

***Introduction...***

One of my fondest memories as a kid was going on family vacations in the summer time. They always came at the end of baseball season and 9 times out of 10 it involved my family loading up and making a trip to Gulf Shores, AL. My parents grew up in Mobile, AL and my brother and I were born in Mobile, AL and this meant that most of our road trips took us “home” to see our family. But before the trip was over we would jump back in the car and make the short drive to Gulf Shores to spend a few days on the beach.

The drive from Mobile to Gulf Shores only takes about an hour but it usually took us longer because we would stop along the way to visit the **USS Alabama Battleship Memorial**. As a young boy, my favorite thing about visiting this park was the ice cream stand right out front. But even as a boy I couldn't help but marvel at the World War II era battleship and submarine floating alongside the gangway.

The USS Alabama launched into service in 1942 housing 2,500 sailors and during WWII she saw battle in the South Pacific arena. She was awarded 9 battle stars during her 3-year tenure and was dubbed the “Heroine of the Pacific.” She was honored to lead the American Fleet into Tokyo Bay in September 5, 1945. **But all that history was lost to me as a young boy. The only things that stood out to me were the huge guns that were mounted to the deck of the ship.**

The USS Alabama was a battleship armed with 52 – 20 mm guns, 48 – 40 mm guns, 20 – 5”/38 cal. and 9 16”/45 cal. guns. The 16”/45 cal.<sup>1</sup> Mark 6 canons were capable of firing a 2,700 lb. armor piercing shell at a velocity of 2,300ft/s at a range of 23 miles.<sup>2</sup> These things were massive and awe-inspiring for me (they still are)<sup>3</sup> but the reality today is that these weapons are now powerless. These incredible weapons that once propelled shells weighing more than a ton could not propel a BB 2 feet today. These weapons were once feared mechanisms of destruction but now they are powerless, housed in a museum floating along the shoreline in Mobile Bay.

***Transition...***

Now, why am I pointing this out? Because in our text this morning God wants us to understand that these decommissioned weapons of war aren't the only things that are powerless in battle. Here at the end of Colossians 2, Paul wants us to understand that there is a battle going on in our lives and it is a battle against sin. He also wants us to understand that some weapons are completely worthless in this battle.

The false teachers in this church are trying to convince everyone that the way to battle sin is with legalism, works-righteousness, and moral living but Paul tells us in verse 23 that these things may look like wisdom but they are powerless to bring an end the sinful longing in our hearts.

**Col 2:20** If 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— <sup>21</sup> “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ussalabama.com/explore/uss-alabama-battleship/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16%22/45\\_caliber\\_Mark\\_6\\_gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16%22/45_caliber_Mark_6_gun)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.navsource.org/archives/01/60a.htm>

<sup>3</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you

The only weapon that will free us from sin's devastating power is Jesus and if we have Jesus we have the only weapon we need.

### ***Sermon Focus...***

#### **I. Jesus wants us to lay aside worthless weapons (Vv. 20-23)**

**V. 20** If 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

Verse 20 opens up with a conditional statement, "if with Christ you died..." and this verse is meant to do two things:

1. It marks a shift **from** Paul's arguments against the false teaching **to** how Christians are to live by faith in Christ alone.
2. It also serves as an invitation for the people reading this letter to consider whether or not they have truly put all of their hope in Jesus. ***If we have truly been born again, if we have truly died with Christ, then there are implications to this that inform how we live our lives.***

The gospel is not simply the baseline of theological truth that one must believe in order to be saved. It is also the motivating ethic for how we live our lives every day.

Paul has been arguing about how Jesus and the gospel are better than Pharisaical legalism. He has been arguing how true spiritual victory comes when we embrace Jesus as our only hope. And now, Paul is going to plead with us **not** to put our confidence in our own ability to overcome sin, but to embrace the whole of what Christ accomplished for us.

So the point of this question, this conditional statement, is not to make us doubt our salvation, but rather to help us fully embrace the Christian worldview. When we believed the gospel it wasn't simply that we adopted a new religion but rather that God had begun a work in our hearts.

**Ephesians 1** tells us that:

"When you heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, (you) were sealed with the Holy Spirit..."

The reality is that we didn't come to Christ on our own, we were drawn to Jesus by the Father (**John 6:44**) and the Spirit of God opened our eyes to see our need of salvation (**2 Cor 4:6**). He also opened our hearts to receive Christ as Lord. We call this being "born-again" and this new birth has massive implications on **not only** our salvation from the guilt of sin but also on how we live our lives from this point forward.

