

Joy Thieves

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Bible Text: Colossians 2:16-23
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This morning, I want you to look at Colossians 2, though, and I'll be looking at verses 16 through 23. Colossians 2:16 through 23. The apostle writes to the church at Colossae and he says,

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Now the first thing that Paul kind of centers on here is don't let anyone rob you of the prize. In other words, the prize of the security of your salvation which brings you joy that your salvation is finished and finalized, it is forever settled in the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that's where our joy comes from. Listen, we joy in him. We do not joy in a system of religion. We do not joy in a plan of salvation. We do not joy in rituals or sacraments or church ordinances. We joy in the Christ who is behind these things and so Paul exhorts these believers at Colossae, "Do not let anyone rob you of this special joy God has given you in his Son Jesus Christ." So I entitled this "Joy Thieves." Now, mind you, there are plenty of them out there. There are plenty of scholars and writers and so-called theologians and pastors who want to bring to you some sort of slant on Christianity that puts some sort of legalistic code along with trusting Christ or puts some special insight they have added to the Gospel and so no longer do you just focus on

Christ, you must focus on Christ plus what these joy thieves say is important that you must follow to be truly saved, and that's just what they are, they are joy thieves.

Now look at verse 16 as we just sort of introduce this. In the first phrase of verse 16 he says, "Therefore let no one act as your judge." You could translate that, "Let no one rule over you or rule that you are unacceptable to God." Let no one do that. If your faith is in Christ and in Christ alone, let no one tell you that's somehow unacceptable. Jesus is the one and only true Judge and if the one and only true Judge has become your Savior and advocate, then you're good with God.

Now they had joy thieves under two basic categories, if you will. They had the Judaizers, those people who came out of orthodox Hebrew tradition and the Jewish religion, and they would say, "Yes, we need to put our faith in Jesus but we must bring the tenets of Judaism, at least some of them over and combine them so that you'll have all of it together." Then on the other extreme, there were the Gnostics and the Gnostics would say, "Yes, it's Jesus but you've got to understand we have new insights and new understandings that only a few of us elites have and you must trust Jesus plus follow the teachings we're going to give you to really be right with God." So whether it was the legalist Judaizers or the elitist Gnostics, both of them were joy thieves. By the way, you'll notice this as we go through, almost always the legalist and the elitist run together. A person is a legalist, he's usually an elitist. If he's an elitist, he's a legalist. So they overlap extensively and intertwine extensively, though I'll deal with them to some degree separately.

So he says, "Do not let them," verse 18, the first phrase, "Do not let them keep defrauding you of your prize." In other words, the prize of complete redemption is yours in Jesus Christ. Do not let them steal this joy from you. Do not let them steal this satisfaction, this contentment, this completeness you have through your faith in Jesus Christ and him alone."

Now, I: the legalist. And if I were just to give you a simple definition of legalism, I would put it this way: it's the religion of human achievement. The religion of human achievement or just works plus Jesus gets you into heaven. That's the legalist and, by the way, I'll bring this out more in a moment but he says these are the elementary principles of the world. Here's what he means by that, it's just natural and normal for fallen mankind to come up with a system of works or hoop jumps or legalisms, some sort of ritual so that you can check these things off and feel like, "Wow, I've done good now. I've checked the boxes. I've done the things God requires so I'm okay now." Our flesh loves that. Natural, sinful, fallen man loves for you to give him a system he can execute; a work he can perform; a ritual he can participate in; and that's why we know it's wrong. That's elementary to the world. That's the way fallen men think. So listen, church, it's always going to be out there, it's always going to be lurking, we're always going to hear these voices, "You must do these things plus put your faith in Jesus Christ." It never ever ends or it won't end until the eternal state.

Now in their particular context, notice what he says they are dealing with, they are dealing with these Judaizers who are talking to them about the Jewish laws of food. They had certain laws concerning certain foods or drinks and when you drink them, or certain observances of certain days, verse 16, "Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." So these things made perfect sense to the people of this day because that's the culture many of them came out of. As far as they could remember, their fathers, their grandfathers, their great-grandfathers and all the forefathers of their faith in Israel taught, "Now these are clean foods and these are unclean. If you eat these clean foods, you're right with God. If you eat these unclean foods, then you're unclean before God and you are condemned before God." So that was just in their DNA that we have to jump through these hoops, we have to observe these things, and Paul says, "Look, that stuff is over through Jesus Christ. You don't let anyone defraud you of the prize. Don't let anyone rob you of your joy of salvation by grace, through faith, in Christ alone."

