

Colossians ALC Winter 2018-2019

Class Six: January 20, 2019 // *Holding Fast to the Head* // Colossians 2:16-23

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" - which all refer to things destined to perish with use - in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Colossians 2:16-23, NASB

I. Review

- A. **Walk worthy of the Lord** – theme of the book (1:10)
- B. **Christ must have first place in everything** – key to fulfilling the theme (1:18)
- C. **Every person is to become complete in Christ** – result of turning the key (1:28)
- D. **Because in Him all wisdom is contained** – reason to be complete in Him (2:3)
- E. **Starts by realizing by faith we already are complete** – positional truth is central (2:10)

II. Don't let yourself be controlled by rituals or men's judgments (vv. 16-18)

- A. *Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.* (vv. 16-17)

The warning is for the church to not start letting people "sit in improper judgment" of what you eat and drink, or any such thing. This is the natural conclusion of "Christ's sufficiency" ("in Him you are complete," v. 10) and "Christ's superiority" ("all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him," v. 3, and "fullness of deity dwells," v.9). All Christian growth and obedience (which are the point of the book, see 1:9-10, 28) is tied to His grace, His work, and learning to walk according to our new identity "in the same way we received Christ Jesus" (v. 6). It never stands on its own, as if avoiding certain foods or certain drinks and things like that are what make a person obedient or disobedient.

The observations of festivals, new moons and Sabbaths are to be regarded as a "**shadow** of what is to come." "Shadow" (*skia*) refers specifically to the "unreality" and fleeting nature of a thing. For the "substance" (which *belongs to Christ*), we have the word *soma*, which literally means, body. In other words, like a body - the real thing.

J. Vernon McGee says, we are not to observe ordinances that are only rituals "pointing to Christ" since He has now come." He tells the story of a WWII young bride he knew in southern California who carried a purse large enough to contain an 8x10 framed picture of her husband who was off in the war. She would pull it out and show him to people at the smallest provocation. When he returned, she went to meet him in Seattle. As McGee said, "Do you think she brought her big purse and picture? Not on your life! She didn't need it! She just threw her arms around the real thing!"

- B. *Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has [not] seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.* (v. 18)

The other error besides trying to dust off old ritual and demands to which people “must comply” (rules of men), is to point to what some pass off as superior self-discipline, higher knowledge, and more spiritual experience. Putting yourself down, worshiping angels or respecting men’s visions will not help. Here Paul is not just warning against a *possible* deception as he might be doing in v. 16, but warning against an active one. Let no one “**keep** defrauding you.” The idea is, let no one (referring to teachers) rob you of experiencing the victory already gained in Christ. This deception has three heads: Their discipline, their ‘wisdom,’ and their spiritual experience. Rather than holding to Christ (see verse 19), they point to how much they deny themselves, how much they know and can explain, and how they can point to their exceptional “God” experiences. What is important here is to realize that when people are dissuaded from a confidence in Christ and instead made confident in their fleshly efforts, they are robbed from some of the rewards God would have been glad to have shared with them as overcomers. (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15, 2 Cor. 5:10-11, etc.)

III. You are no longer under a law of duty but under Christ (vv. 19-23)

- A. *And not (here the thrust is, “instead of”) holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.* (v. 19)

Rather than submitting to men’s regulations, hold fast to the head – that is, Christ. It is Him, working through the Body and what every part does, that brings growth to you. Your confidence can’t be placed in your adherence to laws. Your confidence must be in Christ. As occurs in Colossians, this language reminds us of Ephesians. There we read in 4:15-16, “*we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every join supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*” This reminds us that God will cause us to grow towards completion if we abide in the head (Christ) and stay connected to the Body (Church).

- B. *If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world* (v. 20a)

Again, a first class conditional: *If you have (and of course you have) died with Christ.* Here Paul begins an exhortation by reminding us that we were dead. He already said this back in 2:12-13 (*you were buried with Him and you were dead in your transgressions*), but it is so important for him, he repeats it here. Specifically, they were dead to the “elementary principles of the world.” He says that if they are going to “walk worthy of the Lord” (1:10), they need to remember that their connection to the elementary principles of the world was severed when they believed. The *elementary principles of the world* can be seen as the *zeitgeist* of the age, or it can possibly be demonic spiritual powers. I think it is the first. *Zeitgeist* is the philosophical conviction of the world in a given era, the “ways of the world” at any given time. Our *zeitgeist* is many things, including globalism, intersexuality, and postmodernism. (*Some of us wonder why, when we defend borders, biblical sexuality and the idea that there really are such things as right and wrong, we experience rejection and persecution in the culture. In reality, that should be expected.*

It is just that the America many of us grew up in had enough biblical thinking mixed in with its culture, that we remember when the battle against the spirit of the age was not as formidable. What we have now is more normal for Christians worldwide, in reality.)

