

In Him You Have Been Filled

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All right, we good? All right, well, Shabbat Shalom everyone. As you can see, I am not Pastor Matthew. He actually got sick a few days ago and asked if I could come in and cover for him today. So, please be praying for him that he feels better soon. But yeah, as always, it's a blessing to be with you all today. I'm excited to get into the word. We're going to be talking about [Colossians 2](#) today. But before we dive in, if you don't mind, let's begin in prayer.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this Sabbath day. It is such a blessing to come together to rest, to worship you, and to learn from your word. And Father, I thank you for the message that you gave to share today that you put on my heart to share. I pray that you speak to your people through it, that you help me to just convey what you need them to hear, and what they need to hear. I thank you for everything that you've given us, most of all for your son Yeshua. We pray all this in your son Yeshua's name. Amen. Okay.

Well, we are going to be going through [Colossians 2](#) today, as I said.

Context: A Letter to a Community

To give us some context, Colossians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a community of Messiah followers. And these are predominantly Gentile followers of the Messiah who live in a city called Colossae, hence Colossians. So, a general point to keep in mind as we read Paul's writings is that these are letters that are written to historical communities that are dealing with particular issues. So, Paul is not writing like a general systematic theology that is organized according to headings and things like that. No, he's writing letters. He's writing letters to communities that are dealing with real issues.

And so, what happens is that some conflict arises in one of these communities that Paul has founded, and people have questions about what's going on. And so, Paul hears about what's going on, and he writes a letter to address these issues. Sometimes these communities will write Paul a letter and say, "Hey Paul, we have these questions. Can you help us figure this out?" We see this for example in 1 Corinthians, where Paul is actually responding to a letter. So basically, that's what Paul's letters are. Essentially, he's dealing with issues that are going on in

the community. And so, this is what we see in Colossians. Paul founded this community of believers in Colossae. And after he leaves, he later hears that they are dealing with some stuff. And so, he writes to them to help them answer their questions and to minister to them.

The Problem: False Teachings

So that raises a question. Okay, well, what's going on? What is going on in this community that prompted Paul to write to this community? Well, in [Colossians 2](#), we see that these believers are being influenced. They're being influenced by different teachings that are not in accord with the Messiah. For example, we see in [Colossians 2](#) verse 8, Paul says, quote, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition." These teachers, whoever they are, and there's some debate about that, but these teachers, they promote a certain philosophy that is shaped by what Paul calls human traditions. They claim to have had these visionary experiences, and they insist on certain ascetic practices as being necessary for true fulfillment.

So, what does Paul say to all of this? He says, "No. Fulfillment is not found in any of the stuff that these people are trying to sell you. Fulfillment is not found in any of this."

Now, as I mentioned, there is a lot of debate about who these false teachers in Colossians are. And there's not really a consensus among scholars. Some argue, and this is a popular view, that these are Jewish teachers, and that these teachers are seeking to impose things like the Sabbath, festivals, and food laws onto the Colossian believers, along with the other things like we saw asceticism and so forth.

They get this from verses 16 through 17, which read this. Paul says, quote, "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions 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."

Okay, so on the basis of that passage, a common argument is that these legalists—these teachers who must be Jewish—are telling the Colossian believers that they need to observe these commandments of the Torah, the Sabbath, festivals, and food laws. And Paul is telling the Colossians, "No, you don't need to do those commandments, and you shouldn't let these Jewish legalists judge you for not keeping them." So, that's a popular view. I don't actually think that's what these verses are saying.

In fact, there is a growing number of scholars who argue that it's the other way around. The false teachers operated outside of Judaism, and they were judging the Colossian believers not

for neglecting these commandments, but for observing them. So, it's the other way around. They were judging the Colossian believers for keeping the Sabbath and festivals. And so, that is the position that I take, and I'll give some of the reasons why in a moment. But before we get into the specifics of these details in the passage, I want us to grasp Paul's overall response to what these other teachers were offering. What is the gist of what these teachings are selling the Colossian believers? What is the gist of what these false teachers are saying to them about what they need, what is necessary for them, and how does Paul counter it? After we read through this passage, we'll spend some time talking about why I don't think Paul is invalidating the law of Moses. That is a special interest of mine, so of course we have to talk about it. And presumably, it's a special interest of yours as well, since we're in a Messianic congregation, and we love the Sabbath and festivals. So, we'll talk about that, too. After that, we'll conclude with some thoughts on Paul's message and how it speaks to us today in our own situation. Does that sound okay? Okay.

