

(Colossians) 08 Freedom!

by Bob Utley

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian freedom and the danger of self-righteousness and judgmentalism, encouraging believers to live a life surrendered to God and to prioritize relationships and community.

Duration: 36:08

Scripture: Romans 12:4-5, Galatians 5:13-14, Ephesians 4:15-16, Colossians 2:16 - 3:2

Topics: "Colossians"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having an intimate relationship with the word of God and walking in the light. He criticizes those who inflate themselves without any valid reason, using spiritual language and claiming to have direct messages from God. The preacher shares a story from a mission trip in Brazil where he encountered a false teaching that drinking water from a glass placed on top of a TV could bring healing. He highlights the concept of the body of Christ, unity among believers, and the need to set our minds on heavenly things rather than earthly matters. The sermon concludes with a plea for humility, love, and understanding among believers, acknowledging that none of us fully understand God or the Bible, but we should strive to live a life pleasing to Him.

Transcript

If that song don't make you smile, you've got spiritual Bell's palsy. Thank you, thank you. I come to you with joy and trepidation today because I'm on a favorite text, and favorite texts are dangerous.

I want to take this two ways, if I could. One of the hermeneutical principles, Bible interpretation principles, that I cherish is this basic belief that every text has one meaning. And that meaning is the intent of the original author that wrote it in context.

Can you say an amen to that? But from that one meaning, and I'm not sure I have it, I'm not sure anybody has it, but I do believe that it was written for a purpose and we should start with attempting to find that authorial purpose. From that one meaning comes many possible applications or significances. What that means is basically that I must bring that truth wrapped in first century culture, wrapped in the setting of the original author.

I must try to understand it, and I've been doing that with you with history, with context, with grammar, with word studies, and with parallel passages. Now once I grasp that, then I try to make it applicable,

significant, relevant to our day, our culture, and our lives. There is no golden road.

There is no absolute certainty that we apply it well. But we are trying to keep the original intent. There is the authority.

There is the inspiration. There is the givenness. And now we're trying to say, how does that involve me? How do I live in light of this truth? What is pleasing to God for my life? And we're all on that pilgrimage and we don't all apply or even see the original intent the same way.

I say all that to say this, that I am in the book of Colossians, which is written, and I'm going to show you that as clearly as I can, written to a first century heresy that later became known as Gnosticism. There is no first century writings about this. It's only second century writings.

But from the second century and what they said and what the first century said, it's obvious that these are Greek thinkers trying to make Christianity applicable to Greek thought. Now that's the contextual, historical, original, authorial intent. But I must say to you, because this is my favorite or one of my favorite texts, this application consumes me.

It's hard to get all the filters away from my eyes when I come to this text because I have been deeply affected all of my religious life by the thoughts that are included in these few verses. And I know that. Some of my friends call me battling Bob because I have reacted and continue to react to the religious self-righteous legalism that I have found not only in America but in Baptist life.

I'm appalled by the dogmatic rules that I have come across from sincere godly Christians and I have reacted to it. And I do not want to communicate my reaction. I want to communicate the truth and let you react to it.

But it's only fair to say to you that I guess the text that is related to this that has impacted me most is Paul's discussion in Romans 14, 1 through Romans 15, 13 where he discusses two types of Christians. Now, I'm sorry that Paul labels them with words that are pejorative to us, strong and weak. And that's not at all what it's meant to be because both of these are believers attempting to be pleasing to God.

Both of these are acceptable, wonderful, godly people. So it's not meant to be a pejorative or a negative. But one group has found real freedom in Christ.

Freedom from a pagan past. Freedom from rule-oriented Judaism. Real freedom.

I've tried to say it to you a number of times in a number of ways, but I want to capsule it again. Christian freedom is not freedom to, it's freedom from. I grew up in a church, First Baptist of Bel Air, Texas.

I'm sure the people there would be appalled if they knew this. But as a young person, I remember thinking the more things you don't do, the closer you are to God. But as I have become a Bible teacher and studied Scripture myself, I've been appalled by that characterization because I meet people that I think, with all the best sincere motives, drive everybody away from themselves by their own self-righteous Pharisee-ism.