- C. *Why as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees?* (20b)
Paul continues his thought from vv. 16, ff. You have the fullness of deity in bodily form and all wisdom and knowledge. In Him, you've been made complete.

- If you hold fast to Him as head, you will grow just as you were designed.
- You were dead in your trespasses, but He made you alive with Him
- He cancelled all your debts brought on by sin
- He defeated every spiritual enemy.
- Since you are no longer dead but alive as a new creation raised from the dead
- Since you died with respect to the elementary principles of the world,

Why in heaven's name do you go back to man's way of becoming what God wants you to become? Why submit yourself to man's **regulations**?

- D. *Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!* (Which all refer to things destined to perish with use) *in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men.* (vv. 21-22)
Men's judgments, regulations become the focus for most people who try to please God. *Don't do that, eat that or drink that!* As if it's "things out there that make you unholy." "Do not touch" reminds you of Eve adding that clause to her response to the serpent.

- "We are much worse in our sin than what our self-restraint could mitigate."
- "We are so much more forgiven than these teachers seem to remember."
- "We are much more sufficient in Christ than our efforts can ever make us."

The message of men is, *if you want to pass the muster with God and with man, don't touch that, don't eat this, submit to my warnings, respect my wisdom and be like me.* Paul warns the Colossians that godliness ("*walking worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him*") IT DOES NOT come about through great supposed wisdom or heavenly visions or self-discipline or self-restraint. Rather, He says, such things are "destined to perish with the using." Rather, godliness comes from holding fast to the head, which is Christ.

- E. *These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.* (v. 23)

Paul concludes his warnings of what not to do by acknowledging that when you tell people what to do and what not to do, what ceremonies to observe and what regulations of men will satisfy a holy God, it looks like wisdom, and like meaningful sacrifice. But because it is not of God, it is of but rather man, it does not genuinely "suppress" the flesh and bring about true Christlikeness. Regulations like "you must do this" and "you must refrain from that" are a legalistic effort to gain people's submission to God, but it is done in man's power, not God's.

IV. Discussion and Homework

A. Discussion

1. What do you think prompts some people to set up rules and regulations as their source of confidence before God?
2. When have you been part of a family or a church where the pressure of what to do and what not to do became the focus of your life, rather than holding onto Christ?
3. In what ways have you experienced God's grace being so "freeing" that you were more motivated and able rather than less motivated and able to walk away from sinful temptations and walk in righteousness?
4. How does Romans 8:1-6 go along with this section in Colossians?
5. Is there still a place for commands and warnings if we have been saved by grace through faith, and we are to eschew man's traditions and man's pride?

B. Homework

1. Memorize Colossians 2:20.
2. Discuss with any of your family or friends this week any of the discussion questions.
3. Read Colossians 3 three times this coming week.
4. EXTRA: Read also Galatians 3.

HOLDING FAST TO THE HEAD
COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

HOLDING FAST TO THE HEAD

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

- **Christians don't....**
- **Christians shouldn't...**
- **Christians can't...**

REVIEW

- **What are the key points we have learned so far in Colossians?**

REVIEW

- **What are the key points we have learned so far in Colossians?**
 - **Paul's desire is that the Colossians be filled with experiential knowledge of God so they walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.**
 - **Colossians 1:9 -10**
 - **Christ is the authority / ruler of all. He must have first place in everything.**
 - **Colossians 1:16 – 19, 2:9, 2:1**
 - **Every person (believer) is to become complete in Christ.**
 - **Colossians 1:28**

REVIEW

- **What are the key points we have learned so far in Colossians?**
 - **In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**
 - **Colossians 2:3**
 - **By faith we are already complete.**
 - **Colossians 2.10**

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR
MEN'S JUDGMENTS

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

- How is what we have previously learned in Colossians important to our passage today?

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR MEN'S JUDGMENTS

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

- Two commands so far:
 - Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk in** Him, - Colossians 2:6
 - **See to it** that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. - Colossians 2:8

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR MEN'S JUDGMENTS

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

- False teachers were disturbing the church at Colossae
 - I say this so that **no one will delude** you with persuasive argument.
- Colossians 2:4
 - See to it that **no one takes you captive** through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. - Colossians 2:8

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR
MEN'S JUDGMENTS

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

- Who is passing judgment on you today!
- What philosophy is deceiving you today!

