

Don't be Defrauded of Your Prize

I. How to ruin your faith

Being 'religious' is like a miserable fad diet – it's all about restrictions, prohibitions and rituals.

A. Fads – the latest alternative spirituality, private revelation

"... promoting self-made religion...insisting on worship of angels, taking his stand on visions." (v. 18, 23)

1. Mysticism - the path to God is through inner mystical experiences or seeking special knowledge.

(Adding to work of Christ by seeking special, private revelation or altered state of mind.)

Worship of angels

Angels themselves – influenced the by pagan practice of looking to spiritual mediators.

Or, trying to 'enter' heavenly worship - conducting worship like the angels in heaven.

But Christ came down.

"It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'who will go up to heaven for us to get it'...but the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."
(Deut. 30:12, 14)

Visions - ecstatic state of mind

The false teacher is basing his authority on his private, special revelation.

Elitism – v. 18 lit. "trying to 'enter' into some vision of **their own.**"

"Do I not fill heaven and earth? I have heard the [false] prophets who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed. They lead My people astray.'" (Jer 23:25)

False Humility - what appears to be super spiritual is really not spiritual at all but fleshly, sensuous.

"Let no one disqualify you...puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joint and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." (vv. 18-19)

2. Outcome – defrauded

Disqualified – made to feel like an outsider, because you haven't had these 'spiritual' experiences.

This kind of thinking robs you, "*defrauding you of your prize.*" (v. 18) Which is Christ.

No Growth – disconnected from Christ, like headless torsos cut off from the source of life.

B. Restrictions, prohibitions, asceticism

"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch...these have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body." (20,23)

1. Asceticism – Earning God's acceptance through restrictions and self-abasement.

(Adding to work of Christ by subtracting - taking things away from yourself)

Self-abasement - self-punishment as a means of paying for your sins. Trying to appease God.

Legalism – conforming to taboos that aren't in scripture

Piety – personal holiness is defined by keeping rules. Do's and Don'ts.

These prohibitions - are "*human precepts and teaching,*" and go beyond scripture. (22)

Don't submit – because these are "*things that all perish when as they are used*" and you've died "*to the elemental spirits of this world.*" You belong to Christ and the new age.

"It is sub-Christian to deny the good gifts of a bountiful Creator in the cause of an advanced spirituality. It would be a strange road to Christ-likeness to refuse the blessings that Christ had made." (Lucas, 112)

Appearance of wisdom - "*but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*" (v.23)

2. Outcome - enslaving

No Value – it doesn't work, it doesn't get rid of our sinful desires.

"The old taboos put the wild animals of lust and hatred into cages: there they remain, alive and dangerous a constant threat to their captor." (Wright, 128)

No power – to change the human heart. "*The law made nothing perfect.*" (Heb. 7:19)

"Whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him because it does not go into the heart...but the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man." (Matt 15:17-19)

C. Empty Form - religious performance

"Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath." (v. 16)

1. Ritualism - The way to know God is through mechanical religious observance.

(Adding to the work of Christ by adhering to traditions and regulations not required in scripture.)

Judgment/exclusion

Excluded from belonging to the people of God on "*the basis of the Law's regulations which no longer stand in the way.*" (The law's demands can't condemn us. Jesus paid our debt.) (Wright, 119)

Extending Old Testament regulations.

Food and drink – reference to OT kosher laws, which were "*extended to include wine as well as food. Perhaps a wider application of regulations*" originally designated for those consecrated for service or priestly ministry. I.e. Nazarite vows (Wright, 119)

Observance of holy days

Jewish festivals and the Sabbath, which were meant to point to Jesus.

A test of orthodoxy

"The genuineness of a person's profession of faith has been measured by their stance on drinking alcohol, or the use of tobacco, or the company they keep. Or the faithfulness of a church is gauged by its style of worship, or observance or otherwise of the high days and holy days of the Christian calendar." (Johnston, 69)

Shadows of the age to come

"The dietary and calendar laws were only temporary. They were given by God to prepare His people for the coming of Christ. God's intrusion into the most mundane aspects of their life – what they ate and how they used their time – was meant to foreshadow the fact that He would come in person through His Son as the one who is the Lord of life in its totality." (Johnston, 69,70)

Christ is the fulfillment – Christ ushers in a new age

"When the perfect is come, the partial is done away." (I Cor 13:10)

2. Outcome - burdensome

Exclusion or condemnation

"When a judgmental spirit gets into a church it not only does serious damage to its internal fellowship, it also becomes a major hindrance to the gospel and the way it is perceived by those outside the church." (Johnston, 68)

No substance – Going back to shadows means you miss Christ, the Lord of life and source of life.

"False zeal is responsible for much spiritual misery. It denies Christians what God has not denied them, and commands of them what God has not required. Only false zeal could presume to want to make the 'substance' which is Christ, more substantial still." (Lucas, 118)

Q. Where do we find the substance and the power to grow in our faith?

What is of value? What qualifies you? What frees you from judgment & condemnation?

II. How to Grow in your faith

Relationship with Jesus, the Lord of life

"Our problem is not that we don't know enough about Christ, it is a failure to appreciate what we already have in Him." (TCH)

A. Substance – is found in Christ

Come to Me – *"all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest...My burden is light."*
(Matt 11:28)

Context – Jesus accused of doing what wasn't 'lawful' on Sabbath - burdensome extra-biblical rules.

Jesus is "Lord of the Sabbath" – Sabbath established for man to find his rest in God. We rest or rely
"not on who we are, or what we can do, or how we feel or what we know, but on Jesus and what He has done. And He has done everything." (Lloyd-Jones, 77)

B. Power

Power comes from being connected to Christ - What is true of Jesus is true of you.
When you believed, you were united to Christ in His life, death & resurrection.

Life - Qualified, Christ's perfect record is yours. He lived to satisfy all of the law's demands. *"He has qualified us...redeemed us...forgiven us...and transferred us into his kingdom." (Col 1:12-13) "You have indeed done for us all our works." (Is 26:12)*

Death – “With Christ you died to elemental spirits of the world.”(v. 20) “He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you holy and blameless and beyond reproach.” (1:22)

Resurrection - You are connected to Jesus and the power of His “*indestructible life*” (Heb 7:16)
“He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:25)

C. Growth

From God - “Hold fast to the head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together... grows with a growth that is from God.” (v. 19) Source of our life is from the head, Christ. Stay attached. Abide in Him.

Holdfast – to Christ and to what He has given to us. *Handle, taste and touch!*

Handle God’s Word – the “*living and active*” Word of God transforms us.

“All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be **complete**, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Taste and touch – Communion “*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*” (Ps. 34:8)

The bread and the wine are tangible reminders of His body and blood. Which were given to us, telling us that we belong, and that He is coming back.

Remember –Christ is holding on to you. “*In Him all things hold together.*” (1:17)

The Holdfast

By George Herbert

“All things are more ours by being His.
What Adam had and forfeited for all,
Christ keepeth now who cannot fail or fall.”

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