Fullness in Messiah

So, let's start in verse 1 of chapter 2. This is what Paul says.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Okay. So, right off the bat, Paul is saying that the Messiah is what? The Messiah is the end all, be all. All right? In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Messiah, he's at the top. He's the best. He's everything. All right? He says, "If you want to reach full understanding and wisdom, it is Messiah. He's the answer." So, why is Paul emphasizing this point?

Well, he tells us why. He continues, verse 4.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

Okay, so why is Paul talking about this, emphasizing this point? Because some folks are trying to sway the Colossian believers. They're trying to say that Messiah's not the end all, be all. That you need something else. You need something to supplement that, or something else entirely,

okay? And Paul is reminding them that they already have everything they need in Messiah. All right, he continues verse six.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. And this verse is key, verse 10. And you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

So again, what is Paul saying here? He says, "In Messiah, you already have everything that you could possibly need. You have been filled in him." He continues this point, verse 10. He says,

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. Thus he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

So Paul says, "In him, in Messiah, you are already set up for life. Your debt has been paid. You are forgiven." It's like if you have a billionaire relative who paid off all of your debt and bought you a house. And then, someone's trying to get you to buy a house. Why are you trying to buy a house another way? Why are you trying to spend your own money on a house or trying to get a house another way? Your rich relative already bought you one. He already paid off your debt. You're already set up.

You Have the Messiah, Who Is the Substance

You're set up for life. Paul continues verse 16. Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a Christ. So don't let anyone judge, or more properly criticize, you about those things. They are a shadow of things to come. That's not to say there's anything wrong with those things, as we'll talk about in a moment. But Paul's point is that you have the Messiah, who is the substance. So don't let these people criticize you.

Verse 18 says, "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind and not holding fast

to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God."

So what is Paul saying? He's saying, "Don't let anyone disqualify you on the basis of your failure to adhere to their philosophy." Their philosophy that is shaped by human traditions and is according to certain ascetic practices and visions and so forth. He says, "Instead, hold fast to the Messiah, because that is how you are nourished. It is in the Messiah that you receive growth that can only come from God. It's not through what these other guys are trying to sell you. These ascetic practices and these attempts to induce visions, they do not lead to true wisdom or fulfillment.

As Paul says in verse 23, "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." Yeah, it might appear wise. It might appear like a good idea. It might appear helpful, but it is of no value. It will not give you what you need.

So what is the point? What is Paul's point throughout this chapter? Don't buy what these people are selling. It's not going to fill you up. And it's superfluous. Why? Because you are in Messiah. You already have access to all the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. You've already been forgiven and set free from the rulers and the authorities that once held you captive. You're already part of the body that receives nourishment that can only come from God. So that's Paul's basic point here. Don't buy what these guys are selling. Their philosophy is a cheap counterfeit of the real thing that you already have. So that's the gist, okay?

Two Interpretations of Paul's Meaning

I do want to spend some time talking about verses 16 through 17 because these verses are often misunderstood. So let's read them again. And then we'll talk a little bit more about how I think this is very relevant to us today, what Paul is saying here. But [Colossians 2:16-17](#) says, "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

Okay. So, as I mentioned earlier, there are people who will point to this passage to say that Paul disparaged the law of Moses, particularly certain parts of the law of Moses, the Sabbath and the festivals and food laws. That he's denigrating those things. Many assume that Paul is warning against Jewish legalists who were trying to impose these practices upon his readers. And so the

argument is that Paul is assuring his readers that these practices are unnecessary and that they should reject the criticism that's coming from these Jewish legalists, okay?

However, as I mentioned, there are some scholars—a minority view—like Brian Allen, Harold Weiss, Troy Martin, and others who say that Paul is actually making the opposite point. These scholars argue that the Colossian believers were not being criticized for disregarding these practices. They were being criticized for observing them. These scholars identify Paul's opponents in Colossians as strict ascetics who condemned the Colossian believers for their festive eating and drinking on the Sabbath festivals and new moon, celebrations that Paul describes as a shadow of things to come.

