

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## COLOSSIANS LESSON 3 (Chapter 2, con'd.)

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

This is the third lesson in our study of the Book of Colossians. In this lesson we will be dealing with the idea of will worship or self-imposed religion. Paul condemns this practice in Colossians 2:23 when he writes, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” What we see here in Colossians 2:23 is the idea of self-imposed religion or will worship being condemned in the Bible. What is will worship or self-imposed religion? This simply refers to how people start coming up with their own religion. It is when people start putting their own wants and their own selves first in order to create their own types of standards. What do **you** like? What do **you** want? You will see a lot of people today who are involved in this type of worship. It is not about what **God** wants, but what **they** want.

From the very beginning of time it always has been man’s duty to do what God has commanded. Never has it been a matter of what **we** want or what **we** think might be fit. Instead, it has been a matter of what **God** wants. The first time we read of worship (in Genesis 4), we see Cain and Abel making sacrifices to God. Cain’s was not pleasing, while Abel’s was. Why? It was because Abel did what God said. Romans 10:17 tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to God when Cain’s was not. There always have been people who have been involved in will worship or self-imposed religion.

Another example of this could be something as drastic as idol worship. In Acts 17:22, while Paul was in Athens, he said, “I perceive that you are very religious.” These people were very religious, but were worshiping idols. But that did not make them OK. Why? Because they were involved in will worship. They were not worshiping God and were not worshiping according to what God had said. It is not good enough to “just be religious.” People in the world today will say, “I’m a very religious person.” The people in Acts 17 were religious, too. But they worshiped idols. It is not OK to be religious. It is not good enough to be “just religious.” Simply saying, “I’m religious,” is not a good thing. We must be righteous. We must have the right religion—not just the kind of religion that we come up with. It’s not enough to say, “I’m a very religious person.” You must make sure that you are a righteous person—that is, you are doing what God has commanded in worship to Him.

In Joshua 24:15 the Bible says, “If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Here we see the principle that if you are not going to worship God, that is your choice. You will pay eternal consequences in everlasting Hell fire, but it is your choice. Whatever you are going to do, make your choice. If you are not going to be faithful, then that is your choice. But do not try to be a person who tries to straddle the fence. Do not be a person who wants “a little bit of God” and “a little bit of the

world.” Joshua 24:15 says, “Choose today whom you will serve....” If we choose to serve and worship God, we cannot do it according to our standards. We must do it according to how God has told us. What’s really said is that some people think they have chosen God, when they really have not. A lot of people say, “I don’t worship idols,” or “I don’t do this,” or “I don’t do that.” They think they have chosen God. What is even more dangerous many times is those people who think they are doing what God said, because they “seem” somewhat right. They claim that what they are doing is correct when in reality they have not chosen God. **Claiming** that you are doing the right thing does not mean that you **are**.

Some people who have false views are very sincere. Nobody doubts the sincerity of what they believe. But even if a person is zealous, he can be zealous for the wrong thing. That does not make it right. In Romans 10:1-2 we read, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”

The Israelites had a zeal for God. They thought they were doing the right thing, but their zeal was “not according to knowledge.” It was based upon their own will and what they wanted and felt. In verse 3 Paul went on to say, “They, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” What had these people done? They had created their own righteousness. They thought and felt like they were doing the right thing. I’ve had Bible studies with people who have said, “I know what the Bible says, but my heart tells me this,” or “I feel this way,” or “I’ve always been taught this way.” What is that person doing? He is involved in his own righteousness, and is seeking to establish his own standard instead of following the standard of the word of God, the will of God, and what God has commanded us to do. So many people fall into the category of Romans 10:1-3. They have “zeal without knowledge.” A lot of good people will be in Hell. We need to understand that. A lot of people who are good people, and who think they are doing the right thing, will be lost if they do not repent and change their ways. It is not enough to have zeal or to act like we are doing the right thing. We must do what God has commanded us. In Isaiah 48:1-2 we are told,

“Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness; for they call themselves after the holy city, and lean on the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts is His name.”

