

Colossians #6 - 3 Counterfeits To Christianity

- Am Pastor Mark Driscoll here at the Trinity Church in Scottsdale Arizona, really excited to provide for you the series of sermons based on the Book of Colossians. It's an amazing book of the New Testament where the Apostle Paul is writing from prison to newly planted church. And we took a few months here at the Trinity Church to go verse by verse through this book of the Bible. I've had the honor of preaching and teaching perhaps a few dozen books of the Bible in my career, and this is the first time I've ever been through Colossians and I'm really excited that you can join me. All right, if you have your Bibles, go to Colossians 2:16, we're spending a few months going through this great book of the Bible verse by verse and we're hearing from a man named the Apostle Paul, and he's writing to this new church plant, kind of like ours, it's an eight month old baby church plant just taking root and growing. And how many of you are parents or grandparents, you've raised a kid, right? When they're little, you tell them do this, don't do that because they don't have a lot of reasoning skills and they're not sure how cause and effect quite works yet. So when the kids are little, you tell them do this, don't do that, but as they get a little older, you can't just tell them what to do, you need to teach them how to think because you realize as a parent or a grandparent, you can't always be there to make every decision for them or to make every decision with them. At some point, a child needs to make the transition from just doing what they're told to determining what they should do, that's discernment and reasoning. And kids that grow up kind of a religious home that's a little naive or high control, they don't learn how to make decisions, they don't learn how to think. And as a result, they either obey everyone who tells them to do something which gets them in a lot of trouble or they start to make bad decisions because they don't know how to make good decisions. Well, similarly, the Apostle Paul, he's writing this letter, and he's almost conducting himself like a dad. And he writes this letter to this church that has some new Christians, and it's in fact a new church, but he can't be present with them because he's far away in prison. So we can't be there with them to make every decision saying believe this, don't believe that, trust them, don't trust them, do this, don't do that, he has to teach them how to think for themselves. And so what he teaches them today is that there are three counterfeits to Christianity. And what I really appreciate is Paul doesn't tell us exactly what the name of each group is, he doesn't tell us who the leaders of each group are, because the names change and people come and go, but the ideologies the spiritualities, the philosophies, they continue from generation to generation. So what we're gonna do, we're gonna look at each of them in succession and I'll just warn you in advance, you're gonna be offended, at least I hope you will be. That's my goal. I believe in equality, and I believe everyone should be offended. And so we want to offend all of you, because each of us has these three dispositions or inclinations in our heart or in our relationship with God, and in these areas, we tend to take ourselves very seriously and as a result, sometimes we don't take God seriously enough. So by making fun of ourselves, we're actually taking God a little more seriously and taking ourselves a little less seriously. Well, here's counterfeit number one Law-Making Larry, some will call this legalism. I'll give you a few big words so that you feel like your money's worth. The big word today is legalism, here it is Colossians 2:16-17: "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you." I think it was Eleanor

Roosevelt once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Amen. Good think about that, okay? That People will look down on you or they will judge you because of your biblical Christian convictions, but what he's saying is don't let anyone look down on you, don't accept that, don't wear that, don't assume that, don't say you get to judge me, no, Jesus gets to judge me. And those who love Him can help me. "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you "in question of food and drink or with regard to a festival "or a new moon or a Sabbath. "These are a shadow of the things to come "but the substance belongs to Christ." What he's saying is there are certain things that are shadows, there are other things that are substance. So I'll give you an analogy. Not long ago, spring break came and Grace and I and the two younger kids went over to San Diego, and we went to the San Diego Zoo. And there was a big crowd and kind of we got a little bit separated not far and I was wondering will Grace and kids go to the left or would they go to the right? Well, I could see around the corner there was a shadow and there was Grace and Gideon and Alexi, and I could tell by the heights, I think those are my people. So I followed the shadow and once I saw the shadow, I didn't pay a lot of attention to the shadow, for the rest of the day I was not talking to the shadow, holding the shadow's hand, kissing the shadow, spending time with the shadow, devoted to the shadow, trying carefully not to step on the shadow for fear of harming the shadow, the whole point of the shadow was to show me where my wife and kids were, and once I saw them, I was done with a shadow. What he's saying here is that a lot of rules and regulations are just shadows sort of cascading off of Jesus and once you meet Jesus, once you know Jesus, once you're walking with Jesus, the shadow doesn't really matter, amen. How many of you don't have on your desk at work a picture of the shadow of a person you love? Because the shadow is not really a big deal. It's the substance that really is the big deal And that's what he's talking about here. And what he's talking about religion and spirituality, it's really two things tend to hang up and trip up religious people, diet and days. So how many of you have religious friends and various religious friends, it's very hard to have them all over for a meal. Right? Your Jewish friends are like we're kosher like, I don't know what that is, but okay, I'll google that and figure out what I can't feed you. You have your Muslim friends over, we don't eat pork, right? You have your NFL football fans over and they're gonna eat all the pork that your Muslim friends didn't eat. Every group has kind of got their different rules. How many of you are vegan? How many of you are vegetarian? How many believe that's the right way, diet, and also drink he talks about. Some of you don't mind drinking alcohol, some of you don't drink alcohol. Some of you are gonna fight about this in the foyer afterward, just don't shed any blood, okay? We have all these different opinions and perspectives about diet and also days, festivals, holidays, religious groups tend to have their own traditions and their own high holy days. And so if you're a Jehovah's Witness, you don't celebrate your birthday. Because only godless people in the Bible celebrate their birthday. And you don't wanna be godless, so don't celebrate your birthday. How many of you celebrate Christmas? And so none of you are Purance 'cause the Purance didn't celebrate Christmas, they would in fact work on Christmas as a protest against Christmas. We've got Easter coming up. Some Christians are wondering, should we celebrate Easter? It comes out of the pagan Roman holiday, Eastr, and if you ever wondered, how did the bunny come out of an egg? That's sort of Eastr, that's out of this ancient Roman pagan holiday. How many of you won't celebrate Halloween? Christians argue we shouldn't celebrate that holiday, it's a dark holiday, it comes out of the feast of