And so the idea is that the celebratory joy that believers experience during the Sabbath festivals and new moons foreshadows the coming joy in the eschatological age to come when Messiah returns and establishes his kingdom fully. And so the ascetic teachers in Colossians disapproved of these joyful practices. And so Paul is telling his readers to ignore them. "Keep doing what you're doing. Keep enjoying these things. Keep celebrating. And don't let these killjoys ruin it for you. Don't accept their criticism, okay?"

So those are the two interpretations. The question is, which one is right? Which of these interpretations is right? Cause you could see how either of them could make sense. And taken on its own, either interpretation could work here. Well, I want to challenge the popular interpretation in favor of the minority view that I just talked about.

Challenging the Assumptions

It seems to me that the popular view that Paul is telling his readers that these practices are unnecessary, that interpretation rests on two assumptions that are not very well supported. In fact, I think the evidence undermines these assumptions that I'm going to talk about. And these assumptions form the foundation of the popular interpretation. So, if the assumptions that form the foundation of this popular interpretation are flawed, then that kind of undermines the interpretation. It problematizes it. And we should seek an alternative interpretation that better fits with the context.

So what are these two assumptions undergirding the popular view? Assumption number one is that the Colossian believers did not observe practices like the Sabbath and festivals. Assumption number two is that the Colossian opponents—the false teachers that Paul is countering in this chapter—did observe practices like the Sabbath and festivals. And so, on the

basis of these two assumptions, Paul's opponents who kept the Sabbath and festivals were judging Paul's readers for not keeping them. That's how the argument goes.

However, if these assumptions are wrong—if Paul's readers were keeping these practices and his opponents were not—then the opposite reading makes better sense. Paul's readers were being judged for observing the biblical calendar—the Sabbath and festivals—by critics who thought they shouldn't be doing that.

So let's challenge this first assumption. Is there evidence that the Colossian believers kept the Sabbath and festivals at the time that Paul wrote to them? I think there is.

Evidence from Scripture and Early Christian Practice

We know that the apostles themselves, of course Yeshua—Jesus—he was Jewish. Jesus kept the Sabbath and festivals as we read in the Gospels. The apostles after him, they continued to operate within first-century Judaism, which observed the biblical calendar. And that's what we see. So all of Judaism observed the biblical calendar. The original Messianic movement—Jesus and the apostles—began within first-century Judaism. And so, the apostles continued to operate within that framework. They continued to observe the Sabbath and feast days.

And we see this throughout the book of Acts, right? [Acts 2](#)—they're still celebrating Pentecost after Yeshua's resurrection. We see that Paul is observing the Festival of Unleavened Bread and Yom Kippur in the book of Acts.

So when Gentiles began following the Messiah, they were not joining a separate Gentile religion that did not exist. There was no different religion that they could join. They were joining a Messianic Jewish community and therefore would have adopted the same calendar that their fellow Jewish believers were observing. Naturally, they would have observed the Sabbath and the festivals because that was the religion they were joining. They were joining a religion that did those things.

And throughout Acts, that is what we see. We repeatedly see Gentile believers worshipping alongside Jewish believers in the synagogues on the Sabbath. In fact, at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council in [Acts 15:21](#), James explicitly expects that Gentiles who become followers of Yeshua—most of whom were already attending synagogue services on the Sabbath, as we read earlier in Acts—will continue doing that. He says that Moses is proclaimed every Sabbath in the synagogue. This is what the scholar Benjamin Frosted writes regarding [Acts 21](#). He says, quote, "James' proposal in [Acts 15:21](#) assumes that Gentile believers will have an ongoing relationship

with the believing Jewish community and that their lives will be structured around the biblical calendar."

Additionally, in [1 Corinthians 5:8](#), Paul urges his Jewish and Gentile readers at the church of Corinth to celebrate the Festival of Passover. He says, "Let us celebrate the festival." And he's talking about Passover there. As the scholar J. Bryant Tucker writes regarding [1 Corinthians 5:8](#), he says, "The fact that Paul explicitly mentions a festival suggests that he expects the Corinthian Christ group to engage in a real Passover celebration even if it is now imbued with new meaning considering Christ's sacrifice."

