

Colossians 2:16-23 “Christ, the Real Thing”  
Leviticus 23  
Psalm 81

August 14, 2022

Paul will say that festivals, new moons, and sabbaths  
were a shadow of the things to come.

What does it mean that these things were shadows?

How do you get a shadow?

The light shines on a body,  
and so the resulting shadow looks like the body.

Leviticus 23 helps us see this.

Verses 4-8 talk about the Passover –

a reminder of their redemption from Egypt –  
and a shadow of how Christ delivers us from slavery to sin.

Verses 9-14 then lay out the feast of Firstfruits—

which was connected with Passover, where they gave the firstfruits to God –  
a shadow of how Christ is the firstfruits of salvation, and we are the harvest.

Verses 15-22 then deal with the Feast of Weeks–Pentecost–

a thanksgiving for the harvest that God has provided;  
the command to leave the corners and gleanings of the harvest  
was to be a reminder to the people  
of how they were once slaves.

Pentecost is the completion of Passover.

And even so, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost  
is the completion of Christ’s death and resurrection;

We are not merely redeemed from bondage to sin,  
We are also receiving an inheritance in Christ.

Verses 23-25 then describe the Feast of Trumpets

Okay. Does this one sound weird?

“A memorial of blowing of trumpets”–what sort of feast is that?

Every month, on the first of the month, there was to be a new moon feast  
(Israel had lunar months--always beginning with the new moon;  
that’s where we get our word month)

But the new moon feast for the beginning of the seventh month was different.

The seventh month was the most important month of the year.

Why?

Keep reading...

Verses 26-32 explain the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month –

a shadow of how Christ will offer the perfect sacrifice

Verses 33-43 continue with the 7<sup>th</sup> month – the Feast of Booths –

a thanksgiving for the full harvest on the 15<sup>th</sup> day and for seven days after,  
concluding with a holy convocation on the 8<sup>th</sup> day –

a shadow of how Christ will provide the completion of our inheritance.

All these were shadows of Christ  
which incidentally means that they were good and holy in their own day,  
but have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

Our Psalm of response – Psalm 81 – speaks of blowing the trumpet at the “new moon”  
and at the full moon as “our feast day” –  
probably a reference to the feasts of the 7<sup>th</sup> month.  
We sing Psalm 81 as those who now see the substance –  
those who see Christ Jesus by faith.

Sing Psalm 81  
Read Colossians 2:6-23

We saw last week that we have been circumcised.  
Our old self has been snipped off by Christ  
through our baptism into his death.  
Just as Christ has died to sin once for all,  
so also we have died to sin with Christ,  
being buried with him in baptism,  
in which we also were raised with him through faith  
in the working of God.

Therefore our baptism shows us two things:  
First, Christ has made us alive with him;  
and second, he has forgiven all our sins.  
He has done this by making a public spectacle of Satan and all the idols –  
the principalities and powers – the basic principles of this world –  
which had control over us.

So who are you in Christ?  
Paul thinks about the human person like this:  
First, the core of who you are is described as the “inner man” the “heart” the “mind” –  
Paul has different words for this –  
but it has to do with who you are.  
Second, Paul talks about the “flesh” –  
the basic drives and desires that are part of daily life.  
And third, Paul talks about the surface of our lives –  
thoughts, words, deeds – how we interact with others.

In Adam – humanity fell into sin –  
and so that basic core of humanity became corrupt.  
My old man was *dead* in Adam – dead in sin.

And so not surprisingly, the flesh – our drives and desires – became corrupt –  
as did our thoughts, our words, and our deeds.

But now – in Christ – we have been made alive.

The old man is dead – “I have been crucified with Christ,

Paul says in Galatians 2:20,

“it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

“When Christ, who is your life” (Paul will say in a few verses here in Col 3:4),

“when Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory.”

If you are in Christ, then in your inner self – you have been made new.

You are no longer who you once were!

You have been joined to the life of Christ – and it is no longer you who live,

but Christ who lives in you!

The problem is that we still live in the flesh.

Flesh doesn't just mean “body” – but it includes all the drives and desires of this life.

And the flesh is weak.

But Christ came in the flesh – in order that he might bring life to our mortal bodies!

Chapter 3 is where Paul will explain all this in more detail.

But I mention it now because it is essential to understand what Paul is doing here.

In Verse 8 Paul had warned against the hollow and deceptive philosophy,  
those things which are opposed to Christ.