Their own arrogance that think their opinion and their lifestyle and their interpretation is God's interpretation. I do not doubt their sincerity or their motives, but I doubt their Bible interpretation. I think that these two groups need each other.

One group is worried about offending God and one group is more worried about offending men. But somehow these two groups push the envelope too much in opposite directions. And only as they love, pray for, worship together, struggle with, and have tension-filled lives with each other, only do the opposite strengths and weakness come into a whole that is attractive to a lost world.

Would you turn with me to Colossians 2? I'm going to be dealing with verses 16 through 23. This is Paul's most poignant discussion of religious judgmentalism and self-righteousness. And it's connected, of course, to the Gnostic false teachers.

But behind this Paul's presentation to these Gnostic false teachers, I can hear and see Jesus himself and his most powerful judgmental, condemning words that he ever said. He said to religious, conservative Pharisees and scribes, he loved sinners, but he challenges with a terrible force self-righteousness at any level in human beings. Judgmentalism, rule-oriented religiosity.

And Paul is going to do the same. If anybody knew the dangers of self-righteous, self-made religion, it was Paul, the gung-ho rabbi student of Gamaliel. But on the road to Damascus, a light, a truth, a freedom, a never-can-be-the-same-again moment happened to this mosaic-oriented, rule-oriented, performance-based-oriented person.

And he became the apostle of grace to the Gentiles. And as he was set free from the legalism of Judaism, he now addresses a church that needs to be set free from the legalism of Greek-oriented asceticism. Now, asceticism is the basic orientation toward Greek philosophy that everybody has a divine spark.

And the body is the prison house of the divine spark. And the goal is to be free of the body so that the divine spark can reunite with an impersonal God as a drop of water goes back into an ocean. But that is Greek thought, not Christian thought.

The body is not the source of evil in Christianity. It is the battleground of evil. It is not the problem.

It is the place where the problem manifests itself. So when people say to me, I only eat certain things. I only make love on certain days.

I only wear certain clothes. I only drink certain liquids. I only walk certain places.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I keep running to the application. I don't want to do that, but it just happens, I'm afraid.

How many times have I been told it's the shape of the collar. Men wear pointed collars. Women wear round collars.

And if you don't do that, you're not pleasing to God. And if women wear pantsuits on Sunday night, they're somehow out of bounds. And if we sell a book in church, we're somehow violating.

Why do you think I wore this stupid shirt today? I started to wear shorts too, but I felt like I couldn't get away with it, and I have ugly knees. Some of you are upset that I didn't wear a tie. If you want to wear a tie, wear a tie.

Get your bony finger off my neck and off my life. Some of you raise your hand in choir. I thank God for you.

Others of you don't. Sometimes even Schuyler says, let's stand and raise our hand. I ain't doing it.

If I want to do it, I'll do it. There ain't nobody going to tell me to do it. Pray this prayer after me.

No, not until I hear the prayer, I'm going to pray after somebody. Pray yourself. I want your legalism out of my life.

But I'll lay down my life for your freedom. I'll lay down my life for your right to have those rules. And I know you'll reach some people with your rules that I can't reach.

But I can reach some people you can't reach. Give me the freedom to be a great commission-free Christian. I don't have to please you.

I don't have to walk in your rules. But I have to walk pleasing to Jesus Christ in my life before whom I will stand and give an account of the stewardship of the grace of God. There are two kinds of Gnostics.

One of them said, I'm saved by what I know, these secret passwords through the angelic realm. Therefore, it doesn't matter how I live. So they became what we call antinomian against the law, libertines.

Now, I teach at a Christian school, or did. Oh, we get some Christian kids that are libertines. If it feel good, they do it.

But I meet other young people who are afraid of everything. They're afraid of everything. I still remember.

Just give me a moment, would you? I still remember at First Baptist Marshal where I go to church one Wednesday night. A brother stood up and said, I never mow my lawn on Sunday. And I stood up and said, I mow my lawn every Sunday.

Because, you see, I sit at a desk six days a week. And for me to get out and sweat a little bit and pray a little bit behind the lawnmower is a wonderful freeing experience for me. I walked this morning before I came to church.

