

Sometimes when I'm preaching my way through a book of the Bible, I get surprised at just how 'in depth' it is... And I've gotta tell you, Colossians is catching me out over and over again. And the Bible reading for today, we're going to take it over two weeks.

So today's Part A, and the heading is "Growing in Christ."

The Growing Kingdom, and our personal "Growth **in** the Kingdom" are key images we find throughout the New Testament....

- The seed that gets planted and grows, but it's not the farmer who **makes** it grow (Mark 4:26);
- The Kingdom of God is like a **tiny** seed that gets planted, and grows into a big bush (Mark 4:30)
- The parable of the sower, where some of the crop grows and is fruitful, but much of it peters out...; and then there's

- The evangelist who plants, and the Teacher who waters, and God makes us grow (1Cor 3:6);
- Christ is the cornerstone, and in Him, the Christian church grows into a unified building [the household of God] (Eph 2:19)
- Like a baby, we are to crave pure spiritual milk, so that we grow up into salvation (1Peter 2:2)
- And yet, we're not to remain as babies. The spiritually **immature** never progress to solid meat of the Word of God (1 Cor 3:2 & Heb 5:12)....

It's critical, for Disciples of Jesus to be "Growing in Christ"... And part of our growing in Christ, is our growing in righteousness & Godliness...

But what **really** is that? – because some folk get some really ‘warped’ ideas of how righteousness is demonstrated... And there can be confusion between “**true** righteousness” and “false portrayals of righteousness”...

Now, in this passage, I’ve broken it up into 4 different types of “false portrayals of righteousness”.

1. Religious showiness;
2. Legal showiness (righteousness);
3. Asceticism; and
4. Spiritual showiness...

And we’ll cover the first 3 this week.

1.

One of the most common false portrayals of righteousness is empty religious observance.

The Pharisees were masters at this, and that’s why Jesus was so often at loggerheads with them – They’d made ‘religious showiness’ into an artform. And what made it even worse, was they expected everybody else to be as showy in their religion as they were (as fake as it was)...

And I suspect Paul was worried, that this sort of stuff was going to find its way into the Colossian Gentile church...

Let me set the scene:

Christianity, is the fulfillment of what Judaism was leading up to... The whole Law; and the whole Jewish sacrificial system; the temple itself, and even the furnishings **of** the temple, were but a shadow – a shadow of the heavenly reality, **and** the future fulfilment in Christ...

e.g. The blood of a ram/bull/goat could never set people free from their sins. If blood of animals could do that, why would Jesus need to die??? The blood of the temple sacrifice, was a shadow, looking forward to the future 'once and for all' sacrifice of our Lord...

Even the Sabbath (the day of rest for the people of God) – yes, it is God's plan **and command** for us to have a day-off-a-week, but this itself, was looking forward to its fulfillment. In Hebrews 4, we're told that **there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God** – where we rest from our works... By grace we're saved – Jesus Has done the work on the cross, and we rest in Him...

Now, when it comes to Christianity,,,,, we Gentiles (non-Jews) – we often tend to think that Christianity 'grew out' of Judaism... Wrong...

- Through Christ, we Gentiles, are grafted **into** the people of God.
- Who are the people of God? Israel.

In Romans, Paul talks about how we Gentiles (a wild shoot), are grafted in, to the olive tree of the people of God...

Now, imagine:

- that you were a Colossian;
 - that you grew up in a pagan culture
 - worshipping a pantheon of false gods
 - making sacrifices to your idols and whatever else you had to do for them...
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- But now you've become a Christian, and you've put to death your old idol worship; and
 - you've come to faith in Jesus Christ...

And so, at one time, you used to religiously go through the motions of serving your old gods – to you this was normal... And now you want to do the best you can, to worship God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...

And so, if a Jewish Christian floats into town, he might be very quick to tell you:

- you need to do this
- that
- keep this law
- do this practice
- don't eat this;
- don't touch that;

And that's how you can demonstrate your obedience to God...

Can you see how this could be very tempting for them – *“Oh, a list of what to do – I don't have to work it out for myself, because it prescribes how to live as a Christian....* But thankfully, Paul warns them against this, and he says:

¹⁶ Therefore

Let's stop right there...

Whenever a sentence or especially a paragraph/theme begins with the word “Therefore”, it’s really important that we know what the “therefore” is there for... Alright, Why’s it there? Something has just been said, and because of what’s just been said, do this...

What did we learn last week??? We learned that:

- nothing is needed to be added to Christ...
- In Christ, we have everything we need, because in Christ, is the fulness of the deity – In other words, Jesus is God – How could we add to God?;
- We don’t need to add worldly wisdom to Jesus; **and**
- when it comes to sin, He’s cancelled the record of wrongs – our record of sin has been rubbed out – nailed to the cross, along with its legal demands...

¹⁶ Therefore ...

Wow, that’s what the temple observance and the Levitical law was all about – These were the legal demands to try and mitigate our record of debt of sin,, but that’s now all been taken away. In Christ, there is no record of debt of sin anymore....

And because all of that’s been dealt with; because nothing needs to be added to Jesus:::

¹⁶ Therefore 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.