So, Paul is saying, "Celebrate the festival." This is after Yeshua's resurrection and these communities of Messiah followers are being established. He's talking to Jewish and Gentile believers: "Celebrate the festival."

The Quartodeciman Controversy

Finally, in the late 2nd century AD, you had something called the Quartodeciman controversy. Basically, the Quartodeciman controversy was a debate among early Christians about when to celebrate the Messiah's resurrection. This is significant because on one side of this debate, you had nearly the entire Christian community of Asia Minor where Colossae was located. And the Christians in this community in Asia Minor insisted that the resurrection ought to be celebrated when? On Passover. They insisted that we ought to celebrate the resurrection of the Messiah on the 14th of Nisan exactly according to the biblical calendar. That's why they were called Quartodecimans. It means 14ers, okay? They insisted that we have to celebrate the Passover on the 14th of Nisan, which is when the Torah says to do it.

Passover in Early Christian Communities

So these Christians in Asia Minor, where Colossae is, were celebrating Passover in remembrance of the Messiah just like Yeshua and Paul taught. There's a 2nd century bishop named Polycrates, and he is defending this practice. He actually writes a letter defending his practice. He writes that this practice was handed down to him from figures like the Apostle John and Philip and Polycarp, another early Christian from the early 2nd century. And Polycrates writes, quote, "We observe the exact day, Nisan 14. We observe the exact day neither adding nor taking away." Polycrates also writes, quote, "All my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven."

So this is a 2nd century Christian who is writing, insisting that he received this custom from John the Apostle and from people like Polycarp, and it was handed down and all his relatives continued to observe Passover on the 14th of Nisan. We see this quoted in Eusebius's Church History, book five, chapter 24.

Why is this significant? Because it proves that most Christian communities in Asia Minor where Colossae was located were still keeping Passover in accordance with the biblical calendar long after Colossians was written. This is difficult to explain if Christians in that region had already abandoned the biblical festivals in the 1st century. Why are all these Christians still keeping it in the 2nd century if in Colossians they had already abandoned it? It's difficult to explain. So I think this evidence undermines the popular assumption that early Gentile believers were not observing the Sabbath when Colossians was written.

The Question of Paul's Opponents

But what about the opponents? What about this second assumption—that Paul's opponents in Colossians did celebrate these things? Do we have evidence of that? Did they celebrate the Sabbath and festivals? I would argue that the evidence suggests that Paul's opponents did not observe the Sabbath and festivals.

For instance, Paul describes his opponents as quote, "insisting on asceticism." We see this in verse 18 and 23. So Paul's opponents in Colossians promoted harsh self-denying practices. Well, we see some conflict here. Because apart from the requirement to fast on Yom Kippur, the Sabbath, festivals, and new moon celebrations that we see in the Torah, they were not associated with fasting or self-denial in Jewish and Christian practice.

For example, the Book of Judith is an early Jewish writing written around 100 BC. You have a Jewish woman, Judith, who's the main character. She actually outright refuses to fast on, quote, the Sabbath, new moon, and festivals. It specifically mentions the Sabbath, new moons, and festivals. She refuses to fast on those days. Fasting is fine any other day, but those festival days are not days for fasting in Jewish practice.

Festivals as Joy and Celebration

We also see in the Torah itself and in books like Nehemiah that the Sabbath and biblical festivals are associated with what? They're associated with rest. They're associated with joy and celebration, drinking wine, and having a feast. That's what these holidays are all about. Nehemiah explicitly commands the people not to be sad on Sukkot.

In Nehemiah, chapter 8, he sees the people are mourning. He's like, "Stop being sad. You're commanded to be happy this day. This is a festival of joy." And he goes on to explicitly command them to drink wine. He said, "Drink wine, have a feast, be joyful. This is not a time to be sad. This is not a time to fast, to deny yourself. This is a time of indulgence. It's a time to enjoy and to celebrate, to feast."

That raises the question. If Paul's opponents in Colossians were quote, "insisting on asceticism," then why would they be promoting the Sabbath and festivals, which are, by nature, times of joy and feasting and not times of asceticism? The Sabbath and festivals, by nature, are times of joy and feasting, not asceticism. So that is difficult to explain if the popular interpretation is true because those things are contradictory.

