

**“Subtraction by Addition”**  
**Colossians 2:16-19**  
**August 22, 2021**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

It is good to be back with you this morning, as we return to our series in Colossians. As I explained when we began our time in Colossians, we will spend through the end of August in this letter of Paul, and then, at the beginning of September we will pause this series in Colossians until next spring, and we will begin a fall series in the first few chapters of Deuteronomy.

But this morning we return to Paul’s letter to the Colossians, and we come now to 2:16-19.

Please listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

Paul writes to the Colossian church:

<sup>2:16</sup>Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup>Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup>and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, as we come to your Word,  
we ask you to teach us the way of your statutes,  
that we might keep it to the end.  
Give us understanding, that we may follow your word  
and observe it with our whole hearts.  
Incline our hearts to your testimonies,  
and not to our own selfish ends.  
Turn our eyes and attention now from frivolous things,  
and give us life through your word.  
Grant this for Jesus’ sake. Amen.  
[Based on Psalm 119:33-34, 36-37]

**The Pattern: Subtraction by Addition**

As you may remember, one of the things the Apostle Paul is dealing with as he writes to the Colossian Christians is that he is warning them about false teachers whom the Christians in Colossae are dealing with.

The status of the false teachers and the nature of their teaching is highly disputed. And while Paul is more clear here than in any other place of the letter, about the nature of their teaching ... he still doesn't tell us much, and the verse where he shares the most is regarded by some commentators as one of the most debated texts in the New Testament, with ongoing disputes about the meaning of just about every word used in it. [Moo, 217; Garland, 175; Beale 224]

As interesting as the questions of historical details concerning these false teachers may be, they won't be our main focus this morning. Because while the details of the errors of the false teachers in Colossae remain obscure, the overall pattern is fairly clear. And it is that pattern that has the most relevance for us and for our instruction today.

So what are the key points that we see here? To start, what can we say about the background of the false teaching and false teachers?

First, from the lists given here it seems clear that some, or maybe even all of the distinctive marks of the false teaching had their sources in Judaism. The items listed in verse sixteen seem to support this. [Moo, 220-221; Wright, 123-124]

Second, while there is some debate about this, it seems most likely that the false teachers themselves were not coming from outside the church, but from within the Christian community, and considered themselves Christians – in fact, it seems likely that they considered themselves especially devout Christians. While it is not certain, the phrase Paul uses in verse eighteen likely implies that they have failed to continue to hold to Christ, rather than that they claimed no hold on him at all. [Moo, 217-218, 230]

From those historical points, what can we say about the pattern of their teaching?

Well first, to the Colossian Christians, these false teachers likely appeared more conservative and more rigorous than Paul did. They were advocating for and adhering to restrictions and religious observances that Paul seemed indifferent towards. They were practicing forms of asceticism and outward self-denial that Paul seemed to be neglecting. So these other teachers appeared more rigorous than Paul did.

And then, along with that, they also would have seemed more conservative and more traditional than Paul, because they were drawing all or most of their practices from the Old Testament, and from centuries of Jewish tradition, while Paul was basing his own practices more heavily on the events of just a few decades ago. And so these false teachers would have looked, to many, like those fighting to conserve the old ways, which Paul was brushing aside. These false teachers would have looked like conservatives while Paul appeared to be an innovator, shifting from the older ways.

That's how they would have appeared. But Paul stresses here that things are not really as they appear. What's really going on, Paul says, is a case of subtraction by addition.

Assuming that they did originate within the Christian community, the false teachers presented themselves not as those rejecting Christ or the gospel, but as those adding to what the Colossian Christians already had, and by adding to it, enhancing it, and making it better. Paul and others

had left out the observances listed in verse sixteen, but these teachers were adding them back. Paul was neglecting the importance of the items listed in verse eighteen, but these other teachers were supplementing Paul's message with these other components, which they stressed were really important. They were adding, and so it stands to reason that by following them, the Colossian Christians would not lose anything, but would only gain more.

But Paul says that the opposite is actually true. Paul says here that the real result was subtraction by addition. Paul says that by trying to add to Christ and what he had established for his people, the false teachers had actually lost Christ himself, and in doing so had lost the entire substance of the faith.

