**The Reality Is Found in Christ**

**The Word**

Read together Colossians 2:16-23

**The Big Idea**

Often we’re tempted to seek spiritual fullness in spiritual philosophies, techniques, observances, or practices, but fullness is found in Jesus alone. Our spiritual journeys are simply journeys deeper into Christ himself: who he is, what he has accomplished for us, and how we can surrender more and more our ourselves to him.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. On Sunday we discussed the common temptation to think there is something apart from Christ that we need to pursue in order to unlock true fullness in our lives. Where specifically do you find yourself searching for greater fullness apart from Christ?

2. As you consider the three specific temptations in Colossae, and as you look at the church culture in America today, what are the “hollow and deceptive” philosophies people are buying into that you are most concerned about?

3. Sunday’s message was a call back to simplicity: “a pure and simple devotion to Christ.” How does that call strike you at this time in your life? Is there anything specific you would like to start doing or stop doing?

4. Consider how you are currently engaging spiritual practices (such as Bible reading, prayer, or church attendance). In what ways is your engagement of those practices actually an engagement with Jesus himself, and in what ways do you think you need to refocus how you’re going about those practices?

**Digging Deeper**

Read Galatians 3:1-5. Consider Paul’s poignant question in that passage: “After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” How does that question strike you in this season of your life?

**Sermon Outline**

I. The Issue in Colossae

 A. The Colossians had experienced fullness in coming to faith in Jesus Christ

B. But then a group came from the outside promising greater “fullness” through religious practices, rituals, and experiences.

 1. They were “judging” (v. 16) and “disqualifying”(v. 18) the Colossians

2. The Colossians were beginning to wonder if they were missing out on greater spiritual fullness

 C. Paul is writing to warn them and encourage them to stay focused on Christ

1. These other philosophies depend on “human tradition” and “worldly principles” vs. Christ who embodies the fullness of God (v. 8-9)

2. These other philosophies are “hollow and deceptive”: They look impressive on the outside, but they can’t ultimately deliver on this promise of fullness.

II. The specific temptations in Colossae

 A. Religious rituals and observances (v. 16-17)

1. An ancient Judaism was creeping back into the church

2. It’s tempting to think that if we can connect with something ancient, we’ll tap into fullness

3. And there are ancient observances and practices that can be helpful to our faith, but that’s not where true fullness is found

4. These are mere shadows, and Christ is the true reality (v. 17)

 B. Impressive spiritual experiences (v. 18-19)

1. The idea is that certain mysterious, powerful spiritual experiences and visions authentic your faith and lead to a higher form of spirituality

2. But in reality these were actually “unspiritual” (v. 18) in that they were man-centered, and they had “lost connection with the head: Jesus” (v. 19)

3. It’s tempting to think there are certain powerful spiritual experiences we need to have in order to enter a higher or fuller form of spirituality

4. And spiritual experiences can be wonderful, and the Spirit often gives us powerful experiences of Jesus and what we’ve received through him (Paul himself had many), but that’s not where fullness is found. Fullness is found in Christ himself.

C. Vigorous spiritual disciplines (v. 20-23)

1. Notice the language: “Do not handle, do not touch . . . rules and regulations . . . harsh treatment of the body.” This is a rigorous program of discipline.

2. The perspective here is that through strict personal discipline, I can achieve a higher level of spiritual living.

3. On the one hand, spiritual discipline can be a good thing. Paul himself was very disciplined (“I beat my body and make it my slave”) and he encouraged discipline (“train yourselves to be godly”), but that’s not where fullness is found.

4. All this discipline lacks any power in restraining the “indulgence of the flesh” (v. 23). The flesh is that whole part of us that wants independence, control, ego.

And all this discipline can actually enhance the flesh (consider the Pharisees: they were very disciplined but their flesh was very active in pride, greed, love of approval, love of money, and self-righteousness)

5. Discipline can help shape behavior and habits but it cannot transform the heart, only Christ does that. The flesh doesn’t need to be restrained, it needs to be killed, and that only happens by surrendering it to Christ.

III. How do we respond today?

A. A call to a pure and simple devotion to Christ (2 Cor 11:13)

1. In our contemporary Christian world, one of the challenges is actually the wealth of spiritual and religious resources we have available to us (books, blogs, podcasts, conferences, apps, etc.)

2. All of this can create the assumption that I’m missing out on something and if I could just engage in enough of these things or find just the right one for me, I’ll find greater fullness

3. Let’s pursue simplicity in this. We have Jesus himself! Fullness is found in him, not a program, practice, philosophy, resource, or discipline

4. So the call is simple: look to him. Enjoy him. Trust him. Follow him. Surrender each day to him. Our faith is in him.

B. Consider our religious practices: how can engaging them be an engagement with Jesus himself?

 1. Scripture reading

 a. Do we view the Bible as a wall or a window

1). Are we reading it like a wall to check a box, fill our heads with information, get a practical nugget for the day?

2). Or are we reading it like a window through which we can engage Jesus, know him, enjoy him, trust him, obey him?

 b. Consider the Pharisees in John 5:39-40

2. Sunday church service

a. Am I here out of habit, to see friends, to have a nice place for my children to go, to hear good music?

b. Or am I here to engage with Jesus through his body?

Consider v. 19 in our passage: through Jesus, the head, the whole body grows and builds itself up. Do I experience Jesus himself through his gathered body?