Isn’t it interesting that in this passage we are told that some “swear by the name of the Lord”? They make mention of God, but they do not do these things in truth or in righteousness. There are a lot of people today who speak the name of God. They talk about how much they love God or how much they appreciate the blessings of God. They want to speak God’s name. It’s like name dropping. They just want to get God’s name in there in order to seem like they are righteous. They want to swear by His name, just as Israel did in Isaiah 48. But it is not enough to do that. We must do it in truth and in righteousness. What is truth? John 17:17 says that God’s Word is truth. We will be set free only by the truth (Jn. 8:32), which is the Word of God. We will not be set free by our word, but by the Word of God. We must not only say that we are doing things in the name of God, but we must do those things in truth and in righteousness. It is like those mentioned in Jeremiah 12:2 who were somewhat religious, but were not righteous. Jeremiah said, “You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth but far from their mind.” God’s name was always in the mouths of these people. But God was far from their minds. People today will go to worship for a social club almost. It’s a matter of making themselves feel good. They go so they can feel justified instead of sanctified. Before you can be justified, you must be sanctified. People do not want to be set apart.

They do not want to change. But we have to change if we want to do what God has said. People can talk about God all they want, but if they are not practicing the things discussed in the Word of God, then God is far from their hearts and minds, even if they talk about Him all the time.

A good example of someone changing worship is Jeroboam. He was afraid, and had a lack of faith. He therefore began to put into practice a self-imposed religion. In 1 Kings 12:28 we see that the first thing he did was change the object of worship to a golden calf. Today people are changing the object of worship. You may think, "I've never changed the object of my worship to a golden calf, so I must not be guilty." Do not be so quick! Think about this. To what do we sometimes change the object of our worship? It might not be a golden calf. But we can make ourselves the object of our worship. People have left worship services saying, "I didn't get anything out of that." "I did not like what was said." "I thought it was too long." "I don't want to come back." What is the object? **We** are the object. We say, "Those pews just weren't comfortable enough" or "I didn't enjoy that lesson, and I didn't like what was said." It is not because it is not what the Bible says. It is because so many times **we** have become the object of our worship. The only thing we care about is ourselves and what we get out of it instead of what we put into our worship. We need to make sure that we are not changing the object of worship just as Jeroboam did. Just because we have not changed the object of our worship to a golden calf or some other man-made idol does not mean that we have not changed the object of our worship. We may have made ourselves the focus of our worship, and we need to make sure that that is not the case.

The second thing that Jeroboam did in 1 Kings 12:28 was to change the place of worship. He made it more comfortable for the people. This was purely for convenience. Sometimes people say, "I go to worship here because it's the closest place around." They may not be doing anything even close to what the Scriptures say. But because it is "the closest place around," that is where they go. A building may be more comfortable. Or the pews may be more comfortable. The preacher might not preach as long. Again, people begin to change to make more comfortable for us. It is will worship or self-imposed religion.

The third thing that Jeroboam did was to change the structure of worship. He allowed people from every tribe to be priests, instead of only those from the tribe of Levi (1 Kgs. 12:31). Jeroboam changed the whole structure of worship. A good application today is how people change the structure of New Testament worship. Under the New Law, we have been told to do certain things when we worship God. God has set in order the things that should be in our worship. Are we consulting His Word about those things? There are some religions that allow women to be preachers. Women speak and preach in front of men. Women teach and have authority over men in a religious setting. But 1 Timothy 2:11-14 condemns that. A woman is not to have authority over a male. A woman is not to teach or preach over a male. But many times today we see that happening. People say, "Well, I know that's what the Bible says. But we live in a world where it really doesn't matter. My wife can preach better than I can, so I'm going to let her be the preacher." We must ask the question, "What does God say?" God said in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 that such actions are condemned. A woman must not preach or teach in such a way as to have authority over a man. Some are now saying, "We won't allow women to preach, but we'll let them lead public prayers. That will be OK. It will allow us to slowly migrate into this." That, too, is condemned. Some are willing to allow women to wait on the Lord's Table and serve the Lord's Supper. But that still is allowing women to have authority over men. Some have brought into worship mechanical instruments of music because they want to. They are changing the structure of worship. They are bringing in "praise teams." Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians

5:19 state that we are to sing to one another. Worship is not a concert. But people have made it that way. Such things are unauthorized. We are to sing a cappella. And we are to sing to one another. In all scenarios of our worship, even if we are by ourselves as a small group (Jas. 5:13), we always can worship God (and must worship God) in spirit and in truth if we want to be pleasing to Him. It is not about what **we** want. It is not a matter of entertainment. It is not a matter of changing the structure. Why do so many people change worship? They change it to bring in more people. They think that if they have singing groups, or if they have a piano, or if they have dramas or laser-light shows, then more people will come. What does the Bible say? The Bible condemns those things under New Covenant worship because there is no authority for them. We must not change the structure of worship. If we do, it becomes will worship, which is condemned in the Word of God. When we begin to impose our will and wants over what God has commanded us to do, we are in sin.