Now, having restated the central theme of the book

(who Christ is, and who you are in Christ, vv9-15),

Paul is finally ready to go after the hollow and deceptive philosophy of v8.

We agreed that \*anything\* opposed to Christ

can be called a hollow and deceptive philosophy,

but Paul is going to outline the principles of what the Colossians are facing:

1--emphasizes Jewish rituals (v16)

2--teaches Jewish mysticism (v18)

3--insists upon Jewish restrictions bordering on asceticism (v21-22)

Paul comes back with Christ-centered responses to all three:

First, the OT rituals were a shadow of what we have in Christ (v17)

Christ is the real thing.

Second, the body of Christ connects us to Christ himself; who needs fantastical mysticism? (v19)

When you have Christ – the real thing.

And third, you died to the world with Christ, what good is asceticism? (v20, 23)

When you have Christ – the real thing.

Let's take these three issues one at a time.

## **1--Don't Get Lost in the Shadows**

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.*

Let no one judge you in food or drink,  
or regarding a festival, or a new moon, or sabbaths.

Paul is addressing people who are faced with a Jewish heresy.

There are people who are telling the Colossians  
that they must keep the old food laws.

Paul is telling them:

"NO!! the old requirements of the law have been fulfilled in Christ."

Jesus taught us that it is not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him,  
but it is the things that come out of our mouths that make us unclean.

There are people who are telling the Colossians  
that they *must* keep the various holy days of the OT,  
and again Paul says, "No!

You can keep them if you want to, but they are no longer required by God."

*<sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

These things (v17) are a shadow of things to come, but the reality--the substance--is of Christ.

The word translated "substance" is simply the word "body."

Christ is the *body* that casts the shadows.

Think about the picture here!

How do you get a shadow?

You have a light source that shines on a body –  
and the body casts the shadow.

The OT food laws and feasts were shadows –  
the substance – the body – that cast the shadow – is Christ himself.

So if you have a body that casts a shadow –  
think about where the light comes from!

Christ is in the middle of history – casting shadows back into the OT.

Where does the light come from?

The light comes from the end of history –  
this is the eschatological light!

And this light shines on Jesus – in the middle of history –  
casting shadows back into the OT.

Yet while we have the reality in Christ being *with* and *in* us,

Paul says in 1 Corinthians that we also look in a glass darkly;  
we are still awaiting the final revelation of Christ,  
and so though we have more light,  
we are still pilgrims journeying toward the land of light;  
yet all the while, we travel with that light in Christ.

There is the *already* – but there is also the *not yet*.

While we don't have such complicated feasts,  
Christ has given us one feast--the Lord's Supper.  
We don't have lots and lots of holy days,  
but we do have one holy day--the Lord's Day.

Paul says,  
don't let anyone judge you in food or in drink,  
or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths.

In other words, these matters are not “salvation” matters.

What sorts of things fall into this category?  
alcohol  
cultural holidays (The various trappings of Christmas, etc.)

What about the Sabbath?  
Does this mean that Sabbath-keeping is optional?  
Of course.  
You don't have to keep Saturday holy!

The Colossians were being told that observance of Jewish holy days was necessary.  
Festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths  
pretty well summarizes the OT festal calendar.

The early church usually called Sunday the "Lord's Day"  
NOT the Sabbath – in order to avoid confusion.

The Lord's Day was referred to the “Christian feast day” –  
and when you look at what a “feast day” was in the Roman world –  
a feast day was a day when the courts were closed,  
everyone was supposed to give their servants the day off –  
and everyone was to participate in the religious services of the day.

(In other words, the early church viewed Sunday  
very much like the OT describes the Sabbath!)

Paul is not attacking the Fourth Commandment,  
rather Paul is saying that the Jewish seven-day Sabbath is unnecessary.

Just as Paul has declared that real circumcision,  
the circumcision of Christ,  
takes place in baptism,  
and so renders circumcision unnecessary,  
so also he declares that the old Jewish sabbaths are unnecessary.

You don't have to treat Saturday as a day of rest and worship,  
because that was just a shadow.  
The reality is found in Christ.  
The thing that casts the shadow is  
the One who called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus also taught us that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.  
Ever since the resurrection of Christ,  
the day of rest and worship has been the first day of the week  
--the Lord's Day.  
Other feast days, like the OT festivals, new moons,  
and the observance of the Saturday Sabbath,  
are entirely optional.

