

**Colossians 7 – Christ Above Self Help**  
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We are in a sermon series called Christ Above All and we are preaching verse by verse through the book of Colossians. So far, we've seen that Christ is above creation – above suffering – above the deceptions of the enemy – above the traditions and philosophies of man – Christ is above worldliness and Christ is above legalism.

Today I'm preaching on Colossians 2:18-23. The title of my sermon is Christ Above Self-Help. Remember – Paul wrote this book to address people who were trying to add to the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. One of the ways they did this was by trying to change themselves.

Think of the irony of this: You can go into any bookstore and find hundreds of self-help books. Don't you think it's ironic that books by other people are called self-help? If a book is truly self-help, then the author is the only one who should read it.

Anyway, all these self-help books say basically the same thing: Create your own purpose in life; dream big, aim high, go after your goals, believe in yourself, figure out what you're good at, never give up. Now, that's all good advice and if you do those things you are likely to be more successful than not. But none of those things can change your heart! Only Jesus can do that! This is what Paul addresses in Colossians 2:18-23

*Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For He holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. You have died with Christ, and He has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.*

In this message – we are looking at ways people try to change themselves – spiritual ways and worldly ways. Colossians 2:18 says:

*Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud...*

Remember – Paul is addressing people in Colossae who were adding to Jesus – Jewish legalism and Gnostic mysticism.

We see both of those here. Jewish legalism is represented by pious self-denial. Gnostic mysticism is represented by angel worship.

Both of these philosophies were being insisted on in Colossae – yet these humanistic attempts at change were not from God.

The Good News Translation says: *such people are all puffed up by their human way of thinking.*

The Holman Version says people like this are *inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.*

We must not give in to any attempt to change our hearts through self-effort or mystical experiences. Colossians 2:18 says if we do we will be cheated and end up under condemnation because we can never be good enough through self-help. We will always fail and always feel guilty. That's why we need the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Listen - I do believe there is a place for self-discipline and commitment and determination. But I believe true lasting change requires something way more than that. All of us have tried to change through sheer willpower and have failed miserably. We all can relate to the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7.

Verse 15 says - *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*

Verses 18-19 say: *For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing.*

Do you ever feel this way? The things you know you should do, you don't do. The things you shouldn't do, you do.

Paul is saying this: willpower is not enough. We need something more. That something more is the power of God.

What Paul is describing is the war we all fight between the spirit and the flesh. Before we are saved, we don't care about what God thinks. We want to live to please ourselves. That's the flesh. But when we are born again, we begin to care about what God wants.

Unfortunately, we've lived our whole lives for ourselves and it's a struggle to overcome the flesh and live for God. Paul goes on to describe that struggle in Romans 7:21-25

*So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Paul talks of three laws here: the law of God in the spirit, the law of the flesh and the law of the mind. These three laws relate to the three parts of man: spirit, soul and body.

Your spirit man wants to serve God.

Your flesh wants to serve yourself.

They are at war and that war takes place in your mind.

That's where the battle is won or lost.

What you think and believe will determine your choices and your actions.

We are all in this war. And there is only one way to win this war. Paul asks, "Who will deliver me?" and then he answers his own question: "Jesus Christ our Lord."

Jesus is the only way out.

Jesus is the only way to win this war.

Jesus is the only way to overcome.

Self-help is trying to change from the outside in. But God always works from the inside out. Philippians 2:12-13 says:

*Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.*

He doesn't say work FOR your salvation, but work OUT your salvation. You can't work something out in your life until God works it in. True change is from the inside out. And here's a big key to changing from the inside out: We provide the willingness; God provides the power. I believe that our part is to provide the willingness to change and God's part is to provide the power to change.

By the way – I said willingness, not willpower. They're different.

Willpower is trying to change ourselves through our own strength.

Willingness is allowing God to change us.

All of us have tried to change through sheer willpower and have failed miserably.

Too many Christians are trying to live their lives in their own strength. They give it their best but their hard work never pays off. Self-sufficiency will not get you very far. Trying harder in your own strength will not get you very far.

What a tragedy to rely on our own strength when we can turn it over to the Father and learn to live in the power of God.

So, don't buy into self-help strategies or man's mystical ideas of God that offer secret knowledge. It always results in pride and error. You'll get off into worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

Some people worship angels – but I've taught you in this series that we are to never worship angels. We worship the Creator – not created beings.

Some people worship supernatural experiences. There are many people who seek after supernatural experiences rather than seeking after God. This leads to error.

We are having a prophet named Jeremiah Johnson here on April 11-12<sup>th</sup>. He wrote a book with Loren Sandford called *The Micaiah Company*. In it they say, "If your focus is on the supernatural you will end up in shipwreck, but if your focus is on intimacy with Jesus, you will end up walking in the supernatural." That is so true!

Listen closely – just because someone has a supernatural experience – that does not mean that they are holy or close to God. That's why you need to be grounded in the truth of God's Word and that's why you need to spend time alone with God yourself!

If someone with a supernatural experience tells you something that is contrary to the word of God – refuse it.

If someone gives you a prophetic word that is contrary to Scripture – don't receive it.