God didn't begin this work in us to simply turn us over to our own ideas about how to battle sin. The Spirit of God now dwells in us, guiding us, growing us, convicting us, strengthening us for this new life. Now that He has begun this work in us He wants us to live a new life of faith, not by

reliance upon our own flesh (***do not handle, do not taste, do not touch***), but by dependence upon Christ and the Spirit of God.

**Rom 6:3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life...<sup>11</sup> So you also must ***consider*** yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**When he uses the word consider he is implying that gospel theology is impacting our lives every day.** Sin is no longer our master, Jesus is our master.

<sup>12</sup> **Therefore**, Don't let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, ***but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*** <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

I know that we think the starting point in our battle against sin is for someone to tell us ***what to do***. We want action items, but that's not the first thing we need. The first thing we need is not be told what to do but rather to understand ***what He did***. We need to understand in our minds what God has done deep down in our souls. Theology matters! And sound gospel theology is key to our freedom from the bondage of pharisaical legalism.

(**Illus...**In **Galatians 2**, when Paul confronted Peter over his hypocrisy, He didn't give him a list of things to do but rather he reminded Peter of the gospel. Paul rebuked Peter by telling him, "You are not living in step with the gospel..." Peter needed to be reminded that the gospel sets us free from the legalistic tendencies in our heart and mind. **Legalism has power, not over our sin but over us.**

Let me explain what I mean: The basic operating principle of legalism (man-centered religion) is "I obey therefore I am accepted by God." Legalism lies to us and tells us that through our obedience we can make ourselves acceptable to God and with this as the default mode of our heart we will labor under the empty promise ***that I am all I need***. And one of two things will result, either we will become arrogant and look down on others who aren't like us (Pharisees) or we will be crushed by the reality that no matter how hard we try we can't seem to make any real progress against our sin.

Legalism fails, ***these regulations fail***, for three reasons: 1. They are perishing. IOW, these weapons are worldly and worldly weapons are no use against spiritual problems. 2. They are according to human precepts and teaching. Man alone can't solve our God-sized problem. 3. They are worthless to bring about real spiritual change in our hearts. They focus on the flesh and have no power over our hearts.

These things can't give us what we need so Jesus wants us to lay down these worthless weapons. He wants us to reboot our hearts and minds to the default mode of the gospel where the basic operating principle is, "I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ – therefore I obey." Our lives as gospel people are to be marked by **grace-fueled obedience**.

**Since we belong to Christ, and since we have been born again through faith in Christ, the weapons we will use to battle against indwelling sin are not the weapons of the flesh but the weapons of grace.** In fact, to the Christian the weapons of the flesh are dead. They have been put to death and decommissioned. **To submit to these regulations would be like having a Japanese**

**naval officer come to Mobile, AL and surrender to that old decommissioned Alabama battleship.**

But how does Jesus want us to battle sin now?

## **II. Jesus calls us to keep our mind fixed on Him (Ch. 3:1-3)**

**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. **2** Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. **3** For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

This is a wonderful passage of Scripture that aims to have us fix our gaze on Jesus as the means of overcoming the brokenness of the world, the ongoing sting of personal sin and to gain victory over the temptations of Satan. And this section starts off with a strikingly gospel-centered statement...

*If/since* you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...

He did not tell us to seek the things that are above **in order to** be raised with Christ. But rather, he said **since you have been raised with Christ**, seek the things that are above. This turn of phrase is in direct contradiction to the false teacher's message of legalism and this turn of phrase makes all the difference. Paul is boldly declaring that the way to be free from the power of sin is not through human effort, but through grace-driven longing for more of Jesus.

**John Owen** – Fill your affections with the cross of Christ that there may be no room for sin.

And this longing takes shape in the form of the two imperatives/commands, which are to **“seek the things that are above,”** and **“to set our minds on things that are above.”** Now, don't let this confuse you. Paul is not advocating some ethereal spiritual experience, nor is he pushing for mere intellectualism but rather he is echoing what Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount.

**Matt 6:33** “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...”

**To seek the kingdom of God involves our mind, heart and life. We set our minds on things above when we deliberately and daily commit ourselves to God's glory, God's Word, and God's ways.** Paul wants us to orient our hearts around the fact that the blazing center of the universe is God. He wants us to commit our minds to being renewed by God's Word and He wants us to live out these values in a life of faithfulness to Jesus.

**Can we do this? Of course we can.** We are enabled to live for God's glory **now** because we have been given new spiritual life and our life is **hidden in God (protected)**. In our former state of being **dead to sin** we were unable to live this way, but by faith we have been raised to live a new life in Christ, to live a new life **like** Christ.

