

The Christian's Checklist

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[0 : 0 0] thank you sam for those of you who don't know me i'm robbie i'm on the staff team here at st silas one of the big questions that's been on my mind all week is what makes a good christian if you were to have a checklist of things that made a good christian what would be on it and the way i'm picturing it is like those army recruiters way back in world war ii if you can think of those kind of movies they've if somebody came up to me with a checklist on a clipboard and they had all the boxes and they were to go through it if it's an army recruiter they'd be like okay what are you you're the right height okay you're the right weight yep okay you can run 5k in however many minutes is a good time to run a 5k great um okay you've taped all the boxes you are a good potential soldier come and join the army how would our christian version of that list look it's a great way to judge somebody isn't it if we have a checklist we can look at you and say okay well are you good at this are you bad at this how should i react to you according to what you have and this seems to be what the colossian church were facing people kept trying to judge them according to a checklist that they had they were checking that this these young believers passed ticked all the boxes passed what they expected a christian to do and they'd be comparing these new believers to it they were pushing them into doing new things and they were even judging them for what they were already doing if they were doing it wrong these outsiders who'd come in were saying they weren't proper christians or they weren't good enough christians yet the plan for tonight in our tonight's passage we see what some of these checklists are so we're going to go through them and see what it is the colossians were being forced into but before we start let me just quickly pray father please open our hearts tonight that we might hear and understand your words make clear to us to us all the meaning of this passage and please may your spirit work in our lives because of it amen so we are right in the middle of this letter to the colossians in chapter one what paul was doing was reminding the colossians exactly what they believed who they believed in and now in chapter two we've moved on as paul addresses the issues the colossians were facing and tonight's passage ends a section that began way back in verse eight of chapter two this is what it says in verse eight if you're going to look at it with me see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which relies on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on christ this verse sets paul up for the rest of this chapter so in verses nine to fifteen which we looked at last week paul is telling the colossians that they are alive in christ because of what god has done for them he starts this section around him that everything they have is because of what god has done and tonight paul is connecting that truth with these hollow and deceptive philosophies they were facing these philosophies are the checklist they're new they're not quite right but it's what they were being pressed upon them paul deals with these issues and he tells the colossians not to fall for them and he gives them reason the reason not to and we're going to look at each one in turn it's the first thing we're going to look at in verses 16 to 17 don't fall for the shadow you've already got the real thing don't fall for the shadow you've already got the real thing paul opens this section with a therefore which means he's referring back to those verses before so let me read these verses but i'll replace the therefore with the kind of some of those the previous paragraph so verses 16 and 17 god has made you alive in christ so do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival a new moon celebration or a sabbath day these are a shadow of the things that were to come the reality however is found in christ so here we see the first set of checklists that the colossians were being judged by

