

I. Introduction

- A. I like birds, but I have not had good experiences with them. I've been attacked by a wild goose, my head was dive-bombed by a blackbird while I was riding my bike and I've had my jacket defiled by a pigeon.
- B. Yesterday, (probably the most embarrassing of all) I had a standoff, in my own yard, with a hummingbird. Remember, I'm a city boy, I grew up riding public transportation in Chicago. I could handle surly bus drivers and aggressive street people. I can handle people.
- C. But nature? Forget about it. What should you do when an angry hummingbird blocks your way because he thinks you're going to steal his nectar? I was innocently walking down my own sidewalk, beside my house, when a hummingbird, who was working the bushes, zoomed up and got right in my face.
- D. I froze. He hovered, with this big, sharpened beak ready to peck my eyeballs out with lightning-quick speed. I've been getting a lot of shots because I'm going to Africa in a few weeks. I can tell you that a hummingbird beak is longer and a lot thicker than any needle that has been stuck in me so far.
- E. So, I did what any self-respecting city boy would do. I slowly backed away from the irate hummingbird. He just hovered there saying, "That's right, city boy. Back off."
- F. The funny thing is that I could crush that little thing, if I could catch him. I'm stronger than the hummingbird. I could probably handle whatever pecks he could deliver before I swatted him. I'm tougher and I'm sure I'm meaner. Really, he's probably the littlest enemy I've ever faced—besides viruses and bacteria. But, in the great hummingbird standoff of 2008, it was Bird-1 and Bill-0.
- G. How is that? He intimidated me. Or I should say, he hovered and I intimidated myself.
- H. That is exactly the case in so many of our spiritual battles. Most of the time we don't face giants, we face hummingbirds. We face problems, temptations and legalism that we can actually beat, but we cave in and let ourselves be intimidated.

II. Colossians

- A. Last week, we looked at:
 1. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8.
- B. So, how can you not be lion food?
- C. Paul describes two spiritual enemies and he tells us that we don't have to let them defeat us.
- D. Why? Because Jesus has already defeated them. The devil is fierce, but he's already been defeated. Why do you give up so easily? Why do you quit on Jesus? Why do you turn tail and run from a hummingbird?
- E. Let's look at two spiritual enemies that don't have to wreck your spiritual life.

III. Sermon

A. Other People's Ritualism, verses 16-17

1. "*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*" Colossians 2:16-17.
2. I attended a Christian college, Wheaton College, for my freshman year. I was very surprised the first time I drove by the tennis courts on a Sunday and saw all the nets had been unwound so the top tape rested on the ground. I figured it was somebody's practical joke.
3. But, then it happened the next week and the week after that. Somebody explained to me that the school didn't want students to violate the Sabbath by playing tennis on a Sunday.
4. But, here comes Paul to command us not to let anybody judge us in regard to *sabbaths*. What does he mean?
5. Every Christian has to guard against ritualism. What is that? Ritualism reduces life with God to shallow rituals and religious rites and, if you do these rituals, you will gain the favor of God. For example:
 - a) Keep the sabbath
 - b) Offer the right sacrifices
 - c) Be baptized
 - d) Be circumcised
 - e) Go through confirmation
 - f) Take communion
 - g) Undergo extreme unction (last rites)
 - h) Required fasts. When I was a kid, some Christians wouldn't eat meat on Friday. Actually, they couldn't eat meat on Fridays (which is why there are a whole lot of Friday fish-fry's at restaurants). I didn't grow up in that tradition, so I asked my friends why they couldn't eat meat on Fridays. Never once could even one of my friends tell me why. They did the ritual, but for them it was devoid of meaning.
 - i) I would included repeating set prayers as ritualism, too. Jesus said, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words." Matthew 6:7.
6. What's going on? Simple. God doesn't like ritualism. He doesn't like ritual for ritual's sake. Even when He commanded the ritual, God can't stand it when people do the ritual on the outside without embracing its meaning on the inside.
7. Why not? Because ritualism redefines God. It dumbs Him down. It turns God into a cosmic vending

machine and, if you insert the right coins and press the right buttons, out comes the right treat, the desired answer to prayer or the counterfeit ticket to heaven. God hates that. He's not looking at your rituals; He's looking at your heart.