So they were saying, "Well, you've got to eat this food or not eat this food. You've got to observe this religious festival or that religious festival." As a matter of fact, the festivals, one of the festivals, of course, was the Passover feast and in the Passover feast, what would they do? They would find a spotless lamb and every family would bring a young lamb without defect and it would be sacrificed, but the point is it's not that little lamb you brought on the Jewish day of Passover that washed away your sins, it's the Christ whom that little lamb pointed to; it's the Christ who that little lamb symbolized that saves you.

So these things appeared very plausible to this audience who had quite a bit of Jewish influence in them. They said, "Well, these things were taught in the Old Testament Scriptures, Moses gave them to us, they are in our tradition and we feel like we need to hold to them." But here's what Paul would point out is that you have people who are very structured and very disciplined in their lives, they literally dot the i's and cross the t's on ethics and morality and uprightness and on honesty but their hearts are far from God. As a matter of fact, about 150 years ago, a pastor by the name of Gardner Springer wrote this and he just did such a good job I want to read part of it to you, and he talks about this very issue. He says, "A merely moral man may be very scrupulous of his duties, all of these duties that he owes to his fellow man, while the infinitely important duty he owes to God are kept entirely out of sight. Of loving and serving God, he knows nothing. Whatever he does or whatever he leaves undone, he does nothing for God. He's honest in his dealings with all except God. He robs none but God. He's thankless and faithless to none but God. He feels contemptuously and speaks reproachfully of none but God. A just perception of the relations he sustains to God constitutes no parts of his principles, and the duties which result from these relations constitute no part of his piety. He may not only disbelieve the Scriptures but may never read them, may not only disregard the divine authority but every form of divine worship and live and die as though he had no concern with God and God had no concern with him." So he's saying be careful. It's very easy to run across a person who is very moral and very faithful and very upright and very decent and a wonderful neighbor and, by the way, may be the sweetest, kindest, most giving and sacrificially loving lady you've ever met, yet not have a heart for God. Church, are you mature enough to see through those things?

That's what he's pointing out here, if you merely look at external observance, to laws and works, it's very easy to be a counterfeit in those. And it's very possible, by the way on the converse of this, to find a brother who came out of maybe a very bad home life and a very rough life of sin and he becomes converted and he's still got a lot of rough edges, he's still learning to repent of a lot of things that make him not the most upstanding man and not the most respectable person, but he really loves God and he's growing. By the way, if you love God and you are a repentor and you're growing, you're welcome here. Amen? You may make some messes but all babies make messes. As long as you're on the journey, we're for you and we're with you. Boy, the thing that's really a problem in churches is not the brother that's really gotten saved who still struggles and still wrestles and still repents and still needs to grow, it's the person who grew up being a classic, grade A, USDA 1 Pharisee. They know how to dot the i's, they know how to cross the t's. They're not dishonest. They're not unkind. They can jump through all the hoops but their hearts do not embrace Christ. So he's using an illustration here to warn them that this stuff that some of these legalists come at you with because they look impressive, is not helping you find God and finding God's salvation through Jesus Christ. Watch, watch these joy thieves of legalism.

Then he continues on in verse 17 and he amplifies why we do not look to anything outside of Jesus Christ. He says because these things, now in the particular context, these Jewish things, these rituals, these festivals that they looked to to help them be saved, these things "are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." The point is he's saying, "You think that you have to drink certain drinks to be clean before God to help obtain your salvation but," he says, "look, you don't need a certain drink a human priest administers, you need Jesus because he is the living water. You don't need certain breads and things within the Jewish dietary law to help you maintain or obtain a standing of righteousness before the holy God, you need Jesus because he is the true bread that comes down out of heaven. You've got the substance, you don't need the symbol any longer. You have the substance, you don't need that shadow." That's what he says here, these things are a mere shadow. Hebrews 10:1 reminds us that all the things of the old law are a shadow of the reality of Jesus Christ, and all these things can never make you closer to God. You can work all you want, all you can, jump through every religious hoop somebody gives you, observe every sacrament, every ordinance, have a morally clean upstanding life as far as any person can know and die and go straight to eternal torment because you have to come to the substance, Jesus Christ.