Human Tradition and False Teaching

A second problem is that Paul characterizes his opponents' teachings as being quote, "according to human tradition" and quote, "according to human precepts and teachings." We see this in verse 8 and verse 22. What does that mean? That means that their teachings, by nature, are not derived from the law of Moses because the law of Moses comes from God. It does not come from human tradition. So if their teachings come from human tradition rather than the Torah, it is difficult to see how they could be trying to impose the Torah's Sabbath and festivals, because their teachings come from human tradition, not the law. So how could they be promoting the law?

Now we don't have time to get into this, but one theory about who these false teachers were would further support this interpretation that I'm advocating here. Some scholars have shown that the teachings promoted by Paul's opponents in Colossians bear a strong resemblance to those of the ancient Cynic philosophers. And the ancient Cynic philosophers, just to give a really brief description of what they believed and thought, they were staunchly opposed to wine and festival meals. They explicitly commanded their adherents not to drink wine. They also condemned the use of calendars.

So according to the Cynics, organizing your life around a system of timekeeping was a threat to fulfillment. It was a threat to having contentment in life because you're putting these temporal restraints on your life. You're not able to just live day by day and be free. And so if you abide by a religious calendar, for example, it actually hinders, in their mind, contentment and freedom. The Cynics also rejected physical comforts, and they promoted rigorous self-denial, which fits how Paul characterizes his opponents in Colossians.

If Paul's opponents were Cynics, they would be highly critical of the Sabbath, festivals, and new moons. Why? Because these are celebrations, number one, marked by a calendar. Number two, they involved wine, festive meals, and rejoicing. And so you can take that for what you will. If you want to explore that idea more, you can check out an article I wrote on [Colossians 2](#). It's on my website, davidwilber.com, and I cite several of the scholars who make this argument and go into it in a little bit more detail.

But in any case, even if we set that part of it aside, I think the evidence is against the popular interpretation here. Paul is not condemning Jewish legalists who were attempting to impose the biblical calendar on his readers. He is instructing his readers to ignore the people who were criticizing them for doing that.

Shadows of Things to Come

In light of all of that, let's go through these two verses again point by point really quickly, and then we'll move on.

Paul says in verse 16, "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink." Okay? So many people read this as a reference to the food laws in the Torah, the laws of clean and unclean animals—don't eat pork and all of that. I don't think that's accurate. For one, apart from certain restrictions that apply only to people who are under a Nazarite vow or to priests who are actively serving in the tabernacle, there are no laws in the Torah that regulate the consumption of drink for regular people. So there are no laws talking about whether or not you should drink wine, for example.

So it's strange if this is a reference to the food laws that Paul would reference drink here, okay? Instead, I think food and drink is better understood as the act of eating and drinking. So those Greek terms can be translated as eating and drinking. This is how it's translated in the Young's Literal Translation and some other translations. And so what Paul's saying here is "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of eating and drinking."

The second half of the verse indicates that Paul is thinking about the celebratory feasting and drinking that is associated with the Sabbath, new moon, and festivals. Listen to what the scholar Brian Allen writes. He says, quote, "Food and drink in verse 16 do not refer to Levitical dietary instructions. Rather, their mention is actually a clue that ascetics were criticizing the Colossians for their lavish feasts during Sabbaths, festivals, and new moons, times that were not normally associated with fasting and affliction." End quote.

In other words, he's saying, "Don't let anyone judge you for your eating and drinking, your feasting and your drinking wine on the Sabbath, festivals, and new moons."

Paul goes on to say, "Let no one judge you on matters of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath." As I've argued, Paul's readers were being criticized for observing the biblical calendar, for their feasting and drinking on the Sabbath, festivals, and new moons. Again, Brian Allen writes. He says, quote, "Numerous texts portray the early believers in the Messiah, both Jew and Gentile, involved in the Jewish calendar. Paul wrote to encourage the Colossians that no one should condemn them for eating and drinking, especially on Sabbath and festivals." End quote.

All right. And Paul then says that the eating and drinking, the feasting, the celebration on the Sabbath, festivals, and new moons is a shadow of things to come (verse 17). These things are a shadow of things to come. Okay, so these celebrations point to future realities from the perspective of Paul and his readers. They point forward.

