Colossians 2:16-23 **Scott MALCOLM**

**Why do we submit to regulations, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch?**

There was a story told of one of the more prominent Ministers in the Baptist movement when I first began my ministry in that church. He was a good minister and rose to a position of national prominence in his time. He was a nice guy and always pleasant and helpful to me, but he was very outspoken for conservative issues. Very outspoken.

He like me, was a convert in later life.

He had been a representative rugby player for one of our minor provinces, and people who knew him well, had said he was life and soul of the party; outgoing and full of enthusiasm. One of those people that is a pleasure to be around.

But all that changed when he became a Christian. He gave up rugby, became very serious about moral issues, very diligent in his faith and quietened down immensely. People said he was hardly the same guy.

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When I went into Prison Chaplaincy, I thought it would be an opportunity to use the skills I had as a Minister and as a Probation Officer, to help people in to and with their faith. I thought that becoming a Christian would change a person’s life, and it did, but not always the way I had hoped.

I noticed that people who were doggedly single minded, and not able to see more than one side of an argument … when they became Christians … they were just the same. Except their doggedness, singlemindedness and inflexibility, were applied to their favourite scriptures, rather than their non-Christian fixations. They still couldn’t see anyone else’s point of view, or understand any differing opinion.

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Over the past few weeks, the 10 yearly conference of Anglican Bishops from all around the world has been on in England. It has taken place at Canterbury Cathedral, the University of Kent and at Lambeth Palace in London. It’s called the Lambeth Conference. I have been following it very informally via headlines in the UK church newspaper, The Church Times.

One of the headlines came from one of the Bishops from Ghana, who said that the Ghanaian church could not share communion with Bishops who did not believe the Bible.

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Also, over the last little while there have been numerous media stories about the Christian community, in the West Coast at the top of the South Island, Gloriavale.

Horrific allegations of abuse, of children and workers, women and those who disagree with the leadership, this community seems overwhelmed with rules and regulations of what is and what is not acceptable … except … they only seem to apply to those who are followers, not the leaders.

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This is a question the writer to the Colossian church asks of the congregation present there. They ask it because, as they have set out earlier in the letter, the Colossians have been set free from slavery, why would they want to go back to that? “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?” They have in Jesus the Christ, been given all knowledge, wisdom and authority, why would they want to submit again to another set of rules and regulations? Why when most of them have been delivered from all of this would they welcome the chance to live under these conditions again? Why would they want to lose hold of the head … which is Christ?

Our text for today is a statement of Christian freedom. And asks … why would we not want to live there? Why do we hanker again for the trappings of Egypt?

For the young rugby playing man who became a prominent Baptist Minister, for the men in prison who found faith, for Bishops even, for those at Gloriavale …

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When we have been offered this wonderous gift of Christian freedom … why do we not want to live there? Why does becoming a follower of Christ look more then a curse than a celebration? Why when everything we know about Jesus, tells us he was not a religious rule keeper, when everything we know about Paul tells us he was not a religious rule keeper, why when what we see before us in Colossians tells us, this is not about religious rule keeping … do we and the church … only have rules to offer!

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I think because it’s easy. It’s easy to say don’t do this or that. It’s easy to say, this is right and this is wrong. It’s easy to use these things to keep ourselves feeling like we have an appearance of wisdom … when we don’t. “A self-imposed piety, and humility.” It’s easy to use these things to make ourselves feel special … righteous … self-righteous.

It’s a way we have of saying to ourselves … how good am I!

It’s much harder to think, to seek to understand what the scriptures really say, what they really mean … and what the gospel is all about.

Because it’s not about rules and regulations.

It’s not about becoming serious and morally conservative. It’s not about being deaf to others points of view, it’s not about saying you are the only one who understands the bible, it’s not about holding sway over a community of people.

It’s about freedom, the freedom of all people to grow in to the fullness of maturity in Christ, which then shows itself … in the freedom to love others.

 … This is what Jesus wanted, what Paul preached, what Colossians says!

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