**IT’S ALL ABOUT MESSIAH**

6Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29486a)] of the world, and not according to Christ. 9For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12having 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. 13And 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, 14by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15He disarmed the rulers and authorities[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29493b)] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29493c)]

16Therefore 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. 17These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29496d)] puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19and 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.

20If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23These 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.

SLIDE 1 & 2: The passage we are unpacking today is the doctrinal center, the matza ball if you will, of this letter to the church at Colossae. But without the soup, the matza ball can be a dry, tasteless experience to choke down our throats. Jesus is the whole soup and infuses the bowl – this letter to the Colossians is ALL ABOUT MESSIAH.

SLIDE 3: We’ve learned so far that although Paul had never been to this church, he was a **partner** in the work there with Epaphrus and wrote this letter from a Roman prison in response to the news that there was destructive teaching going on in the congregation. **The source of the heresy probably grew out of the context of their local culture, both pagan and Jewish. They were in danger of devaluing the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ**; the false teachers were trying to add a lot more than carrots to the soup. By the time they would be finished, it wouldn’t be genuine matzah ball soup anymore.

I’m not parking my spoon on the matza ball this morning and using this as a proof text for or against orthopraxy. More importantly, I think this passage teaches us how to focus on the main issue – Jesus. Not Jesus plus anything else – just Jesus. It sounds oversimplified but the soup ingredients are quite straightforward as any bubbe, Jewish grandma, will tell you. I think there is ample wiggle room for different expressions of faith in Jesus, different seasonings or flavors (I’ve made vegan matzah ball soup), as long as we remember that He alone accomplished the work of redemption in us.

SLIDE 4: **The phrase, “In Christ”, appears fifteen times in this letter and half of those occurrences are in this chapter. Paul wants believers to know Jesus and know his voice so that they will not be deceived by false teaching. Remember, the Colossians have not succumbed to heresy – this letter is preventative medicine.**

SLIDE 5: Paul divides his letter between theological exposition and practical application; I appreciate that Paul begins his letter by affirming the people here before admonishing them. He is a fantastic example for us of a positive approach to our brothers and sisters. He **encourages** before he **exhorts**, **commends** before he **corrects**. In fact, the pattern of the whole section is “positive teaching followed by negative warning” expanded all the way through this pericope and he doesn’t perseverate on the position he opposes. He starts this section with an introductory exhortation (vv 6-8), a summary of salvation (vv 9-15) and then his application for the Colossians’ situation (vv 16-23). Once again, Paul paves the way for us today in how we ought to work together. **He always starts with praise and prayer before he provides his principle.**

SLIDE 6: **This is not a passage to weaponize our words and wound his sheep.** Our witness comes before our words and we receive the promise of God’s wisdom. What we receive from the Lord is what we give to others. It’s not about us – it’s about Him. Jesus in all his fullness is completely adequate for our lives in him. He is our sufficiency and we are sated. It’s basic but dense. For those of you familiar with matza balls, this passage is a sinker – not light and fluffy floating on the top of the pot. I’ve cut the matza ball into a few pieces so it’s easier to eat:

SLIDE 7: **Choosing Messiah – 2:6-7**

SLIDE 8: 6Therefore, as you ***received*** Christ Jesus the Lord, so ***walk*** in him, 7***rooted*** and ***built up*** in him and ***established*** in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

SLIDE 9: We could be full for the rest of the morning in these verses! In verse 6, we are reminded that Jesus is our Lord, our Master, the One to whom we surrender our will. Verses 6 and 7 are the ***halakhah*** of the believer’s journey – the way in which we are to walk, live, move forward and anchor our identity. This is not their grandma’s halakhah. They consolidate not only **what** we are to believe, but **who** we are and **how** we follow. ***Halakh*** – we walk forward, we continue where we began by remaining in Him, the ***halakhah of Yeshua*** bears the fruit of salvation which Paul elaborates in Galatians 5:22-25 after he has reminded these believers to walk forward in the freedom that Yeshua has secured for them, **“22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. … If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”** This ***halakhah*** is both inner disposition and outward behavior.

These verses also echo Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians in chapter 3 of that letter, “17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being **rooted** and **grounded** in love, 18may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to **know the love** of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

*In these two short verses, Paul gives us four active steps to build our lives on Jesus:*

V 6 – **stay in love** with Jesus, keep the flame of your heart for him ignited, walk in him, follow him

V 7 – **grow in our identity** as believers “rooted” and “built up” – actions!