What are these things to come that Paul is referring to? Well, in the context of Colossians, this seems to point to the future hopes of believers, such as the Messiah's return, the resurrection, and all of those related events—the Messiah coming back to establish his kingdom.

Throughout Colossians, Paul repeatedly emphasizes the hope that believers have in Messiah. He says in [Colossians 3:4](#), quote, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." So that's a future promise that believers have to look forward to, and Paul is constantly telling them to hold on to the hope they have, okay?

Celebration Points to the Future Kingdom

So the celebratory joy that believers experience during the Sabbath, festivals, and new moons—all that celebration—is a glimpse into the future joy to come. These celebrations point ahead to the future kingdom. We read, for example, in [Isaiah 66](#), talking about the eschatological kingdom, that all mankind will worship God from Sabbath to Sabbath, and from new moon to new moon. And so we have a reference to the biblical calendar being observed in the eschatological age to come.

In [Isaiah 25](#), we see that in the age to come—God's kingdom—you're going to have the best wine. It's going to be well-aged wine. There's going to be a feast. It's going to be a time of rejoicing and celebrating. That is what we are promised in the age to come. And so the festivals that we celebrate right now, they point forward to that ultimate celebration. So these are wonderful things that God has given us, and we should not let anyone criticize us for enjoying them.

The Substance Belongs to Christ

At the same time, Paul says this: "But the substance belongs to Christ." Verse 17: "But the substance belongs to Christ." Well, what does that mean?

Even though the Sabbath and festivals and new moons—all that celebration during these times, that feasting and drinking—even though that provides a glimpse into the coming age, the Messiah himself embodies the reality that these things only foreshadow. The Messiah himself embodies it.

The joy of the coming age is ultimately rooted in what the Messiah has already accomplished, and believers are already able to experience this joy in some measure through their union with the Messiah. It's like a way to time travel into the future. Because we are in Messiah through the spirit that we're given, through our union with him, we can in some sense time travel to the future and experience the joy of the future age even right now.

So this makes the Sabbath and festivals all the more meaningful. They point to the joy that is ultimately found in the Messiah. And that goes right back to Paul's main point throughout this chapter. What is Paul's main point throughout this entire chapter? His main point is that true fulfillment is already available to you in the Messiah.

Don't Buy the Snake Oil

If someone is coming to you and insisting on all of this other stuff—insisting on asceticism and saying, "Hey, you need to do all of this other stuff. You need to do these things so you can induce visions and see into the heavens and do all these cool things that will give you something special, so that you can be filled, so that you can really experience something amazing"—they're trying to sell you on that.

Paul is saying, don't buy what these guys are selling. Don't buy it. Why? You already have it all. You already have the real thing. The stuff that they're selling—it's not going to give you what you want. Your debt has already been paid. You already have access in Messiah to all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. All of this other stuff that these guys are selling you, it's not going to fill you up.

How Does This Relate to Us Today?

How does this message relate to us today? Because we don't have cynic philosophers coming up to us today insisting on asceticism and these other things. That was something Paul's audience

was dealing with. But how does this relate to us today?

Well, I think that this is relevant in many ways. Just like in Colossians, there are many snake oil salesmen in our own day who are telling you that you are not complete, that you are not fulfilled. They need you to believe that because they need you to believe that you need them in order to fix it.

This is how politics works, right? Politicians—they generate a sense of discontentment and sell you on the idea that they are the ones who will fix all your problems. The reason your life is horrible is because the current administration in power is making your life terrible. Everything is hopeless for you. You can never have a good life because of all of these external factors just ruining everything for you. But if you vote for me, all your wildest dreams will come true. Right?

So this is also how cults work. In exchange for your loyalty to them, they give you a sense of belonging, purpose, and identity that you can't get anywhere else. You've got to stay part of this cult. You've got to be part of this special group, and you'll be happy. You'll be content. You'll be fulfilled.

We also see this with certain internet influencers today—many internet influencers who are selling you on the idea that you are failing at life, that everything's hopeless, that you can't fix things on your own, that you need them. If you want to be successful like them, if you want to have all the money and the great relationships and the status, if you want to be fulfilled in life, you need them. You have to give them all your money and all your attention. Click on their videos so that they can teach you the secrets of looks maxing and how to escape the matrix.