That word "soma" or "substance" means Jesus is the body, he is the actual body, he is the reality of God's true and only salvation. When we were children, do you know what we did as children? One of the things we did as children was played with our shadows. We'd see our shadows and we'd try to step on it, we'd try to dodge it, and that shadow was as quick as we were. But when you became adult, you stopped paying attention to shadows, you started paying attention to actual things. That's his point here. If you are adding works to salvation, you're looking at shadows. You're chasing shadows. Don't look at those things, look at Christ. Look to Christ.

Now here's what's hard: these things are spiritually discerned because if I tell you, "Okay, come to church, tithe your income, be baptized in the baptistery, don't commit murder, don't commit adultery," and about four or five other things, you can probably do a pretty decent job of checking those off. It doesn't mean your heart is right. It doesn't mean you've really trusted in Christ. Do you know what else? Those things are easy for the natural man to grasp. He gets that.

Now can I just go a little further? Are you listening this morning? Don't stop listening, I'll have to preach longer, alright? Listen good now. That's why many of our forefathers in evangelicalism, good men who were trying to help us, but they started adding things in the process of getting people converted that the Scripture does not mention. Fill out this card. Raise your hand. Walk to the front. Repeat this prayer. Now those things in themselves are not evil but you've got to be careful because humanity wants to do something and hordes of people absolutely, undeniably, truly factual, millions of people have done those things yet do not yet know Christ. They checked them off because, you see, that's logical, that's elementary, that's the elementary principles of the world Paul talks about. We all get that. We all come forth from the womb thinking that's how it works but to know Christ has a mysticism to it. Really it does. It's a spiritual reality where the Spirit of God using the word of God creates in your heart a capacity to apprehend and grab him and hold to him and treasure him, Christ and Christ alone. That's why when Jesus was talking to Nicodemus he didn't give Nicodemus some steps to take, he didn't give Nicodemus a plan of salvation, he said, "Nicodemus, it's of the Spirit. You've got to be spiritually born to put your faith in Jesus Christ."

Now Paul is writing to a church that had at least a good percentage or a strong majority of truly born again Christians in it and he said, "What's happening, these legalists are coming in and they're bringing the shadows, the symbols that pointed to Jesus and trying to get you off of the real thing, the substance, and get you onto the picture." I love pictures of my family, I love the pictures of my wife, and by the way, on this trip I was on, I looked at those some and I was blessed. I lay there in bed at night and scrolling through and seeing the grandkids etc. etc, but when I got home, do you know what I did? I looked at them. I hugged them. I kissed them. I've spent time with them because I had the real thing now. A man would be considered mentally deranged if he never paid any attention to his wife and his family but yet was absorbed with their pictures. That's what they're doing. That's what he's saying you're doing if you begin to think that hoop jumping or rituals or works somehow aid your salvation. Don't let these joy thieves rob you of the joy – now listen – of casting ourselves radically abandoned on Jesus Christ and saying, "O Christ, you are my all in all and I rest in that and I joy in that! Every wretched part of me knows I can't earn it but you have done it and I rest in you." What a glory that is. Don't let anybody rob you of that joy whether it's somebody that says you've got to be baptized, you've got to take the Lord's supper. You know, if you view those type of things and many others as having some spiritual merit, you are again as spiritually deranged as a man is psychologically deranged if he treasures his shadow over his person. That's the point Paul is making.

Well, that's one aspect or maybe we would say one side of the coin, now let's go to the other. Not only is the legalist the one who wants to rob you of your joy, he's a joy thief, the elitist can be a joy thief. The elitist can be a joy thief. We begin in verse 18 and he continues and he amplifies this and this is where I get elitism from because notice how verse 18 is worded, "Let no one keep defrauding you," or robbing you, "of the prize you have by delighting in self-abasement," these are these people, oh, they deny themselves and they are holier than the rest of us, "and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind." Did you hear that? Are you prone toward the charismatic leaning of things? He said, "These people see visions and are fascinated at these revelations and insights they see," and Paul says, "they have fleshly minds." So the next time somebody says, "The Spirit revealed this or the Spirit showed that, I saw this miracle and I saw that miracle," well, it could be but Paul said it equally may be somebody who's just full of themselves and wants you to think they are a spiritual elitist. "I've got more of the Spirit than you've got. I talk in tongues more than you do. I saw more miracles than you saw performed. I experienced this thing from God and that thing from God," outside of Scripture, that is.