V7 – **apply the truth** of the Scripture to our lives – “strengthened in the faith as you were taught”

V7 – **be** **thankful**; this abundant gratitude leaves no room for dissension, division or departure from Jesus; this thankfulness can be a litmus test for our own spiritual state; if you want to be healthy, be thankful

This introductory exhortation isn’t redundant – it’s **a prescription for staying close to Jesus**, for not walking away. We all know people who have left the fold of faith and I think that their apostasy began somewhere in the bed of these two verses. As an English nerd, I noticed that Paul uses direct imperatives throughout this letter which makes it simple and forceful, “walk, be rooted, built up, strengthened, thankful” and “don’t be deceived”; if anything, Paul is direct. He admonishes that these believers are being enticed away from Jesus and forsaking their ***halakhah***, their faith walk in Him. He reminds them to be satisfied in Jesus alone and not look elsewhere. He **roots** their identity in Jesus and **exhorts** them in their **devotional** life as well – **be thankful**. This is their defense against deceit**.** SLIDE 10: **There is no higher spiritual stage beyond clinging to Yeshua!** From this foundation of faith, he moves forward to the challenge:

SLIDE 11:

**Challenging with the Gospel – 2:8-15**

8See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29486a)] of the world, and not according to Christ. 9For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12having 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. 13And 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, 14by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15He disarmed the rulers and authorities[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29493b)] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29493c)]

SLIDE 12: V 8 - LOOK OUT! BEWARE! TAKE HEED! Don’t let anyone take you captive! This is **battle** language and the war is spiritual. The Colossians were in danger of being partially seduced by the culture surrounding and infusing them; whatever the elemental forces and angel teachings were specifically is not the point for us today. Those were the specific influences and heritage of the Colossians; we have our own baggage wherever we come from. We should remember we are no different and we must guard our hearts vigilantly as well. Sometimes the ideas and culture in which we’ve grown up or been immersed in still permeates our thinking and syncretizes our faith. There are so many beautifully packaged sound ideas and philosophies that echo and parallel truth that are bombarding us every day – no matter how great they seem, no matter how palatable or attractive – or even parallel, not one of them will redeem us. We must hold everything up to the light of Jesus and they will pale in comparison. All the mystery we need to know is found in Him and He is the embodiment of wisdom.

**Paul turns their eyes to Jesus in verses 9-10:**

9For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

* He is Messiah, the one who is God’s appointed king forever, the one we had hoped for through whom God would redeem the world and will judge the earth – all God’s plans center on Him because He is sufficient
* He is Lord, the creator, ruler, sustainer, owner of the entire universe, God himself. The world centers on Him. He is our Lord and we serve Him and His purposes.

I like the way these verses read in The Message, ***“Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don’t need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.”***

SLIDE 13: Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, from a prison cell like Paul, *“Being a Christian does not mean being religious in a certain way, making oneself into something or other (a sinner, penitent, or saint), according to some method or other. Instead it means being human, not a certain type of human being, but the human being Christ creates in us. It is not a religious act that makes someone a Christian, but rather sharing in God’s suffering in the worldly life.”*

Bonhoeffer recognizes that God chose his fullness to dwell bodily in Jesus. We express our union with Him and that resurrection life in him empowers our mission or else it’s vanity. This is Christian spirituality.

* SLIDE 14: In verses 11-15, Paul then combats the false teaching by **reiterating the Gospel** for the Colossians. Tim Keller, *“The Gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus than we ever dared hope.” And again, “****The Gospel is*** *that Jesus came to earth, lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.”*

Many of us here have made a vocation of teaching and proclaiming the Gospel and it is good for us to continually preach it to ourselves. What in our lives does not reflect the Gospel? What looks dark when held up to the light of Jesus? Do we live out our relationships, our finances, our health, our hopes in complete surrender to Him? The places that are closed to His Spirit can be footholds for the enemy of our souls. We need to let the Gospel challenge our hearts and minds, our desires and our habits, every single day. We need to have our hearts circumcised in Him and bury our old nature in baptism with Jesus. We are exhorted to true humility in this section. Tim Keller aptly said that, “Humility is so shy. If you begin talking about it, it leaves.” Let’s see ourselves in the light of Scripture and think of Yeshua more and ourselves less. Paul challenges them with the truth of the Gospel before laying out his challenges to the false teachers.