I mean, very destructive ideologies—I mean, the transgender ideology is the most sinister of this, right? You cannot actually be fulfilled in the body that God gave you. You have to change it. You have to take these hormones and change your physical appearance, and then finally you'll be able to... It's a lie.

Everyone is trying to convince you that you are not fulfilled. Paul's message in Colossians is: don't buy it. It's snake oil. Don't buy it. They are trying to sell you a cheap imitation. Your rich relative already bought you a house. Why are you listening to some dude trying to get you to buy a different house? A smaller one—yeah, a shack, right?

You Are Already Filled in Him

So don't go looking to be filled by all these other philosophies and practices that are out there. You are already filled in him. And this applies not only to unbiblical human traditions and philosophies. It also applies to good things. Because we even look to some good things, and we see good things in life that we might be tempted to turn to for ultimate fulfillment, okay?

I argued earlier that Paul's depiction of the Sabbath, festivals, and new moon celebrations is actually positive, right? He's like, "These practices offer a glimpse into the glorious age to come. These are wonderful things. These are good things." But even these good things in themselves cannot fulfill you. Because what does Paul say? He says the substance belongs to Christ. That's who it's ultimately about. That's who ultimately fulfills you.

The Sabbath, festivals, and new moon celebrations are good. They're great. They're wonderful. I love them. They are a shadow of the glorious age to come. But the Messiah embodies that future reality that these practices only foreshadow. He is the one who brings about the age to come.

What Good Things Might We Elevate?

What are some good things that we might wrongly elevate in our search for fulfillment? I'm talking about good things. What are some good things that we might wrongly elevate to a place they should not be in some misguided search for fulfillment?

Relationships. For many of you, that might be your marriage. You might be looking to your spouse to fulfill you. Right? Nothing wrong with marriage, obviously. It's a very good thing. But if you're looking to your spouse to fulfill you, Paul says, don't do that. Don't do that. God gave you your spouse as a good gift—to help you, to bless you, for you to help and to bless them. But you do not fulfill each other. In fact, if you are looking to your spouse to fulfill you, you are setting them up to fail because they will disappoint you. They are human, just like you are. They can't fulfill you. No person is capable of fulfilling you. It could actually be very harmful to a relationship if you are relying on another person to completely fulfill you. Again, marriage is very good. But it is not what fills you. There is only one who can do that.

The good news is that when you put Messiah above all else, all these other areas of your life become better. And you're happier. Why? Because you have a healthier perspective. You have a healthier, proper perspective toward everything else. You are not putting unreasonable expectations on your spouse, or your job, or whatever. You recognize them for what they are—the good things that they are in many ways. But you find fulfillment in the Messiah. You find fulfillment in the Messiah. Okay, so I've said that a million times.

How Do We Actually Do This?

But that raises the question: How do we actually do that? Because it's easy to just say, "All right, find your fulfillment in the Messiah. Okay, I agree." I'm here at church, and I... How do I feel fulfilled? How do I find my fulfillment in Messiah? It's kind of abstract, okay? Believe hard enough? How does it actually work?

Well, Paul answers this in the next chapter, and he gets very practical. Here's what Paul says at the beginning of chapter 3. He says:

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

Put On, Then, as God's Chosen Ones

Skipping down to verse 12: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body." And this point is key. "And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

So what is Paul saying? He says, in light of all the amazing things that God has done for you in Messiah — paid your debt, forgiven you, you now have access to all the wisdom and knowledge and understanding, you have everything that you could possibly want — in light of all of that, we are called to live in the way that Paul has just described. We seek what is above and we put to death what is earthly in us.

What That Looks Like Practically

What does that look like practically? We stop participating in sexual immorality. We stop coveting. We stop being angry. We let go of anger. We stop engaging in obscene talk. Lying. Greed. All of the works of the flesh, because that's earthly. You can't really feel fulfilled and content when you are engaging in those behaviors. Engaging in that stuff is not going to fill you. You're not going to be able to feel fulfilled if you're engaging in that.

