

Series: Colossians - A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems
Sermon: Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at the Table
October 14, 2018

Key Scriptures: Colossians 2:16-23; John 15:4-5; Psalm 23:5

Key Tags: Jesus, Counterfeits, Enemies, Death with Christ, Table.

Summary: Paul is acting as a concerned father by making the Colossian Jesus followers aware of the counterfeit religious traps that they can drift toward. The church is challenged to continue growing in the midst of an enemy trying to pull them away.

It is known as the Red River rivalry. It is the game that occurs every year between the Texas Longhorns and the Oklahoma Sooners. Until this year, it had only been a rumor. Now it's known as the Cotton Bowl Caper.

In 1999, Mike Leach was the Offense Coordinator for the Oklahoma Sooners. He said, "We have to do anything to get an edge. We want to keep them off balance and get them to squander as many plays as we can."

The Sooners were a huge underdog and on Wednesday night before the game, Leach had an idea. He decided to come up with a counterfeit play script. He created 70 plays that would be the opposite of the actual plays that they would be running. If the actual play would go to the left, the counterfeit script would say that the play was going to the right.

Leach used one of his players to deploy the decoy so Texas would find it. The player was to run past the Texas sidelines and run into the tunnel and act like he was putting the counterfeit script into his belt into "accidentally" let it fall out.

One of the Texas graduate assistants walked through the tunnel and found what he thought was the playbook from Oklahoma. He sees what it is, his eyes get big and takes it straight to the Texas locker room.

Carl Reese was the Defensive Coordinator for Texas. He ended up with the counterfeit script. He was up in the press box and he began furiously trying to match up plays that would stop the offense of Oklahoma. Reese says that he was trying to call plays, watch the game, and look at the counterfeit script. He said, "It was a huge distraction."

The second play of the game. The counterfeit script said that everything was going to go to the left when in fact, everything went to the right. Oklahoma scored a touchdown. Reese said, "As the game went on, it was a catastrophe."

Before Reese knew it, it was 17 - 0, the Sooners were ahead, Coach Reese had had enough. He wadded up the counterfeit script and threw it on the ground. Let's press pause on that story and we'll come back to it later.

We are going through the book of Colossians. Paul has told us that we have a big Jesus, who is God, he is Creator, and Head of the Church. Last week, we learned that there are spiritual forces trying to pull us away from Jesus. This enemy knows us and he is going to take things out there and pull us away from things in here. The things out there that we mentioned were lusts and likes. The enemy wants to use sexuality and distort it from God's design. He wants to use people to pressure you and pull you away from honoring God with your life.

We also learned that we have a tendency to wander away from God. So, when you combine someone trying to pull you away and you have natural tendency to drift... that is a dangerous combination.

But, what about in here? Could the enemy take spiritual things and use them to pull us away from God? Paul says, "Yes." That dangerous combination of an enemy trying to pull you away and your tendency to wander existed in the church at Colossae. This group of believers were doing good. They were trying to grow and mature, but Paul knew he needed to warn them of the danger.

Look what he writes in Colossians 2:16, "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day." He goes on in verse 18 saying, "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you." So he is saying, "Don't let anyone judge you or disqualify you. Don't let anyone do anything that would stifle your growth and connection to Jesus."

You will notice that Paul doesn't tell us the names of the people who are doing these things. I don't think he is just blaming it on the enemy, Satan, or the unseen spiritual forces. This was a real threat by real people and they were telling people that Jesus was less than. He was less than God. He wasn't the Creator; he was created. He was a good guy, but definitely not the Head of the Church and the Authority above all authorities. These counterfeiters were saying, "Since he is less than, there are some other things that you need to do to be a Christian."

I think the reason Paul doesn't mention the people involved was that it really wasn't important. What was important was for the Jesus' followers at Colossae to be able to recognize the counterfeits that were being presented to the church. One of the things that they needed to realize...that you and I need to realize... is how drawn we can be to these counterfeits. These counterfeits pull us away from a relationship with Jesus and get us focused on being religious and doing religious things.