Why are so many people involved in self-imposed will worship? First, it is because they want to be. In 2 Timothy 4:1-5 Paul said that there would be those people who wanted to have their ears tickled, and that they would find teachers who would do that. You always can find someone who will justify your actions. God will not justify your actions until you change your life and no longer continue in sin. But you always can find someone will tell you that what you are doing is OK. It was that very thing about which Paul was warning Timothy when he spoke of those who wanted to have their ears tickled. They wanted to be involved in self-imposed will worship because it made them feel good. It was what they wanted to do. I once was speaking with a person who had misquoted a passage, and thus had completely changed the meaning of the verse. When someone corrected the person, he said, "I don't care if it changes the meaning. I don't care if that's not what the Bible says. I still like what it says, and I think it's a good statement." That person wanted to be involved in will worship. That is sinful. In Jeremiah 5:30-31 the Bible says, "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?" What was happening when prophets under the Old Law were prophesying falsely? People loved it. They liked what they were hearing. It was not about what God said. It was about what they wanted. We need to remember the Words of Jeremiah 10:23—"It is not in man to direct his own steps." It is not about what we want, but is about what God wants. Unfortunately, the reason that so many people are involved in will worship is because they want to be.

Others are involved in will worship, not because they want their ears tickled, but because of ignorance. They "think" they are doing the right thing. They claim that they do not want their ears tickled, but instead want to know what the Bible says. Apparently some people want to be justified by their ignorance. Acts 17:30 shows us that under the New Covenant ignorance will not be an excuse. We cannot go to the Day of Judgment and say, "God, I didn't realize that when you said in Acts 2:38 that I had to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of my sins, You really meant it. My preacher told me that was no big deal." We cannot be excused because of our ignorance. In Proverbs 1:22 we read, "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge." With some people who are simple minded, it is almost as if they like being that way because they think it excuses them. But the Bible says that they cannot continue in such simplicity. Romans 16:18 talks about false teachers, and says, "Those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." Ignorance will not be an excuse on the Day of Judgment. If you say that you are ignorant or simple minded, listen to the words of Proverbs 2:1-5,

“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”

We need to make sure that we are searching, studying, and not being led astray by denominations. Denominations are sinful, yet so many people today are involved in them. They are listening to what their preacher says. A person might say, “I’m ignorant. He will tell me what’s OK. He’s studied his Bible, so I’m just going to listen to him.” People must stop being ignorant, and must search the Bible to see what it says so that they can turn from their sinful ways. In Proverbs 2:1-5 the Bible talks about “seeking discernment as silver.” If people knew that there was silver all throughout a particular church building, how many people do you think would come to worship services to see if that silver was there? I suspect that everyone in the community would. But when it comes to truth, many people allow the Bible—which is much more powerful and worth a whole lot more than something like silver and gold—to collect dust on their shelf. We must stop being ignorant, and instead must start studying the Word of God. Do not let your preacher tell you what the Bible says. Pick it up and study it for yourself. Then do what it says. Make sure that you are following what God has said.

Another reason people are involved in will worship is because it has the appearance of wisdom (Col. 2:23). Their worship “appears” to be right. It “seems” right and “feels” right. Some people say, “I know I’m not necessarily doing the right thing, but it’s OK because I feel religious.” Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Isaiah 55:8-9 says that our ways are not God’s ways. We cannot say, “I know this is what God said, but I wouldn’t do it that way.” If our way is not what God said, then we need to change what we are doing and do it God’s way. Our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. We must not rely on worldly wisdom, feelings, or thoughts to get us to Heaven. We must rely on truth. Proverbs 18:2 says that “a fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” Someone might say, “Well, I know what the Bible says,” but he rejects it because in reality he does not want to understand it. All he wants to do is express his own heart. People can talk about their emotions or experiences all they want. But emotions and experiences will not change what is said in God’s Word. Emotions and experiences do not change truth. “A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” Make sure that you are not a fool. Do not simply go by what your heart says, but go to the Bible to see what it says. Proverbs 16:25 is another good verse: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Proverbs 3:7 says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil.” In 2 Kings 5:10-12 we read about Naaman, who had leprosy. When he went to be cleansed, he said to Elisha, “I thought you were going to come out and wave your hands.” He “thought” that there was another way. And when he found out that he had to go dip in the River Jordan seven times, he did not like it. Why? It was because he “thought” there had to be another way. We cannot rely on what we think or feel. We must rely on what we know from the Word of God.

