

Only Christ is Necessary

Colossians 2:16-23 NKJ ¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

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Let no one judge you. This is an imperative. It is far stronger in the Greek than it is in the English. We hear this and we probably think, "If someone tells me I have to do this I don't have to listen. They can't tell me what to do." But what Paul is actually saying is more like, "don't even let them say it. Get up and tell them and everyone listening they are wrong. Do not allow people who speak like this to talk. Oppose their false religion by teaching the truth."

This is our salvation that is at stake here. This is the path to heaven. If there are those who tell you in order to get to heaven you have to do this or that, fight them. Stand up for the one and only true way of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

How sinful we are that we are so slow to fight for the truth but so quick to fight for our opinion. If the topic is the color of the carpet or the type of music or the windows, we will fight to the death. But when somebody denies the power of baptism or says that you have to accept Christ to be saved, then our attitude is often to stay silent. We think, "well at least we are both Christian we don't have to make a big deal about it."

"No!" says Paul, "Do not allow this talk." None of these things are necessary for salvation. Now let's be clear here. Paul has no problem with festivals, fasting, abstaining from alcohol, as long as you are not professing this as your means of salvation.

These things are a shadow he says.

A shadow is still useful. Peter Pan was on the TV the other day. You remember how sad he was when he lost his shadow. Shadows are useful. Shadows are a vague image of the thing or person they are attached to.

So Paul says these things, fasting, festivals, sabbaths, the OT sacrifices they have some value. Especially before Christ, they gave a very vague outline of who Christ was. But now that Christ is here the shadow serves almost no purpose. Whatever you can learn about Christ from the shadow you can learn it even better from Christ himself.

The book of Leviticus I'm guessing is probably one of the least read books of the bible. One time in college someone asked me if I read the whole bible.

I said, "Well I don't know that I have ever read the book of Leviticus all the way through. Everything else definitely that one I'm not sure about."

Now I did then go and read it through. The book of Leviticus is useful, it is the word of God. The laws and sacrifices vaguely teach us about Christ. But they are useful only if you keep them attached to Christ.

Paul also talks about the "mystery" which has now been revealed. In a well written mystery novel you don't know the result until it is revealed at the end. So for the Old Testament believers the way of salvation was hidden in clues and rules. Once the end has been revealed you can go back and all the events and clues take on new significance. So also we who know Christ and his death and resurrection are able to see significance in the Old Testament regulations knowing that they point to Christ. But again they are useful only if you keep the focus on Christ.

The false teachers at Colossae had ripped that shadow away from Jesus. These laws and ceremonies were now an end unto themselves without Christ. And therefore they were completely useless. And even worse than that they were destroying faith because they taught people to believe in their own work righteousness.

For this reason we can keep the third commandment, even though we completely ignore the surface meaning. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. We don't keep the Sabbath. Is there anyone here who has ever worshipped on a Saturday? Ok I have sometimes, especially overseas, but not usually.

But that "Saturday" is only the shadow, only a vague outline of Christ. Christ is the Sabbath. Sometimes people think the third commandment means go to church on Sunday. No. Jesus didn't replace one day with another. He replaced a shadow with himself. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

We keep the third commandment whenever we remember Christ. Whether it's in our daily devotions or here at church, or your just walking down the road and singing a hymn and thanking God that there aren't any tigers gnawing on your leg. Whenever we remember Christ, praise and thank Him we are keeping the third commandment.

The substance is of Christ.

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"false humility" Notice the false is in italics. That means it isn't in the Greek, the translator added it to try and make sense of what Paul is saying here. Actually Paul is probably referring to fasting. This word for humility is in some cases used to mean the humiliation of the body. You see that in verse 23 humility and the neglect of the body. The idea of fasting fits much better in the context.

worship of angels. Here we have this idea that we need help and so we are going to reach out and convince the angels to help us. Either through prayer or by bribing them. But the scriptures nowhere teach that the angels can help us with our sin and salvation. Scripture promises that they will guard us from danger. But not that they will help us grow spiritual. Certainly not that they will help us achieve salvation.

"introducing into those things which he has not seen" or "which are not seen." It's hard to know exactly what Paul is referring to here. Probably one of two possibilities. One, some sort of visions. Or two some sort of mysterious hidden knowledge that is only revealed to you when you are initiated into the false religion. In either case it is a secret hidden thing only revealed to certain people which will supposedly help you on your path of salvation.

The point is that these false teachers are holding out these as options for spiritual growth. You can fast and whip yourself to teach yourself not to sin. You can ask angels for help. You can rely on visions or secret knowledge. All you've got then is a fleshly solution to a fleshly problem.

vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. With this phrase Paul is making fun of the false teachers. They thought that the body was the problem. But Paul points out, you are trying to use the ideas of your sinful mind to solve the problems of your sinful body. If the flesh is the problem how are the plans of your mind going to help. You can't pull yourself up by your own boot straps.

instead we need Christ. Instead of trying to pull yourself up hold on to Christ he says. Now you are going to grow. Christ will make sure you grow. Spiritual growth and salvation comes only through holding on to Christ who is the head.

This type of idea is all around us. Probably no one will offer circumcision as a way of salvation but many false teachers offer many other plans and strategies. All around people offer all kinds of strategies and self made programs to better yourself and achieve salvation. These can sometimes be useful for earthly gain but they are useless for spiritual growth and salvation.

Don't trade what you have in Christ for these empty and useless ideas of men.

²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Notice what Paul says here, "These things have an appearance of wisdom but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

This type of asceticism that Paul is talking about here looks very good. You give up all your worldly goods and go live in a cave. Or you spend thirty year sitting on top of a pole. People are impressed. Look at that. But it accomplishes nothing, at best you are trading one sin for another.

Buddha left everything to go find enlightenment. He abandoned his family and his responsibilities.

The problem is so much deeper than we like to admit. The problem is the heart and the mind. It is not fasting and rules that is going to fix our sinfulness. The sinful body needs to die.

We have the solution in Christ. Our sinful flesh needs to die. It does in our baptism.

The question here is what gives life to the heart. Because that is the problem. The problem is a dead heart. Traditions of men, asectic life style, does not help to make the heart alive. The only thing that is going to do that is dying with Christ, that is baptism. This is something you already have in Christ.

Therefore Paul says don't let anyone cheat you. Don't give up something so useful for something so useless. Don't be Jack from Jack and the beanstalk. Don't trade a cow for a couple beans. Granted it worked out in the fairy tale but it won't in real life.

When Paul says don't let anyone cheat you, the picture there is of a man fighting wrestling for a prize. But he loses. He does all that work and goes home empty handed. We don't have to go home empty handed the victory is ours, given to us by Christ. If anyone tells you you have to do anything to get it don't listen, oppose them, it is yours in Christ.

Christ is all and only what we need. Don't allow anyone to teach anything else.

Amen