Let's go back to verse 16. Paul says don't let anyone judge you when it comes to eating, drinking or religious festivals. This counterfeit had a slice of Judaism. The religious leaders of the Jews had so many rules and one of the things he is telling us to be careful of is when you make your rules more important than God's rules. When we get away from a relationship with Jesus, we find that ***Religious people like rules.***

Some of the rules that we live by start from a great heart. Let's say you have a struggle or temptation. As a Jesus follower, you find a way to not fall to the temptation. Let's say your struggle is with alcohol so you create some guardrails for your life. Maybe one of your guardrails is that you don't go to social events where people are drinking because you get in trouble. That is a great guardrail for you. Let's say you struggle with pornography so you decide that you are not going to have the internet at your house. That is a pretty good idea if it helps you.

So, you had a struggle. You figured out some guardrails that would help you in your struggle. We cross a line when we expect others to adopt our rules. We begin imposing our rules on other people. Because I don't go to social events with alcohol, no one should go to a social event with alcohol. Because I don't have the internet, no one should have the internet. But rule loving people don't stop there. There is one more thing they do. They judge people who don't follow their rules.

There is a big word for this...legalism. It starts with a real need, but you overstep your bounds when you start imposing your rules on everyone else. Here is something we have to learn. God gets to make rules for everyone. I get to make rules for me.

Let me give you some modern day illustrations that we can have strong opinions: home school, Christian school or public education; Politics - Democrat or Republican; Worship Styles - Hymns or contemporary songs; Do you celebrate Christmas, Easter, or Halloween; Most can agree that drinking too much is wrong, but is drinking socially ok or should you not drink at all?

We have to watch saying, “if you are really a Christian you will”...We have to be careful with that statement. You can have your own preferences, but do not let your preferences become your prejudices. Don’t think that the way you operate in matters of conscience is the way that everyone needs to do it. You can have an opinion, but don’t impose your opinions on others. So, we have to be careful of the counterfeit of rule making.

Another counterfeit Paul mentions is that *religious people love to look spiritual*. In verse 18 he says, “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind.

Look at the terms he uses: false humility, they go into great detail about their experience and they are puffed up. On down in verse 23, Paul mentions self-imposed worship and their harsh treatment of the body. Some people had quit worrying about what they looked like and they had become “monastic” and developed practices that removed them from the world altogether. This counterfeit had the belief that understanding God was a mystery reserved only for a few. If you didn’t worship a certain way or have certain spiritual experiences, you really weren’t a Christian. They took pride in their hyper-spirituality—trying to be better than anyone else.

How many of you like Krispy Kreme donuts? My wife, Rebecca, loves a glazed donut filled with whipped cream, but if you want to get her riled up...you give her a cream-filled donut with no cream inside. It is not a pretty picture.

Paul is telling us that this counterfeit has a real gap between what is on the outside and what is on the inside. On Sunday, you are teaching a class, but last Wednesday, you weren’t honest with someone at work. You sing on the worship team and are visible to everyone at church, but you hide at home with your work because you can’t handle the chaos of bedtime with the kids and you know you are going to fight with your spouse. You talk in the language of “Christianese”. You call people brother. You say “Amen” when you agree with them, but when they are gone, you criticize them and talk bad about them behind their back.

Jesus had a lot to say about our lives when the outside doesn’t match up with the inside. One time Jesus told the crowds and he was specifically talking about the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. He said, “You must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. Everything they do is done for people to see.” He tells them they are

like whitewashed tombs. They look beautiful on the outside but on the inside they are full of dead men's bones.

I want to remind you Paul doesn't name who is doing this. I think the reason is because the "who", is in the mirror. It is you and I. We have strong opinions and we like rules and we impose them on others. We like to make ourselves look spiritual by having spiritual practices that look good on the outside, but we have nothing of substance on the inside.

Paul describes what is on the inside if rules dominate you or what you look like on the outside becomes your focus. Look what he says in verse 17, "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

He calls these counterfeits a shadow. A shadow has the shape or the form of, but it has no substance. I remember when our girls were in elementary school. Probably like your kids, they came home with a silhouette that they had made at school. It looked like this. It was an outline of their head. When our girls brought that home, they were so proud and we put it on the refrigerator. I have to be honest. I don't know where their silhouettes are. They are in a box in the attic. The pictures that are on the wall or are on the mantel today are ones where you can see their substance. I want to see the joy in their smiles. I want to see the growth throughout the years. I want to see the substance that makes them my girls.

Has Paul got your attention yet? Has he made you aware of things out there and things in here that can pull you away from Jesus? Think about the things we have talked about for the last two weeks: lusts, likes, rules and trying to look good on the outside. One of these probably causes you to struggle. For some reason, it catches your eye, but Paul is telling us that these counterfeits are traps to pull us away from Jesus.