When you're holding on to anger or lust or constantly coveting what isn't yours, those are the things that are going to keep you enslaved. You're going to be miserable. You're going to be constantly searching. If you're coveting, you're constantly yearning for something you don't have, that's not yours, that you want. How can you feel fulfilled? How can you feel content when you're focused on that?

So Paul says, put those things away. And instead, love one another and forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven us. Put away the anger. The most miserable people in the world are the angriest people in the world. If you're holding on to anger, you can't feel happy. You can't feel content. Forgive each other. Let it go. Then you can feel happy. Then you can feel —

Give Thanks

This next point is key. This is very practical. Paul says, "Give thanks." Paul emphasizes gratitude several times throughout Colossians. He repeats it several times. Give thanks to God. Give thanks to him. Praise him and worship him with thanksgiving in your heart.

Typically, when you start expressing gratitude for the good things that you have — when you start vocalizing that — you start feeling it. You have to take the step first practically and actively give thanks. And then as you do it, it will affect your emotions. You will start feeling it. You start feeling filled and content. If you're ungrateful, if you feel entitled to things that you don't have, that weren't given to you, if you're angry, if you're not thankful, you cannot feel fulfilled. So if you want to feel fulfilled, give thanks.

And Paul gives one very practical way to do that, which we're going to do in a minute. He says to give thanks through — quote — "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We express our thankfulness to God through those things.

So with that in mind, worship team, if you can come back up. We're going to do this. We are going to express thanks to God for all of the amazing things that he has done for us through

singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. As we sing together, I want you to focus on what God has done for you in Messiah. Your debt has been paid.

Closing Worship

Amen. You've been forgiven. You've been given a new life. You've been given hope for the future. You have hope. This life isn't all there is. No matter how bad it is, you have hope. So give thanks to God for these things. Give thanks to God for the hope that you have. Ask him to help you break free from any earthly things still within Anger, sexual immorality, greed, covetousness, anything that continues to hold you back from fully experiencing the fulfillment that he wants for you. Our anger, our sexual struggles, covetousness, our ingratitude. We love you, Lord, and we thank you for everything that you have done, everything that you are continuing to do. In Yeshua's name, amen. Everything worthy of all the praise we could ever bring. Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe. We live for you. Yeshua, the name above every other name. Yeshua, the only one who could ever save. Worthy of every breath you could ever breathe. We live for Oh, we live for you. And holy, there is no one like you. There is none beside you. Open up my eyes in wonder and show me who you are and fill me with your heart and lead me in your love to those around me. Sing worthy. Worthy of every song we could ever sing. Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring. breathe. We live for you. Yeshua. other name. Yeshua, the only one who could ever save. Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe. We live for Oh, we live for you. And holy, there is no one like you. There is none beside wonder and show me who you are and fill me with your heart and lead in your love to those around me. Holy, there is no one like you. There is none beside you. Open up my eyes in wonder and show who you are and fill with your heart and lead in your love to those Holy, lead us in your love, God. Oh, lead us in your love. And I will build my life upon your love. It is a firm foundation. And I will put my trust in you alone. And I will not be shaken. Oh, I will build my life upon your love. firm foundation. And I will put my trust in you alone. And I will not be shaken. Holy, there is no one like you. There is none beside you. Open up my eyes in wonder and show me who you are and fill me with your heart and lead there is no one like you. There is none beside wonder and show me who you are and fill me with your heart and lead me in your love to Oh, lead us in your love, God. Lead us in your love. So worthy, so wonderful. We worship you, Father. So holy, so worthy, so wonderful. There's no one like you. No one like you, God. Oh, no other one, no other one. So worthy and wonderful. Bless you, Father. Thank you, Father. You are worthy of our praise. We're so grateful, Father. You and you alone be praised. All blessing and honor and glory and power are yours. Holy is your name forevermore. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. Who was and is and is to come. You are worthy, Father. We bless you

and we praise you. In Yeshua's name. Hear, oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. May the Lord cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another and for all people in order to strengthen your hearts as blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all of his kadoshim. May the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be like-minded with one another in the manner of Messiah so that together with one voice you glorify the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah. And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you his peace. In the name of our Sar Shalom, our Prince of Peace, Yeshua Hamashiach. Amen and amen. Shabbat Shalom, family. Amen.

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