8. Even Moses, who wrote the laws that created the rituals for the Jews, also wrote:
 - a) "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer." Deuteronomy 10:16.
9. We just celebrated the Lord's Supper today. It is a ritual. It is a totally meaningless ritual unless you embrace its inner purpose: to remember the sacrifice Jesus made to pay for your sins.
10. Some time ago, I talked to a woman after a Wednesday night Bible class I used to teach. She had attended church all her life. I asked her if she had any confidence she would go to heaven.
11. She said she didn't. I asked why God might let her into heaven at all. She said, "Because I was baptized."
12. Then I asked her what baptism meant and she didn't have a clue.
13. That is a classic case of ritualism. A ritual is always an outward symbol of an underlying reality and if the underlying reality isn't there, you can pile up all the symbols you want and it won't make a bit of difference.
14. That's why verse 17 calls them "shadows" and says that Christ is the "substance" that causes the shadow.
 - a) The bread is a symbol, but the body of Christ nailed to the Cross is the substance.
 - b) The wine is a symbol, but the blood of Christ paying for our sins is the substance.
 - c) Our act of eating together is a symbol, but that day you first trusted Christ, that moment of salvation, is the substance.
15. When you partake of the shadow and ignore the substance, you are guilty of ritualism and God hates it. God doesn't really care about *food or drink or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths*.
16. So you have to guard against ritualism.
17. But that's not precisely the danger Paul warns against. He doesn't say beware of ritualism. What he actually says is beware of Other People's Ritualism. Don't let other people cram their love of ritual down your throat. Do not let anybody judge you because you don't partake of their particular religious rituals.
18. I grew up in a church that said that it was a sin to drink, dance, play cards (except Uno) or go to the movies. I swallowed that message for a long time. I didn't want my church family to think I was a second rate Christian. I didn't want to face their disapproval. So, I didn't do any of those things until a little movie called *Star Wars* came out. I snuck out to see it and loved it, but felt guilty every minute.
19. I let other people's legalism dominate my life. They were a hummingbird hovering in my path, but I treated them like they were a roaring lion. I should have swatted them and kept moving. Instead, I slinked back to my narrow, rigid spiritual cage called legalism. As long as a lion was on the loose, I wasn't going anywhere.
20. Until I learned that the devil uses legalism as a scare tactic. I stopped letting him use it on me.
21. Do not let other people judge you, writes Paul, because you don't buy into their ritualized, superficial, externally-based view of following Jesus.
22. You serve Jesus Christ, not your church friends and not me. You live to please God, not us. That doesn't mean you get to do whatever you want, because the Bible has plenty of guidelines to warn you away from the spiritual toxins of society.
23. It doesn't mean you should never seek out wise counsel or godly advice. Of course you should.
24. *But, armed with your Bible and your conscience, you have all you need to chart your course through life.* Within these two guidelines, you are *totally free*. You don't live for my approval or any other Christian's approval. You live for God's approval. Be free, Christian. Stay free.
25. Don't let any Christian or church tie you up in their rules, regulations and rituals. Christ has set you free. Be free. Especially from other people's ritualism.

B. Revived Paganism, verses 18-19

1. *"Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God."* Colossians 2:18-19.
2. The first command said do not let anybody judge you.
3. This second command says, do not let anybody cheat you of your reward. The Greek word here means to have an umpire rip you off with a bad call. Then he gives five qualities of that kind of umpire:
 - a) taking delight in false humility;
 - b) practicing the worship of angels;
 - c) intruding into those things which he has not seen;
 - d) vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind;
 - e) not holding fast to the Head.
4. This is the second kind of danger that faces Christians today. A religious world view that we can call Revived Paganism.
5. In Europe and America, Christianity is growing zero percent a year, or shrinking in some places. In

- Europe and America, Paganism is growing 29% per year. The old druids are back and it isn't pretty for Christians.
6. The lion from hell is roaring loudly, but if you look closely, you'll see he's wearing dentures.
 7. Prudence Jones, who is the former president of the Pagan Federation, defines paganism this way:
 8. "A religion that is a nature-venerating theophany personified in the great goddess and the god." In her opinion, paganism is bringing western civilization back to its pre-Christian roots. (Dr. Michael Cooper, Trinity Magazine, Spring, 2008, "The Resurgence of Paganism in the West" by Dr Michael Cooper, page 25).
 9. Peter Jones, a professor at Westminster Seminary, writes:
 - a) "Christians should not fail to see that enormous changes in philosophy, sexuality and spirituality are taking place at the very moment when the mediums are proclaiming the triumphal arrival of a New Age, and at the very moment when Christianity, in its own (we all thought) "native" land, is being marginalized and pushed out to the fringes of American culture—where scapegoats tend to end up. This is no longer the fifties. This is a spirit war and the enemy is in the air we breath, the water we drink and most of the movies and television we watch."
 - b) (*Spirit Wars in the Third Millennium* at <http://www.cwipp.org/articles.asp?section=Peter&id=96099>)
 10. Let's go back to those five qualities of a bad spiritual umpire:
 11. *Taking delight in false humility.*
 - a) These are false teachers who come across in a spirit of false humility. They are gentle, loving, soft spoken, grandfatherly or grandmotherly, and self-deprecating. They are dangerously false and the Bible tells us to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.
 - b) In our generation, here's the key quality: They do not come straight out and state their opinions as truths. Instead, they make suggestions and have a great appearance of modesty.
 - c) The truth is, they undermine the faith, especially for young people.
 12. *Practicing the worship of angels.*
 - a) This is revived paganism. What does the Bible say about the religions of the world?
 - (1) "*But Israel soon became fat and unruly; the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed! Then they abandoned the God who had made them; they made light of the Rock of their salvation. They stirred up his jealousy by worshiping foreign gods; they provoked his fury with detestable acts. They offered sacrifices to demons, non-gods, to gods they had not known before, to gods only recently arrived, to gods their ancestors had never feared. You neglected the Rock who had fathered you; you forgot the God who had given you birth.*" Deuteronomy 32:15-18.
 - (2) "*No, not at all. What I am saying is that these sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. And I don't want any of you to be partners with demons.*" 1 Corinthians 10:20.
 - b) Look, any teacher who proclaims any truth other than historic, biblical Christianity is getting his or her marching orders from demons.
 - c) From fallen angels. It is not a harmless pastime to flirt with other religions. It is a journey to the real dark side of the cosmos.
 - d) The problem is that people either don't admit it or don't realize it.
 - e) The core problem in Colosse was a teaching that would soon become Gnosticism. It taught that the Supreme God spun off millions of spirit beings called emanations, rank after rank, a whole hierarchy. It taught that we don't deal with God, we deal with His angels. That's what Gnosticism taught.
 - f) Either on purpose or by accident, that's what many revived pagans are teaching, too.
 13. *Taking his stand on visions he has seen (NASB).*
 - a) This is a complicated phrase and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) nails the translation.
 - b) You will either take your stand on the written word of God or you will take your stand on something else.
 - c) That's it. Not complicated.
 - d) Once you set the Bible on the sideline, anything goes. It happens inside the church and it happens outside the church.
 - e) How many times have I spoken with Christians who had a vision or a hunch or some kind of message from God that is NOT from Scripture? Forget that stuff. Look at this book (the Bible) **HASN'T GOD TOLD YOU ENOUGH IN HERE?** Before you go out chasing extra words from God, how about chasing down a few words from God's book, the Bible?
 - f) Christianity does not rest on people's visions, psychic experiences, fortune tellers, spirit beings, tarot cards, the World of Warcraft or on the position of the planets and stars—they are hydrogen gas balls, not gods.
 - g) Christianity rests on an unchanging Bible.
 - h) Once you get into the realm of visions and dreams, you have no way to verify what anybody says. I say, the devil works easily through other people's visions.