do you celebrate the sabbath in the right way do you celebrate the new moon festival do you eat the right things all these jewish traditions were being thrust upon this young church as things that christians must do now let me make it clear these aren't bad things they're taken directly from the old testament but the problem with what is happening is they are being used to judge these christians if they didn't celebrate the new moon festival which was a monthly time of thanksgiving they aren't really christians or if they ate eat something that the jewish people shouldn't have eaten they're not good enough christians paul tells the colossians they can't let anyone judge them according to this checklist why not what is it that's wrong with this well these old traditions that are being forced upon them are but shadows of the thing that was to come these traditions were given so that israel would recognize the real thing when it came they're foreshadowing the coming of jesus i take the new moon celebration what that was was at the beginning of every month when the new moon appeared in the sky the jewish people gathered together it was symbolic of a time of renewal and new beginnings and it was a good thing to celebrate because they remember what god has done but it was a shadow for the real renewal that would come to israel when jesus christ came and it would happen through his death if you were to look at a shadow and assume it was the real thing you'd be missing out severely there's no detail there's no depth you're just getting a silhouette and the verse goes on to make very clear the things with which they are looking at our shadows but the reality of these traditions are found in christ imagine you're a painter you walk into your studio and the first thing you see on the wall is the shadow of your new subject and you're taken aback they have great posture great broad shoulders this is going to be great i could i could just use that that shadow is going to be a great painting then you take a step further into your studio and you see the person you see the slight smile on their lips the single lock of hair on their forehead the look of just slight worry they might have and you realize oh that face is going to make a much better painting if i can capture that this will be a masterpiece what kind of artist would then turn around and go nah it doesn't matter i'm going to just lose the shadow let's just go back to the black silhouette i'll just copy that down that'll do that is it's missing the point you're going to lose the depth of the emotion on the face imagine if leonardo da vinci who i think painted the mona lisa i've realized now i'm worried that that's not the case um imagine if da vinci came in saw mona lisa's face her weird half smile and went i don't need that and just drew a black blob it would not be hang a painting of a silhouette would not be hanging in the louvre but this is what these false teachers were doing they had seen the face of jesus they'd seen the thing that was being pointed to the fulfillment of all these traditions but all they wanted to do was stick with the shadow they didn't want to rest in the fulfillment that had come by putting these jewish traditions on the checklist of christianness they're minimizing the work of christ by adding a thing that these people needed to do they're implying that jesus wasn't enough and that just isn't true paul's made so clear god has already forgiven all of our sins we need to do no more it can be easy for us today in 2020 to look around and say wow it must have been quite hard to fall to the ancient jewish traditions but we don't have that pressure anymore and it's partially true we don't have the jewish traditions surrounding us but being a part of a church there are many traditions we can be just as tempted to fall to things that in themselves are good and right and are used to point us to jesus and what he's done the temptation we face isn't that

these are bad but how we view them that we view these traditions and give them too high a place of concern in our heads an example perhaps do we think there's a right liturgy that a church should do do we think that if another church doesn't say the same kind of prayers together that we do they can't really be that good a church oh well that church down the road they're all right they're not bad but they don't say the lord's prayer together a week so they can't be as good as us you could add anything that we might do as a church to that list or anything someone else does another church if we hold these traditions too high they get in the way of seeing jesus they become the more important thing by which we judge people and we forget that these traditions aren't important compared to having access to the man jesus himself being judged by traditions was a deception the colossians almost fell for and it's so easy for us to fall into it too don't rely on the shadows when we have the real thing the second checklist the colossians face paul's warning is don't fall for the extra spiritual you've already got fullness in christ don't fall for the extra spiritual you've already got fullness in christ this is verses 18 to 19 so this is another group of outsiders another group of teachers that's come into colossi and have gone to the church and clearly this law are a very spiritual group we read that they worship angels and they have these great big fancy visions they go on and on and on and on and on about these visions they talk in great detail they let the things they see dictate the things they do paul also tells us that they delight in false humility and they're puffed up with idle notions these people love to pretend to be humble as soon as it comes down to it though when they think about these visions it seems to give them a bit of a sense of superiority can you can you just hear what they would say oh you don't have visions maybe one day you will like we do oh sorry what's that oh you only worship jesus well maybe one day you'll understand like we do more about the great angels these false teachers had arrived on the scene and were telling everyone they couldn't be real christians because they didn't have the same visions they didn't have the same ideas the colossians apparently spent too much time on jesus hadn't they realized there was more to it than that but paul does not let this sit he tells the colossians straight up don't be disqualified by these people and even he tells them exactly why they shouldn't be look at verse 18 they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual minds these people are pressing a strange hybrid spirituality on the colossians but they are in no way of the spirits the holy spirit which guides the colossians in their love as we would have read read in chapter one that holy spirit is not in these teachers what irony these men would delight themselves on their spirituality but they do not have these spirits not only that but they are completely disconnected from the heads they have no part in jesus and jesus has no part in them paul says this he's basically saying if they're not being guided by jesus and his teaching how on earth can they disqualify anyone let me return to my earlier analogy of a recruiter so you go to the army recruitment office uh ready to sign up and see if you pass all the boxes but when you get in you open the door and you see actually somebody isn't standing in an army uniform they're standing in a uniform for the post office and they ask you other questions of things you might