In verse 21, Paul reminds them of some of the rules they had regarding food and drink. Verse 21 says, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" That is the entire verse. I think there is a sarcasm here and Paul is hoping that we will see the counterfeits for what they really are...a distraction from Jesus being big in our lives. I think Paul is hoping we will come to the conclusion that we are not going to handle, we are not going to taste and we are not going to touch these counterfeits.

One of the reasons that these counterfeits can be so appealing is that some of you would like your relationship with Jesus to be like a paint by numbers kit. My daughter Mackenzie, had a baby shower last Sunday. We took all the stuff back to

their house and she began putting a baby swing together. Her husband and I were sitting on the couch watching football and we kept asking do you need any help. She said no this is pretty easy. The directions are all pictures. That is kind of the way we want our relationship with Jesus to be. We don't have to put much thought into it.

Religion is like that, but a relationship is different. A relationship takes time. It takes knowing someone, spending time with someone and talking with someone. Jesus doesn't want to just hand you a set of directions. In Galatians 5:1, Paul wrote, "Christ has set us free to live a free life." These counterfeits are not about freedom; they are about fear.

Let me take you back to where we began. Do you remember the Red River Rivalry? Texas was down 17 - 0. The Defensive coordinator wadded up the counterfeit, threw it in the trash can and got focused on the original game plan. Texas ended up winning the game 38 -28.

Some of you have heard the name Randy. That is Docs preaching partner. Randy was my basketball coach at Kentucky Christian University. My senior year we made it to the National tournament. We had made it to the semifinals and played a team out of Bay Ridge, Texas. This was one of those games that went back and forth the entire game. The lead would be with Bay Ridge. Then the lead would be with us. And then it will go back again. With about a minute left in the game, you can imagine that the emotions were high. Randy called a timeout and we huddled up. I remember it plain as day. He said, "Isn't this fun?" We thought he had lost his mind. But he knew that we were scared. He wanted to try to loosen up so we wouldn't play tense. He was trying to remove all the distractions.

In the midst of all the threats at Colossae. In the midst of a lot of counterfeit things that are going on, Paul gives us a couple of clues as to how not to drift. He wants to get us refocused on the original game plan. I don't want you to miss what he says.

In verse 19, Paul says the reason these counterfeits are so appealing to the Jesus followers is because "They are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together." We have learned that Christ is the head of the Church and the church is often referred to as the body, but I think Paul wants us to think about a physical body. For a part of the body to be healthy, it has to be connected to the body. For a part of the body to know what is supposed to do and how it is supposed to function, it has to be connected to the head.

Last week and this week, Paul has acted like a father to us. He is very concerned about what is out there that could trip us up and stunt our growth. He is challenging us to grow in the midst of these enemies that are trying to pull us away from Jesus.

Paul challenging us to grow in the midst of our enemies echoes what David wrote in Psalm 23. David gives this mental picture of a shepherd, who is guiding and doing things for his sheep. Right in the middle of Psalm 23, he writes, “You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.”

God says I want to prepare a table for you right in the middle of your enemies. You would think God would clear out all the enemies, then prepare a table, but he says the table is prepared in the midst of the struggle. He’s going to prepare a table in the midst of the challenge.

It is a table for two. Jesus sits down and says please sit down. May I pour you some water? What is powerful about this picture is where David lived in the Middle East, a meal at a table was a powerful invitation to someone. You have been invited by Jesus - the God of the universe, the Creator of the World, the Head of the Church and the Authority of all Authorities to sit at a table with him. That is what is so remarkable about the table. It is not what is on the table. It is who is at the table. And please know, you are wanted at the table.

Jesus made a similar, powerful invitation to his disciples on the most difficult night of his life. He invited them to a table. We call it the last supper. He wanted to connect with them and he wanted them to understand the strong connection that would be needed for them to grow and continue the mission. I like how the Message translation puts what Jesus says to his disciples, “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.”

They were going to need to be connected to Jesus, because they were going to need him when he got arrested. They were going to need him when he was hanging on the cross. They were going to need him when they were hiding out in a room when he was in the tomb. They were going to need him when he told them to go and make disciples. They were going to him when they were persecuted for their faith.

