

## Paul's Letter to the Colossians

### 7. Substance not Shadows (2:8-19)

In the second part of chapter 2, the Apostle Paul begins to tackle some of the specific ideas taught by those who were troubling the Colossians. These false teachers proclaimed a religion of ritualism, harsh treatment of the body, and the worship of angels. The unsuspecting were easily led astray by their smooth words. Paul wanted the believers in Christ to stand their ground, and remain committed to the truth they had received by more trustworthy men. Point by point, he deals with each error and directs the focus of the believer back to Christ and the message of His grace.

#### I. A Serious Warning: (verse 8-10)

1. Paul warns believers not to let anyone "...take you c\_\_\_\_\_ through philosophy and empty deception..." The picture this word creates is of a conquering army taking prisoners of war and leading them away as part of the spoils. Paul describes the false teachers as those seeking to steal men and women away from the truth of God, and misleading unsuspecting people, and putting them into a spiritual prison of darkness.

- Charles Baker points out that *"Paul is not making a wholesale condemnation of philosophy, for the word means love of wisdom, and surely Paul says a great deal about gaining wisdom in this epistle. It was the false teacher's philosophy he was condemning. This philosophy was based on speculation...not upon the written revealed Word of God."* (Understanding the Body of Christ, p.112)
- Their philosophy was based not on truth, but "...the t\_\_\_\_\_ of men..." and the "...basic principles of this w\_\_\_\_\_..."
- However, the Christian's wisdom must be founded upon C\_\_\_\_\_.

#### II. "Do, Do, Do?" or "Done, Done, Done?": (verses 16-17)

2. L\_\_\_\_\_ (or Pharisaism) was one of the specific errors circulating among the false teachers in Colossae. They were into rituals and observances. "If you want to be a good Christian, here is a list of do's and don'ts you had better follow." "If you want to be in good standing with God, these are the ceremonies that are required." They took major sections of the Law of Moses and insisted these commands were still binding for believers today.

- This form of teaching is usually more concerned with outer a\_\_\_\_\_ rather than the inner condition of one's heart. (Matthew 23:25-28)
- Followers of this teaching often j\_\_\_\_\_ the spiritual condition of others based on whether or not they measured up to the rules and regulations imposed on them by the group.
- Can you imagine being a fairly new believer? You were taught that you are saved by grace through faith. But now you are being told by a different teacher that being a Christian is not as simple as walking with Christ by faith. You are handed an extensive set of commands you are told you must follow. How might you feel? How do you think these Colossians felt?

3. One example Paul cites in verse 16 of the rigid requirements placed on followers of this teaching concerned the types of f\_\_\_\_\_ they were not allowed to eat. In the OT, the Law

specified clean and unclean animals the Jewish people were allowed to serve. Apparently, these false teachers insisted these restrictions were still in effect today (or else they had assembled their own list of dietary restrictions). How have things changed for God's people in the Dispensation of Grace?

- Acts 10:9-15 (*note: the meaning of this vision involves more than the lunch menu*)
- 1 Timothy 4:4-5
- Romans 14:1-4

4. Can you think of modern day situations where legalistic Christians might be tempted to judge those around them when it comes to what we eat or drink? What is infinitely more important than what you order for lunch?

5. Christians today have much greater freedom in the items we're able to place on our grocery list. However, in what situations might it be better for us not to make full use this liberty? (1 Cor. 8:8-13)

6. A second example second example of the legalistic tendencies of the false teachers in Colossae pertained to their rigid observance of special holy d\_\_\_\_\_ (i.e. a festival, new moon, or Sabbath). They specified exactly what a person was allowed to do, and not allowed to do, on these days. Again, this was a carryover from the Old Testament Law. Read Exodus 31:12-17.

- The Sabbath was to be a perpetual s\_\_\_\_\_ between the Jewish people and God of the covenant He made with them.
- The first six days of the week they were to conduct work, but S\_\_\_\_\_ was to be a day of total rest. (Exodus 16:23 prohibited cooking and Exodus 35:3 forbid starting a fire)
- Those who did not observe the Sabbath were to be put to d\_\_\_\_\_.

7. How important was the Sabbath to Israel's faith in the OT? Was this day optional for them?

8. There are certainly principles believers should take away from Old Testament passages about the Sabbath (like the importance of having a day of rest to refocus on spiritual things because life is meant to be more than work). However, what does Paul tell us in Colossians 2:16 about trying to observe the Sabbath in the dispensation of grace (or any other of Israel's feast days for that matter)?

9. Many churches have redefined the Sabbath as S\_\_\_\_\_ worship, and insist that it is wrong for believers to do any work on this day ("We'd better not catch you mowing your yard, painting the barn, or pulling weeds!") What does Paul say about this kind of legalism for believers living in the dispensation of grace?

10. Christians worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, because it is the day of the resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). But is there any verse you know of that equates Sunday with the Sabbath?

11. Different churches observe many holy days and observances nowhere to be found in Scripture (there is an entire church calendar). Can you think of examples? We understand that observing these days does not make anyone more spiritual than another. However, before we condemn these Christians for observing special days, what instruction does Paul give us in Romans 14:5-6, 10?

### III. Possessing the True Substance, Not Clinging to Shadows: (verse 17-19)

12. The Law of Moses, and all the commands and rituals it contains, pointed to Christ:

- The sacrifices foreshadowed His role as the “L\_\_\_\_\_ of God”
- The Day of Atonement looked forward to the c\_\_\_\_\_ and His substitutionary death.
- The Sabbath anticipates a future day of r\_\_\_\_\_. God’s people will enter one day when our work on this earth is over (see Hebrews 4:9)
- Water baptism pictures our c\_\_\_\_\_ from sin through Christ’s blood.

13. Would you rather have the shadows that pointed to Christ, or the reality (the substance) of Christ in your life? What did the false teachers fail to realize when they insisted on holding on to these practices of the Law which have already been fulfilled in Christ?

- Charles Baker writes,

*All of these observances were merely shadows cast by Christ before he arrived on the scene. A shadow has no reality or substance; yet millions of people are still trying to grasp the shadows, instead of seeing that the reality is in Christ. Their action is akin to that of a man who marries a beautiful and gracious woman, but never looks at her, never speaks to her, never embraces her, but instead sits before a dim picture of her, talking to it and kissing it. Don't let such a fellow as this criticize you for holding to your wife and enjoying her fellowship and love. That is what Paul is saying. (Understanding the Body of Christ, p.115)*

14 The problem with placing ourselves under the Law is that it turns our faith into dead r\_\_\_\_\_ rather than a dynamic r\_\_\_\_\_ with God. It makes the Christian life a matter of following a set of do’s and don’ts. Men and women exhaust themselves trying to live a certain way. Only Christ’s life within us equips the believer to live for God. What warning does Paul give in Galatians 5:1? Does this mean we have no law at all, and are free to live however we please? (Galatians 5:13-15)?

#### Bibliography:

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Gaebeli, Frank E. Expositor’s Bible Commentary - Colossians Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI 1989-1997