Is it a sin to walk on Sunday? Because walking is work to you? Can I not even walk on Sunday? Can I not go to a smoothie on Sunday? Can I not go fishing on Sunday? I used to be the associate pastor at a church in this area. And the pastor was such a legalist that he said, come go fishing with me at 12.01 on Sunday night. I guess the fish were unholy at 11.59. Suddenly the worms are now spiritual at 12.01. And the Jews didn't even keep the midnight calendar.

Where do we get our rules from? If I ask you where you got your rules, you could know because they're certainly not from the Bible. So we got two kind of Gnostics. One, do what you want to.

There are no rules. A plague on their house. There are some things Christians don't do.

The other one is there are a million rules. The more things you don't do, the closer you are to God. Let's get away from those crazy people and isolate ourselves in a tower and be spiritual all by ourselves up there in the great conservative room.

And half the rules they have and half the rules you have have nothing to do with Scripture and everything to do with American Baptist Christianity. I want to tell you the one characteristic of Jesus is not that you do or don't do it, it's that you love Jesus Christ. And because you love him, you're now free to love yourself and love others.

Most legalists I know hate themselves and hate others too. So Paul starts this. Therefore, no one is to act as your judge.

Did I read that right? No one is to act as your judge. Who is this apostle talking to, everyday Christians? No one is to act as your judge. I want you to know, look at your Bible.

Verse 16 and 18 are parallel. Verse 18 is let no one act as an umpire. Verse 16 is let no one act as judge.

In regard to, we got to act as judge in some theology. I mean, Jesus is fully God and fully man. Salvation is justification by grace through faith.

I mean, there are some things we have to judge. When you all are calling a pastor, don't you ask him a few questions? Ask him what he believes? Sure, we have to judge in some areas. But the problem is we start judging these areas.

I saw you and you had a pork sandwich. Well, send me to hell. And send that pig with me.

Food or drink. Some of you are more worried about coolers than you are about people going to hell. I started to bring a beer, but I didn't want to call 911.

Some of you think beer is more evil than Satan. In respect to festival or new moon or Sabbath, I've been told I'm going to hell because I don't worship on Saturday. Special days, special places.

Life is special when you meet Jesus Christ, die to self, and get it about the Great Commission. All of life is sacred. There are no special days, special places, special words, special formulas, special don'ts, special do's.

Christlikeness is the mandate for every Christian and nothing less. And we're into we don't, we don't, we don't, we don't, and the result is nobody wants to join a place like that. Things which are a mere shadow.

Now, notice the difference here. It's two Greek words that are in contrast. Shadow.

Now, shadow is used in the book of Hebrews twice for the Mosaic law. It might refer to that here, but I assume it's referring to this Greek-oriented rules. So, here is the shadow, but the substance, now, this is really the word body, soma.

Now, it can be translated as reality or substance or it can be translated and understood as the body of Christ, the church. So, are we talking about Greek philosophy versus the church or are we talking about the shadow of human rules versus the substance that belongs to Christianity? Now, I'm not sure I can answer that. Here is, and Paul comes right back to his point in verse 16.

Let no one keep defrauding you. So, these are present imperatives with the May article that means stop and act already in process. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize.

Now, what is that prize? What is the prize? Eternal life? Freedom? A relationship with Christ? A new day? What is the prize? By delighting in self-abasement, the worship of angels, taking his stand on... Now, the word visions, as you see, is in italics which means it doesn't really say visions, but then it has, he has seen. So, we're either talking about seeing angels, claiming to see angels, or a special vision. I always get tickled with Paul.

I love Paul, but I want to kick Paul. You know, Paul, 2 Corinthians 12 says they're talking about all the things they saw. I've had a vision, Paul says.

I was caught up to the third heaven, but I can't tell you about it. Well, thanks for bringing it up, Paul. He just wanted to show he had visions too.

Man, you start looking at TV today, if you don't have a vision, you're nobody. Scripture is the revelation of the invisible God and Jesus is the ultimate revelation of that God and we don't necessarily need a vision. Because visions change from moment to moment and person to person.