Salween, it comes out of this pagan Druid Celtic ancient festival, we shouldn't participant. And so all of these conflicts come around diet, should we eat that or drink that? And days, should we celebrate or not celebrate those particular holidays, and here's what happens. Different people have different opinions and what can come to answer these questions is something called legalism. Here's legalism, God's laws plus my laws, that's legalism. That's legalism. God, you did a really good job making some rules, you missed a few, I'm here to help. I'm here to help. You're welcome, you're welcome. You know, I put in here first and second opinions, my latest book of the Bible just to sort of clarify the things that you missed, I'ma add those to the book, you're welcome, Lord. I know you didn't mean to miss these things, but you know, we all make mistakes, thankfully, I'm here to help, right? So legalism is God's laws plus my laws. Now, this is very, very common in religion and it leads to a guy we'll call Law-Making Larry. Okay, what's wrong with Law-Making Larry? You can see he's very angry, that's how legalism gets. Now, here's how legalism starts, here's how lawmaking starts apart from the Bible. Number one, let's say Larry, do you like him? Yes or no?

- [Congregant] Yes.

- Okay, one of you likes it. Good, okay, well, that's a start. Don't look down on humble beginnings. Okay, one of you likes Larry. He struggled or stumbled with something. There was some temptation, something was difficult for him and he either was really struggling with it or he got in trouble with it. Okay, can we sympathize, empathize with Larry a little bit? Okay, say yes. Okay, good job, okay. I just made a law. Okay, we're all gonna sympathize with Larry, okay? He made a rule to guard himself. Is that a bad thing? No. Let's say you've struggled with alcohol. So you make some guardrails for your life. You say, you know what? I don't drink and I don't go to social events where people will be drinking 'cause I get in trouble. Is that okay? That's okay. That's okay. That's totally fine. Some of you would say, I go home and I download stuff on the internet that I shouldn't be looking at and I get myself in trouble, so I've decided I'm not gonna have the internet at my house, is that okay? That's okay. That's okay, that's totally fine. These are guardrails for your life, knowing that these are areas where you're weak and you can struggle and stumble so you make rules guardrails for yourself. Thus far, points one and two, I agree with Larry. Now here's where it becomes a problem. Point number three, he demanded that others adopt his rules. You ever met this guy? You met this guy? He's like, the internet's nasty, unplug it. Like well, wait, Larry. Wait, we don't have to. Oh, yes, you do, we all need to unplug the internet. That's a rule, okay? Okay, Larry, well, and Jesus didn't drink wine it was grape juice. No, he didn't, Larry, it sounds like you've been drinking. No No, right, Larry, Larry, okay, these are rules for you, they're not rules for everybody. See, God gets to make rules for everybody, Larry, you can make rules for you but you don't get to make rules for everybody. So he starts imposing his conscience, his rules, his guardrails on everyone. And then number four, he judged those who do not obey his rules. He judged everybody, so you're wrong and you're wrong and you're wrong and I'm gonna plug the internet back in and we're gonna talk about this, right? Then comes the mushroom cloud of controversy and conflict. This is how legalism starts, someone has a real struggle, and they put some guardrails in that are really helpful and then they overstep their bounds and they start imposing their laws, their rules on everyone else, and