And Paul describes three ways they had done this – three cases of spiritual subtraction by addition going on among the false teachers.

What we'll see is that with their additions, the false teachers were promoting substanceless shadows, headless spirituality, and bodiless growth.

### **The First Case: Substanceless Shadows**

So first, the false teachers were promoting a faith of substanceless shadows. And we see this in verses sixteen and seventeen. There we read: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

Paul here lists the items that are being disputed. And one thing it is important to realize with this list here is that these things have come up before. In Romans 14 Paul deals with the topic of different views among Christians on what kind of food should be eaten, and also the topic of what kind of festival days should our shouldn't be observed. In First Corinthians eight through ten Paul also deals with related issues. And one of the key things that Paul comes back to in those passages is that Christians may disagree about these practices, but they are not essential to the faith, and so Christians should love and respect one another even as they believe different things about these questions, and even as they practice different things regarding them.

The issue with the items on the list in verse sixteen, then, is not the items themselves, but how the false teachers are valuing them. Paul begins by saying in verse sixteen that the Christians must not let anyone "pass judgment" on them over these things. The false teachers were not just practicing these things. They were not just promoting their practice of these things. But they were judging those who did not practice them. They were also trying to "disqualify" other Christians based on them, as we read in verse eighteen. And they were "insisting" on them, as we read in verse eighteen as well. And those dynamics, for Paul, change everything.

The situation is not one where Christians are disagreeing on these kinds of questions, but continuing together in love. That is what Paul exhorted the believers in Rome and Corinth to. The situation in Colossae is instead that these false teachers are "insisting" on their strict practice of these things, and they are trying to "judge" and "disqualify" those who do not do what they do. They have taken these practices and treated them as essential. And that changes the way Paul views them and speaks of them, when compared to those he writes to in Rome and Corinth.

And so here, Paul not only refuses the demands of the false teachers in Colossae, but he says that in doing what they have done, those teachers have lost the true substance of the faith.

We see that in verse seventeen. By “insisting” and “judging” and “disqualifying” others by these elements that are *not* essential to the Christian faith, Paul says that they have clung to the shadows, while neglecting the substance, which is of Christ.

Now, a shadow, is not necessarily a bad thing. And before the coming of Christ the shadows were especially important to the people of God, as Christ was so significant that even from the future, he cast a shadow into the past, which was the basis for the ceremonial practices of the people of God in the Old Testament. But even then, the shadow was not meant to be the chief focus of the people of God. The shadow, as important as it was then, was meant to point to the thing that cast it – to the substance, which is of Christ.

But by focusing on the shadow, by elevating the shadow to the level of being essential after Christ’s coming, these false teachers in Colossae had de-valued, and even failed to hold on to, the substance which that shadow was meant to point to in the past.

For them it took the form of reviving and insisting on Jewish food laws and details of the Jewish calendar. What form does it tend to take for us? What does it look like when we elevate the shadow over the substance in the spiritual realm?

Well, it might be helpful to begin by considering what it looks like when this valuing of shadow over substance is done overtly and openly. After all, the false teachers of Colossae would at least have denied the claim that they had traded the substance for the shadow, even though Paul tells us that that is exactly what they had done. But in our culture, many embrace the idea that in the spiritual realm we should cling to shadows, rather than substance.

A dominant perspective in our secular culture today is that when it comes to our spiritual lives, we are to seek our own “truth” – a set of spiritual beliefs and practices that “work” for us personally. But we are not to insist that they are necessary or true for anyone else. We are not to insist that “our truth” should be anyone else’s truth, let alone that it should be regarded as objectively true for everyone.

Now, that might sound, and it certainly would look like the exact opposite of the false teachers in Colossae. Where the false teachers are characterized by judgmentalism, our secular culture urges us to nonjudgmentalism. But ironically, in truth, they are both pursuing the same thing. They are both pursuing the shadows of spirituality, rather than the substance.

The striking difference is that in our secular culture, people are intentional in seeking shadow rather than substance – in seeking a set of beliefs and practices without insisting that they are rooted in objective reality – without claiming that they correspond to real things that have real existence for everyone in the universe.

