

Today's Part B of a 2-part message.

We've been learning about "Growing in Christ". ... And growth in Godliness/righteousness, always accompanies any growth in Christ.

But sometimes we get "shadow" mixed up with "substance", and here in Colossians, Paul is making us aware that there can be some 'warped ideas', around Godliness, and there are false portrayals of growth in Christ.

He began this section with the word "therefore", And I said last week, wherever we see the word "therefore", we need to know what it's there for (Why's it there?). It's because just before this, he's told us that Christ is everything we need. There is no benefit gained, by adding worldly wisdom to Christ.

And nothing **we** do, can ever add anything of substance, to the grace and forgiveness we've received in Christ... Our sins have been totally erased – every record of wrong has been nailed to the cross.

And so if anyone ever criticises a Disciple of Jesus, for **not**:

- fulfilling all religious righteousness;
- keeping certain religious observances; or
- denying ourselves enough (to gain the favour of God),
- being spiritual enough...

that means they haven't grasped the significance of the cross. The significance of the cross means that nothing needs to be added.

Now, last week, we divided these false portrayals of growth in Christ into 4 categories, but we only got through 3 of them:

1. Religious showiness:– to make a big show of religion, whether it be:

- doing the right religious ceremonies & observing the seasons on the religious calendar; or
- ‘High-Church’ and all the smells & bells to go with it; or
- the flashy concert atmosphere, and dim lights to give the appearance of Holy Spirit presence...)
– it’s a religious showiness.

2. Legal showiness; - To give the appearance that I’m always **doing** the right thing – Keeping the rules, and I make sure that everybody **sees** I’m doing the right thing, **and** expect that they also keep the same rules that I keep..

3. Asceticism; - Trying to gain God’s approval by denying ourselves anything of pleasure, and then to expect that others should also deny themselves (in order to make themselves ‘more Godly’)....

So, that’s 3 **false** portrayals of Godliness and Growth in Christ we covered last week, and now we come to the 4th:

V¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, [delighting in] asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind

4. What he's talking about, is “**spiritual** showiness” – it's having a persona of being “the spiritually elite”...

Now, some folk are really attracted to that – they crave ‘spiritual experiences’, as if having a “supernatural experience” is going to be the pinnacle of their walk with God, and then after they've had such an experience, they feel they need to have one every week??? (spiritual junkies, always looking for the next ‘fix’)

And so for those who are craving some kind of amazing experience week after week (day after day), they're kept in good supply, by people who put on a persona of being the “spiritually elite”...

This is how Paul describes them:

– They go on and on about:

- God spoke to me and told me this;
- God told me that;
- I had a vision and I saw this; and
- God has given a word to me for you; and.....

Now, the Lord does give Spiritual gifts, and at times, He does give dreams and visions. And we should **never** despise these,,, (not a cessationist.)

But I think what Paul's describing here, is a false image of having a **superior form** of Godliness... It's the attitude that, "You're an inferior Christian, because you don't have the same experiences as I do... And you'll be a better Christian (more complete/spiritual) if you learn to hear from God, the way that I hear from God..."

And they project an image of being "super-spiritual", going on and on about their visions, and experiences of angels & what-not... But how does Paul describe this??? **puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind**

It's the exact opposite of what they're trying to portray... They don't go on and on because they're 'more spiritual' – they go on-&-on because they're puffed up (when there is no reason to be puffed up)... And it's not the Spirit at all – it's 'of the flesh'. The Greek word for sensuous is σαρκὸς (sarkos), which means "flesh"...

You know, Paul himself had some of the most amazing spiritual experiences, but **he** wouldn't go on-&-on about it... In fact, in 2 Corinthians 12, he talks of himself (in the 3rd person): "I know this bloke who was caught up to paradise, and heard things that he wasn't able to repeat. He didn't even know if he was there in person, or if he'd dreamed it..." but he says, "Although it's true, I'm not even going to tell you about it, because that would serve to elevate me spiritually, and make me conceited"...

You see, Paul understood, that a spiritual man, doesn't try and prove his worth by constantly telling everybody else of his

own spiritual experience. The grace of Christ is the experience we need to tell...

Being puffed-up spiritually, is a false-image of Godliness (every bit as much as empty religion is). And what it does, is it leads a person to delight in having a spiritual experience, more than what we delight in Christ... **And** it gives a false message to others, that “You’re an inferior Christian, because you’re not spiritual enough”...

But Christ is everything we need... The fulness of God is in Christ. And by His Holy Spirit, Christ is in us. We are **already** one with Him... And going on in detail about visions, and being puffed up with our past spiritual experiences, doesn’t give us spiritual growth – it’s a working of the flesh... – And a working of the flesh, disconnects us from Christ....

Do you understand what I’m saying here? **Having** a Spiritual experience is great, and we praise God that His Spirit is at work... But:

- being puffed up by that Spiritual experience;
- going on and on about it and telling everybody about it over and over again; and
- expecting that other people should have the same spiritual experience,,,

That’s not of the Spirit – that’s of the flesh.