then judging those who don't, who don't agree with them. Let me give you some modern day debates, Bible translations in the church. You ever seen people fight about that? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, yeah, that is God's translation, that is Satan's translation. You're reading Satan's Bible. Really? I didn't know Satan wrote a Bible, interesting, okay. Now, here's my view of Bible translations, it's like ice cream, there's a lot of them, most of them are good, a few of them make me sick to my stomach, but most of my like, okay? That's how I view Bible translations. I do have a preference, what is yours, Pastor Mark? I will not tell you 'cause it'll sound like a law. How about this one; kid's education? Oh, I'll just throw that out there and just let it simmer for a bit. Okay, think about this; I've had some of you come up recently and ask, Pastor Mark, what is your position on the education of children? Okay, let me give you my official public position. I believe that children should be educated. That's my official public position, okay? And then people answer, I know Pastor Mark, but should they be homeschooled, private schooled, public schools or charter schools? My answer is, for sure, one of those, okay? And I've had some people come in recently said, no, we were told that there's only one right way to educate your child. My point is, you need to make the decision if you're a parent per child per year, because kids and circumstances and needs change and different schools have different strengths and weaknesses, whatever choice you make, as a parent, you need to be actively involved with your child in their life including their school, you need to get to know the teacher, the administrators, the curriculum, you need to be involved because it's your responsibility as a parent. I had somebody come in recently, they said, so if we don't homeschool our kids, you're not gonna discipline us. Well, first of all, I don't have time for discipline. I'm 47, I barely have time to even shave. And in addition, no, we're not gonna, that's no, no, they said, well, at our last church, we were told that we're in sin unless we homeschool. Really? No, no, that's somewhere Larry made a rule. Larry made a law. Well, mark you I'm not against, I believe that each parent filled with the Holy Spirit, seeking wise counsel, doing their research can decide per child per year what is best for them and make adjustments if they make the wrong decision. About this one, political party. You wanna talk about politics? Me neither, okay? I don't know if you've noticed this, our current political climate has the church a wee bit divided, I don't know if you noticed that. Some people will say no, no, if you're really a Christian, you'll be a Democrat and others say no, no, if you're really a Christian you'd be Republican and then some say, you're both crazy, if you're really Christian, you'd be a libertarian and hate them all. And everybody fights and makes an argument. Now what happens is, you can have your own preferences, but don't let your preferences become your prejudices. Don't think that the way that you operate according to conscience is the way that everyone needs to operate according to conscience. Now, do you think I have opinions? I give opinions for a living, I'm a professional. I have an opinion on everything, everything from political party to whether or not baseball should have a designated hitter. I have an opinion on everything. I actually have a very strong opinion and I can actually articulate my opinion, I can argue for my opinion, but I don't wanna impose my opinion because what happens is, a guy like Larry, Law-Making Larry, because something is caused him to struggle or stumble, his intent is to safeguard and protect people but it ends up not being helpful because eventually you have rules about the rules and laws about the laws and you have the kind of situation where when Jesus came along, the religious leaders killed Him because He was breaking the rules. Not that He was breaking God's laws, He was breaking their religious

traditions. And it would be like this, it would be like, if you came to me and people do this to spiritual leadership all the time, they come up and they say, there's a problem with this, we need to make a rule. So it would be like if someone came up and said, I hear that people at the Trinity Church are over consuming whiskey and water. So I got up and I said, okay, we have a problem guys, going forward, we forbid whiskey and water because you're over consuming. Neither of those are acceptable. I thought that would be funnier than you guys did. Okay, so Imagine if then I heard that there were problems in relationships with women and there were problems in relationship with men. So I got up on a Sunday I said, new rule, no relationships with women or men. History shows that those kinds of relationships only cause pain and strife, amen. So no relationships with men or women. Okay. And if you wanna talk to me about it, do not call text or email because nasty things get done on your phone and phones are now illegal. Okay? So don't talk to me, otherwise you're in sin using your phone. This is what happens: people have trouble with something we make a rule or a law to protect them but what we end up doing is taking away all of our freedom. Well, here's some problems with legalism; it's birthed in fear. Oh, no, that's trouble. Oh, no, that's danger. Oh, no, oh, no, oh, no. You end up being raised in a prison, your world gets smaller and smaller, and smaller, and smaller and smaller. And the longer you're in a group that likes to make rules, they make rules, then they make more rules, then they make rules about the rules. and then a committee makes additional rules about the rules. And pretty soon you don't need the Holy Spirit, you don't need the Word of God, you don't need to think, you don't need to walk with God because the manual will tell you everything you need to know and it's not God's Word, wrong manual. Number three, it reproduces uniformity. God wants us to have unity but not uniformity. When we get to the kingdom of God, there's gonna be a lot of diversity, different ages, races, cultures, nations, backgrounds, languages, I mean, it's gonna be a lot of diversity, but the Unity will be around Jesus. Uniformity is a counterfeit of unity. I know of one church, literally, almost every man there is an engineer and every woman homeschools, right? And everyone uses the same homeschool curriculum, right? And they all dress the same, and it's very uniform, it's almost like somewhere there's a bunch of palettes and you go buy the kit for how to be a Christian and then everything is according to the kit, it's total uniformity. That concerns me. And it dies joyless or rebellious, either you're a person who's compliant and you're one of those people who just obeys all the rules, but it's joyless or you're rebellious. How many of you are rebellious? If somebody gives you a rule, you're gonna break it. And so the more rules they make, whoa! Right, I hope you know this, Marilyn Manson went to Christian school, okay? Just throwing that out there, something to think about, Okay, once you give somebody a lot of rules and they don't have a love for Jesus or a new nature or the Holy Spirit, all of a sudden those laws are a trampoline, they, Whoo! I'm gonna rebel against that and they rebel big time. That's why some kids raised in very legalistic, structured, high control, fear-based Christian homes, as they get older and they leave home, those kids break every rule, every commandment, they violate every protocol, they make up for lost time. So let me say this, couple things just to help you out. God's laws are for everyone, your rules are just for you. God's laws are for everyone, your rules are just for you. Feel free to make rules for you, but your rules are for you, they're not for me, they're not for us. Number two, I said it, but don't make your preferences your prejudices. I prefer this kind of music, therefore, it's godly and it's the kind of music that God likes. I prefer this mode of worship. I prefer this kind of education for my