Alright, he’s talking about:

- the Jewish
 - festivals;
 - customs;
 - religious practices
- Under the Levitical law, there were:
 - certain events they had to observe every year;
 - festivals they had to celebrate;
 - certain foods they could eat/couldn't eat

But now, as Christians, we don't need to keep these rules and regulations any longer. Why? Because Christ is enough. He's everything... V¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

I love the late afternoon sun, because I look at my shadow and I look tall and skinny...

It is so funny, to observe a child when they discover their shadow... It follows me. I can't get away from it... And if I chase it, I can't catch it...

Shadows have no substance. And this is a really good analogy... The Levitical Law, along with its customs and practices, were but a shadow – not so much an interim measure, but a dim image of the substance that was to come – Christ Jesus our Lord...

But even now, 2000 years later, when it comes to growing in Christ, we still get “shadow” confused with “substance”...

I think I've told you this story before, but I'm going to tell you again because it's a good one:

When I was at Bible college, we were attending a church in Suburban Brisbane. We had a pretty 'contemporary' sort of a service – very low key... And there was a lady who started attending. And I was talking with her one day, and she said "Yeah, I thought I'd start off coming to this church, because Christianity's all so new to me, but after a few years, when I've grown more, I'll be able to go into one of the inner city churches to experience it more completely..."

And to me, that was just Bazaar... She thought that to become a mature Christian, was to have worship with the smells and bells & the minister wearing his dressing gown, and pretty coloured scarf, and maybe a funny looking hat, and where the congregation would take part by reading their bit from a book...

But what she was describing (which she thought would be the pinnacle of faith), carries the very real risk of being "religious showiness"..... BTW, having a carefully choreographed concert with swinging lights and smoke-machines is just as risky of being a religious show...

2.
Closely related to religious showiness, is Legal showiness... Keeping the law – doing the right thing, and making sure people know I'm keeping the law and doing the right thing...

When one of our children was in either Pre-school/Grade 1, he was quite upset because he discovered that the father of one of

his friends was a smoker... And not only was he concerned that his friend's father was about to die (because he knew that cigarettes aren't good for us, and smoking kills),,, in his mind, smoking was so wrong, "He's going to go to Hell when he dies", which won't be far away because he's a smoker...

And for me as a dad, that was both at the one time, "beautiful" – my little boy's concern for the lost... but it also had to be a teachable moment – "Being a smoker isn't what sends someone to Hell – it's a heart not surrendered to Jesus"...

But also with sadness, I had to realise that my little boy, most likely came to this conclusion, because that's the sort of attitude he'd obviously observed in the Christian church... There's certain unwritten rules, (or maybe in some churches they are written)...

- Don't do this;
- don't do that;

- Do not handle;
- Do not taste;
- Do not touch...

And "following rules" to be seen by men, is all about giving an image of "Godliness", but is probably not "godliness" at all...

I applied for a job on a farm one time, and there was a cottage for us to live in. And they said, "The wiring's there for a TV aerial, but the previous worker had to take it down, because in

their religion, they're not allowed to watch the TV. And they didn't have a TV, but because they had an aerial on their house, they used to cop a bit of flack because other people in their church would drive past and see the aerial and accuse them of watching TV. So they pulled it down... ”

False Godliness is keeping up the appearance that I'm keeping all the rules.

3. Next: A third false-image of growing in Godliness, is Asceticism...

Asceticism means “avoiding what feels “good”; and doing a lot of what feels tough...

Asceticism:

- Never eat chocolate;
- Only ever eat meat if it's boiled;
- Husbands and wives, don't enjoy each other too much – that's only for the purposes of making children...
- Wearing sack-cloth undies is asceticism, because it's rough and agitating;
- A vow of silence is asceticism;
- As is a vow of poverty;
- Fasting;
- Never ever drink alcohol, is a form of asceticism...

Now, as Christians, we don't indulge the flesh, and at times, it is right for us to deny ourselves certain indulgences... I mean Jesus Himself, said that there would be times when His disciples would fast. And as disciples of Jesus, there are times when we should fast, for the purposes of prayer...

But Jesus taught us that when we fast, to do it privately, which is the **opposite** of what Paul's talking about here.

Being showy about what we deny ourselves is demonstrating a false growing in righteousness... Look at me. I'm doing it so tough because I'm a good Christian...

V¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism....
Now, a better translation would be ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, [delighting in] asceticism.... You see, if I delight in my "asceticism", that means I'm feeling: *"My way is so much more superior to yours. Look how much I go without... You're not a very good Christian, because you're not denying yourself enough."*

But the whole point is, we don't grow in righteousness through:

1. Religious showiness;
2. Legal showiness;
3. Asceticism by denying ourselves and making a big show of it.

Christ is everything we need. Now, I know what's coming next, and so I feel like I'm leaving you hanging, but we're going to pause here, and we'll pick up from here next week.

Let's pray

Heavenly Father,
We want to thank You, that Christ is enough.

Lord, our desire is to grow in Christ;
and to grow in Holiness and righteousness.
But we don't want it to ever be
anything that's false;
or showy;
or ingenuous...

Lord, help us as a church,
to never be about religious showiness;
or legal showiness,,,,,
where we make sure people can see we're doing really
nice things...

And help us never to seek Your approval
through our own self-denial...

Lord we thank You,
that all we need is in Christ,
And that on the cross,
He cancelled our record of wrong.
and therefore, we don't have to try
and earn our way into Your good-books...
Because we're already there,

through Christ and Him only.

Thankyou Jesus.

Amen.