Now it is important for us to recognize that Jesus is not merely an example for us to follow, He is first and foremost our divine Savior to be trusted and worshipped. But, **as believers in Christ** we are to follow His example. His Godward orientation is an example for us to follow. His self-giving love is an example for us to follow. His zeal for the glory of God sets an example for us to follow. His faithful obedience to the will of the Father is an example for us to follow...

**Are any of us going to do this perfectly? No.** When we stumble in sin, God's grace is there to lift us back on our feet. We remember that God's love for us is not based on our merit but is cemented to His grace. We confess our sin to God, we repent of that sin and we refocus our minds on Jesus.

**But practically speaking what does this look like?** Jesus has freed us from the guilt of sin and the authority of sin; but while we live our bodies are still subject to sin's presence and this is where the day to day battle of sanctification comes into focus for us.

And since this is a battle we have to learn to use the weapons that our captain has given us. Let's call them the ***weapons of grace***.<sup>4</sup>

### **1. The blood of Christ is our first weapon**

**Ephesians 2:13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

As we struggle against sin we must always keep before us the gospel reality that it is through the blood of Christ that God has redeemed me and made me his own; not my moral success or the modification of my behavior. And this is so hard for us because we are naturally wired to believe that we will overcome some obstacle or achieve our goals through our own efforts.

**(illus.** God is not in Heaven holding a clipboard and watching us to see when we fail so that he can mark us off His team.

The truth is that God loves us and accepts us because of Christ and this shouldn't make us complacent it should set our hearts on fire to battle our enemy because of our love for our king. And when we fail it should make us want to run back to Him, not away from Him.

### **2. The Word of God is our second weapon**

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God<sup>1</sup> may be competent, equipped for every good work.

This verse helps us to understand the value of what we hold in our hands. This bible is the Word of God, ***theopneustos***. This gives us the picture of God breathing and as His breath passes the vocal chords we hear the sound of His voice. This is the voice of God to us and it is, more than any other thing, helps us to fix our mind and heart on the things above.

When it comes to knowing and doing the will of God we are blind without His Word. I cannot stress enough the necessity of filling our mind and life with God's Word.

### **3. Prayer in the Spirit**

According to **Ephesians 6**, we only have two offensive weapons at our disposal. They are the Word of God and prayer and both are indispensable to the believer in battling sin. Sometimes our prayers consist of crying out for God to show us our sin, and sometimes we cry out to God to show us the way out that He has provided.

Sometimes we cry out asking God to forgive our sin and cleanse us from it, sometimes we cry out thanking Him for a victory. But, through it all our lifeline to our field captain is prayer and when all we can do is bow our heads and moan, he lives to make intercession on our behalf.

**4. Finally, the last weapon we have in our battle against sin is the community of Faith** and we see evidence of it in our passage (**Col 3:1**). The verbs here are in the **2<sup>nd</sup> person plural**, which

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<sup>4</sup> The weapons of Grace idea have been adapted from a sermon by Matt Chandler from Colossians 3

means that Paul is not simply talking to individuals, he is talking to the church as a whole and he is exhorting us to battle sin together.

**He is saying, “You (pl) set your (pl) minds on the things above...”** We follow Christ together, we learn about Christ together, we battle sin together. We need to build into our lives, layers of relationships where we can learn and grow and where we can pour out into others and help them to grow.

These are just a few of the weapons at our disposal as we battle to be more and more free from sin and to be more and more like Christ. **But what will be the final result of this battle?**

### **III. Jesus will bring us home to glory (V. 4)**

<sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The false teachers promise something that they cannot deliver, but Christ will deliver on His promises. What Jesus starts in us He will finish in us. If you are a believer in Christ, then this life is going to end one of two ways: Either you are going to see Jesus coming out of Heaven one day or you are going to die and go be with Him until He busts out of Heaven one day. But either way, our Christian hope is that we will be with Jesus in glory.

### ***Conclusion...***

**But that is not the hope of everyone.** This last verse brings the end of our lives right out into the open and it is intended to give confidence to those who are in Christ but for those who are not trusting in Christ this verse is no comfort for you. The Bible says that on the day when Christ comes again His glory will be so intensely awesome that unbelievers will cry out to God for the mountains to fall on them in the hopes that Jesus won't be able to see them and carry out the punishment they deserve.

His glory is awesome for those who trust in Him but His glory will be awful for those who reject Him as Savior and Lord. I want to urge you to take your sin seriously, to take the state of your soul before God seriously. Understand, that you cannot battle the spiritual problem of sin in your heart with the tools of this world. There is no legalistic track that will take you to Heaven.

Jesus alone can cleanse your heart of sin. Jesus alone has made a way for you to be right with God. Trust in Him, turn to Him, cry out to Him...and you will find both forgiveness and peace.