children. I prefer this translation of the Bible. These are my preferences, God, I'm sure that you're like me and have good taste. And so these people who disagree with me, I'm sure they disagree with you. Now, my preferences become my prejudices and also number three, distinguish principles and methods. Legalists can't do this. Legalist like to slam a Bible verse on everything. So that if you disagree with them, you're not biblical. But they don't distinguish between principles and methods. The Bible gives us closed handed principles and open handed methods. So it says to worship the Lord. Well, how many songs and what key with what instruments, open handed? The Bible says to educate our children, how to do so? Open handed. The Bible tells us to be good citizens and to pray for our governing officials but it doesn't tell us exactly what box to tick when we head into vote. Okay? Principles and methods and principles and methods and we need to be clear on God's biblical principles and then leave a little bit of freedom and flexibility and conscience for people, guided by the Holy Spirit with wise counsel to decide and determine what methods God would have for them. Does this make sense? Okay, otherwise, here's what happens, let me let me give you one illustration to close this. When we first moved into our home, there was a fence in the back, we have a desert wash behind us and I was thinking, do we really need that fence? See, we were new to Arizona. I see you all laughing now. I said, do we really need that fence? And then I saw javelina, and coyotes, and a rattlesnake, and I kid you not a bobcat. Now I was like, I love that fence that, that fence, that's a genius fence right there. I have children, I like all of them. You know, I wanna keep them all and I think that fence is good, okay?. God's law is like a fence to protect His kids from harm. That's why if you hop the fence of God's law, you go get yourself into danger and trouble. What people do that are lawmaking and they're legalistic by nature, they say, okay, God, that's a good fence but what if a bobcat could hop the fence? What if you know rattlesnake could crawl under? What if a javelina could dig around? Well, then I'll just build a fence inside the fence. Well, you know, but I don't know if that fence is still close to danger, how about we build a fence within the fence, within the fence, within the fence, within the fence and a rule in a rule, and a law in a law, and a fence and a fence, and next thing you know, it's not a yard, it's a prison cell. And there's so many rules and laws and fences and borders that you can't live your life, there's no freedom, you're domineered, you're controlled and one of two things happens, you're joyless man, I can't do anything or rebellious, forget it. I'm gonna go hop all the fences and get myself in lots of trouble. Those of you who come from Bible Church backgrounds, those of you who come from something called the reformed tradition, those of you who are like me, and you're nerds and you like reading dead people and footnotes, this is our proclivity. Out of a genuine hope to help ourselves and others, we can make rules that God did not make and what goes from offense to protect children to have fun in the yard, ends up building a prison in which people are held and not free to live their life in joy. True or false. True, okay, true. Now, let me say this too. Do I have my own conscience issues? I do, I'll share some of them with you. I don't put anything on top of the Bible. So like when I'm at home, I always read books, I'm a nerd. And I always put the Bible on top, I won't put anything on top of the Bible, for me it's just my way of saying nothing's above the Bible for me. But I'm not gonna make that a law, that's me. I can't watch any horror film, I've had so many demonic encounters in my life, it just troubles me, I don't think that all journals and film are evil, there's just certain films, I just can't watch, it doesn't edify me, it doesn't work. But I don't think it's a sin. I don't play video games. Okay, at all my kids will tell