So beware of elitism. As we look at not our dear Roman Catholic friends, some of them know the Lord and I love my Catholic friends, I just wish they weren't under Catholic doctrine, but in the hierarchy of the church in Catholic theology, they see angels, they have all these mediators beyond Jesus, they have spiritism, they put all this credit to you touch the bones of this ancient pope or get near it and you get this spiritual power from it. It's just silly superstition. It's all in Roman Catholicism and it makes them feel like, "Ah, we have the insights you must have." So it's a form of robbing your joy of looking to Jesus alone because you've got to look to Jesus plus these elitists who have had these wonderful experiences.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to listen to me: God has commanded you to love, respect, submit to, and hold in high esteem your pastor, your preaching pastor primarily. It doesn't mean your other pastors aren't deserving of that but the one who delivers the word the Bible says is to be held in high esteem and be worthy of double honor. Now listen to me, I am no better, I'm not ahead of anyone, I have no special gift, the only thing I can do is preach this word and the Spirit apply it to your heart. That's it. Now hopefully over the years like you would any older man who has walked with God, I have some wisdom in counsel. If you need that for some area of your life and I'll do my best, but there is no special aura or spiritual elitism or position I have other than the office you're supposed to respect because of the service I'm supposed to render for your sake and for God's glory. It's very different than me saying, "Well, I saw a vision. I have an insight. God showed me something special so you've got to really take me and Jesus to be really right with God."

Now we seen this in the Jehovah's Witness cult movement. They have revelations beyond Scripture so you've got to go to their studies and hear and learn of the things beyond Scripture if you want to be right with God. That's the elitism he's condemning here. The Church of Jesus Christ of so-called Latter Day Saints or the Mormons, the same thing Joseph Smith said he got all this special revelation and special insight beyond the

Scripture. If you really want to be right with God, you study the Scripture, you believe on Jesus plus you follow the dictates of the elitists of the Mormon church. Then again, the Roman Catholic dogma teaches this same type of thing.

So they can get into this thing and they can also begin to teach you and here's where you've got to be careful, here's a joy thief for sure, they can tell you you've got to experience some sort of mystical thing, a mystical experience within your heart to know you're really saved. Some would say that's talking in tongues or that's being slain in the Spirit or 1,001 things, but listen to me, to be saved you put your faith in Christ plus nothing some elitist tells you. Period. You don't need Jeff Noblit. You don't need my preaching. You do need solid preaching but it doesn't have to be me. You don't need John MacArthur, you don't need John Piper, you don't need the pope in the Catholic Church, you need Christ and Christ alone. All of these human instruments are to be respected but they're just human instruments. We'll die and be gone but Jesus does not die. Don't let these joy thieves convince you to look at someone else. "Well, Brother Jeff said..." Well, that may be good and right but when you said Brother Jeff said are you saying I believe it because it's biblical or I've just got this mystical aura about Brother Jeff? Be careful. Don't put me somewhere God doesn't put me. Respect me for the office but not because I've got some spiritual dimension you don't have. I don't have it.

He says in verse 18, they are inflated, they are blown up, they are puffed up with pride, "inflated without cause by their fleshly minds," and they're telling you, you've basically got to go through us if you want to get to heaven and you want to be right with God.

Verse 19. So they are centering things on what they say instead of on Christ because verse 19 says, "and not holding fast to the head." In their pride, they dethrone Christ from his primacy. Again, Roman Catholic theology, what do they do? They enthrone Mary and Mary, in effect, is a co-redemptress with Jesus Christ. And on and on and on we can go with things that have been added in other than simple faith in Christ. These are joy thieves. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, teach that Jesus is a god, not the God. He's not fully God like God the Father, he's just a god, and so they emphasize that he's not finally sufficient for your salvation, you've got to have our system also. The Mormon church teaches that when you die, you'll become a god and you'll populate your own planet and your blessed wife will have children for all eternity. I don't know why you ladies wouldn't say, "Well, I don't know if I'm in on that now."