These false guides, whether Pharisaic and/or Essenic mixed with pagan Gnosticism, were making these believers feel as if their teaching was superior, tempting them to an intellectually higher level but Paul points out that they are vain and deceitful in contrast to the fulness of God in Jesus. It looks like Paul is using their own language, philosophy and fullness, to echo the false teachers’ jargon; he holds them up against Jesus to show that they are false. He’s not attacking all philosophy since he often uses philosophical terms in his writing (without the Messiah, Christianity itself would just be another philosophy) but he’s honing in on this particular false teaching. A counterfeit bill may be difficult to detect unless it’s held under scrutiny and looked at in the right light. (Canadian $) Wisdom comes only from God himself and fearing Him is the beginning of wisdom. All other wisdom and knowledge lacks Jesus. Paul wrote to the Colossians at the beginning of this chapter that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are found in Jesus. We must reflect the glory of Jesus, not our own glory! In v 9, it’s not that we become “little gods” by partaking in the divine nature but we have fullness in him through the new birth, through our hearts that have been circumcised and softened in him.

One commentator noted that ancient authors often avoided naming their opponents, partly to avoid giving them unnecessary publicity, partly to emphasize issues rather than personalities. Once again this seems a wise principle for us to follow as we serve for the glory of Messiah.

SLIDE 15: A quick look at this teaching which will run ahead to the end of this pericope:

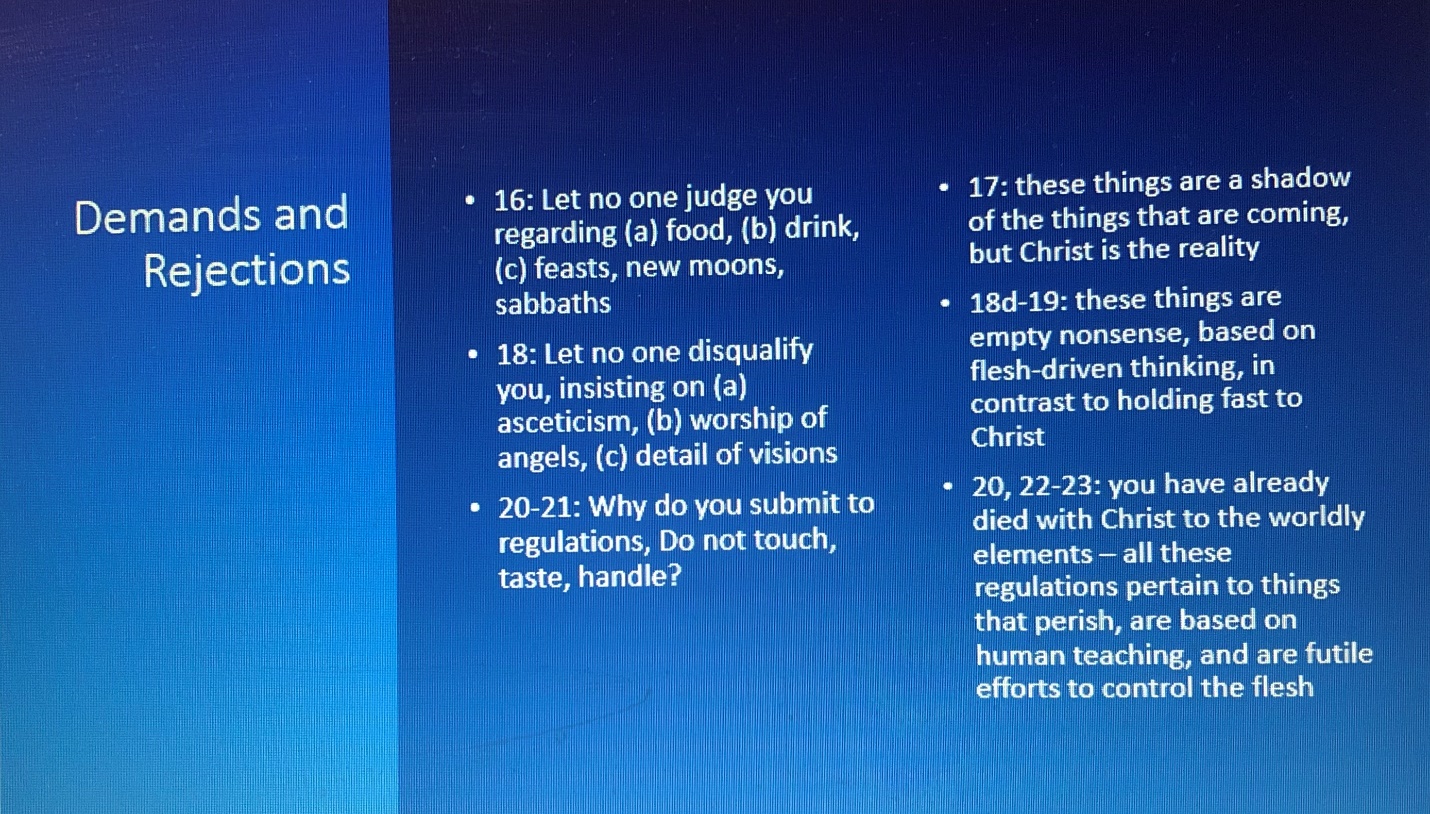
2:9-10: **Gnosticism** which tried to diminish Jesus by saying he was just a spirit visiting earth, not God incarnate; we know he is fully God, fully man, 100% omnipotent and sovereign over every power

