

Big idea: Do not be sucked in by, excluded by, disqualified by, false teaching that says, 'Jesus as Lord' is not enough and we need to do more and know more.

FCF: That Jesus as Lord is not enough, and we must do more and know more.

Application: Jesus as Lord is enough – so be prepared in this!

1. The yips...

Golf is one of the few sports I do not enjoy playing or watching – as Oscar Wilde is reputed to have said, 'Golf is a walk in the park, interrupted'. However, I do enjoy reading about golf and golfers.

Golfers often go through the yips – they lose their form and they start to play badly. A brilliant golfer becomes a hack in a matter of weeks. What might start with a physiological issue becomes a mental issue – the player is consumed by doubts, deceived about their abilities, and they start looking for solutions.

It seems to me that golfers go in one of two directions: on the one hand, they turn to increased practice, spending hours and hours working on their putting, their swing, their stance – anything that might undo their predicament and restore them to confidence; on the other hand, they start to consult professional coaches. Moving from one guru to another, from one legend to another – any amount of increased knowledge to turn their game around. In the yips, reduced to a hack, doubting the raw truth of what they can do, a troubled golfer turns to working more and knowing more. You see it time and time again – Ian Baker-Finch, Tiger Woods, Greg Norman,

Nick Faldo, Rory McIlroy, and the list goes on. More work and more knowledge, more and more work, are seen as the ways out once the reality of their skills is doubted and their form crumbles.

It seems to me that the Colossian Christians are facing the theological equivalent of the yips – being led down the path that doubts what they have, down the path where alternatives to the truth are offered.

They are facing a false teaching which creates doubts about the truth that Jesus is enough. Last week, we saw how Paul dealt with that lie by taking the Christians in Colossae back to the raw truth, the reality: if Jesus is their Lord, they are 'in him', and have all that they need – 'his story is now their story', and they have life at its fullest.

In these verses, verses 16-23, Paul turns his attention to what the false teachers are suggesting as to how these Christians must live – if Jesus is Lord is not enough. At its base, the false teachers seem to be saying, 'Jesus is Lord is not enough. This means that your sins are not forgiven and you really don't know God. Therefore, let us show you what you need to do and what you need to know. You just need to do more and know more. If you don't, there is no eternal inheritance for you'.

It is the same issue we face, isn't it? Once the idea that Jesus is enough is doubted, once the raw reality of what we have is forgotten or dimmed, then what can we do? We still have sin. We still need to know God. The only possible solution is to do more and

know more, to make up by ourselves for what is lacking in what Jesus did!

As we will see, Paul has one answer to this: ‘That is a pack of lies. Jesus is Lord, so it has all been done for you, and you have God fully revealed’.

PRAY.

2. A picture of the dangerous deceit...

The Christians in Colossae are doing well as God’s people. Their reputation for love and faith has spread. They are growing in their identity as people transferred into the kingdom of God’s Son. They are being transformed as God’s people. Paul and Timothy pray for more of this. They have reminded the Colossians that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is able to do all this for them – to reconcile them to God, to transfer their eternal postcode, to completely transform them. They have reminded the Colossians of their work as ‘servants of the gospel’ – the good news of who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done – and that they have been given this job for the benefit of the Colossians (and all God’s people).

However, there is a danger – **look at Colossians 2:4... READ.**

There is an alternative that is being offered to the Colossians. It is an alternative, it seems, that says, ‘Jesus is Lord is NOT enough’. It is persuasive.

Paul and Timothy make clear the key principle for how to deal with this alternative – **look at Colossians 2:6-7... READ.**

Jesus is Lord is enough – it is how they began, and it is how they must continue. In Jesus, they have everything they need – remember 1:21-22? Remember 2:3?

Now, they look at this alternative in close detail – **look at Colossians 2:8... READ.**

What is being offered is very clearly ‘not based on Christ’. It is something that says ‘Jesus is Lord is NOT enough’. Now, when you think about it – and Paul and Timothy do over the next verses (9-15), and Neil helped us look at that last week – to be connected to Jesus, to be ‘in/with him’, is to have everything you need as a human being. To put it bluntly, to be ‘in Jesus’ is to have life at its fullest, to be part of God’s people, to be made alive, to have your sins forgiven – and this is all publicly verifiable. As Neil so memorably put it last week, ‘his story is now your story’. Everything about Jesus’ life is now your’s.

So, what is the alternative? What is being offered?

This is a notorious area of debate. Reams of paper, gallons of ink, and much theological sweat have been spent on working out what this ‘persuasive argument’, this ‘philosophy and empty deceit’ are.

