

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Colossians 2:16-23 on February 15, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Profile**

**Today's Focus: Profile Compromised**

**"Beware the Colossian Faith Hackers!"**

- 1. They'll compromise your connection to Christ**
- 2. They'll challenge your integrity with a malicious law code**
- 3. They can be defeated with strong baptismal security**

In the name of Jesus Christ in whom all God's fullness lives in bodily form. Amen.

Any of you ever have a social media profile compromised or your email hacked or your identify stolen or something like that? It can happen to anybody. Sony has had its share of problems with this recently. And a couple weeks ago hackers claiming allegiance to ISIS actually took control of the social media accounts of the U.S. military's Central Command. They were posting threatening messages and propaganda videos along with some military documents. Yikes!

Well so far in this Profile series where we've been studying the book of Colossians, we've seen how God has given each of us a wonderful new identity in Christ. How we can be secure in who we are in Christ. So who you are isn't what people think of you on your best day or what others say about you on your worst day. Last week Nathan reminded us that you are fully loved and forgiven in Christ at the end of every day. Christ's perfect profile is given to us through baptism—his sin free status, his identity as a beloved son of the Father.

Friends, can you begin to see how catastrophic it would be if we were to allow our spiritual profiles to get compromised? Because that can happen you know. Some of the Colossian Christians were in danger of that happening to them. Spiritual faith hackers were on the scene, false religious teachers. And in every case these hackers were trying to get people to lose their connection to Christ and to seek security instead in some religious rules and practices that seemed to be spiritual but were actually harmful. So today we're going to hear how the Apostle Paul responds and we're going to talk about you this applies also to you and me.

**"Beware the Colossian Faith Hackers!"** Beware! First...because they'll compromise your connection to Christ. Paul writes,

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore 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. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

*<sup>18</sup> Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the 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. <sup>19</sup> They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

Let's stop here for a little bit because you're probably wondering, What's going on? Well a couple things. The faith hackers in Colosse were being critical of the Christians. They were judging them on the basis of whether they were keeping the Old Testament ceremonial Jewish laws, particularly those that had to do with food and festivals. A little background. You see in the Old Testament God required the Jews to live distinctly different lives from the pagan world around them. One such way was the custom of circumcision that Nathan talked about last week. Another way had to do with special dietary laws and the types of food you could and could not eat. For example, the Romans loved to eat pork, but the Jews in Jesus' day were forbidden from it. Some of you right now are trying to imagine what life would be like without bacon. Don't worry, you'd survive! But that's what it was like to be an Old Testament Jew.

And in the Old Testament, the Jews were required to celebrate certain religious festivals on specific days. Actually every Saturday was to be a complete day of rest called the Sabbath. That was the day the Jews were especially to worship the LORD. So these Colossian faith hackers were telling the Colossian Christians, most of whom didn't even have a Jewish background, that they had to keep these Jewish rules regarding food and festivals. They were saying, "You gotta add keeping these rules to your religious to-do list in order to stay connected to Jesus."

And then there's this matter of worshiping angels. Any of you wonder about that? It seems like it was some sort of superstitious practice that appealed to people because it had an element of mystery to it and it gave people a false sense of humility. It sounds like some of the faith hackers were saying, with mock humility, "Whoah, we can't worship God directly. He's so far above us you know. We wouldn't even dare claim to be able to go into God's presence so you need instead to do what we do and try and open your mind and access God through his intermediaries in the spirit realm. Until you have these kinds of mystical journeys and experiences in the spirit realm you can't really know what God thinks of you."

Sounds a little bizarre, doesn't it? But what does Paul say about these faith hackers and their false teachings? He says, "Don't let them judge you by those Jewish laws anymore! Don't let them disqualify you with those superstitious man-made practices!" It's interesting that the word in Greek for "disqualify" has the idea of being an umpire or a referee. I picture an NFL referee going under the hood to watch the replay and then coming out and saying, "After further review, the receiver did not complete the process of making a catch."

Well in essence that's what these faith hackers were doing. They were saying, "Christians, after further review, based on some technicalities of the rules, our judgment is that you are not complete in Christ." That sounds terrible, doesn't it? Have any of you ever gotten the message from somebody that you are not spiritually complete in Christ until you have had some sort of special, religious experience? That's what was going on.

But Paul says, "They're the ones who've lost their connection to the head—which is Jesus Christ. **Beware the Colossians faith hackers!** because people like that will cause you to lose your connection to Christ too. Sure, they sound humble. Their teachings *seem* spiritual. But they're trying to cut off your head which is Christ. What good is a body that's had its head cut off? Think about it!"

<sup>16</sup> *Therefore 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.* <sup>17</sup> *These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* I'm bringing this up again because some of you may have wondered about some of these things. Why don't we worship on Saturday? Can we eat a bacon cheese burger? Well listen to what Paul says, <sup>17</sup> *These [all the ceremonial Jewish laws in the Old Testament] are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*



Shadows! For example here's a picture. What do you see? There are enough details there to figure out that it's a football player coming out of the tunnel, right? But he's a shadowy figure. You can't quite tell who he is. But once he comes out of the tunnel then it becomes fully clear. No longer will you be fixated on the silhouette or the shadow but on the person who embodies it. That's the point. The Old Testament was full of shadows whose purpose was to point ahead to the coming of Jesus Christ. It would not have been wrong for the Colossians to practice some of the Old Testament laws simply as customs or traditions but it was wrong for the faith hackers to insist that they had to now even after Jesus Christ had come. By insisting on these rules the faith hackers placed an unbearable burden on believers. And they were trying to compromise their connection to Christ because they were promoting a religion of works and not of grace.