But in both cases this pursuit of shadows over substance – whether intentional or unintentional – in both cases it falls flat. It does not work.

Because in almost every other area of life we know that shadows are not enough if they are not linked to substantive reality.

While on vacation the last few weeks, I read a couple books on human space flight, just for fun. And there I came across one striking example of this reality.

Bart Sibrel is a conspiracy theorist who has built his career on his independent films denying that the Apollo missions ever really landed a man on the moon. And he has tried, over the years, to confront former NASA astronauts with this claim. As Roger Launius [LAWN-ee-us] recounts it, on September 9, 2002 “Sibrel confronted [Buzz] Aldrin [from the crew of Apollo 11,] at a Los Angeles hotel.” In the fairly aggressive confrontation, Sibrel pursued Aldrin, denying that Aldrin had landed on the moon, and calling Aldrin “a ‘liar, a thief, and a coward.’ At that point Aldrin, then 72 years old, hit [the 37-year-old] Sibrel with a right hook that sent [Sibrel] to his knees. While Sibrel pressed charges, the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s office declined to pursue the incident.” Launius adds the comment that “Most people who viewed the video of this altercation expressed concern that Aldrin might have hurt his hand.” [Launius, 180]

Now, Aldrin and Sibrel disagreed on a whole lot. They did not see eye to eye. But they both deeply agreed on one important thing: that the substance of what objectively happened was of chief importance.

It didn’t matter if it was Buzz Aldrin’s “personal truth” that he had walked on the moon if it wasn’t objective truth. If it wasn’t objective truth that he did it, then Aldrin’s whole life was a sham. Every picture, every badge, every event he’d spoken at, every book blurb and introduction he’d written, every shadow of the moon landing in his life, was a lie, then. Those elements in his life meant nothing if they were shadows that were not rooted in the substance of the actual, historic moon landing.

Similarly, Bart Sibrel also knew that it did not matter if his denial of the moon landing was just his own private truth. If it was a private truth, but not an objective truth, then his work and much of his career was a lie and a substanceless waste.

Both men knew that what mattered most was not the shadows of the moon landing in their lives, but the substance of what objectively happened.

And Aldrin, who knew, and had experienced the objective truth, was so enraged by Sibrel denying it that he lost his cool and punched him in the face.

And while it doesn’t usually come to blows like that, the fact remains that we approach most things in life with the same framework. It’s not just how we think of our family, or our marriage, or our job, or our country, or our friendships, that matters – it is what is objectively true about them that is of chief importance.

And the same is true in the spiritual realm. A spiritual life of shadows is nothing if it has no substance – if it has no objective reality, if it is not “true truth.”

And so, for secular people, Paul's words confront us with the fact that a shadowy approach to spiritual reality is insufficient. We must seek substance. We must seek a spiritual life rooted in what is really true of the universe we live in.

And as Christians, we can pat ourselves on the back for already knowing that ... which makes it that much worse when we still fall into the same patterns. Because we too can do what Paul describes here – hopefully not to the same extent as these false teachers, who Paul says have lost their hold on Christ – but to different degrees, we too can be tempted to do the same thing that they do – to emphasize the shadows so much that we lose focus on the substance.

Think about it. Think about when someone has done that to you. Maybe the issue was their perspective on an ethical position they held to, but which Christians often disagree on. Maybe it was on a doctrine that Christians have always disagreed on, but they saw as essential. Maybe it was something more practical: the details of how you approach dating, or how you raise your kids, or how you vote, or how you worship, or how you talk about aspects of the Christian life, or something else. But they took some issue that Christians often disagree on, and they raised it to such a level that they questioned – either overtly or by implication – they questioned how seriously you took your Christian faith really was ... all because you approached that issue differently than they did. You've had that happen to you ... haven't you? You've had another Christian insist that their perspective on a relatively low-level issue was actually essential ... you've had another Christian judge you, and maybe even seek to disqualify your faith, based on such a disagreement, right?

If you haven't, that's great. But one day you will. Trust me.

It is an all too common experience of the Christian life to have another Christian you know get infatuated with the shadows and implications of the faith to such an extent that they threatened the substance of the Christian faith – they had downgraded the importance of Christ by elevating that concern so high, and then they pressure you to do the same.