Let me tell you what we do know:

- It puts humans back in the centre of life – it is established on ‘human tradition’ – look at verse 8.

- It puts this world back in the centre of life – it deals with life from the perspective of the broken world that we live in – look at verse 8.
- It expresses these two ideas through an exhortation to ‘do more’ – to obey rules, to deal with our human situation through more activity, to deal with our human nature through rigorous denial and through strict behaviour – look at verses 16 and 20-23.
- It expresses these two ideas through an exhortation to ‘know more’ – to access secret and privileged knowledge, and secret and privileged actions – look at verse 18.

In essence, the alternative on offer seems to be saying – and we can only read between the lines of Paul and Timothy here – ‘Jesus as Lord is NOT enough. He cannot deal with your sinful nature – so you must do more to rein it in. He cannot give you the knowledge of God that you need – so you must know more’.

How does Paul deal with this alternative?

3. Dealing with the deceit...

Paul and Timothy are very clear in how they deal with this dangerous deceit – they make a command, and then they expose the dangerous deceit – they make a command, and then they expose the dangerous deceit – they make a personal application, and they lay the truth out before their readers. In this sense, Paul and Timothy are very clear – the dangerous deceit offers nothing except the opposite of what Jesus offers.

(i) The first command is in **verse 16... READ.**

Whatever else this ‘persuasive’ teaching is, it is divisive. It separates those who are strenuously doing enough, and those who are not making any effort whatsoever. But it is divisive on a deeper level – it decides who is in the kingdom of God based on what rules they keep, and it excludes those who don’t keep the right rules.

If this is not that clear, it is clarified as Paul and Timothy expose the dangerous deceit – **look at verse 17... READ.**

Whatever else this ‘persuasive’ teaching is, it is legalistic: it emphasises that Jesus is not enough to deal with our sin and we need to do more, add more, to Jesus. Put simply, humans can deal with sin by keeping rules and regulations which limit consumption of food and drink, and which monitor our days and time. It seems to be part of a much larger framework of rules and regulations – look down at verse 20 – which aims to deal with the dangers of sin by doing more stuff, avoiding more stuff, keeping more days, and being more law-abiding (in a religious sense).

Paul and Timothy want their readers to know how useless this is.

On the one hand, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of sin here. Remember how we have defined sin? It is the attitude and action that says, ‘I am God and God is not’. It is an internal problem, that is revealed in behaviour – it is not something bad out there that humans have to keep at bay. This is the very point that Jesus is dealing with in our reading from Mark 7 – sin is not a thing out there, but the very nature of our human hearts. Sin is not dealt with by more rigorous laws and rule-keeping – it must be dealt with at the very core of human nature.

On the other hand, there are shadows throughout the history of God's dealing with humanity which point to a full reality where God will do as he promised – roll back sin, and bring his approval. The dangerous deceit, it seems, has returned to these laws from the past – perhaps, even most likely, Old Testament laws – and misunderstood them. Those laws were not given to fix sin – they were given to reveal how far short humans (even the people of God) fall short of God's standard of perfection. Even as God gave his people these laws so that they would know how to represent him, they revealed their complete failure and their complete sin. Those laws pointed forward to a time when God himself would deal with human nature.

And Paul has just reminded us how that happens – remember verse 11?

In Jesus, the reality, the fullness, the substance, of God dealing with our human nature has taken place. As a human, he is everything we could never be. He is perfect. He lived perfection, for us. So, because he did that, we do not have to do more to have our sins dealt with. He has dealt with our broken and rebellious and sinful human nature for us, by being what we could not be: the one human who is perfect.

By being connected to him, humans can have all his perfection, all that he has done. Why, Paul and Timothy are saying, would you swap that for a return to laws that pointed to Jesus – to fruitless activity that does nothing about your nature?

(ii) The second command is in **verse 18... READ.**

Again, this 'persuasive' teaching is divisive – it disqualifies some, and brings others in. Again, it is hard to pin it down, and there is much debate about its precise form. However, I think we can say this much – it offers changed behaviour through exclusive and special knowledge. These people delight in the fact that they think they have had special insight, special revelation, special knowledge. This has changed their behaviour, so that they now 'worship' angels, carry out certain rigorous acts of behaviour, and insist on the necessity to have the same knowledge.

Alongside their encouragement to 'do more', these people insist that people need to 'know more'.