But in all of these – now listen – in all of these elitisms – now listen here – here's what happens, Jesus gets brought down and men get brought up. Did you hear that? When ever you start seeing that, caution flags should start waving. "Wait a minute, when that preacher got through, I kind of felt like Jesus wasn't all that great and glorious but I was a little better and man can get up there." No, absolutely not. He is the head. He alone was deity in human form. He alone was the substitutionary sacrifice for your sins on the cross. He alone has risen from the dead for your justification. He alone ascended to the right hand of God where he faithfully intercedes for his elect children. He alone is your Savior. Look to Jesus. Don't you look to anything that I've ever told you to do other than look to Jesus. Look to Jesus. Set it with him. Rest in him. Treasure him. He alone. Period. Don't

let anybody, anywhere, at any time come in with legalism or elitism and rob you of the joy of, "My faith is in Christ and it's settled forever." Period. Period.

So Jesus and him alone. Notice how he words it here in verse 19. These guys are not holding fast to the head, Jesus, "from whom the entire body," in other words he's big enough to save every single person he's going to save, "being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God." So Jesus is all you need for the totality of what you need. Justification, sanctification and glorification, he does it all. Now he does it through ordained means, primarily local church fellowship, local church responsibility, local church commitment under the preaching of the word of God, and of course, your Bible studies, your small groups. Those are part of the means he's ordained that you find more of Jesus, you love Jesus better, you learn more of him, and you hold to him more fully. 2 Peter 1:3 reminds us, "seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." He has granted you everything you need through Christ Jesus.

Now look at verses 20 through 22. Now the word "if" at the beginning of verse 20 is a first-class conditional phrase which means it's assumed as true. So you can say not, "If you died with Christ," but "since you died with Christ," you died to what? "The elementary principles of the world." You've died to everything the legalist or the elitist might try to add to Jesus. You've died to looking to that. You've died to holding to that. You've died to believing that way. You all believed that way to some degree before you were converted but once you are genuinely converted, you died to all of that nonsense. Since you have died to the elementary principles of the world, "why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!'" In other words, some genuine believers have begun toying with adding some legalism or adding some of the insights of the elitists to the faith, verse 22, "(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?" In other words, whether or not you eat this food or don't eat that food, that stuff perishes but Jesus doesn't perish. He's saying, "Do you not see the foolishness of looking to anything other than Christ?" So he says you've buried the old approach. You've buried the old viewpoint of needing hoops to jump through or legalism to perform to feel like you've gained that. You buried in that.

If I might give a little bit of a gruesome illustration, it's like a man who buries his wife, his spouse, she has passed away and by the way, she was an awful wife, just awful. She has died, he didn't kill her, she died, alright? She died, he has buried another woman now. He can do that. His wife has passed away and his new wife is wonderful to him. Absolutely wonderful to him but they catch him one night digging up his old wife's body and dragging her in the house. Why? It's just an old habit, I guess, to have the old bag around. I didn't mean to say it that way but she's in bad shape now, for sure, she's been in the grave. Why wouldn't he just rejoice in his new wife? That's what Paul is saying here, you've died to all that old nonsense, it's corrupt, it's wrong, it's rotting, it's decrepit, it can't save you. Don't go back to that. Don't dig up the old corpse. Enjoy the new you've been given in Christ and Christ alone. Amen? You don't need that old dead stuff. She's an

old dead burden. You don't need her. We hold such as is unthinkable or rather that type of illustration to dig up your old spouse's corpse, that's unthinkable in the natural realm but why in heaven's name do you do it in the spiritual realm? Why do you keep digging up the old elementary things of the world and adding them to Jesus?

I want to caution you in your Baptist background, don't say, "Well, I asked Jesus to save me." So? So? The flesh can do that. What I want to know is your heart trusting in Jesus? Is your heart resting in Jesus? I've been very thorough with you on this point through the years but you have to be because, look, from the time Paul wrote this to the church at Colossae 2,000 years ago up to today, every day a new twist comes out. Are you hearing me? Every day a new twist. Every day a new little work. Every day a new little insight from elitists comes out and it can rob you of your joy of trusting in Christ and Christ alone. That's why you've got to sit under strong preaching because I have to preach that nonsense back out of you every Sunday. That's my job. By the way, when I study, it studies it back out of me. Amen? We need to get washed out again every week, get our thinking back on the truth and what really matters and what really saves.

Verse 23, he says, "These are matters." When you hear the legalist come with their arguments, oh my goodness, they seem impressive. When you hear the elitists come with their special insights, oh it sounds wonderful, it sounds like, "Well, that's right." So Paul says in verse 23, "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion." In other words, they came up with this themselves. God didn't come up with it but it sounds so good and so right and so assuring. Every one of us would like some check off boxes to check off and say, "I'm okay with God now." That's not the question, the question is are you trusting in his Son Jesus Christ? Is he the love of your life? Is he who you're looking to and you're relying on nothing else? Self-made religion.