You *do* need rest!  
God made you to work for six days  
(and by work, I don't just mean "what you do for pay" –  
but rather, what you do to hold body and soul together!  
Work includes all the things you do around the house –  
in the community – *and* for pay).  
But just as God rested on the seventh day –  
so also you must rest!

One of my favorite articles on this subject I read in an airplane magazine  
from a secular Jew –  
who was reflecting on the craziness of the pace that we moderns keep.  
And he realized that he *needed* one day a week to slow down and unplug!

So *please* do not pass judgment on one another in these areas –  
but *do* pay attention to the *substance* of these things!  
The substance is Christ!

Secondly,  
Paul warns in verses 18-19 about mysticism.

## **2--Time for some Body Building! (v18-19)**

<sup>18</sup> *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,<sup>[d]</sup> puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,*

Angel worship refers to the practice of invoking angels for help and protection –  
a common feature in Jewish mysticism.

The way Paul describes these views suggests that there is a strong Jewish component –  
but also aspects of Persian and Greco-Roman thought.

It's a combination that produced a wide variety of religious groups –  
Manichaeism – various gnostic groups –  
for that matter, Simon Magus (in Acts 8) seems to have similar influences.

But the same impulse exists today.

It could be compared to those who delight in private revelations today.

There are people who claim that they receive direct, personal revelation from God himself.

They set themselves up as teachers and prophets,  
and they may sound very spiritual in their words.

But this is nothing but an individualistic form of religion  
which puts personal, individual experience  
over the corporate life and worship of the church.

Paul says that such a man has lost connection with the Head.

This is a strong statement;  
it means that such a person is not a Christian.

He says that these people have fleshly minds.

This means that their flesh has not been snipped away in the circumcision of Christ.

They are worshipping beings other than God,  
and they are not holding fast to Christ, who is the head of a body!

Christians are members of Christ's body

--which means a local church body

--notice the language of being held together by joints and ligaments.

The body is a connected creature.

Your body is held together by real, physical stuff.

And even so, the body of Christ is held together

by real people in real places like – here in Indiana!

This means that you and I need each other.

We are dependent upon one another for our growth in the body.

(read v19)

*<sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

God causes the body to grow--not just individual believers.

It is not that God causes the individuals to grow,  
and therefore the body grows

--no, what Paul is saying is that God causes the whole body to grow,  
which involves the growth of each part.

You will not grow in Christ apart from your brothers and sisters in Christ

--if you think that you are growing in isolation, then beware!

If you are “growing” all by yourself,  
then you will become useless to the body.

We don't need an arm that is fifteen feet long!

Imagine what would happen if your foot just decided to grow another ten inches!

This just doesn't happen.

Body parts don't grow in isolation from the body

(and when things grow in isolation – we call that cancer...).

But on the other hand,

imagine what would happen if part of your body ceased to function.

If your liver decided to stop working,

or if the hair on the left side of your head suddenly quit growing,  
you'd be pretty bummed!

In other words, individual spiritual growth is not *spiritual* growth at all.

If you think that you are growing in isolation from the body,  
then you are actually spiritually deformed.

The body grows together with the increase that is from God.

The sort of individualism that results in people looking for mystical experiences  
can destroy a church.

I myself used to long for direct revelation from God.

I was a charismatic for a while.

I liked to think that I was a prophet,

and I used to go back into the mountains and wait for revelations from God.

I have since repented of all the time I wasted on seeking private mystical experiences,  
rather than seeking to nourish and knit together the body.

You see,

God reveals his will to those who walk in his ways,  
and seek the good of Christ's body.

God never gave me what I was looking for,



but he gave me something better.  
He gave me a desire to nourish his flock,  
and a joy in growing together with the body.

Let us not get caught up in an individualistic emphasis on our own private experience,  
but let us get caught up in the love and fellowship  
which comes from nourishing one another in the body of Christ.

How can we do this?

Regular worship and fellowship on Sundays, and as you can throughout the week.

But also in your households –

do you pray together as husband and wife?

Do you pray with your children?

Do you pray with your roommates?

Do you pray with your friends?

Daily times of prayer, singing, and reading the Word.

Mothers, with your little ones,

make it a practice of singing and praying with them throughout the day.

Fathers, when you tuck them in at night,

read the scriptures, and pray with them.