Paul and Timothy expose the reality of this – **look at verses 18-19... READ.**

These people have become separated from 'the head' – from the source of all the knowledge anyone needs. Remember who 'the head' is? Remember Colossians 1:18? Remember that 'in Jesus' is all the fullness of God? Remember that 'in Jesus' are 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge... hidden'? Remember that 'in Jesus' humans can be made 'full' and 'mature' and presented before God as 'faultless'?

To offer a return to human-focussed knowledge and unique experiences is to trade the only one who is fully God for puffed-up concepts created inside human minds. Why would you do that?

(iii) This summary and exposure of the 'persuasive' teaching, the dangerous deceit, is finalised in **verses 20-23... READ.**

The change here is quite striking – it moves to a direct address to the Colossians, as a group – ‘you’. And the point is not complicated. Put simply, Paul and Timothy lay a very clear exhortation before their readers: ‘If you are connected to Christ, if in him you have been transferred and transformed, if your postcode has changed and if Jesus is all you need, why are you getting the yips, why are you returning to stuff that you know doesn’t work?’

In essence, Paul and Timothy close by drawing the threads together. In Jesus, you have been transferred and transformed. In Jesus, his life is your life. In Jesus, all your sinful nature is dealt with. In Jesus, you know God and have the full knowledge you need. In Jesus... so, why go back to stuff that doesn’t work?

4. Dealing with the yips...

At the heart of the golfing yips is doubt that what the golfer has is enough. They start to doubt what they have – and they strive harder, and they seek more enlightened advice... and downwards they go...

The warning here is quite clear – ‘In Jesus as Lord, you have enough – don’t be taken away by ‘persuasive’ ideas that offer more strenuous behaviour and exclusive knowledge’.

Before I suggest three applications, let me be clear about what I am not saying. I am not saying that the Christian life is devoid of commands and rules, and a desire for deeper knowledge. I mean, Paul prays this in Colossians 1! But these must be in their right place: good deeds are not the way to deal with sin, and greater knowledge is not the way to know God. NO – Christ’s deeds are

the way our sin is dealt with, and Christ's nature is where we know God. But, once saved by the Lordship of Jesus – once we have fullness, forgiveness of sins, membership in God's people and new life, IN HIM – then we strive, by God's help, to live more like Jesus, and we dive more deeply into knowledge of God.

(i) First, we must continue to grasp the significance of being 'in Jesus'. The incredible truth that, in him, 'his story is now your story' should never be dimmed, always treasured, and wonderfully enjoyed. I want you to spend some time this week pondering all the riches we have by being 'in him'. In this sense, you are enjoying the 'therefore' at the start of verse 16, returning to all that you have 'in him', so that nothing else seems sufficient or persuasive. In him, we have all that we need for life at its fullest – forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration a future hope, maturity, the fullness of true humanity – that is so much to delight in – to luxuriate in – to be satisfied by.

(ii) Second, we must be aware of the danger of the 'persuasive' argument. In this sense, our readings from Genesis 3 and Mark 7 are so important. In Genesis 3, we are shown how easy it is to doubt the sufficiency and perfection of God's provision. In Mark 7, we are reminded of where the true source of dissatisfaction and doubt is – inside the human heart, and not with God. Sin – thinking we can be God instead of God because we don't think has our best interests at heart – can never be dealt with by stricter rules, greater efforts, or by knowledge that is privileged. Sin can only be dealt with at the core of our nature, and can only be dealt with by the one who is both human and God, the one sinned against: Jesus. In this sense, a faulty understanding of sin, and a faulty understanding of the

goodness of God, and a faulty understanding of the nature of Jesus – these lay the seed-bed for ‘persuasive’ arguments. So, I guess the prayer that Paul prayed back there in Colossians 1:9-12, and the general principle explained in Colossians 2:6-7, are critical. My question to you is this – have you applied them in a practical way to yourself? What does that look like?

(iii) Third, and following on from what I have just said, we must be careful of where we get our knowledge and growth and insight into Jesus and his sufficiency from. At its most foundational level, the baseline for anything is expressed clearly in verse 8 – it must be ‘on Christ’. At the next level up, we need to make sure that what we do read, devour, and watch is stuff that affirms the sufficiency of Christ in the Bible – that he is Lord, that his story is our story, that what he has done is complete and so are we. And, then, at the next level up, how that stuff is communicated needs to affirm these truths and fullness. In this sense, we can keep asking ourselves, ‘Is what I am learning ‘on Christ’, accords with what the Bible says is ‘in Christ’, and does it increase my satisfaction in his sufficiency as Lord?’