

A Cul-de-sac of Holiness

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[0:00] Colossians 2.20, we'll read through 3.4. For, since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These are all destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Holiness is not optional. And if your life doesn't bear the fruit of holiness, then you will not be seeing the Lord.

[1:22] You will not be going to heaven. Listen to Revelation 21. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

This is the second death. So the end of unholiness is eternal death. Existence, but not life.

And we have a hard time understanding that, because for us, existence is life, but the end is existence, but nothing that could be called life. So no holiness, no heaven.

Those are the facts. Now, what you do with those facts tells you whether you are a believing, free Christian, or still under the spirit of slavery to fear that leads to death.

Still enslaved. Still enslaved to your sins. Still enslaved to the law. Still condemned in your own mind. So do you hear, without holiness, no one will see the Lord?

[2:34] And do you run with that to Jesus Christ? And seek holiness from Christ? Not only positional holiness. Not only imputed holiness.

And by that, I mean not only justification, a right standing with God, but a change of life holiness, sanctification. So does that turn you to Christ in your life?

Or does that turn you in on yourself? So you hear a sermon on, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Do you immediately turn in on yourself? Or does that make you go to Jesus Christ?

To scheming, or does that turn you in on yourself? To scheming on how I can be holy? What rules do I need to put in place? Where do I need to start trying a lot harder? What do I need to be doing?

Now, don't get me wrong. We're not talking, and I'm not speaking against effort. The point here is not to say that there is no effort, nor striving to put on holiness.

[3:36] It says, make every effort to be holy. For without holiness, no one will see the Lord. The point is the heart context of that pursuit of holiness.

The heart direction in that effort. In that context. Is it in the context of you? Or is it in the context of Jesus Christ?

And that is the big picture of Colossians chapter 2, 20 through the end of chapter 3. 2, 20, he is beginning to transition into the directions for our life.

Now, how do we live this life? And so he begins to speak about holiness. And in this transition paragraph that we're going to look at, verse 20 through 23 today, he is saying there is a way of holiness that is a dead end.

It's commendable that these people are pursuing holiness, that's for sure. But it's a road that doesn't go anywhere. It's a cul-de-sac of holiness. Now, have you ever done that?

[4:39] Been in one of those neighborhoods you've never been in, and it's one of those, it seems like a newer subdivision in the last 20 years. And how they build them is with a whole bunch of

cul-de-sacs. They're not straight roads going all the way through.

There's a lot of cul-de-sacs. And so I've done this a lot of times. I can think of one person's house that I always, when I'm going there, I always turn in wrong. And so I turn in a street early, and I think I'm going to their house, and I end up having to turn right around and heading back to where I went. I was no better off at all. It didn't take me where I wanted to go. Now, in these verses here, in verses 20 through 23, Paul is going to show us a cul-de-sac of holiness.

Something that appears that it's going the right way. It appears that it's going to take me where I want. But in the end, it doesn't lead me anywhere. It's the cul-de-sac of worldly sanctification. And he says there's an appearance of wisdom, but they lack any value, any real value, in restraining sensual indulgence. So they come up with rules and guidelines and instructions and things that seem to make sense that should work, but they don't work.

[5:52] They don't work. They don't take me where I want to go. It looks like it will take me where I want to go, but in the end, I'm no better off than I was before. So two questions as we begin right away.

One, do you want to be holy? Well, you better. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Now, the second question is, are you on the right road to holiness?

Are you on the right road to holiness, or are you on a cul-de-sac of holiness, a dead end? And that should be a, it's a relevant question to all of us, because these people were religious, and they thought they were on the right road.

And it made sense. It seemed to make sense. If they looked at things, there was an appearance that they were on the right road. They were doing the right things. But Paul is saying it wasn't.

Appearances were deceiving. So are you on a cul-de-sac? Are you on the cul-de-sac of worldly sanctification, where you're doing holiness in the world's ways?

[6:57] And it's easier than you would think to fall into this, because it's the natural way that we do things. It's the fleshly way of doing things. It's what makes most sense to our flesh.

And so that's what we want to talk about tonight. So how do you know if you're on the dead end of holiness? You're going somewhere, and you're no better off for it. Well, I think there would be a lot of tests, a lot of things that I could say that come to mind.