What we need is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and an intimate relationship with the Word of God. And the freedom to walk in the light we have. Inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.

Oh, my. You mean these people who sound so spiritual and so God told me and so rule-oriented? I remember I was in Brazil one time on a mission trip and my friend, my interpreter said to me, this guy just said, it was a religion show, I couldn't understand it. This guy just said, if you'll fill a glass of water up and put it on top of your TV, when the show's over, if you'll drink it, you'll be healed.

I wonder how many glasses of water were put on that television set by sincere, duped religious people. Not holding fast to the head. Now, we're talking about the body of Christ here.

The body of Christ becomes very important in the book of Romans, it's mentioned one time, chapter 12, 1 Corinthians chapter 12. It's a concept of the people of God as a body. All different, all different gifts, but united in a unity.

It's only in Ephesians and Colossians where Christ is said to be the head of the body. It's only in these two prison epistles where that aspect is brought. So, he's talking about that, not holding fast to the head.

It seems they were more concerned with the minutia of human traditions than they were with Christ himself from whom the whole body being supplied and held together by joints and ligaments grows with the growth which is from God. I said it to you before, I'm committed to the body of Christ and whatever I can do, whatever, whatever I can do for its health and growth, I will do. Whatever limits I have to put on myself, whatever sacrificial giving, whatever it takes for the growth and health of the body of Christ, that I think is the ultimate call for the believer.

Not American individualism or I get to vote or take my opinion or what I think about. Who cares what you think about anything? I'm beginning a new paragraph in verse 20. If you have died with Christ.

Now, this is the idea that when we were saved, there was an old man who deserved condemnation. That old man died. Our baptism is a symbol of this.

That we were buried in death in Christ and then we're raised to walk in newness of life. We have died to self. That is exactly what Romans 6 and 7 is talking about.

This is no longer our life. He lives his life through us. Now, when I was younger, I was deeply influenced by the Deeper Life Movement.

I thank God for it, but I'm bothered by their insistence on that our personality must cease to exist and his personality must flow through us because I really believe that God created us as we are. Psalm 139 is important to me. That he wants to take my gifts and my personality and my understanding and use them

for his glory.

And what I've understood is that we can't be a blessing to everybody. We can't please everybody. So we must bless those we can and not be deterred by the screaming, screeching, griping of those we can't.

And together we'll get it done. And apart we will not. If you've died with Christ... Now, the word elementary principles of the world is the Greek word stoicheia.

It's used in a number of ways. I showed you in Hebrews, the end of chapter 5 and 6, that it referred to basic Jewish doctrines. It certainly can mean that.

It basically means the ABCs or something in a row or the basic truths about. But in a Gnostic context, and Colossians certainly is a Gnostic context, they use the word stoicheia for the angelic levels between a high holy God and a lesser God who could form matter. And their view of salvation is not that Jesus died on the cross for you and you trust him by faith.

Oh, no, no. You have to join their group and get the secret password through each one of these angelic levels. And this intimidated the early church.

Is there some more knowledge I need than Jesus died for me? Do I need secret knowledge and fuller knowledge and code knowledge and special prophecy? No. If you know Jesus, you know all there is. We don't need more.

We don't need deeper. We need him. Why? Why? Why? As if you were living in the world.

And there is the problem. Christians got one foot in the kingdom of God and one foot in the kingdom of men and try to live that way and cannot. Cannot live that way.

Why? If, verse class conditional, the if in verse 20 is first class, we have assumed to have died. If we've died, if we've died, then why are we living in the world? Why do you submit yourself to decrees? Now, verse 21, look in your Bible. There is no verb and there are no connectors.

Now, this is very strange in Greek. There are always connectors. Now, sometimes there's no verb.

That's true. But with no verb and no connectors, this is emphatic. And it's emphatic to the point that I think this may have been the slogan of the false teachers.

And listen to this slogan. Listen to this slogan. I think I've heard this preached.

Do not handle. Do not taste. Do not touch.

Now, that sounds like asceticism. It sounds like Eve talking to Satan and said, God said I couldn't even touch it. God didn't say don't touch that fruit.

He said don't eat it. It's this human extension. I've heard sermons on this.