you, I don't know anything about video games. I don't think they're a sin, I just don't care and I got things to do and for me, I just don't feel like it's a good use of my time. Now I could make an argument for each of these things and we can take a vote and I might be able to persuade you and then we could put it in a manual and then we got a lot of problems. And you've got your things too, right? You've got your things and that's okay for you. And you live according to your conscience, I live according to my conscience, but we all live according to God's laws. God's laws don't change, we're not rejecting God's laws, but we're distinguishing between God's laws for everyone and our rules for ourselves. So, that's the first one, Law-Making Larry. Here's the second one, counterfeit number two, and everything that's really valuable gets counterfeited, there's fakes and forgeries, Christianity is no different. This is Harry the Hippie. We'll call this mysticism, if you wanna know the big word, here it is Colossians 2:18-19, let no one disqualify you. Again, this is where someone is saying, you're not spiritual enough. You're not as spiritual as we are. Insisting on asceticism, supernatural, paranormal, spiritual experiences. These are your spiritual butterflies. Oh, the wind shifted. I'm following the spirit, oh the wind shifted I'm following the spirit. And worship of angels, they're into visions and dreams and other realms and aliens just thrown it out there. Going on in detail about visions, well, I don't need the Bible, God speaks to me directly. God tells me things that He doesn't tell anyone else. Puffed up, right, arrogant, without reason by a sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body nourished and it's together, that's our church, through its joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God. Here's what happens with mysticism, it's about spirituality and sensuality, that's what he's saying. Spirituality is visions, dreams, angels, you know, near death experiences, paranormal activity, supernatural, and also sensual. What this means is that it's mindless, it doesn't really think, it doesn't love the Lord your God with all your mind, it's not transformed by the renewing of your mind, it's not really thinking about what is happening and interpreting the data. And it could also end up being very carnal. This is why some cults and false religions, they always end up in lots of sexual sin and it tends to go with false teaching. And so what he's saying is, this sort of mysticism of Harry the Hippie, it's very spiritual and it's very sensual, that's what he's saying. So let me give you a simple functional definition for mysticism. I get closer to God through my spiritual experiences. So I'm chasing spiritual experiences, I'm seeking spiritual experiences, I'm yearning for spirit, give me a vision, give me an angel, give me a word, give me something supernatural, paranormal, God. I don't wanna just read the Bible, I want something bigger and better and bolder. I want something more. Give me some sort of paranormal supernatural experience. Here's the problem with Harry the Hippie, here's how he gets into trouble. Here he is, you like him? Okay, he's a little better, okay. Here's Harry the Hippie, he wants to be close to God, is that a good idea? Okay, so again, Larry's issue is he doesn't want people to get into harm. Well, that's good. But he's got the wrong solution to prevent the problem from happening. Harry the Hippie, he has a good design, he wants to be close to God. Okay, let's say that's good, I can affirm that, I understand that. But he creates a spiritual experience ladder that doesn't lead to Jesus. When you're in these circles, they will talk literally about almost a ladder where there's different levels or rungs. And as you climb them, you get closer to God through your experiences, okay? And then he recruits other people to climb his ladder, let's do this together, let's form a group, let's all do this together, and then demonic forces, Satan and demons, are happy to keep him spiritually distracted. You want a

vision? We'll give you a vision, we don't care as long as you're not going to Jesus. You want an angel? We'll send a demon dressed up, they can pretend, that's fine. You want a healing? The Bible says there's counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles. Satan and demons are willing to fake, forgery, the kingdom of God to keep you spiritually engaged. Now, the desire is not bad to be close to God but these all lead to grave danger. What does this look like today in the non-Christian world? Well, people tend to believe in evolution physically but they also tend to believe in evolution spiritually. That you can get to higher levels of consciousness, this is what's called a New Age or new spirituality. This would be Oprah Winfrey, Deepak Chopra, Marianne Williamson, books like "The Secret" there's these trends and fads that sort of flow through pop culture. And it's all about supernatural, paranormal spiritual experiences that aren't connected to Jesus or the real Jesus of the Bible. And it makes you feel like you're inferior when he says let no one disqualify you, what he's saying is someone looks down on you and they're saying, oh you believe the Bible? You're one of those primitive people. Oh, you think Jesus is enough? Well, that was thousands of years ago. You know, we've really advanced a lot since then supernaturally and spiritually, why are you into Jesus? That's very primitive stuff. We're not driving horse drawn carriages and buggies anymore either, we've all moved on, have you not moved on? And it makes you feel a little inferior, a little judged. I had this experience, I was on ABC Nightline debating Deepak Chopra, a leader in this world and he literally at one point in our debate, he basically told me that I was primitive, which made me feel like four guys back on the evolutionary chart with a slow forehead and knuckles on the ground. I know feel primitive. But what he was saying was, that he had evolved to a higher level of consciousness than me so I couldn't understand this spiritual truth that he was talking about because I was primitive. Okay, I didn't agree with that. But this is why some people who wanna open themselves up to the paranormal and the supernatural, they will use drugs, they'll use alcohol and altered states of consciousness trying to thin the veil between this world and the invisible world and to invite us to experience the supernatural world. Some of you would ask, what does this look like when it comes to just general mainstream spirituality? Have you ever been to Sedona? Wow! There's a guy in a loincloth drinking herbal tea trying to reflect the energy of the rock. And he's like you're primitive like, actually, I think we could debate this point as to which one of us is primitive, nice crystal, right? Right, it's very spiritual but you go, what about Jesus? They're like He had an enlightened consciousness and He was on another evolutionary plane that I hope to achieve. I don't think so. Right, I don't think so. We'll edit that out. But, but that's what this looks like. It looks very spiritual. But there's versions of this even within the church. So let me give you some verses within the church. So within the church, it's almost like there are varsity and junior varsity Christians. And until you have certain experiences, you're still junior varsity. You're still junior varsity. I will never forget, I was teaching in a conference and I had a woman come up after and she said, have you ever spoken in tongues? I said, I believe in speaking in tongues, I love people who speak in tongues, I would be happy if God had me speak in tongues, but I've never spoken in tongues. She said, it's really sad you don't have the Holy Spirit. You've done a lot without God. Well, thank you for all the encouragement. Wow, okay. But her view was still junior varsity, it's amazing what you did on JV. Okay, so there are different ways and experiences that Christians are told in junior varsity, speak in tongues, tithe, fast, go to mission trip, get a vision from God, hear from God, street witness, be baptized, figure out who your guardian angel is, get