But what we want to do is focus on what he is saying here. And the first thing that we want to notice about this dead end sanctification is that it doesn't reckon with our union with Jesus Christ and his death.

It doesn't reckon with my union with Christ. It doesn't count on. It doesn't depend on. It doesn't need. Indeed, it's totally besides my union, my shared life with Jesus Christ.

So that's a good question right away. When I think of holiness, is the first thing that I think of union with Jesus Christ, or do I think of this is what I need to do? When you think about being holy, does union with Christ have anything to do with it?

[8:05] If you're on the path of holiness, if your path of holiness doesn't factor in verse 20, since you've died with Christ, then you are on a dead end.

You're on a dead end. Paul's way of thinking says, since I've died with Christ, therefore, these are the things that I need to be doing. These are the things that I don't need to be doing.

This is the right way, and this is the wrong way of pursuing holiness. Because I have died with Christ, I am going to pursue holiness in this way. Remember, we talked about indicatives and imperatives.

Commands are the truth and commands. That's what we're seeing here. In the world's way of thinking, my dying with Christ has nothing to do with my holiness.

It doesn't mean anything. It doesn't count for anything. It has nothing to do with me being holy. And they would say, died with Christ. What does that even mean? And what does that even matter? I need to be holy.

[9:06] What does it matter if I died with Christ? I don't even know what you're talking about. But that's where holiness, Christian holiness, begins. So what happened when you became a Christian?

Paul says, your history and Christ's history were joined together. And so what happened to him happened to you. What happened to him happened to you.

He died to the basic principles of this world. And so when he died, you died also to the basic principles of this world. You died with him.

His death to the basic principles of this world, his death to the law, to the world's way of living and thinking and being right with God, became my death to the same things. Now, we've already talked about these basic principles of the world.

Paul talked about them in chapter 2, verse 8. And that was quite a while ago. So I want to remind you, what is he talking about when he says Christ died of the basic principles of this world?

[10:08] Well, they are the fundamental way the world thinks about how I relate to God. They are the fundamental way that the world thinks, this is how I relate to God.

Paul in Galatians 4.3 uses it to refer to the law. But it's bigger than just God's law. Whether it's God's law or any other law, the principles of this world says, if I do this or if I do that, then I will be saved.

Then my relationship with God ultimately depends upon me and my actions. And so it puts faith in what I do instead of faith in Jesus Christ.

The basic principles of the world put the emphasis, the stress, the faith on me and not on Jesus Christ. So again, in Paul's mind, it doesn't matter whether you're a Jew under God's law or whether you're a Buddhist under Buddhist rules or a Muslim under Islamic rules or a Christian under the Christian rules that you've made up in your own mind.

The basic principles of the world always boils down to this. God will accept me. God will help me because I keep the rules. Whatever those rules would be.

[11:25] It's what I do that makes me righteous. It's what I do that makes me good. It's what I do that makes me valuable. It's what I do, in this case, that will make me better.

A better version of me depends upon what I do. But it's more than just religious. See, this is where we have to expand and understand because now we're living in a secular world.

And so what, these things don't apply at all? No, they apply just the same. You can see it working out in all sorts of ways. You can see it working out in fitness and exercise.

So they say, they start working out. They feel like they need to work out in order to feel good about themselves.

A good day is a good day when they had a good workout. And a bad day is bad because they had a bad workout. And now they're working out, and now they're looking at people who don't work out, and they're judging them based on that fact.

[12:29] They don't work out. And they look down their noses at it. And so now they say, well, how am I going to become a better person, a more fulfilled person? Well, this is what I need to do. I need to work out harder.

I need to get this out of my diet. I need to put this into my workout. And then they make lists, and they make their goals. And if they succeed, they're winners. And if they fail, they're losers. People do it with money.

People do it with friends. People do it with grades, with sports, with looks. My good standing depends on what I've done, what I have, what I've accomplished, who I am in myself, and what I've done.

There's no grace anywhere in it. And there's no thankfulness either. There's no sense of, I'm living in God's world, and God is so good, and he has loved me, and I am thankful for it.

There's no thankfulness. There's only entitlement. So if there's any entitlement in your pursuit of holiness, where you somehow in your mind end up arguing, God owes me this bit of holiness, you're on the world's dead end to holiness.

[13:39] John says that what worldliness is in 1 John, boasting, not thankfulness, boasting, is what marks worldliness. Boasting of what he has and what he does.