(1) *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”* 1 Timothy 4:1.

- i) Can God speak to your heart? Yes, He can. But when He does He will always and only REPEAT WHAT HE HAS ALREADY SAID IN THE BIBLE. He'll remind you or reinforce it, but He'll never contradict it.

14. *Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.*

- a) That is, a flesh-dominated mind, a mind dominated by the Inner Mess.
 b) Do the math:
 (1) False humility and piety, plus
 (2) teaching that comes from spirit beings, plus
 (3) teaching that comes from subjective visions and experience EQUALS
 (4) an arrogant teaching that resists God, and is totally dominated by the flesh.
 c) Puffed up, like a puffer fish, they seem bigger than they really are.
 d) You think they're a giant. They're a hummingbird and you don't need to be afraid. You need to swat the enemies of the faith of Jesus Christ.
 e) Lastly, we have the test of all things, the measure of all truth and faith:

15. *Not holding fast the Head [Christ].*

- a) What we think about Jesus affects everything about us.
 b) Is Jesus God? Then we have a boss, a king, a ruler and an owner.
 c) Is Jesus Human? Then we have a brother, a friend, an example and a family.
 d) Is Jesus Unique? The only person ever to be fully God AND fully human? Then we have a faith unlike any other faith.
 e) Is Jesus our Savior? Then we have hope no other religion can offer.
 f) Did Jesus die for our sins? Then there is salvation in no other name.
 g) Did Jesus rise from the dead? Then, because He lives, we too shall live.
 h) Is Jesus in heaven, preparing a place for us? Then we should set our affections on things above.
 i) Is Jesus coming again? Then we should prepare so that we can be confident at His coming.
 j) Is Jesus living inside us? Then we should let Him live through us.
 16. Any religion that redefines Jesus or knocks Him out of His central role is revived paganism. It is the doctrines of demons.
 17. The devil isn't interested in getting you to renounce Jesus. He just wants you to demote Jesus, just a little. Instead of the core and center of your life, just make Him a part of your life. Instead of making Jesus the sun and orbiting your life around Him, make yourself the sun. Make yourself, your horoscope, your religions, your druidism or your rituals, the sun and make Jesus one of the many planets that orbits you.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Do you want to know how not to be lion food?
 B. Then stake your life on the Bible. Hold fast to the Head—Jesus Christ—and that means to stake your whole life on His word, the Bible.
 1. Jesus reminded the devil, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4.
 C. Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to shove aside any other source of spiritual truth and stand your whole life on the Bible?
 1. Your financial life,
 2. Your sexual life,
 3. Your marital life,
 4. Your single life,
 5. Your emotional life,
 6. Your career, and parenting, and entertainment and how you speak.
 D. It's not rocket science. It's what your grandmother and great grandmother knew, if they were Christians. Stake your life on the Bible. Stick your neck out and act as if it's true. Trust Christ in you to live through you. Day by day, learn more and more about Jesus and He will glue together your shattered insides. He will grow and mature you with a supernatural growth that comes only from God.
 E. The devil hates the taste of humans who've been feeding on the Word; he hates the smell of a Christ centered life. This is how to not be lion food.