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR MEN'S JUDGMENTS

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

- Paul warns the church to not let others set in judgment over them.
- Not allowing others to sit in judgment is the natural conclusion of a proper understanding of:
 - Christ's sufficiency – Colossians 2:10
 - Christ's superiority – Colossians 2:3
 - Christ's fulness of deity – Colossians 2:9

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR
MEN'S JUDGMENTS

COLOSSIANS 2:16-18

- All Christian growth and obedience is tied to His grace, His work, and learning to walk according to our new identity.
- Obedience never stands on its own.

DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONTROLLED BY RITUALS OR MEN'S JUDGMENTS

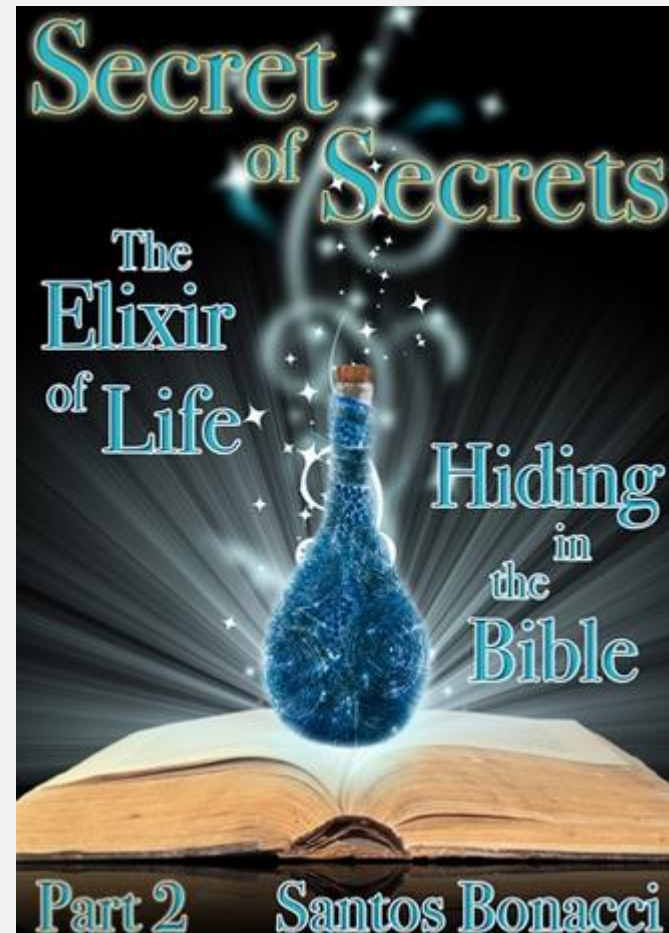
COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

- The observations of festivals, new moons and Sabbaths are to be regarded as a “shadow of what is to come.”
- The shadow is not the real thing, it is only to point our attention to Him who fulfilled the Law. The substance belongs to Christ.
- In light of all that Christ has done for man, it only stands to reason that we have been set free from legalistic Old Testament dietary laws or observing celebrations, etc. - Galatians. 3:1-3; 5:1

LET NO ONE DEFRAUD YOU OF YOUR PRIZE

COLOSSIANS 2:17

- The other error:
 - Do you have the higher knowledge?



LET NO ONE DEFRAUD YOU OF YOUR PRIZE

COLOSSIANS 2:17

- The other error:
 - Paul is warning against an active deception. The idea is, let no one (referring to teachers) rob you of experiencing the victory already gained in Christ.
 - The deception has three heads:
 - Discipline
 - Wisdom
 - Spiritual Experience

LET NO ONE DEFRAUD YOU OF YOUR PRIZE

COLOSSIANS 2:17

- The other error:
 - When people are dissuaded from a confidence in Christ and instead made confident in their fleshly efforts, they are robbed from some of the rewards God would have been glad to have shared with them as overcomers.
 - 1 Corinthians 3:10 – 15, 2 Corinthians 5:10 – 1, Ephesians 6:8

YOU ARE NO LONGER UNDER A LAW OF DUTY BUT UNDER CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- Don't submit to the regulation of men, hold fast to Christ.
 - Working together in the Body brings personal growth.
 - Your confidence must be in Christ.
 - Philippians 3: 1-8 (really the whole chapter)
 - God will cause us to grow towards completion if we abide in the head (Christ) and stay connected to the Body (Church).
 - Ephesians 4:15 - 16