That's what worldliness is. The strict, fundamentalistic, legalist, with all of his rules, and his strict separation from the world, so no movies, no alcohol, no bars, no tattoos, no cigarettes, no public school, everything that says, I don't do what they do, I don't have what they have, I don't go where they go.

That person in John's categories could be the most worldly person of all, even while they're making every attempt to push out the world in all of its sinfulness.

Because worldliness is this attitude that says, that looks to me and depends upon me, and trusts me, and says I'm good, and this is how I can get better. So how do you know you're on a cul-de-sac of holiness?

That's really not going anywhere. Well, you're not reckoning, you're not counting your union with Christ. The fact that you died with Christ to this way of thinking means nothing to you.

[14:52] So instead, because it doesn't mean anything to you, you go right on submitting to the rules of the world. You just go right on doing it. Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

You go right on with these rules. You go right on thinking it's about what you do. Your works. But Paul says that that just doesn't go with your status with Christ, in Christ.

That just doesn't fit with what has happened to you. You died to those rules. You died to that world. You died to that way of relating to God.

So why? Why? How can you submit to its rules anymore? Don't submit to its rules anymore. The world operates on these principles. But with Christ, you died to this world.

The laws no longer apply to a dead person. The world's laws no longer apply to a dead person. The world's way of doing and thinking doesn't apply any longer because you are dead.

[15:55] Now, you know that. It's a very simple thing. It's very verifiable. You go into a graveyard and there are not people arresting all those people laying there doing nothing for loitering, are they?

No, because the rules no longer apply in the same way if you're dead. If you've died with Christ, now you're no longer under law but under grace.

And the fundamental way you relate to God has changed. Has changed because you've died. And so now your relationship doesn't hang on your law keeping but on his grace.

And that changes the way you pursue holiness. It's not unconnected. It's not disconnected. It changes the way you pursue holiness. I am free from those man-made human rules that once bound my conscience.

And so I'm not going back to those rules. The slavery, I'm not going back to that. Not even to be holy. Because I died with Christ.

[17:00] And in chapter 3, verse 1, we read, Since you have been raised with Christ, you're going to live a different way. You're going to pursue holiness in a fundamentally different way.

So how do you know that if you're on the cul-de-sac of the world's holiness, the world's sanctification? Well, you aren't depending on, you aren't counting on, this death that you've experienced with Jesus Christ.

That doesn't mean anything to you. You don't need it. You don't depend upon it. It doesn't factor in anywhere. Now secondly, and really a development of that first point, is this.

You still fight sin with rules. You still fight sin with rules. The world's answer to sin is never grace. It's never a deep change of heart. It's never deep faith and repentance. It's always rules. That's how the government handles any, the corrupt heart of men.

[18:01] All they can say is we need to reform the laws. We need better laws. If we had better laws, if we had better policies, if we had better procedures, if we had better enforcement. So we need better police officers.

We need better education. We need better policies and procedures. But the law never changes anything. It tells us what is right. But it never changes anything about the heart of man.

The law shows people to be lawbreakers, but it doesn't make them law keepers. So there are shootings. There are terrible shootings.

And we make laws that say you can't buy these guns. You can't bring your guns here. But do the gun laws work? Well, I want to be really careful here.

My point's not to get into this. But just to say. To a limited extent, they do in certain situations. But this is what one non-biased site said.

[19:03] Attempts to outlaw the manufacture and importation of handguns have failed because they stimulate the genesis of a black market for guns, similar to the black market for drugs. Laws seeking to keep handguns out of the hands of criminals, juveniles, and mental defectives have failed to reduce crime because active criminals either have guns already or can steal them.

Now, my point here, again, is not to get involved in the gun issue. My calling is not to the NRA. My calling is the Christian ministry. And I know nothing but Christ crucified.

Please don't come up to me and talk to me about this. My point is that rules do not change the hearts of men. Laws only make men more ingenious about sinning, more creative in how to sin, more deceptive in how to get around the rules and the laws.

So you put the filter on your teenager's computer, and that's good. I'm not saying that's not good. But that alone doesn't change their hearts.

No rules, no procedures, no policies end up really making men holy. It might suppress the sin, and that could be good. It might keep it from having a chance to develop, and that's good.

