

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND NOT LEGALISM

(Colossians 2:16–23)

WHAT IS TRUE, AND WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS DO?

Did you, or did you not, die with Christ? If the answer is “Yes,” then the power that is to shape your life is not found in following rules or in human traditions that make you appear super spiritual. Rules do not change people or their hearts. That is what Christ’s death was about. Christ is the source of life and the ‘head’ of all rule and authority, so hold fast to Him! Human rituals and regulations have no value without Christ. He is enough!

1.) False Piety: Legalism concerning food and worship (v. 16-17)

- Do not allow anyone to judge you for not conforming to empty human rituals without the true substance, which is Christ.
- Legalism leads to self-righteous judgmentalism and joylessness. The remedy to legalism is the constant realization of Christ’s grace.

2.) False Practices: Humility and unspiritual mysticism (v. 18-19)¹

- Do not allow the ‘super spiritual’ to disqualify you or make you feel like a failure if you are in Christ—He is enough! In Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and in Him, you are filled (2:9, 10).
- Mysticism leads to a proud, elitist spirit that contributes nothing to true worship. The remedy to mysticism is an understanding of how we are filled in Christ. The reason you are not to allow yourself to be disqualified in this way is not because you are such a wonderful success at living the Christian life, but because you are in Christ. The teaching of 2:9–15 lies behind the warnings of 2:16 and 2:18.
- The super-spiritual person loves themselves and does not hold to Christ as the Head of all rule and authority. He/she attracts your attention to him/herself and not to Christ!

3.) False Regulations: Self-made religion, humility, and body control, which have no value in curbing sinful self-indulgence (v. 20-23)

- Do not let anyone enslave you to human regulations! Man-made rules seem to have wisdom but are worthless in making you more acceptable to God. Abstaining from the satisfaction of bodily and social needs like food, drink, sex, sleep, clothes, and wealth comes from worldly human motives. The remedy is an understanding of the Cross (we have died, been buried, and resurrected with Christ)!

APPLICATION:

Spiritual discipline is good but be careful not to reject the beautiful and good things God grants in the pursuit of holiness. There is liberty in the Christian life, but do not try to get to God on your own terms. Extreme humility can feed the flesh by starving it.

¹ John Woodhouse, Colossians, and Philemon: So Walk in Him, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2011), 158.

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