need to join the post office and you don't meet them and they tell you sorry you can't join the army that's you don't pass my this i have my things here you don't pass it you're not going to accept that are you if you want to join the army why on earth would you follow the checklist for the post office you're going to turn around and say actually i'm not going to listen to you get me someone who knows what they're talking about the colossians were being deceived by people who seemed to know what they were talking about i'm sure that false humility and the visions made them seem great they probably spoke with great passion but paul wanted the colossians to see they have no right to disqualify anyone because they are disqualified themselves paul's been very clear in this letter verse 10 says that the colossian church were saved by god alone and they've been brought to fullness in christ there's nothing extra they can add there's nothing else they need to know or worship any teacher who's judging the colossians because they know more clearly know nothing now how do we know today that we aren't being taken captive paul's warning is still relevant to us and there are still plenty false teachers around people who are willing to deceive us and lead us away from the true the truth the hard thing is that it isn't obvious when false teachers walk in there's no earthquake they don't grow horns they don't have red eyes it's not directly visible when somebody's trying to lead you astray the easiest way to figure out actually is someone giving me the truth or are they maybe leading me off well the way we check is by are they connected to the head are they being led by christ and what they do and teach are they listening to his words if a teacher starts going beyond what the bible teaches us you've got to start worrying maybe you've seen the there's a movie on netflix called american gospel it's a documentary and it's really really worth watching it's fantastic but what it does is essentially goes into a great false teaching movement that's kind of the prosperity gospel and it highlights ways to kind of recognize this so what are the ways to tell that you kind of pick up by watching american gospel well it shows how they stop using scripture to guide them these false teachers they let their own desires lead what they want becomes the important thing but like are the colossian false teachers it isn't obvious they do with false humility they start to add in checklists of their own they add spiritual sounding things things that you'd need to have to be a good christian you need to have these to join their churches the teachers look wise they sound great they're wonderful communicators they can grab a room of thousands and have them in the palm of their hands but if they're not connected to the heads and they're not following jesus properly they have no right to disqualify anyone we need to be careful who we're listening to whether it's in a podcast or if we're listening to other sermons just because somebody sounds spiritual does not mean they are of the holy spirit don't fall for the extra spirituality people can try and bring we already have fullness in christ going on to our final point don't fall for extra rules you've already got everything you need don't fall for extra rules you've already got everything you need and this is verses 20 to 23 do you notice how in the beginning of this section paul changes his tone in the past few verses he's been saying do not let anyone do not let anyone and suddenly we've got why do you clearly this is an issue the colossians must already be falling for clearly it's another checklist issue that they've kind of developed on their own or some other teacher they've started to listen to this time it isn't a checklist that goes over traditions and it's not one that goes over spirituality this time it's a

checklist of worldly things they should or shouldn't do the rules they're working towards are pretty they're physical ones things they can't touch handle taste someone must have come in some deceiver must have come in and convinced the colossians they need to follow these rules and if they don't they're not a proper christian or they're not growing as a christian once more paul throws that out the window the beginning of that verse he reminds them you have died with christ the elemental spiritual forces of this world hold no power over them verse 15 earlier in the chapter that we had read says christ has disarmed all powers that we might face satan who is the king of this world the prince of this world who these forces follow he has no sway over what we do we can call out the lies that he tells us and turn away what's the great lie that we find in these rules that we try and add well the great lie is that they help us grow in holiness the colossians were facing people telling them to fall in line follow the rules and if you do the right things you'll be a better christian but these rules the colossians are trying to follow they're all to do with things that are destined to perish with use verse 22 these things that the rules are to do with are going to pass away whether we touch them or not isn't going to affect what happens to us in fact the colossians believe in jesus they believe that and paul has told them they have already died with christ christ went to the cross and nailed the charges against them to the cross he's taken away every bad thing they've ever done and made them clean there is nothing the colossians can do to be more holy there's no rules we can follow that makes us more better christians if they've already died and risen with christ like paul has told us in this letter why worry about what is going to perish if we want to become better christians what we need is more christ we need to change our heart not the things we do and the difficulty with this truth and this is especially true for us today is that it's really really hard to tell if you've become a better christian we can't see how our hearts are there's no helpful bar that is above our head that kind of goes up the more of a christian you become more often than not being a christian doesn't feel like we're succeeding but it feels like we're struggling every day is a battle but when we get given rules that we can follow things that good christians might do well we can start to mark our progress can make us feel good about ourselves this is why these rules seem wise they feel like we're doing good things i've read my bible every day for the past three months score i'm a good christian we can measure the progress we make but they don't change our hearts these extra rules paul tells us they can't restrain the sensual indulgences we face we could go and live our entire lives as monks in the deserts take the minimalist idea to the extreme have nothing around us there's literally no way we can be tempted that's not going to make us more holy it's not going to change our hearts we'll still be sinners now today i hope that we all have our own little habits that help us in our christian walk and these are good things please don't hear me and think i'm saying don't read your bible i'm not what we can do to help us are goods following a bible reading plan is goods setting aside time the same time every day for prayer is goods maybe some of us fast regularly from food or from technology so we can spend more time with god that is goods as long as our focus is on the right place