[20 : 24] But again, it would never work the opposite virtue of holiness, of purity, of kindness, of love. Again, they have the appearance of wisdom, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

But rules, that's what the world has to work with. Now notice Paul has in mind certain kinds of rules. Rules about eating and drinking, is what he's talking about.

These rules have, he says, have to do with things that are destined to perish with use. He's not talking about the rules themselves, perishing with use. You can't use up a law.

He's talking about, they refer to, they're about things, that just perish when you use them. So when you eat a sandwich, it's perished. It's gone. When you drink your glass of milk, it's destroyed.

Rules about food, and drink, and things like that, are completely useless, and pointless. They don't have anything to do with anything eternally, spiritual. And besides, you know what Jesus said, it's not what goes into a man that defiles him, it's what comes out of a man that defiles him.

[21 : 36] It's his disobedience. It's his words. It's his attitudes. That's what defiles him. And so it's completely pointless to say, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, because they have to do with temporary, external things, and they don't get to the heart.

They don't affect any change here. But that's the world's holiness. It always puts its finger on the wrong thing. On things that don't really matter.

It puts the blame in the wrong place. So instead of saying me, it says, it's the food that makes me defiled. Instead of saying me, we say, it's the situation.

And we do the very same thing, because we're just like them. Maybe different in some ways, but we do the same thing. I get angry. Well, why are you angry? Because they did that.

They said this. And if they didn't do this or that, then I wouldn't get angry. So anger isn't a heart problem, is it? It's another person problem. You see the same sort of thing in strict Islamic or even Christian modesty laws.

[22 : 51] So in strict Islamic countries, whose fault is it that a man lusts after a woman? It's her fault. So we'll dress her in head to toe, cover her all up, so I don't lust.

It doesn't change my heart at all. And it puts the finger in the wrong place. The way to holiness is always, to the world, fixing outward things. So new rules, new procedures, new clothes, new food, fixing other people, making the situation such and such just right.

And that's all they can do. It's all focused on earthly, temporary factors and will make the rules to manage those situations and those things.

And again, it's a cul-de-sac. It seems promising, but it ends up leading nowhere. The sin that you oppress and hold down in one area ends up squeezing out and looking very different and coming out in a different area.

Now, the third point, and here's the ultimate reason it doesn't go anywhere. It's finally all self-focused.

[24 : 07] It's finally all self-generated. And just to put it broadly, it never gets above self. It never gets above self.

It's based on human wisdom, he says. Where do the rules come from? They come from my mind. I think they're a good idea. They make sense to me. How am I going to worship?

Well, it's self-imposed worship. I will do this and this is how I will do it. It's all driven by false humility. False humility is pretending to be low when inside your heart is high.

It's pretending that I am nothing, but while thinking I'm going to be able to make it happen. So it never reaches real humility.

So whose fault is it? It's their fault. It's the situation's fault. It's my body's fault, so I'll treat it harshly. But it's never my fault.

[25 : 05] I never need saved from me. You know you're getting to the heart of the gospel when you realize you don't need saved from hell, and you don't need saved from this or that sin.

You know you're getting to the heart of the gospel when you realize I need saved from me. I'm the problem. See, worldly sanctification allows you your dignity.

It keeps pride right where it belongs or right where it is, no matter how it looks on the outside.

Pride's still at work. And it's easy to see.

Or it's easy to see in your own life. They don't cry for help. They don't pray. Prayer doesn't fit in with worldly sanctification.

Or if they pray, they pray for strength. All I need is a little bit of strength so I can do this. Now, praying for strength is one thing, but when you pray for strength in the sense of I just need a little help, God, so that I can do it.

[26 : 17] See, they pray for strength. They don't pray for rescue. None of it gets to the real problem. It's me. It's self. And so it's still holding on at all costs to the fact that the idea that I can manage this.

I can do this if I can just figure it out just right. And it still assumes that it's really up to me and if it was really up to me then I can really do it. And it still assumes that if I'm supposed to do it then I can do it.

But that is the exact opposite of what you see if you begin with verse 20 and you count yourself dead with Jesus Christ. That's the exact opposite of what we see if you count yourself dead if we count ourselves dead with Christ.

Why was the cross necessary? Not because I needed a little help. And not because I needed a little strength. It was because I was a totally lost cause.

They called him Jesus because he was going to save his people from their sin. They didn't call him Jesus because me and him were going to save me from my sin. It was him.