Or after dinner, or whatever time is best.

(We would sometimes act out bible stories with our kids!)

Body building is hard work.

But it is our calling in Christ.

Paul's third point gets at the danger of thinking that rules will save you:

### **3--Dead Men Don't Do Legalism (20-23)**

<sup>20</sup> *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—* <sup>21</sup> *“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”*

<sup>22</sup> *(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

If you've died to the basic principles of the world,  
why should you act as though you still belong to it?

The death Christ died he died to sin (Rom. 6:10);

you died with Christ;

therefore you died to sin as well.

Sin has no more power over you than it has over Christ!!

So why on earth would you need the old regulations

--especially the ones made up by men?!!

Following rigorous rules are utterly worthless because they do not touch the heart!  
As long as you simply try to deal with sins from the outside you will fail,  
because the real problem is found in your heart.

Paul is fighting against legalism.

What is legalism?

Someone once said that a legalist is anyone who is stricter than you are!!

No, actually legalism is the belief that following the law  
is going to win favor with God.  
Legalism is the idea that there is something I can do to please God.  
Oftentimes it takes the form of saying  
that once you are saved by grace,  
you now need to respond with obedience  
in order to please God.

Legalism can be the idea that if you have your devotional time everyday,  
God will reward you;  
legalism can be the belief that if you serve others,  
you will be blessed;  
legalism is the notion that if you hold your tongue in check,  
God will be pleased with you.

That's all rot.

God will reward you because you are in Christ,  
and all that is Christ's has become yours.  
God will bless you because you are indwelt by his Spirit  
who has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ.  
God will be pleased with you solely because of the righteousness of Christ  
--not because of anything you or I have done.

Yes, you should worship God daily in prayer and the reading of scripture,  
together with your families and in private  
--but not out of guilt or desire for reward  
--rather out of gratitude and joy for what Christ has done.

Otherwise it is merely the very same "self-imposed religion" which Paul condemns!

Yes you should serve others and seek their interests above your own  
--but not out of a desire to be blessed!

You've already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ;  
you've already died and been raised with him;  
what more could you possibly want!

Serve others from the overflow of thankfulness  
--not out of false humility.

These "regulations" which Paul rejects "do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"  
are often exactly what we think about when we think about the Christian life.  
We think that Christians are people who don't drink,  
don't smoke,  
don't watch "R" rated movies,  
don't gamble,  
don't swear,  
etc.

Now I'm not saying that these things are all equal!  
But Paul is saying,  
"that IS NOT THE POINT"!!!

Those things are external!  
You can avoid every single one of them  
and still be a pagan.

Mormons are well-known for their moral lifestyle,  
and yet they are as far from Christ as Muslims--who also avoid such things!

No, the Christian life, in its essence,  
is not about externals.  
Legalism sets forth a list of do's and don'ts,  
and as long as you pass, you're okay.

Christianity looks at the heart.  
Paul says that legalism has NO VALUE against the indulgence of the flesh.

Where is your heart?  
What matters most to you?

Are you a new creature in Christ?  
If so,  
then your life will reflect it  
--not so much in this "self-imposed" religion,  
but rather in your love toward others,  
your true humility and your gentleness of spirit.

Paul says not to let others judge you in these indifferent matters.  
And so I will not.  
What I will say is that your life must reflect the mindset of Christ.

Your attitude toward others,  
at home,  
at work,  
and in the church,  
must be filled with the fruit of the Spirit,  
love, joy, peace, patience,  
kindness, goodness, gentleness,  
faithfulness, and self-control.

Because where the Spirit has restrained the working of the flesh on the inside,  
the externals take care of themselves.

So Paul objects to three things:

- 1) the idea that God is pleased by eating special foods and observing special days
- 2) the idea that God desires us to have mystical religious experiences all by ourselves
- 3) the idea that we can please God by following man-made rules about worship or piety.

Focusing on the externals of religion is to miss the whole point of what Christ has done.

And Paul puts in its place one thing:

You have died with Christ,  
you have been raised into newness of life in his body.  
Therefore live like it.

In our day there has been a lot of enthusiasm for *authenticity*.

Be yourself.  
Be true to you!  
Be who you are!

The problem is that we are sinners.

Just be yourself – generally winds up hurting a lot of other people!

So let me add two words:

Be yourself *in Christ*.  
Be true to who you are *in Christ*.  
Be who you are *in Christ*.