prophet of the Lord who came to share a word with Jeroboam and again, he had his specific instructions from God and he carried them out. Jeroboam invited him to come to his house and eat and drink with him and the prophet said that he couldn’t because he had specific instructions from the Lord. So he went about his way, and later on encountered *another* prophet. That prophet invited him to come to his house and eat and drink and once again the prophet declined because he had a specific command from God not to do so. The other prophet (supposedly an older, wiser prophet) then told him a lie, saying that he’d received word from an angel that he was indeed supposed to join him at his home. Now he was in a pickle. He KNEW he had a command from God, but this other prophet said that he also had a word and the two commands were very different. Eventually the prophet relents and goes against the command that God had given him, and later on is attacked by a lion and killed. The Scripture even tells us that the lion didn’t consume the prophet or his donkey – he was simply a tool of divine judgement.

In this story we have the classic example of someone who knows what is right, but allows themselves to be led astray by a seemingly more *seasoned, spiritual* person. All of these things are different examples of the same truth that Paul drives home to the Colossian believers. If we want to do right by God and please Him, then we MUST make His word the center of our focus and obedience to it our passion. Let’s remember, friends, that we have an intimate relationship with the Most High God. He loves us. We have union with Him. Our walk with Him means knowing Him, listening to His voice, and obeying Him implicitly and immediately.

Read these texts: Matthew 17:1-8 (emphasis on v. 5 & 8); John 15:4-5; Hebrews 13:20-21 (Who does the equipping?)

What do these verses have in common regarding the pre-eminence of Christ and our actions? Can you think of any other verses in this genre? (If you need a place to start, consider Phil. 2)

In light of the fact that the righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:17), what will our lives look like if we walk by faith in the reality of these verses?