When it's happened to you, maybe you've been tempted to follow them. Maybe you have followed them in the past. Because, after all, it felt like you were simply adding something. And maybe adding that thing felt more serious, and more rigorous, and more conservative, and so what could the danger really be, you reasoned?

But Paul says that such things, raised to such a level, are not simple addition. But instead, they are subtraction by addition. Because the primacy of Christ is threatened by the misordered elevation of such issues.

Maybe you have been hurt by that sort of thing. Maybe you've been seriously tempted by it. And maybe you've done it to other people.

Have you? Have you judged other believers based on something that you have no business judging them on ... something which Christians can disagree on?

We can all be hurt by others doing this. We can all be tempted by others promoting this. We can all be in danger of doing this to others ourselves.

What is Paul's solution? What does he hold out as the alternative?

Paul's answer is to point us to Christ.

Paul's answer is to remind us that Christ must be the substance of our faith, and everything else must flow from him, be united to him, and point to him, just as a shadow emerges from the substance of a man. Because that substance of Christ is of infinitely more value than the shadows he casts.

Christ, his person, and his work, and his calling and teaching for us, laid out throughout the Scriptures, are to be of chief importance. And everything else is much less. And those lesser things – those things that Christians so often disagree on – are never to be elevated to the level of Christ himself, any more than a shadow should be elevated to the level of a man.

And so Paul's urging for us is to keep Christ primary in our spiritual lives, our relationship to God, and our relationships to one another.

For Christians this means that all we believe and all we do must be rooted in the substance of Christ. And we may need to remind ourselves of that with some regularity. Because it can be easy to shift to focusing on shadows.

For non-Christians, it means that if you want to find spiritual substance – if you want to find what the spiritual impulses in your heart, the spiritual shadows of your mind, all point to – then you must turn to Christ, and see how he is the one casting the shadows of spiritual longing in your heart.

When tempted to substanceless shadows, we must turn instead to the substance of Christ.

That's the first thing we see here in our text.

### **The Second Case: Headless Spirituality**

The second temptation we see is that the false teachers are promoting headless spirituality. And we see this in verse eighteen and the beginning of verse nineteen. There we read: "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head"

Now ... as I said earlier, these verses, and verse eighteen in particular, are highly disputed.

It's unclear what exactly Paul has in mind with the word that the ESV has translated here as "asceticism" though from the context it would seem to be some sort of false humility.

It's also unclear what is meant by the phrase the "worship of angels," whether it means intentionally giving worship to angels, or a hyper-focus on the worship that the angels give to God, or simply an overvaluing of the role of angels. [Moo, 226-227; Wright, 126-127]

It's even unclear what Paul means with his reference to visions – whether the false teachers are mainly seeking visions, or talking a lot about their visions, or something else.

But whatever the details may be, once again a pattern emerges. Central to what Paul is focused on here is the issue of where the teachers look for their chief source of spiritual authority, and their chief source of spiritual life. This especially comes out at the end of verse eighteen, where Paul says that they are “puffed up without reason.” [Moo, 224] Arrogance is key to what is being described here. By these things the false teachers think they are more spiritual than they really are.

And that is emphasized even further when Paul characterizes them as having a “sensuous mind” at the end of verse eighteen. The Greek says that they have “the mind of the flesh.” And so again Paul is pointing out that while they think they are being extra spiritual, in truth they are being extra un-spiritual. [Wright, 127]

This arrogance is rooted in the fact that in the items listed, they are looking to themselves for spiritual authority and life, rather than looking to Christ.

And this point is driven home at the beginning of verse nineteen when Paul says that they are not holding to Christ as their Head. And the emphasis here is that as the head, Christ is to be both the source of spiritual authority and the source of spiritual life for believers. [Moo, 230-231]

But instead of looking to Christ for authority and life, these false teachers had looked to themselves. They had looked to their own practices, summed up in the word “asceticism.” They had looked to their own ability to grasp at and achieve spiritual knowledge, summed up in their focus on visions. And they had focused on their own spiritual practices – whether attempts to worship or join with the worship of angels. In these ways they had stopped looking to Christ for spiritual life and authority, and had looked instead to themselves: to their own actions, their own achievements, their own abilities. And in doing so to such an extent, Paul says they had lost their connection to Christ as their Head. He had ceased to be their head because they were trying to be their own head.

