

## Terms to Know

- **Asceticism** – This is a denial of self beyond what Scripture prescribes. In many ways, it is a form of self-denial practiced for the purpose of living a self-disciplined and spiritually focused life. For instance, someone might avoid certain foods or items deemed luxurious and instead choose a simple, meager lifestyle.
  - One example of a famous Christian who practiced asceticism was *Simeon Stylites*. He lived on top of a 10-foot, and later a 50-foot, pillar with only about 11 square feet of platform space. He did this to remove himself from the distractions of daily life, which he believed hindered his spiritual walk.
- **Worship of Angels** – This phrase could refer to one of two things:
  - Most likely, it refers to the actual act of worshiping angels as though they were deities independent of God.
  - Alternatively (though this is the minority opinion), it could refer to the veneration of great preachers or holy men. The reason for this interpretation is that the Greek word for *angel* (ἄγγελος, *angelos*) means “messenger,” and translators must determine whether it refers to a heavenly or human messenger. Either way, Scripture clearly prohibits worshiping any being other than God.

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In verse 16, the passage begins with the word *therefore*, which means we cannot let it stand alone if we want to fully grasp what Paul is saying. The *therefore* connects to what we discussed last week — that Christ paid the price for our sins, erased our debts, and triumphed over all institutions, both governmental and religious. Because He accomplished these things, we no longer need to allow others to pass judgment on us based on how religious we appear.

This, however, is not a free pass to live immorally. Rather, it is Christ reminding us that we do not need to be *performative* in our faith. Our customs, practices, or celebrations do not determine our righteousness or standing before God. Whether someone wears nice clothes to church or chooses not to celebrate Christmas does not affect their righteousness before Him.

For example, when I was overseas, Christmas was viewed very differently among believers than it is here. For them, it was not a time to slow down and be with family (that came later during Chinese New Year). Instead, it was a time for outreach and gospel sharing. It was a coinflips chance that church leaders would even have a Christmas tree or imagery of it in their homes or house churches. Also, the most likely gift you were to receive was an apple. Their way of celebrating Christmas did not give them any more or less access to God than ours here, where we make it a family celebration with gifts.

We are now free from religion dictating the day-to-day regulations of our lives. Paul is calling for a renewal of understanding — that God alone is Lord and King over our daily living, not men who claim to rule on his behalf. Therefore, when it comes to choices about what we eat or drink, we should not be held captive by human teachings. This does not mean we live without boundaries, but that our boundaries should be shaped by the leading of the Holy Spirit, not by guilt or a desire to please others.

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One thing students must understand is that when a person is saved, there is a **real death** and a **real birth** that take place. When someone becomes a believer, the sin within their heart dies — that sin was placed upon Christ, and He died bearing it. We now die to the world and identify with the death of Jesus, but also the life he brings. Just as baptism symbolizes this, we also identify with His resurrection, which gives us new life through the power of God displayed in Christ's resurrection. We are buried with him in death and raised to walk in newness of life, now a new creation that is beholden to the law of the spirit.

This is why in verse 20 Paul asks, *"If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations according to human precepts and teachings?"*

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Many religious errors begin with good intentions. Self-made religion and asceticism often stem from a sincere awareness of our fallen, sinful nature. Where they go wrong is in their **response** to that awareness. They rightly recognize that sin corrupts the body, but wrongly conclude that it is their place to inflict punishment on themselves. Judgment on the body belongs to the Lord alone. God will one day bring judgment — and for believers, renewal — to our bodies according to His will. It is not our role to impose extra burdens or pain upon ourselves because we are unsatisfied with God's sovereign will in how He judges the flesh.

- For **believers**, our souls have been born again and live eternally, eagerly awaiting Christ's return, while our flesh remains subject to death and must still be judged by death (Romans 8:10).
- For **unbelievers**, both body and soul remain dead in sin and will face God's ultimate judgment if they do not accept his free gift (Romans 6:23).