

Kidnapped?

1. Warm up: Hopefully none of us has ever been kidnapped, but when in your life have you found yourself physically trapped or confined? And how did that feel?
2. Paul begins this week's scripture passage with these words, "See to it that no one takes you captive." The Greek word translated here as "captive" is *sulagogeo* (soo-lag-ogue-EH-o), which means to take someone captive as a slave or to kidnap someone. Paul is referring to something that might be called "religious kidnapping." He warns the Colossian Christians that they are in danger of being religiously kidnapped. To get the full context of what Paul's saying, let's read Colossians 2:8-23, as printed on p. 3.
3. Although we don't know all the details of what was happening in the Colossian Church, we can piece together a fairly good picture from the words and phrases Paul uses. Religious authority figures in the church were teaching things that were inconsistent with what Jesus had taught. Based on visions they had, they were teaching the Colossian Christians to worship angels, to observe special days (festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths), to avoid touching or tasting certain things, developing all kinds of religious rituals and regulations that had to be observed, and promoting complex esoteric doctrines. In short, they were teaching the Colossians to focus on outward religious observance at the expense of inner spiritual development. Paul declares all these things to be "of no value."
 - a. If you've ever been in a religious setting where the leaders place great emphasis on outward religious observance, with lots of rituals, rules, regulations, restrictions, and detailed prescribed doctrinal positions that everyone had to embrace lockstep, you may have been a victim of "religious kidnapping." If you've ever been in a religious community like that, tell us what that was like, how it felt, and how it affected your spiritual life.
 - b. Why do you think it's so easy for religious communities to slip into the mode of placing great emphasis on outward religious observance and compelling uniformity?
 - c. Why do you think so many people choose to settle into the kind of religious communities described in paragraphs (a) and (b) above? What's the allure?
4. It's not hard to see why Paul declared that outward religious observance, standing alone, is "of no value." History and personal experience offer many examples of people who are very religious, but still very bad. Jeff shared examples of deeply religious mafia leaders and slave owners, as well as hardhearted churches and church people who have no compassion for the poor and disadvantaged.
 - a. Have you ever known someone who was very religiously observant, but also a really terrible, broken person? Tell us what you witnessed.

- b. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once said, “Most of the evil in the world does not come from evil people. It comes from people who consider themselves good.” What do you think he meant? Do you agree or disagree?
 - c. Jesus himself warned that religious conversion often makes someone “twice a child of hell,” *i.e.*, even worse than before their conversion. Why do you think outward religious observance so loosely correlates with genuine inner goodness?
5. Preoccupation with outward religious observance is deadly because it often distracts from what matters most, *i.e.*, developing a direct, unfiltered, personal interactive relationship with God. That’s why, in verse 10 of our passage, Paul reminds us that we find spiritual “fullness” in Jesus and his emphasis on our ability to have direct access to God.
- a. Matthew 27:51 says, “At the moment [Jesus died] the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” How would you explain to someone the meaning and significance of that?
 - b. Speaking to ordinary believers, 1 Peter 2:9 says, “You are a royal priesthood . . . , God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called you out of darkness into marvelous light.” Do you see yourself as a “priest?” If so, what’s the meaning and significance of that?
 - c. The scriptures teach that, through Jesus, we can have direct access to God. We can enter the presence of God at any time and speak directly to God and hear directly from God. Jeff offered examples in Sunday’s sermon. Tell us about a time when it feels like God heard you and spoke to you in a powerful way.
 - d. On Sunday Jeff suggested a form of interactive, conversational prayer in which we find a private place, picture Jesus sitting in a chair nearby, and simply talk to him as a friend about whatever’s on our heart. Then, after sharing our heart, Jeff suggested we get quiet and listen for what Jesus might want to say back to us and repeat that aloud to ourselves. “If it resonates as authentic to Jesus,” Jeff said, “go with it.” Do you engage in that kind of interactive prayer with God? If so, how does it benefit you? If not, what stands in the way for you?
 - e. The point of Sunday’s sermon was not that religious rituals, practices, and regulations, are inherently bad. Jeff stated that they can play a positive role in our spiritual life if they’re consistent with Jesus and his teachings and they play a supportive role in our spiritual life, rather than becoming a preoccupation. Is there some form of outward religious observance or ritual that plays a positive supportive role in your life? Tell us about it and how it helps you.
 - f. Jeff said, “Religion that’s transformational is always relational.” What do you think he meant? Do you agree? Why is relationship with God so critical to spiritual transformation?

Colossians 2:8-23

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; ¹²when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

16 Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. ¹⁷These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ²¹'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'? ²²All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. ²³These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.