And again, this is a temptation we see both in the secular world around us, and in the Church.

The secular world, again, is often overt about it. Spirituality is all about us. We make ourselves the chief authority, deciding item by item what we think is good and what we think is true. We make ourselves also the ultimate source of spiritual life, seeking, ourselves, to identify what we really need, and how we can lay hold of it.

But any real experience with this approach begins to reveal how insufficient it is. We may want to be our own spiritual authority ... but the fact is that we are not enough for that. We often don't really know what is true. And whether we follow our mind or our heart, the answers we come up with often let us down again and again.

Similarly, we quickly learn that we cannot be the source of our own spiritual life. After all, one of our deepest spiritual impulses, as human beings, is a knowledge that we are not enough. We are dependent creatures.

We need a greater being than ourselves in our life. We need a greater source of life and authority. We need a spiritual head. And the spiritual head we need is Jesus Christ. He, as both God and man, is the only one trustworthy to be our ultimate spiritual authority. And he, as the one who died for our sins, and rose again to give us new life, is the only one through whom we can receive true spiritual life.

If you are a Christian, you know this. And yet we too are often tempted to shift from Christ to other authorities and other sources of spiritual life. We begin over-emphasizing ourselves: our actions, our reasoning, our experiences.

And we often do it in ways that feel very spiritual, and that can sound or look very spiritually serious and rigorous to others.

What does that look like for you? How do you tend to shift the center of spiritual authority from Christ to yourself? And how do you tend to shift from relying on Christ for your spiritual life to relying more and more on yourself?

Paul says that when we begin to shift in those ways – when we give in more and more to those temptations, we are in danger of losing our grip on Christ. That is the logical outcome of such a path.

Now God is a good shepherd. And he often calls us back before we get too far. But we are called to beware and to repent when we see where we are heading down such a path. We are called to turn back to Christ as our head – as the chief source of spiritual life and authority. He is what we need, and he is what we must lay hold of, with both hands, clinging to him, and relying fully on him.

So we see here how, in our faith, we can be tempted to substanceless shadows, and how we can be tempted to headless spirituality.

### **The Third Case: Bodiless Growth**

Third, and finally, we see that the false teachers in Colossae are also trying to achieve bodiless growth. In verse nineteen we read that they are: “not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”

The reference to the “body” here is a reference to the Church. And that emphasis has come up a few times. Earlier, in chapter one, Paul evoked the image of Christ as the head, and his Church as the body. Then, in the Greek of verse seventeen it seems likely that Paul intended an allusion to the Church again [Moo, 2230224; Wright, 125-126]. And now, in verse nineteen, he returns to an emphasis on the role of the Church. It is, he points out here, a Church that has life in its unity to Christ, and in the unity between its members, as it is “nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments,” he writes.

But these false teachers had become separated from the body.

And a separation like theirs could happen either by leaving the church themselves, or by trying to separate true believers from their church community – whether by seeking to formally cast them out, or to informally drive them out.

Now, we need, once again, to note the irony and the pattern. The false teachers think they are being more spiritual, more rigorous, more conservative. They think they are spiritually superior – that they are the true spiritual body. But instead, they have become separated from the true spiritual Body of Christ.

Of course, not all decisions to break fellowship follow this pattern. But a lot of them do. Sometimes fellowship is broken because there is a serious problem with a church and the right thing to do is to leave. But often that decision is made instead because people decide they are too good for a particular congregation. In a similar way, some people are removed from church membership formally because they have violated their membership vows and resisted the attempts of the church to bring them to repentance. But often people are informally pushed away or driven from a congregation, because some in the congregation have decided that those people are not good enough for their church.

Do you see that first pattern in your own life? Have you left believers behind out of personal arrogance? Do we see that second pattern in the life of our congregation? Have we driven others away from our fellowship because of our corporate arrogance? Paul's words should drive us to consider such questions.

Because Paul says that when we do that – when we produce divisions from other believers out of arrogance, and out of a sense of superiority, we are, to some extent, separating ourselves from the Body of Christ.