It's a good example of taking one verse out of the Bible. This is the slogan of the false teachers. Yes, it's recorded in the Bible, but in context it's exactly opposite what we're supposed to do.

And yet this characterizes so much conservative evangelical Christianity. Do not handle. Don't touch that non-King James translation.

Don't taste. You put what in your mouth? Don't touch. Look at the parenthesis.

Which all refer to things destined to perish in the euthan. Oh, that sounds like Paul. Remember what Jesus said in Mark 7, Matthew 15, when they're all worried about the food laws and Jesus said it's not what goes in a man that defiles him.

It's what comes out. His speech reveals his heart. It's not what you eat or don't eat, drink or don't eat.

It's how you treat one another. You cannot eat pork and be a mean-spirited person. Maybe if you ate a little pork you'd be less mean-spirited.

You mean all this religious don'ts really ends in ineffective spirituality? That's what I'm saying. That's what I'm saying. In accordance with the commandments and teachings of men.

I just got through Isaiah. Isaiah 29, 13. I quoted it last week.

It haunts my mind because I'm an evangelical Christian. These people worship me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And their worship consists in rules learned by rote from men.

Men, not apostles. Denominations, cultures, philosophies of the age, personality preferences. You mean we're bound by rules that aren't from God? That's what I'm saying.

Are there some rules from God? Yes. How do I know the difference? Read the book. Read the book.

These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom. Oh, they look spiritual. In self-made religion and self-abasement and the severe treatment of the body.

Look, God, how much I'm suffering. I still remember my studies in church history where monks in the Middle Ages took pig skins. And what are they doing? Took pig skins and wrapped them with the bristles in around their body.

In the winter, naked with pig bristles to show God how much they love him. Does a rash show God you love him? Does a grumbling stomach show God you love him? I remember one time this guy came to ETBU and he said, it was in one of these groups, I never make love on Saturday because Sunday is holy. You know me.

I make love every Saturday, twice. That's a lie. It's an overstatement, but... So you don't make love and now you're spiritual? Maybe you're impotent.

Don't you be blaming God for something you choose or not choose to do? For his spiritual presence? Aren't we back to human legalism? Aren't we back to human performance? Aren't we back to don'ts? God, what has happened to us? We love our rules more than we love one another. That's what's happened to us. That's a powerful statement.

You ought to write it down. We love our rules more than we love one another, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on the things above. I'm into chapter 3 now, but you catch what he's saying. And do not on the things that are the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Man, you mean all these things I thought would make me spiritual turn me into a legalist? I think the worst thing we could do at a Baptist church is when somebody trusts Christ, give them three pages of what Baptists don't do. Turn them right into legalists. My view is give them a warm Sunday school class, a New Testament, and a couple of years.

I don't know quite how to end this. Some of you are legalists. I thank God for you.

Some of you have no rules. I worry about you. Somehow it's better for us to love one another than it is to, quote, get it right here.

Somehow in humility we have to say that all of us are pilgrims, that we all live and see through a glass darkly, that we're a multitude of personalities whose lives have been changed by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. And we can't be the same, but we're not sure exactly what we ought to be. But as long as we keep the great commission before us, together we can reach the pluralism of a lost world for Christ as long as we don't let each other drive us crazy.

What's that old song, don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy? Friends, none of us fully, completely, and perfectly know God. None of us fully, completely, and perfectly understand the Bible. None of us know exactly how to live the Christian life that's pleasing to God.

We're all struggling. We're all praying. We're all reading Scripture.

Can we love one another and get past my rules or God's rules? I'm always amazed when I go through the hallways and shake hands in Sunday school and know that numerous people go home because I have somehow offended them in my sermons over the last few months and think that by going home or keeping their tithe and till, that that somehow is spiritual and supportive. We are not going to agree, but we must love one another. We must.

The invitation today, if you're a legalist, you need to come and repent. And if you are a free Christian, you need to come and make sure that your freedom is not a license to hurt your brother. And if you're lost, you need to come and be saved.

And if you have no clue what I'm talking about, you need to pray where you are.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22528.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/bob-utley/colossians-08-freedom/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net