That is why Jesus said, “Be connected...I am the vine you are the branches...you have to be connected.” That is why Paul says, “He is the head; you are the body...you have to be connected.” David is saying, “God is preparing a table for you...Be connected.” That is the message you are going to hear at the table in the midst of all these

counterfeit messages that can distract us. The message is *At the table, you will be connected*.

One question I have to ask you, “Are you sitting at the table that you have been invited to?” There are lots of tables to sit at. Paul has made that clear. If you are a student, do you sit at a table of popularity and at this table you are asked to compromise some of your values? You won’t be asked to do that at this table? Are you sitting at a table with someone at work that you flirt with? At that table there is a rush of energy that you don’t get when you go home to your spouse? That connection can never offer you what is offered at this table. Maybe you are at a table with your rules and opinions and it feels really comfortable. At that table, you will never experience the freedom that is found at this table.

I don’t know if you listened to the first song we sang today. The song was called *You Say* by Lauren Daigle. The lyrics said, “Remind me once again just who I am, because I need to know.” At this table, he says, “You are loved when can’t feel a thing. You are strong, when you think you are weak. You are held when you feel like you are falling short. And when you don’t feel like you belong, he looks you in the eye and says, ‘You are mine.’” It is so important for us to realize who is at this table - Jesus. Remember, he is God. He can say these things and he can back them up.

Not only do we need to make sure we are not at another table, we need to make sure we don’t give the enemy a seat at this table. Last week, we said there is an enemy, a big E enemy, trying to pull you away from Jesus. We are told that, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” You can’t stop him from prowling around. He prowled around in the Garden of Eden. He prowled around on the night Jesus was arrested. He was prowling around in the church at Colossae. He is prowling around right now. The problem is not that he is prowling around. The problem is that he wants to sit down.

Paul has told us about the enemy. He has told us about the counterfeits. He is saying, “If you are not careful, the enemy is going to pull up a chair.” He is going to say all of the opposite things that we sang earlier. He says something like, “What are you doing at church? You are a mess. These people have been staring at you ever since you walked in. You are not like them. It would probably be better if you never came back here again.”

In a heartbeat, he finds a way to get between you and your wife, between you and a friend, you and your parents, you and yourself, and you and God. He is sitting at

your table, eating your food that God prepared for you in the presence of your enemies.

So, be connected to Jesus; do not give the enemy a seat at the table.

There is a second little nugget that Paul doesn't want us to miss in the midst of these counterfeits. In verse 20, he says, "You died with Christ to the spiritual forces of this world.." He is reminding us of our identification with Jesus. You have died with Christ. Back in verse 11, he says, "You have been buried with him in baptism and you have been raised with him." Our identification with Jesus is in his death, burial and resurrection. That is what gives us our identity.

I think Paul highlights that "we have died with Christ" because death severs a bond with the enemy. We have to realize that you and I did not have a bond to Jesus. We had a bond to sin like a slave to a master, but Jesus' death, burial and resurrection broke the attachment to that former relationship of bondage. Paul is saying that the finality of your death with Christ has been confirmed by the burial and resurrection with Christ so you can begin a new life in Christ.

At the table, *you will be reminded who you are.*

He is going to remind you that..."You have died with me, You have been buried with me, and now...You have new life in me." This is something that he wants us to believe. Because of our connection, he wants us to have confidence in these things. Because of our identification with him, he wants us to have confidence in our identity.

That is why Paul can ask these questions about these counterfeits. Why in the world would you let someone judge you? You died with Christ to those things. Why would you let someone cause you to think that you might be disqualified? You have been buried with Jesus. He is who you are bonded to now.

I think Jesus is going to remind you at the table that you have died with him and I think he hopes you will look him in the eye and say, "That is who I am." When he says that you have been buried with him, I think he hopes you will say, "That is exactly who I am. He is going to say that you have new life in me and I believe he hopes you will say, "That is how I am going to live."

There is a great hymn called *Blessed Assurance*. It starts out by saying "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine..." And then it gets to the chorus that says, "This is my story,

this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.” I think that phrase, “This is my story”, would be a great response when Jesus reminds us about his death, burial and new life in him.

In fact, would you say that phrase, “This is my story.” Let’s say it together...”This is my story. I am going to say a few phrases and why don’t you just respond to the phrases by saying, “This is my story.”

You have died with Christ...(All) This is my story.

You have been buried with Christ...(All) This is my story.

You have new life in Christ...(All) This is my story.