2:11-17: **Legalism** which basically states that you can earn your own way to heaven by your good works; salvation is found only in Messiah

2:18-19: **Mysticism** which implies that you can make your way to heaven through spiritual experiences or being overly spiritual; can look spiritual and fool others but not God; he sees that self-righteousness is disconnected from Jesus, the Head

2:20-23: **Asceticism** which makes you more spiritual by denying yourself life’s pleasures; has the appearance of righteousness but is heretical by focusing on our actions rather than Jesus; looks like wisdom but lacks value

SLIDE 16: It might be easier to look at how addresses these assaults by looking at this chart which I “borrowed” from a commentary,



To reiterate how Paul challenges the Colossians with the Gospel, he actually begins from chapter 1 – Gospel gives us redemption, (13,14) no condemnation (22) qualifies us for heaven and included all the nations (12)

It’s hard to believe but HE FORGIVES US! THAT’S IT! (Romans 2:28-29) Here he gives us the picture of being buried with him through baptism into death (Romans 6:4-6) Paul taught that the new birth is Christian circumcision: this was decided at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 - uncircumcision is the opposite - unbaptized and dead in sin. In contrast, v14 gives us the assurance of a debt that has been completely cancelled. The penalty of the Law was nailed to the tree! He wiped away our IOU. We are given the gift of holiness and righteousness in him not through any of our own efforts.

I know that I always need to remind myself of this. I love the lyrics, especially the last stanza, of the well-known hymn that reflect the peace of the Gospel:

SLIDE 17: **It Is Well with My Soul**

***My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul – It is well, it is well with my soul***

Now moving on to verses 16-17, chasing shadows:

SLIDE 18: **Chasing Shadows – 2:16-17**

16Therefore 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. 17These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=colossians+2&version=ESV#fen-ESV-29496d)] puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19and 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.

SLIDE 19: **Therefore:**

Don’t let anyone judge you

Don’t let anyone disqualify you! Yeshua taught us that unless we remain completely connected to him, we won’t accomplish anything (John 15:5)

16-17So don’t put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services, or holy days. All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ.

These teachers were serving up clever ideas (8), spiritual disciplines (16), different worship (18), rules and regulations (21) as a way of gaining a deeper, more mature, spiritual experience of God – a type of syncretism – combined with truth but ultimately deceptive

Paul dismisses this as empty and of human origin – a shadow of the truth and warns them not to abandon the substance chase a shadow; he says it’s sensual, not spiritual, and cut off from Christ! How can a body live if it severed from the head?

Shadows distort the truth; Paul Tripp says it’s like looking in a carnival mirror at a distorted image of yourself – recognizable but inaccurate. SLIDE 20: One year, I sent out a card with this family picture on it (see slide); many of our friends who see us on a regular basis thought it was artistic but those who were far away found it unsatisfying. They wanted to see our faces and how much the kids had actually grown. SLIDE 21: The shadows in the frontal shot make us seem like a tribe of giants. Shadows only reflect the substance – hug a person, not their shadow.

Growing up I loved reading Aesops Fables and I used to try to discern the moral of the story before I reached the end. I remember many of the aphorisms even in my adulthood. Reading Paul’s reference to a shadow in this passage made me think of this story, The Dog and his Shadow SLIDE 22:

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| IT happened that a Dog had got a piece of meat and was carrying it home in his mouth to eat it in peace. Now on his way home he had to cross a plank lying across a running brook. As he crossed, he looked down and saw his own shadow reflected in the water beneath. Thinking it was another dog with another piece of meat, he made up his mind to have that also. So he made a snap at the shadow in the water, but as he opened his mouth the piece of meat fell out, dropped into the water and was never seen more.   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | “BEWARE LEST YOU LOSE THE SUBSTANCE BY GRASPING AT THE SHADOW.” | |

Jesus is the substance so let’s cling to him. Earth-bound rules can be like knives; the criminal’s knife is threatening but the surgeon’s knife is healing. Our traditions should remind us of our connection to Yeshua, the substance, and his complete sufficiency for us. When we focus on them in any other way, we are expressing independence from God, exerting our control over our lives and setting our own terms and conditions on Him. Let’s use tradition, observance, fasting and spirituality to enhance the truth not kill our salvation. Our rituals should be done with meaning and understanding to reinforce, enhance and invigorate our true faith and to connect us to communities. As we focus on the substance, not the shadow, we **check our identity** in these last few verses:

SLIDE 23: **Checking our identity – 2:20-23**

20If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23These 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.