What must we do so that we do not worship in vain? What can we do to make sure that we are not involved in will worship? First we need to make sure that **God’s** will, not **our** will, is the focus of our worship. Matthew 7:21 tells us that we must do the will of God. We must not just say, “Lord, Lord.” Is God the focus of your worship? Do you ask yourself, “What does God expect of me as I worship Him?” Or, is your worship about you, and what you can get out of it? Make sure that your worship is not about you, but is all about God. People today seem to simply want to conform—as if worship was a big concert.

The idea is, "Let's see what we can do to bring people in." But if truth is not present, it does not matter. John 4:23-24 tells us that we must worship God in spirit and in truth. Acts 24:14 tells us that we must worship God according to "the Way"—that is, we must worship Him according to what He has commanded us.

Another thing we can do to avoid will worship is examine ourselves. After we realize that we do indeed want God to be the focus of our worship, and that He is the reason we are worshipping, we need to examine ourselves. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 the Bible says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." We need to continually examine what we are doing. We need to ask ourselves if we are really being honest with ourselves, and if we are doing what God wants us to do. Or, are we doing something because it is simply "what we've always done" or "what our parents always taught us." We must not get mad or be offended. We must be honest with ourselves because on the Day of Judgment we will have to stand face to face with the Lord and face the consequences of not having done what God said. We need to ask ourselves if we are really seeking God's will, or if we are adding to our worship.

Another thing that can help is that we must be willing to repent and change. Are you willing to be wrong? The reason that so many people are not right is because they are not willing to be wrong. Before a person can change, he must be willing to say, "I am willing to be wrong." Then he can change and do what God has told him to do. We must be willing to admit that we might be doing something that is wrong. A person might say, "No, I am never going to admit that I could be doing something wrong. I don't care what the Bible says. My mom told me this is right, and that is what I'm going to do." We must be willing to change and do God's will. From Romans 12:1-2 we learn that we cannot conform to this world, but instead must transform to what God would have us to be.

Are you worshipping God the correct way? Are you in the one church—the church of Christ. Are you worshipping God in spirit in truth? Have you obeyed His way, or are you continuing to be involved in self-imposed will worship? Will you change in order to obey God? If you have yet to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38), we pray today that you will obey the Gospel of Christ.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST* is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***  
**607 McLish Ave.**  
**Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com). We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

### STUDY QUESTIONS FOR COLOSSIANS LESSON 3 (CHAPTER 2, CON'D.)

1. When, in Colossians 2:23, the apostle Paul wrote about “self-imposed religion,” what was he discussing?
2. According to Romans 10:17, when we do something “by faith,” what is the ultimate standard our action(s)?
3. While Paul was in Athens, he came across some people whom he described in Acts 17:22. How did he describe them?
4. In Joshua 24:15, what did Joshua urge the Israelites to do?
5. According to Paul’s assessment in Romans 10:2, the Israelites of whom he spoke had zeal, yet lacked another trait. What was it?
6. In Romans 10:3 Paul mentioned three characteristics that applied to the Israelites. What were those three characteristics?
7. In Isaiah 48:1-2 the prophet Isaiah spoke of certain people who “swore by the name of the Lord,” and “made mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness.” What did Isaiah mean by such an assessment?
8. According to John 17:17, what is the ultimate source of truth?
9. According to John 8:32, what is one thing that truth can do for us?
10. When the prophet Jeremiah said, in speaking of how certain people viewed God, “You are near in their mouth but far from their mind” (Jer. 12:2), what did he mean?
11. In 1 Kings 12:17-28 we read of a certain king who did things that were not pleasing to God. Who was that king?
12. What did the king (mentioned in 1 Kings 12:17-28) do that displeased God?
13. What does 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit?
14. What do Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 tell us that we are to do?
15. In 2 Timothy 4:3 Paul spoke of people who would “have itching ears.” In verse 4 he then explained where such an attitude would lead. What did Paul say would happen as a result of such an attitude?
16. According to Jeremiah 10:23, what can man **not** do?
17. What, according to Proverbs 18:2, are two characteristics of a person whom the Bible refers to as “a fool”?
18. According to John 4:24, how must we worship God?