**True Spiritual Growth**

Colossians 2:16-23

**Introduction**

The use of performance-enhancing drugs by professional athletes has been acknowledged as a problem since the 1960s. Many have been found to use drugs to quickly “bulk up,” increasing muscle mass and strength by means of steroids and hormones. What may be true of these athletes’ means to physical growth could be similar to the growth of certain Christians and ministries. Christians can bulk up spiritually—more Bible reading, serving, church attendance, prayer, standards—but is that real growth? How to grow spiritually is the subject of many books, sermons, and even songs. That’s a good thing, in that it ought to be the desire of every believer to grow spiritually.

The Colossians were concerned about their spiritual growth; they wanted to be free from the rule of sin and to live lives pleasing to God. Unfortunately, they were being fed a lie about the means to spiritual growth. They were tempted to go after the spiritual bulk put on by the false teachers of their day, who loaded up on rules, seemed strong in denying themselves, and had amazing stories of religious experiences and visions. Paul, however, did not count their growth as real, legitimate spiritual growth. Up to this point in his letter, he has emphasized the supremacy, sufficiency, and completeness in Christ. He now deals with the false teachers more directly, and we will consider the messages the believers in Colossae were hearing from them as we consider the true source of spiritual growth.

1. **They were led to believe that spiritual growth is possible through keeping certain rules. (v. 16-17)** 
   1. They were judged because they did not keep certain aspects of the Old Testament. (v. 16)
      * 1. Judge - passing a personal judgment on someone's actions, often in a negative sense; to criticize, condemn, or find fault with.
        2. There were those who wanted to judge them on the basis of their diet.
        3. They also wanted to judge them on the basis of their observance of holy days.
   2. Two reasons are presented as to why Christians are not to be judged by these areas. (v. 17)
2. Since you have been forgiven by God, there is no one who can judge you.
3. Those items have their place only as a shadow of the relationship with Christ.
4. Shadow - prophetically, it speaks of the relation of type to antitype; foreshadowing.
5. Body - it speaks figuratively of a substance or reality in contrast to a shadow.
6. For example, some have asked, “Should Christians observe the Sabbath?”
   * 1. The Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament.
     2. The early believers gathered on Sunday. (See Mark 16:1; John 20:1; Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2).
     3. Paul referred to it as a shadow. Now, we have Christ. It is not binding.
     4. Why would they go back to the shadows when they have Christ?
   1. “Because it is in Christ that you have spiritual fullness, Paul is saying, do not let anyone impose upon you a program of spiritual development that does not have Christ at its heart.” (Moo)
7. **They were led to believe that spiritual growth is possible through certain practices. (v. 18)**
   1. There were those who acted like a referee in their lives.
8. Beguile – to decide against, as an umpire; to rob of a prize; to condemn; to deprive of a spiritual reward; to disqualify; to judge unworthy.
9. Paul is saying, “Let no one disqualify you” or “Let no one judge that you should not receive the prize.”
   1. Paul describes them as those who delight in humility.
10. Normally, this is a positive characteristic, but the context is negative.
11. They delight in a false humility. They humble themselves through their rigid religious practices.
    1. They were involved in the worship of angels.
12. “Many Jewish apocalyptic texts refer to angelic worship.” (Moo)
13. It is for this reason that Paul has so highlighted the superiority of Christ over all spiritual beings.
    1. They made much of their religious experiences.
14. “Intruding” – entering into.
15. This is a person who goes on and on about some experience or vision they purportedly had.
16. As a result, he is puffed up (inflated) in his mind.
17. **Central Idea: Although the believers in Colossae were being led to believe otherwise, spiritual growth is possible only in obedience to and dependence upon Christ. (v. 19-23)** 
    1. Paul expressed a major problem with their religious experiences. (v. 19)
18. “The false teachers were apparently professing Christians, who, because of their preoccupation with rules and spiritual beings and visions, had lost contact with the only effective source of spiritual growth…[They] have been making far too big a deal of matters that do not get to the essence of true Christian spirituality: the change of heart and mind that leads to true holiness.” (Moo)
19. They lacked connection to Christ.
    1. Holding - following a doctrine, creedal confession, or course of life; to hold fast to; to keep hold of; to continue firmly in.
    2. Having nourishment – vigor supplied to the body; to be supported.
    3. Knit together – united together; to be joined.
    4. Increase – growth; used figuratively in the New Testament of the church as Christ's body, whether increasing in numbers or spiritual maturity. Here the emphasis would be on their spiritual maturity.
20. “The body of Christ grows as its members, or parts, support and learn from each other….Paul’s main point here is not how the members facilitate growth but how the ultimate source of the body’s growth is Christ, its head.” (Moo)
    1. Paul causes them to think biblically about their situation. (v. 20-23)
       1. Since they are complete in Christ and under His authority, there is no need to be under rules that do not come from Christ. (v. 21-22)
       2. They may have an appearance of wisdom. (v. 23a) It is actually man-made. “Will-worship” means self-made religion; would-be religion; a set of religious beliefs and practices resulting from one's own desires and initiative; a self-imposed religion; a religion thought up by oneself.
       3. It is a false humility.
       4. “Neglecting the body” refers to severe self-control, suggesting an ascetic and unsparing attitude; asceticism. “Neglecting the body…does not nourish the spirit.”
    2. These practices lack value in restraining the flesh. Instead of producing spiritual growth, such an emphasis leads into the indulgence of the flesh!
21. **Application: The means of spiritual growth is a relationship with Christ.**
    1. Do you have contact with the source of spiritual growth?
       1. Your source of spiritual growth is not a list of rules, self-affliction, another person, a book, a program, or a church.
       2. Your source of spiritual growth is Christ.
    2. Thus, the means of spiritual growth is a relationship with Christ.
       1. Reading the Bible is God’s means of knowing Christ.
       2. Prayer is God’s means of relating to Christ.
       3. Service calls on you to rely on Christ.
    3. Are you under His headship?
       1. Are you properly connected to members of His body? Is the body functioning under His headship? Is every part providing (supplying) His nourishment to every part?
       2. He is sufficient. He can sustain you through any trial. He can change the direction of any life.
       3. People may be looking outside of Christ for help not because He is insufficient, but because we as Christians are not properly connected to our Head (Christ).
       4. Since spiritual growth is only possible through Christ, we need to bring people into contact with Christ.

**Conclusion**

We should not stress rules without relationship. God wants more for your life than empty religious motions and practices. He wants a growing relationship through Christ.