healed, heal someone else, pick the right Bible translation, figure out the end times, I know when He's coming back, right? Form of worship music, right? All of these different ways are, once you've sort of passed this threshold, from primitive to higher rung on the ladder, now you're closer to God, now you're more spiritual, you've sort of evolved beyond the rest of your junior varsity. Here's what I need you to know, on Team Jesus there's no JV. Okay, just like in a family, a parent should never play favorites. In God's family, He loves all of His kids and He doesn't play favorites. He loves and serves all of His kids. And this concept of ladder climbing, it's interesting. I was in a debate with another sort of New Age thought leader that writes and such in, and they literally said, you need to climb into higher levels of consciousness, it was a ladder. There is a ladder in the Bible, it's in Genesis. There's a guy named Jacob and he has this really strange experience, I think it's like Genesis 28. And this ladder, does the ladder go up from earth or come down from heaven, for those of you know the story? Ladder doesn't come up from earth, it comes down from heaven. Okay? And what doesn't happen is, Jacob does not climb the ladder up to God. What happens is the angels come down the ladder to Jacob. And it's all foreshadowing that eventually Jesus is gonna come down the ladder. So the way we have supernatural experience, the way we're close to God, is not that we create a ladder that we climb up through our supernatural experiences to get close to God, but that God comes down as Jesus Christ. And He brings the supernatural with Him. He brings the kingdom of God with Him. He brings healing, He brings miracles, He brings revelation with Him, but it's all connected to Him. That's where he says, any spirituality that's not connected to Christ as the head, or if it doesn't flow down from Jesus, if it's not connected to Jesus, if it doesn't reveal Jesus, then it's demonic, then it's counterfeit, it's satanic. And let me tell you this, Satan and demons don't mind it if you're spiritual as long as you don't get to Jesus. Their whole goal is to keep you from Jesus. So if you'll just be spiritual, as long as it's not spiritual in connection to Jesus, they're fine with that. And that's the problem with mysticism. Jesus says it this way; a wicked and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. So I don't think that we should be chasing signs and wonders and miracles and paranormal and supernatural, I think we should be following Jesus and walking with Jesus and I believe as we're walking with Jesus, I don't believe that we should be seeking signs and wonders, but I think signs and wonders will be following us as we walk with Him. I believe that people will get healed, God will speak, supernatural things will happen, the kingdom of God will unveil itself, I don't believe it'll be a demonic counterfeit, I think it'll be the real deal but we're working with Jesus, we're walking with Jesus, and those things will follow us, those are not the things that we follow. Let's make the difference. Okay, the third third category, so we've dealt with Larry, the law-maker, we've dealt with Harry the Hippie, and now we're gonna deal with Minimalist Martha, you can call this asceticism. Colossians 2:20-23, "If with Christ, "you died to the elemental spirits of the world." Here's what he's saying, if you're a Christian, so I would ask you, are you a Christian? Do you believe in Jesus? Do You love Jesus? Have you confessed your sins to Jesus, right? Is Jesus the center of your life? If with Christ, you died to the elemental spirits of the world, what he's talking about there is just general spirituality, the demonic, that which is paranormal and supernatural but not Jesus. Why is if you were still alive to the world do you submit to the regulations? And here are religious rules. Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. Rules, rules, rules, rules, rules. We're referring to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings. Religious leaders like to make

rules and more rules and more rules, don't do this, don't do that, don't do this, don't do that, but they're all human rules, they're not God's laws. These are things that we make up not things that God reveals. These have indeed the appearance of wisdom, how many of you have heard these things? You're like, you know, that actually, I don't know, maybe they're right. Maybe we should just adopt all their rules. Maybe their rules are gonna, maybe their rules are good, I don't know what I'm doing, so I'll just follow the rules. Some of you like your relationship with Jesus to me more like a Paint by Numbers kid, or the assembling of IKEA Furniture. Right? Just step one, step two, step three, just tell me what to do. But relationships are a little more complicated than that. They take actually knowing someone and spending time with someone and listening to someone and talking to someone. And Jesus doesn't wanna just hand you a set of directions, He wants to walk with you in the context of a relationship. In the same way, I don't wanna just give my kids a manual and then leave. Here's the manual, kids, obey I, you're welcome, goodbye. Have a nice life. No, I wanna, I know you, I love you, let me talk with you, let me walk with you, let's talk about this, let's work through this, I wanna be there in the context of relationship to help you make decisions. I won't just give you a Paint by Numbers kit, I wanna give you a relationship where we work it out together, God's like that. These have the appearance of wisdom and promoting self-made religion. Self-made religion is people speculating about God, Christianity is Jesus revealing Himself to us. The difference is, man-made religion is speculation about God, Christianity is revelation from God. Nobody made up Christianity, God did. That's why it's the biggest thing in the history of the world, more nations, more cultures, more languages, more people walking with, confessing, worshipping, devoted to Jesus than anyone or anything that's lived in the history of the world. That's why in the history of the world, the biggest thing going is the church. Because nobody made this up. God created Christianity, a family around his risen Son, Jesus. Counterfeits come along, world religions, philosophies, ideologies, cults and spiritualities, and they try and co-opt what God has created, but God is creator, Satan is counterfeiter. Satan doesn't create things, he counterfeits what God created. And when he calls that here is self-made religion, things that God didn't make. And asceticism, we'll talk about that, and severity to the body, that's the key line, but there have no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Sometimes you find the groups that have the most rules, when you really dig underneath, they have the most problems. Rules and rules and rules and rules and rules and rules and rules and rules and rules and children are being abused by men who made the rules. You're like, what in the world? Because they are of no use in stopping the flesh. That's this rebellious sinful nature. Unless our nature changes, it doesn't matter how many rules are made, we won't obey any of them until we have a new nature that loves the law of God. Let me explain to you, let me give you a simple, functional practical definition of this. I starve my body to feed my soul. Okay, I starve my body to feed my soul. Body is the physical part, the soul is the spiritual part and this sort of teaching that Paul is arguing against, we'll call it asceticism categorically says, my body has desires and yearnings and appetites and pleasures, get me in a lot of trouble. A true or false, your body has some appetites that have gotten you into trouble. Okay, you don't have to raise your hand 'cause there's no need for all of us to raise our hand. But let's just throw out their food. We're like, what? Huh? What? Did you say something, I was snacking? Yeah. Alcohol, drugs, sex, comfort, anyone ever heard of these things? what these are, these are the passions and pleasures of the