If someone has a dream or vision that doesn't line up with the Bible – reject it or that dream will be a nightmare!

Even if an angel tells you something that is contrary to the word of God – refuse it, resist it and rebuke it in Jesus' name! Galatians 1:8-9 says:

*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! As we have said before, I now say again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!*

Hear me closely – I am not against supernatural experiences like dreams, visions, prophecies and angelic visitations. I've experienced most of those things myself - but I don't seek them. They are by-products of seeking God. The key is staying connected to Jesus. That's how you help yourself! That's how you grow and mature in your faith! Colossians 2:19 says:

*...they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For He holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.* People get deceived when they are not connected to Christ – who is the Head of the body. In the Bible – the head is considered to be the source. The head of the church is Jesus Christ. He alone is the source of salvation – life – growth and maturity. If you are cut off from Him – you are cut off from your life source. That will stunt your spiritual growth.

This is not to say that we don't need each other. Jesus is the source and He holds us together and gives us growth. This sounds very much like Ephesians 4:11-16

*It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

For true change, growth and maturity to happen – we need to stay connected to the Head of the body – Jesus Christ. We need to stay connected to leaders in the body – the 5-fold ministers. And we need to stay connected to other believers in the body.

Joint and ligaments represent two parts of the body joined together in relationship. When we are connected to Jesus – He always does His part. Then – when the rest of us do our parts – when each part does its work – change and growth happen.

I wonder what part of change or growth in the church is not happening because some of us aren't connected or doing our parts? Too many of us are all wrapped up in ourselves. Like the old saying goes – A person all wrapped up in themselves makes a very small package!

Being a part of the body of Christ and being willing to help others does not come naturally to us. That's why Colossians 2:20-23 says:

*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations -- "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 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.*

True change requires dying to self.

Living for God requires dying to self.

Being willing to help others requires dying to self.

What does Paul mean when he says, "you died with Christ"?

Notice this is past tense – you died with Christ.

It's already happened. When? On the cross! How? You were in Christ!

If you died with Christ – why are you alive to the world's ways?

If you died with Christ – why are you living for the flesh?

If you died with Christ – why are you submitting to Satan's schemes?

Sanctification involves a daily realization that we have died with Christ and in Christ we have been raised from the dead. Daily reformation is the result of daily resurrection!

You are dead, buried and resurrected in Christ - so don't submit to the world's ways. Don't put second things first!

As C.S. Lewis said, "Put first things first and second things are thrown in. Put second things first and you lose both first and second things."

He also said, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."

Jesus said seek first the kingdom and the secondary things will be given to you.

So – why are you submitted to the world's ways? To the commandments and doctrines of men like, "Don't touch, taste or handle." Extreme self-denial does not get to the real issue – your heart. All of man's rules and regulations and techniques and self-help approaches to change can never bring about internal transformation.

They have an appearance of wisdom, religion and humility, but they have absolutely zero power to overcome the flesh! They all focus on what you do rather than on what Christ has done! The only way to deal with the flesh is to die to it!

Outside cleanup does not result in inside cleanup.  
External rule keeping does not change the heart.  
Behavior modification cannot change the heart.

In this passage Paul is basically saying that Old Testament religious practices and modern humanistic practices are equally enslaving – one is not better than the other. So, don't live by what appears to be wisdom. Don't follow self-made religions. They have no power. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 says:

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

True wisdom comes from the Scripture - is centered in Christ and it's full of the power of the Holy Spirit. Reject everything else no matter how good it sounds!

Sometimes change is a process – but God can change us in a moment – from the inside out. Most of the time, God is waiting for us to come to the end of ourselves – for us to stop trusting in ourselves and start trusting in Him. When we stop self-help and start God-help – change can happen fast!

Zacchaeus was a tax collector who cheated people out of money for years. He had one lunch with Jesus and came away saying, "I'm giving money back to everyone I've ever cheated." What happened? Self-help? NO! He was changed from the inside out by the power of God!

Gideon was hiding from his enemies, but after an encounter with God he went from hiding from his enemies to leading the army against his enemies. What happened? He was changed from the inside out by the power of God!

Moses hid in the desert in fear for 40 years. He had an encounter with God in a burning bush and went from leading sheep to leading the whole nation of Israel. What happened? He was changed from the inside out by the power of God!

After Jesus died the disciples were hiding out in fear. On the Day of Pentecost, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and ran out into the street boldly praising God and proclaiming Jesus as Lord. What happened? Self-help? NO! They were changed from the inside out by the power of God!

And God can do the same thing with you! You cannot change your own heart – but God is the author and the finisher of your salvation! Trying to change yourself will only leave you feeling guilty and condemned – but there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ! You can try to change yourself – but you will eventually give up on yourself – but God will never leave you, forsake you, or give up on you!

God is able to save you to the uttermost!  
 He saves you spirit, soul and body!  
 He saves you past, present and future!  
 He saves you in all times, all places and all circumstances.

So – give up trusting in yourself and put your trust in God!  
 Stop trying to live in your willpower and start living by Holy Spirit power!  
 Stop putting your faith in yourself and put your faith in Christ.  
 In Christ you are saved and accepted and complete!  
 In Christ you are dead to self and alive with resurrection power!