In the church, when one group of people see themselves as being “more spiritual”, it cripples the body of Christ.... In Paul’s 1st letter to the church in Corinth, he chastises the ones who see themselves as being spiritually elite. And then he gives the image of the church as the body, and how **every** disciple of Jesus is spiritual – and God has arranged the body, how **He** intends it to be... And we don’t all have the same spiritual gifts (that’s the way he’s designed us). If we **did** all have the same spiritual gifts, then we wouldn’t be a body...

And it’s with this context in mind, that he uses the same image, here in V19:

Where he tells us that those who are “puffed-up” (spiritually), are disconnected from the head (Christ)...

But when we as a church, are connected to Christ (Who is our head), we as a body, **grow**... We are nourished – how are we nourished? With the word of God. **and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.**

Isn’t that exciting...

Church growth: Every church wants to grow, hey... We want to grow in number. We want to grow spiritually...

I did a search on the Koorong Website for “church growth” (& there’s 1609 products to choose from). You’d think we would’ve learned our lesson by now: Growth doesn’t come from reading a book, or running a program, or from a particular method – at least not Godly growth...

Growth occurs when we're connected to Christ, and He knits us together...

Let's move on: V²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations —
²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"
²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used) — according to human precepts and teachings?
²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Now, the point Paul's making here, is "trying to project an **image** of Godliness", is actually a worldly thing... And **spiritually**, it's a temptation from the evil one — **the elemental spirits of the world** (demons)...

To grow in Christ, isn't at all about showiness, whether it be about:

- Religion
- Rule-keeping;
- Self-denial;
- having Super-Spiritual experiences...

None of those things will make us better disciples of Jesus, and in fact, if we are chasing these things, it will **hinder** our

growth in Christ, because we feel there is something more to be added.

A couple of weeks ago, we talked about how worldly wisdom doesn't originate from Christ. Its origin, is human tradition, influenced by the demonic... And now, Paul's cast the net a bit wider, to help us to understand that even within the church, the **elemental spirits of the world** – the demonic, are trying to shape the traditions of the church to point us towards

- Religion
- Rule-keeping;
- Self-denial;
- having Super-Spiritual experiences...

What's pointing us towards these things? The elemental spirits of the world (the demonic). Why? Because Satan does not want you to be connected to Christ, and Satan doesn't want you to be satisfied and content, that being connected to Christ, is enough...

The lie of the devil, is that you always have to add more.

One of the biggest causes of marital divorce today, is "discontentment"... The husband and wife – not bad,, but one of them feels that there's something missing from their relationship, and they want something more... They're discontent, and so they divorce... (Obviously no idea of what a marriage is)...

But some folk are like that with Christ, or with the church they're in... *My church might be alright, and I get good teaching, but I want something more...*

More:

- Religion / religious experiences / Godly atmosphere (whatever that is)
- Rule-keeping;
- Self-denial;
- Super-Spiritual experiences...

They're wanting more – They're discontent. What are they discontent with? They're discontent with Christ...

To be discontent with the church, is ultimately to be discontent with Christ...

Remember, V¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Are you getting this? **I** cannot grow by myself. I have to be connected to the Head (Christ)... But I can't be connected to the head, without also being connected to the body...

I cannot grow in Christ, unless I am connected together with the body, because the **whole** body is **nourished and knit together** through its joints and ligaments... And that's the **growth** that is from God.

Now, for those who are listening online, If you are not connected with a local fellowship, I urge you, to connect with your brothers and sisters in Christ. They need you, so that they can grow in Christ, as much as you need them, so you can grow in Christ...

Anyway, these substitutes for Christ, Paul says are **according to human precepts and teachings ...**

That's an important phrase. In Mark 7:7, Jesus used that same phrase, when He quoted Isaiah 29.

Jesus was talking about the Pharisees, who would reject the commandments of God, and make up their own traditions. The pharisees were getting up Jesus because His disciples didn't properly wash their hands before they ate. And Jesus' response was:

Mark 7:6–8 (ESV)

6, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

**" 'This people honours me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;**

**7 in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**

8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

Now, at this point, Jesus was focusing specifically on the religious rules – don't touch this, don't eat that... And yet all of these examples of false godliness are all tied together. And here **Paul** is talking about self-made religion and asceticism.

These things might have the appearance of wisdom, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh...

It is the strong desire of every faithful Christian, to grow in Christ, in all righteousness and holiness... Is it not??? Nod your head up and down...

But if we try to achieve that through man-made religion and rules and regulations, or super-spiritual experiences, we're going to fail.

You see, it's a heart issue... We've died to things of the flesh. We've been raised to new life. And Christ in us, is enough.

Let's pray

Heavenly Father,
Once again, we thank You, that Christ is enough.

Lord, forgive us man-made religion
- a religion of showiness...

- Religious
- legal
- self-denial; and even
- spiritual showiness...

Lord, your word tells us here,
that this sort of showiness,
disconnects us from the Head (Christ)

Lord, Christ is enough.
We delight in Christ.
And we delight in Him,
together with each other...

Lord, help us (as a church)
to grow as the body of Christ.
With a growth that is from God.

And for the glory of God.

Amen.