physical body. And what we realize is man, we can get into trouble with our physical body and then this leads some people to think that the body is evil so it's spirituality by subtraction. It's spirituality by subtraction. Let me show you what it looks like for Minimalist Martha. There's Minimalist Martha, she's living in a tent in the woods, she only drinks rainwater and she grows her own vegetables. and she makes her own clothes. She has a zero carbon footprint. That's Minimalist Martha. Some are like, that's not funny. Okay, then we figured out what your thing is. All right, all right. Okay, now here's what happened to Minimalist Martha. She experienced and witnessed overindulgence. Have you ever seen that? You're like, oh my gosh, what people are doing with food and alcohol and drugs and sex, it's out of control. Any of you ever seen somebody who's really addicted or hurt themselves? You're heart breaks, you're like, let's say it's you. So this can either be your experience or the experience that you observe of someone you love. Number two, she decided that the body is dangerous and pleasure is evil. This body is dangerous and pleasure is evil. Now we're having the wrong answer to the real problem. Number three, she determined that bodily subtraction is spiritual addition. The less I eat, the holier I am. The less I drink, the holier I am. The less I enjoy, the holier I am. The less that I possess and own, the holier that I am. that I have spiritual addition through subtraction. And she sought to atone for herself through her own suffering. I've done bad things, I need to suffer to pay God back. I need to suffer to pay God back. She doesn't fully understand Jesus already suffered to pay God back. So you don't need to suffer the pay God back. Today in the non-Christian world, this would be like separatist groups, they sort of set up a commune, almost these idyllic societies, go up to the mountains. We've got a few here in Arizona, do these exist? Everybody, that's it, we're leaving the nasty city with all the temptations, we're gonna up in the woods, we're gonna leave off the land, we're gonna be rugged and wait for Armageddon, we got enough ammo, we know who wins, right? These are some of these little towns in Arizona, they almost have this aesthetic, like the further we get away from people, the further we get away from civilization, the further we get away from temptation, the closer we get to God. This can include whole religions like Buddhism, which is about denial of bodily pleasure to get closer to God. Today in Christianity, this would be people who say, I'll call it poverty theology. Prosperity theology is, the more you have the closer you're to God. Prosperity theology is the less you have, the closer you are to God. Poverty and prosperity theology are both wrong. 'Cause you can't get any closer to God than Jesus. And it doesn't matter if you have a new car or you give it away, you're still not closer to Jesus. Right? You're as close to Jesus as you can be because Jesus is close to you. But this poverty theology basically says, if you really love God, you're not gonna sleep in a comfortable bed, you're not gonna live in a nice home, you're not gonna drive a dependable car, you're certainly not going to eat sort of very good food and you're never going to drink you know, a fine vintage of wine and you're not going to wear, you know, comfortable clothes. What you're going to do is mature your soul through suffering as much as you can. And the problem here is this, it's thinking the only way that God matures me is through hardship and suffering. That's not true. God matures me through everything. When I'm healthy, there's stuff to learn. When I'm sick, there's stuff to learn. When things are going great, there's stuff to learn. When things fall apart, there's stuff to learn. When it's just an overabundance of blessing, there's stuff to learn. And when there is a real lack and want and need, there is stuff to learn. That's where Paul says, I've learned the secret of being content, whether I have much or