He says they are also here in verse 23, they are often into "self-abasement," asceticism, "and severe treatment of the body." Are you listening to me? Usually the guys that really get your attention have an outward appearance of self-denial and they know it and they use it. Are you listening to me? They look so impressive outwardly and I've seen so much of this and quite honestly I was impressed with some of these guys for a while, then I realized you can't deny yourself a nice car, nice clothes, a nice house, a nice everything, and live like you're at the edge of the poverty line and be full of the flesh and pride which is exactly what Paul is saying. Self-abasement, that's Paul's word. He is saying watch these guys that come to you looking like, "Oh, I'm just so humble. I live below everybody else because I love Jesus more." They don't say that but they want you to think that and Paul says that's often as much of a sign of fleshly pride as the man who glories in the wealth he does have. You can't go by what a man has or he does not have because those can be very misleading. Don't look at the outside, it's the content of the heart that makes the difference.

As a matter of fact, listen to this statement about the fourth century A.D. St. Jerome they called him. St. Jerome tells how having lived a rebellious life in his youth, after he came to Christ he fled from all contact with the gross and vulgar world in which he had once sought to gratify all his fleshly lusts. So he leaves Rome and he wandered to Palestine,

that's the Holy Land, he thought it would be better there. When he got to Palestine, he lived in a cave near Bethlehem where he sought to subdue his natural lustful cravings and he almost fasted himself to salvation. Then St. Jerome tells us how disappointed he was when absolutely exhausted and weary, he falls asleep and in his dreams he dreamed of indulging in the riotous rebellions and fleshly indulgence that he knew before he was saved. His point was, "I denied myself of everything. I gave up everything, I even hid myself in a cave. I fasted all I could and I still found my heart had sin in it. I was trying to get away from the world and I took it all in there with me." What's the point? No matter how much a man like that works, he's still condemned before God. You have to place your faith in Jesus Christ. Outward hoop jumps, sacrifices, starvations, fastings, there is a place for some of these things for a genuine Christian, I understand that, but these things do not make you more righteous. Christ does and Christ alone.

John MacArthur further adds that there was a view in the church and it still lingers to some degree today, that the body was evil. As a matter of fact, Father Athanasius, he was the founder of Christian monasticism, he would never change his vest or wash his feet because he wanted to be holy. Where does that come from? I don't know. He was outdone by Simeon the Stylite who spent the last 36 years of his life atop a 50 foot pillar. "I'm going to place myself, I'm going to get on this pole and I'm going to live up there for 36 years to deny myself the world and try and get away from the lust of the world." Foolishness, ridiculous, Paul would say.

Martin Luther talks about how before his conversion when he came to realize its faith in Jesus Christ that brings justification alone, he nearly wrecked his life, he says, through asceticism, denying himself, doing without the world. That's why Paul says, look at verse 23, the last phrase, he says, "These look like wisdom, these look like the true thing," last phrase, "but are of no value against fleshly indulgence." No value against fleshly indulgence. Paul says on another occasion that the law stirs up the passions of the heart. The more you put the law in a person and say, "Perform this law so that you'll be pleasing to God," the more they are likely to sin. It's not law that keeps you serving God, it's grace. The goodness of God leads you to repentance.

Beware of joy thieves. Don't listen to them. Don't honor them. Are you listening to me this morning? Look, I listen to other pastors other than our pastors and we all do that, and that's good, there's a lot of good in that, but you've got to be careful, these guys get off on something, you don't live with them, you don't watch them, you don't know where they're coming from and they can start throwing in little things and before you know it, you're kind of hooked to that particular preacher on the internet because he has given me insights nobody else has given me. Well, he may be helping you greatly but also some of these guys are entrapping you, getting you conditioned and lured into their viewpoint which is something other than Christ alone. So beware of the legalist, beware of the elitist because they are joy thieves.

One person said and I don't know who originally said this but they said joy is the flag which is flown from the castle of the heart when the king is present. I want Grace Life Church folks to be distinctively joyous. Joyous and not running around deep down. No,

running around with your head up and knowing that I'm a wretched sinner, I deserve nothing, but my Savior cleanses me and makes me whole.