[27 : 37] It had to be him. Because the very thing I needed to be saved from was me and my sin, my flesh.

And so the cross proclaims for all who will dare to see it that the human condition, our human condition, is beyond human hope. It took the death of the Son of God as a man to bring hope. It didn't take a few new rules, some little strength. And see, if I died with him, and I am considering that and counting that as true, then I have died to the notion that I could have saved myself. And if I died with him, then I have died to the idea that I wasn't so bad. God, the Son of God had to be, had to be crucified, had to be nailed to a cross.

Stakes had to be driven through his hands and through his feet. God had to forsake him to let me in, to have me forgiven, to have my sins dealt with.

[28 : 41] And so, how bad was I? The Son of God had to experience the wrath of God to set me free. Imagine all the anger of God being poured out on his Son.

That's what had to happen because my situation was so bad. See, religion and worldly holiness, it allows me, it lets me keep my dignity.

The cross doesn't. Religion lets me keep my pride. The cross doesn't. If the cross doesn't make you despair, then you aren't seen for what it is.

We sing that song when I survey the wondrous cross, I pour contempt on all my pride. The cross is the screaming indictment of the lostness, the depravity, the helplessness, and the hopelessness of man.

But, that's not all it says. Thank the Lord, that's not all it says. If I count myself dead with Christ, it's not all despair. The final note is God's love and God's for me.

[29 : 49] God saved me from me. He killed his Son for me. God saved me from me by killing me with his Son. So, when he died, I died.

And when I died to my flesh, the power of sin, that's how he saved me. And so, when Christ died, I died with him and that was my salvation.

That was the love of God poured out. Not only to rescue me from the consequences of my sin, but to rescue me from the power of my sin. To save me from the power of my sin.

And so, what the cross says is God has saved me, God is saving me, and God will save me. In love, he is for me. And so, with that in our minds, we don't look for new rules.

I don't need the man-made rules because I have God for me. See, man-made rules are ways of us saving ourselves and us fixing the situation, but if God is for me, then I don't need them.

[30 : 47] I have Christ my Savior. And so, I don't need to hold on to the idea that it's really their fault, it's the situation's fault, I don't have to hide and pretend like it's someone else's fault except for mine.

It is me. I can be honest. And you know, when you can be honest, when you're safe. When you're safe, when you can say, yep, this is what I am and this is what I've done, but I believe that Jesus Christ is enough.

Then you can finally admit, you know what, it's not them, not my wife, it's not my kids, it's not them, it's not the situation, it's me. And I have been forgiven all my sin, so now I'm no longer under the rule and the condemnation of sin, and I'm set free and I'm free and it was all of God's doing and that draws me to God.

That moves me to go toward Him. It moves me into holiness and that tells me He's with me in this. He cares about my holiness and through Christ I have all the resources that I need in order to be holy.

And so the cross sets me free from myself, the cross opens the doors of heaven, the fountains of heaven, and so I quit looking at myself and I turn now both eyes on Jesus Christ and that's where we're going to go in the next chapter.

[32:07] I turn both of my eyes on Jesus Christ and that's where my holiness will come from. And so when by faith I take my eyes off of myself and my doings and now with two eyes I look in faith to Christ my Savior.

And that's how you get out of the cul-de-sac and on the road to holiness. So brothers and sisters here's where we end with the words of Paul.

So count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God through Christ Jesus. Count yourselves dead to sin.

Count yourselves dead to this world's worldly principles but alive to God through Jesus Christ and that's how you get out of the cul-de-sac and on the road to holiness.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father we do pray that you would teach us that you would teach us the centrality of Jesus Christ that you would teach us how he is our great law giver how he kept the law for us and how that should move us to keep the law but I pray that you would help us to keep the law in its proper place and help us to understand the place for rules and policies and procedures that are wise but teach us the place for them.

[33:37] Help us to put Jesus Christ first and foremost in our hearts and so that in all these things we won't undermine him and we won't replace him but through these things we will follow hard after him.

We teach us what it means to walk by faith to live by faith on Jesus Christ teach us what it means to count ourselves dead not only to sin but to the principles of this world and to walk in freedom and in holiness and righteousness that we would glorify you.

Holy Spirit please teach us in Jesus name I do pray Amen. Amen. Amen.