whether I have little. The all of life is an opportunity to learn. How many of you found that it's harder to be godly when you win than when you lose. Sometimes it's easy to be godly when you lose and it's hard to be godly when you win. It's through winning and losing, it's through healing and suffering, it's through prosperity and poverty and God uses all of it to help mature us. And the problem with this minimalist thinking is, it's only through pain, it's only through hardship, it's only through struggle, it's only through suffering, that God can mature me, so I need to get rid of everything that might be good and I need to welcome everything that might be hard and then that'll make me more godly because I'm suffering. Now when we do suffer, we can suffer in such a way that we love Jesus and become like Him, but our goal is not to increase our suffering but to accept whatever suffering that God has destined for us. I'll give you an example. I was at a meeting with some pastors out of town some years ago, I'll try not to give away too many details. And one of the pastors says, hey, let's all go to a baseball game. That's a great idea. Okay, that's a great idea because I love baseball. Again, this is preferences, not saying it's the holier sport but I think we'll play it in heaven, just throwing it out there, I like baseball. And in baseball, it takes forever and it's a good sport to talk, right? You can't really talk at a football game, right? "Cause everybody's yelling. So you can't really have, but baseball is more like a, it's like a nerd sport for librarians to sit down and have reasonable conversations. And it takes about three hours, so you can really have a nice talk. So I thought, well this is, and he says, let's go to the baseball game and I'll get us one of those booths where we can all sit together and then we can eat and they'll bring along the hotdogs and everything, and then there's a dessert cart that comes with, we can always sell in it, I'm buying it. I'm like, this is a great idea. Some of the other pastors are like, this is a great idea, but the room was split. Some of the pastors were like, I don't know about that, as they stroke their brow and they're, I don't know. That's a lot of money, I don't know if we should spend that. And what will people think if they see us just eating hotdogs and dessert? What will people think? And what if we over indulge, or even you gonna have a beer? This is the conversation we're having. I'm like, you know what? Somebody just pulled the fan out of the bouncy house, it's getting less fun. This this is getting less fun, very suddenly. So I said I'm in. Like, hot dog, desert, I'm in. And it literally split the group. Some of us went, some of us didn't. And some we're really having a serious struggle, should we go have fun? Should we spend money? Should we eat something? What if people see us, what will they think? I hope they think they were practicing for heaven. I've read this book called the Bible and in the end it says, there's gonna have meat and wine and song and awesome people and it sounds like a party to me and I'm just interning, getting ready for the big grand finale. Right? That's my that's my view of it, okay? But their view was, no, less makes you closer to God. So for those of you that might lean not, let's say this, we all lean toward one of these, right? So think of yourself. Do you lean more toward Law-Making Larry. You're like, man, I make rules and rules about the rules and I got rules about the rules and my house is a lot of rules for my kids and we're all about the rules. Are you more like Harry the Hippie? You're like, I don't know, man, how do you feel? How do you feel? Right? How many of you, you're gonna be more like Minimalist Martha like, I don't know, that might be fun, what if we smile? Then what? What if Tom as fun is gonna want to do it again? Next thing you know, it's a habit, then it's an addiction. Right? Which way do you lean? Well, here's the good news. We know that Jesus came in a body and He lived His life in full obedience to the law, did not sin, He brings to us not just

spiritual experience, but the Holy Spirit that our whole life is a spiritual experience lived in relationship with God and through relationship with Jesus and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we can decide what we're supposed to do with the body and it's passions and pleasures, we can live according to God's law and according to our conscience. And so what Paul is basically saying here is this, there's really only two ways to view spirituality. One is me at the center, my rules, my experiences, or my suffering, that's what makes me godly. The other is Jesus. Jesus obeyed all of God's laws and died so that I could be forgiven, my spiritual experience is in relationship with Jesus and when I walk with Jesus, I know what's good and bad for me and I can walk according to my conscience, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the wise counsel of others, without needing to impose my rules on everyone else. That's the kind of Christianity that we adhere to here at the Trinity Church. We're brand new baby church, and I need you to know that. I'ma pray for and you know what we're gonna do? We're gonna take communion. Communion, we remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. And we'll have wine and juice, you know why? You disagree and we love both of you. So just pick one, I don't care. We're gonna sing songs and you can raise your hands or raise one hand, or raise it all the way up here, go half or just go here, raise them in your heart, I don't care, just sing, okay? And we're gonna celebrate Jesus, and we're gonna celebrate our diversity and we're gonna celebrate our unity around Jesus. Amen. So Father, God, thanks for an opportunity to study Colossians today and to learn these really helpful truths, Lord. I pray for those who hear, Lord each of us has a predisposition and inclination, a counterfeit that we find a little more compelling Lord, for me, it would probably be legalism, it would probably be just adding to the rules and making more rules about the rules. And so, Lord, please show each of us the area that we are most prone to drift and the counterfeit there we're most prone to purchase and deliver us from bondage to those things and let us live in the freedom of the Spirit, under the truth of your word, in relationship with your Son. And Lord, I pray for us here at the Trinity Church, that we would have unity without uniformity, that we would all love and serve the same Jesus. But like every family, there'd be family resemblances, but it's not a whole family of clones. And so, Lord Jesus, we invite you to be the one who fulfills the law for us, the one who brings us the kingdom of God and the spiritual experiences of life, and the one who also walks with us to decide and determine what is good for us and what is bad for us and what we can handle and what we can't. And so, Lord, I pray for these people to be free, to be joyful, to be biblical, to be filled with the Spirit and to love Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.