YOU ARE NO LONGER UNDER A LAW OF DUTY BUT UNDER CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- Don't submit to the regulation of men, hold fast to Christ.
- Keep in mind that we are all part of Christ's body/the church, and as the members of our physical body must be connected to the head/brain at all times, so must the members of Christ's body remain connected to "The Head". Had the false teachers been connected to "The Head", they would not have been false teachers. -
Colossians Verse by Verse – FBC Bible Study Guide

YOU ARE NO LONGER UNDER A LAW OF DUTY BUT UNDER CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- If you have died...
 - A first class conditional: If you have (and of course you have) died with Christ.
 - Paul repeats what he said previously in verses 12 – 13. This is so important it is repeated.
 - Specifically, they were dead to the “elementary principles of the world.”
 - Because we have died with Christ, we are no longer under the power of the principles of this world system. We have been crucified to the world and the law. - Galatians 2:19-20, 6:14

YOU ARE NO LONGER UNDER A LAW OF DUTY BUT UNDER CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- The elementary principles of the world can be seen as the zeitgeist of the age, or it can possibly be demonic spiritual powers. I think it is the first. Zeitgeist is the philosophical conviction of the world in a given era, the “ways of the world” at any given time. Our zeitgeist is many things, including globalism, intersexuality, and postmodernism.
 - As earnest believers we are at odds with the philosophical convictions of our age. We should expect conflict, rejection and persecution.

*WHY AS IF YOU WERE LIVING IN THE WORLD, DO YOU SUBMIT YOURSELF
TO DECREES?*

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- Again, If you have died...? Have you forgotten you are complete in Christ?
 - If you hold fast to Him as head, you will grow just as you were designed.
 - You were dead in your trespasses, but He made you alive with Him
 - He cancelled all your debts brought on by sin
 - He defeated every spiritual enemy.
 - Since you are no longer dead but alive as a new creation raised from the dead
 - Since you died with respect to the elementary principles of the world
- Why in heaven's name do you go back to man's way of becoming what God wants you to become? Why submit yourself to man's regulations? Why are you submitting yourself to follow the law? To follow false teachers?

DO NOT HANDLE, DO NOT TASTE, DO NOT TOUCH!

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- Men's judgments, regulations become the focus for most people who try to please God.
 - Don't becomes the key word. The message of men is, if you want to pass the muster with God and with man, don't touch that, don't eat this, submit to my warnings, respect my wisdom and be like me.
 - Legalism has the appearance of wisdom.
- What truly makes us holy? Is it what we do or who we know?
 - **Godliness comes from holding fast to the head, which is Christ!**

...BUT ARE OF NO VALUE AGAINST FLESHLY INDULGENCE.

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- The legalism we impose on ourselves or others lacks any value in restraining sensual indulgence.
- Regulations like “you must do this” and “you must refrain from that” are a legalistic effort to gain people’s submission to God, but it is done in man’s power, not God’s.

...BUT ARE OF NO VALUE AGAINST FLESHLY INDULGENCE.

COLOSSIANS 2:19 - 23

- “For the Gospel of Grace is the end of religion, the final posting of the CLOSED sign on the sweatshop of the human race’s constant struggle to think well of itself; for at best, that is what religion is: Man’s well meant, but dim-witted attempt to gain approval for doing odd jobs that he thinks God will thank him for...Religion, therefore, is a loser...It has a failed past and a bankrupt future...There was no religion in Eden, and there will be none in the New Jerusalem; and in the meantime, Jesus has died and risen to persuade us to knock it off right now. He has made it real clear that as far as God is concerned, we’re all home free already, and there is not a single religious thing that you or I have to do.....We are simply invited to believe it”... -Robert Farrar Capon

DISCUSSION

- A. What do you think prompts some people to set up rules and regulations as their source of confidence before God?
- B. When have you been part of a family or a church where the pressure of what to do and what not to do became the focus of your life, rather than holding onto Christ?
- C. In what ways have you experienced God's grace being so "freeing" that you were more motivated and able rather than less motivated and able to walk away from sinful temptations and walk in righteousness?
- D. How does Romans 8:1-6 go along with this section in Colossians?
- E. Is there still a place for commands and warnings if we have been saved by grace through faith, and we are to eschew man's traditions and man's pride?