<sup>17</sup> *These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* In other words Jesus is the real bread of life. He is the perfect Passover Lamb. He is the perfect sacrifice that atoned for sin once for all. He is the bringer of the true Sabbath rest for people's souls everywhere. Jesus alone perfectly fulfilled every commandment, law, rule, and shadow. He kept them not only in outward form but in spirit. You couldn't disqualify him on a technicality. That's what makes him our all-sufficient Savior!

So friends, **Beware the Colossian faith hackers!** Beware also 2) because they'll challenge your integrity with a malicious law code. I'm not talking any more about people who might insist that you keep Old Testament ceremonial laws. I mean how often does that happen today? Rather I'm talking now about anyone who insists you have to keep any man-made rules or traditions in order to be fully acceptable to God.

*<sup>20</sup> Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup> "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?*

*<sup>22</sup> These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup> Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

Can you think of anyone who says, "If you want to be fully acceptable to God, you need to do these things?" Well if you thought, "Boy that sounds a lot like the Pharisees in Jesus' day" ... good thought. They had a list a mile long of man-made rules and traditions over and above God's rules even that they said you had to keep. Then because they had so many rules it was easy to catch you on a technicality. Friends, **Beware the Colossian Faith Hackers!** because they'll challenge your integrity with a malicious law code.

I just started reading a book about the football program at Trinity Bible College in ND. The subtitle of the book is "In the trenches with College Football's Worst Team." It's a fun read for me because I actually played against them when I played football at Martin Luther College.

Anyway, Trinity Bible College is a school affiliated with the Assemblies of God. And so this book describes some of the rules they have at that school. Now the thing is I'm not against having rules per se. Rules are helpful and necessary in society and in schools, even Christian schools. Rather it's all the rules about how to make people good Christians that make me uncomfortable. It's all the artificial rules where someone thought, "Well this will stop people from sinning" or "This will get people to start worshiping God in the right way" or "This is how we'll get people to start showing the world how much we love Jesus." Sounds sort of spiritual, but this is what the Colossian faith hackers were saying too.

Now we could come up with a couple hundred contemporary examples I'm sure, but here's just one. At Trinity Bible College, blue jeans used to be barred, as in any wearing of blue jeans. But of course some people wondered where the boundary was on that. What makes something a blue jean? Is it a percentage of denim material? Is it a particular shade of blue? What makes denim so dangerous anyway? But they had a rule because the thinking was, I suppose, "Good Christians don't wear blue jeans." So the school leadership over time has had to wrestle with how to keep redefining what the rules are.

“I was forever defining what jeans were,” said Trinity’s VP of college relations. “We had to really define it by materials and color. It just got ridiculous.” To some it sounds spiritual to think, “We’re going to have rules to keep people from conforming to the world. We’re going to make rules to keep people from sinning. Where should we start? How about by saying, “No blue jeans.”

Well that’s what Colossians hackers were trying to do. “*Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!*” It was a malicious law code. Can you see why this is dangerous? It sounds spiritual and humble to say we’re going to keep these rules, but it can quickly become arrogant to insist on it as if this makes anyone more acceptable to God if they do it and less acceptable to God if they don’t. Even worse is if you or I start to think we’re better Christians than others because we do or don’t do certain things that those other people don’t do or do.

Let’s just take a custom like making the sign of the cross to remember your baptism or putting ashes on your forehead for Ash Wednesday as an external sign of internal repentance. You can do those things. They’re human practices neither commanded or forbidden by God. And as practices they can be helpful. But if those traditions become mere superstitious repetition or mere outward displays whereby you start to feel better about yourself just because you do them, then you’ve fallen victim to the Colossian faith hackers. You ever judge other people by your religious rules? Do you ever judge another church just because they do things a little different? You ever make someone feel disqualified from ever stepping foot in our church by your attitudes and opinions? Those are the damning sins that result from getting your spiritual profile hacked!

The good news is there is a way for the Colossians faith hackers to be defeated in our lives. It’s with strong baptismal security! Friends, remember who Jesus is and why he came. He came because, as the Scripture says, *there is no one righteous, not even one* (Romans 3:10). In fact *if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing* (Galatians 2:21)! But joyfully Jesus, the true God, came as one of us to fulfill God’s law completely. And because Jesus has fulfilled the law completely, he’s taken it off our agenda completely as a religious requirement. This is true of both the Old Testament Jewish laws and any man-made rules or traditions! There is no religious requirement needed to gain or maintain God’s approval or acceptance. For in Christ we already have it!

This is why are led to praise God whenever we reclaim our baptismal security. Through baptism we are covered by the perfect righteousness of Jesus—who never let his profile get compromised. We celebrate how his perfect profile has become ours. How the Holy Spirit now dwells in us to strengthen us through God’s word and sacraments. This is what makes us secure. This is the gospel. It’s what defeats the Colossian faith hackers in our lives. It what makes us hopeful, cheerful, and welcoming to all who are weary and burdened by the law. Amen.