SLIDE 24: Once again, I liked Peterson’s interpretation of these verses:

20-23So, then, if with Christ you’ve put all that pretentious and infantile religion behind you, why do you let yourselves be bullied by it? “Don’t touch this! Don’t taste that! Don’t go near this!” Do you think things that are here today and gone tomorrow are worth that kind of attention? Such things sound impressive if said in a deep enough voice. They even give the illusion of being pious and humble and ascetic. But they’re just another way of showing off, making yourselves look important.

SLIDE 25: The danger of these false teachers was through their clever arguments, they were drawing believers away from Jesus making them feel that they needed something more, that what they had in Messiah wasn’t enough. Paul encourages them to choose Yeshua because he is all that they need! All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus and Jesus fills the tabernacle of every believer’s heart. All wisdom and knowledge, all forgiveness, all godliness, all redemption, everything we could ever need is found in Jesus. Paul reminds his brothers and sisters in this congregation of that and encourages them to choose their Messiah, challenge the false teaching with the truth of the Gospel, stop chasing shadows and check themselves in their faith. Unfortunately, these potential delusions still exist among us today. It’s the Jesus “plus [ ]” gospel but as soon as we try to add anything to all that Jesus already is, we will automatically diminish who he is.

**Our identity is in Jesus** not Jesus plus our achievements, not Jesus plus our strengths or weaknesses, not Jesus plus our advancement. Each one of us can fill in the blank of an identity outside of Jesus; I am “a good believer”, “an intelligent person”, “a proficient minister” and therefore I am significant, secure and accepted or conversely “a failure”, “a plain, unskilled worker…” and therefore I am insignificant, useless and unworthy - and the list could go on ad nauseum. **Our identity can’t be based on our performance**; that is what Paul is telling this congregation – just Jesus, not Jesus plus ANYTHING. The plus is a trap, a prison. The “plus” will NEVER BE ENOUGH like Hugh Jackman’s song in The Greatest Showman. The “plus” will make us competitive and difficult to be around – using people as either obstacles or opportunities. The “plus” doesn’t help us to love God or love our neighbor.

Look back at v 16, it leads to judgementalism and spiritual pride in v 18 and ultimately disconnection from Jesus in v 19. Only if our identity is vertical, in Yeshua, can we form partnerships full of the grace and peace of God. If we need anything plus Jesus, no matter what it is (ministry, achievements, good health, strong family) then we forsake the Gospel.

Are we focusing on things that are destined to perish? That’s what Paul is asking the Colossians to consider as he holds up the mirror of the Gospel to their faces. He reminds them, and us today, that we have in fact, died with the Messiah on the tree and we have been raised with him to new life. We are separated from our old selves, our old systems, and to our old world. That resurrection power lives in us now! Even though we are still sinners, the power of sin in our lives has been broken and we can check our hearts, challenge ourselves with the truth of the Gospel, stop chasing fleeting shadows and choose to walk in the freedom of Messiah.

He is exalted over all. He is the one who has redeemed us, not we ourselves. When we remember that, we make better ministers, better partners as Paul exemplified to us, better people in Him. I’m grateful for the privilege of preparing this message because I needed to preach it to myself. I’m grateful for the work that God has done through our partnerships in the Gospel and I look forward to what He is still going to do through all of us.

Just finished an outreach based on the theme of L’reyacha – loving our neighbor as ourselves. We can ask what this love means or looks like for each one of us but we know that this was Yeshua’s prayer for all of his followers, for love, for unity, for partnership in the gospel. This is how the world will know him. When we are bound together built on this foundation we are stronger. (John 13, 17) Through our partnerships in the Gospel, our goals will be accomplished and we will be answers to Yeshua’s prayer – your kingdom come. It’s here in us now and what we long for in our hearts.

If I could add another imperative to this outline, it would lead us into the first verses of the next chapter which we will focus on tomorrow: SLIDE 26: **Changing our Mind:**

3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

If you are doing everything you can do to bring honor and glory to Him you are not missing our or leaving anything undone – you’ve got it all covered. Let’s keep it simple – it’s all about Messiah!

SLIDE 27: See cartoon

And now you’ve eaten the whole matzah ball: SLIDE 28