And in our particular time and setting, it can be easy to let our guard down towards this temptation. The Church is always threatened towards disregard for God's law and acceptance of immorality on the one end, and towards arrogant judgmentalism and Phariseeism on the other end. Both temptations always exist, and we see Paul dealing with both in his letters. But in an age dominated by one of those temptations, we can turn all our attention to that threat, and turn our backs on the other temptation, backing right into it without even realizing it. As we focus on the permissiveness and open acceptance of sin in the culture around us, we can easily respond by falling into the sort of arrogant judgmentalism that Paul describes here in the false teachers. After all, it was, in part, just that kind of cultural setting in the ancient world that fueled the Pharisees themselves.

So this temptation to arrogant judgmentalism and a sense of superiority that divides us from the rest of the Body of Christ is a real temptation for us.

But if we give into it, Paul tells us that the spiritual dangers are serious. Because as we lose connection to the Body of Christ, so we lose connection to Christ himself, the Head. And as we seek superior growth on our own, Paul says in verse nineteen that we remove ourselves from the very place where God has chosen to provide the spiritual growth we need. God, Paul reminds us, gives growth to the Body, and so it is ordinarily only in connection with the Body that we can receive the growth that we need.

As one commentator notes: “It is no shame when a Christian finds that he or she cannot grow spiritually without support and help from fellow believers; it is, rather, a surprise that anyone should have thought such a thing possible, let alone desirable.” [Wright, 129]

There *is* a logic to the false teachers’ approach. If you want a church to grow spiritually, then you should work to make it an extra-elite church, separating out those who don’t measure up, and distancing yourself from them so they don’t hold you back. And if you’re seeking to grow spiritually yourself, it’s best to pursue it alone, so no one else can drag you down. There is a logic there. But it is a human logic. It is a carnal logic, produced, as Paul says in verse eighteen, by a fleshly mind. For true growth comes wherever *God* says he will give it. And God has said he will give growth in his Church, united by Christ alone – a Church filled with strengths and weaknesses, with spiritual life and sinful struggles.

And so the third thing we see is that if we are to have real spiritual growth, we must seek it within the Body of Christ.

That means worship with the Body is crucial to our growth. That means relationships within the Body are essential. We are not just to smile at one another on Sundays and say cheerfully that we are doing well as we sip our coffee. We are to be, Paul says, knit together. That means intimate connection with others – relationships in which we discuss and wrestle with real spiritual truths from the Scriptures and real spiritual struggles from our own lives.

You need to think seriously about what that means for you. And we, as a church, need to think seriously about what that means for us, and how we should together approach the task of bearing one another’s burdens and building one another up in Christ, as a community.

But one thing we cannot deny is that if we want spiritual growth, we must seek it in connection with the Church, the Body of Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The temptations Paul identifies here are to add to the core of the Christian faith – whether adding new elements, or treating lesser issues as essential.

But Paul tells us here that the truth is that when we do this we are subtracting. We are subtracting Christ from our spiritual lives, by making him share the royal and unrivaled status he is supposed to have in our lives and in his Church.

The temptation is addition. The truth is subtraction.

At the same time, when we make these additions, we often feel superior to those who don’t make them. We feel more elite, more rigorous, more traditional, more conservative, more committed.

But the truth, Paul says, is that we become inferior. We give our prime allegiance to shadows instead of to the substance they are meant to point us to. We look to our feeble selves for direction and life, instead of looking to Christ, the true Head. We try to grow on our own, without the Body through which God has ordained life.

The temptation is to a sense of superiority, but the truth is that we become inferior.

And so the temptation is a lie. It is a deception. It might feel spiritual, but it is at heart carnal. And it is a temptation for us that is at least as much a threat as those worldly temptations we can more obviously see coming.

Paul's answer to this threat throughout our text is simple: Cling to Christ.

Recognize that he is the substance of your life, and give him priority over everything else.

Recognize that he is the head – he is your authority and the only source of life.

Recognize that his Church is his Body, and you need his Body to have life, whether you can see it or not.

The substance of Christ, the headship of Christ, the Body of Christ. That is what we most need.

Compared to that, everything else is a shifting shadow.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

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