[20 : 20] what we need to be doing is protecting our attitudes from relying on these things we can't think that following our own personal checklist is what is keeping us with christ we can't think we are being better christians because we are just doing these things taking the boxes that isn't the taking the boxes that helps us these are not the goal the goal is not to finish the bible in a year the goal is to know more of christ the goal of fasting is not to be hungry then pride yourself that you've gone three days without eating food the goal of fasting is that when you feel hunger you pray and give thanks to god for what you have it's so we can focus on god and not ourselves the colossians were using the rules they were given to judge themselves and judge one another the colossians would look and say oh they've handled that thing they're not doing as well as i have i've not eaten that in months i must be doing great what that means is that if we struggle with self-discipline you are just as good a christian as anyone else if your friend is brilliant and they nail their devotional time every day and you know that but you can't find the time or you struggle it's okay if your bible life is irregular christ has still done everything for you maybe you struggle with praying every day let me tell you that's okay to struggle christ has still done everything for you now we continue to press on we must always continue to yearn to to know more of god to read god's words to hear him speak and to speak to him on our own terms as often as we can but we can't rely on our own personal checklists how much you read the bible doesn't affect the way god looks at you when he looks at you what he sees is someone who's alive in christ if you believe in jesus when he looks at you he sees the exact same person today as he did the day you became a christian we can't gain holiness when jesus views us when god looks at us he sees us perfect through christ's sacrifice maybe tonight's your first night in a church maybe or maybe you've been coming for a while but you don't believe let me tell you jesus came and died so we could stop struggling to be good enough all the standards that are set of us in life all the rules we ache to follow the ways we go to fit in they mean nothing to god if you want to be able to rest from the struggles to fit in and follow the rules if you just ache to be accepted for who you are and not how you act with your friends turn to jesus he loves you who you are today he wants you to come to him if we believe in christ we are accepted and made holy and we can flourish in life the way we were made through throughout colossians paul reminds the church that they began as believers when they trusted in christ and they're going to continue as believers by trusting in christ it's the same message for us today my friends we can stop relying on traditions or spirituality or the rules we set ourselves none of that changes who we've been made in christ we can give up with the pretense of pretending to be good christians when we're facing difficulty because we are still full in christ so if you were to take a checklist a clipboard within the top it says how to be a good christian there is one box and that box says believes in jesus let me pray father thank you that we have the real thing in our grasps we don't need to rely on

our traditions we have jesus but i thank you that there is no need to top up our spiritualness because you've given us the holy spirit there's no need for us to follow rules because christ did it all for us father give us the desire to know you more to read your word more to hear you speak more give us the wisdom to know where our personal little habits are goods but open our eyes to see where they have become a stumbling block father we thank you that it is all being done there is no condemnation for us but as christ has nailed those charges to the cross help us remember this as we go out there we can't become more holy we are perfect in your sights and we thank you for that in your holy name father amen