

The Devastating Influences of False Doctrine

“¹⁶ Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*:¹⁷ Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.¹⁸ Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,¹⁹ And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.²⁰ Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,²¹ (Touch not; taste not; handle not;²² Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?²³ Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh” (Colossians 2:16-23).

Having already established the true believer’s freedom from the prison of dead ritualism and futile attempts at self-righteousness, Paul goes on to caution against being influenced and intimidated into false ethical practices by three unscriptural belief systems.

Ethics are a derivative of our belief system (doctrine). Ethics are moral rules that govern our actions involving a response to certain situations of life. These may include responses to certain temptations to sin or personal responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. When our doctrine is correct, the ethical rules governing our lives will be correct.

Paul is dealing with three areas of FALSE TEACHING that establish false moral ethics and bring restraints that are extra-Biblical, or involve the believer in things that are empty of any spiritual value. These three false teachings are *legalism*, *mysticism*, and *asceticism*. All three of these false teachings involve the professing believer in practices that deny his completeness in Christ. Each of these false teachings integrated pagan beliefs and human philosophies with Biblical truth. Any one of these false teachings is extremely dangerous and deadly to a real faith in Christ.

Colossians 2:14-16 - LEGALISM

Legalism found its beginnings in the mixture of apostate Judaism and Gnosticism. The warning of verse 16 is against being pressured (“judge you”) into the false religious practices that are listed. These things were part of the Old Covenant and were only intended to provide types. These types were fulfilled in the New Covenant in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were only *shadows* (v 17) of that which Christ and His finished work is the reality. The believer’s completeness (Col. 2:10) lies in what Christ has already accomplished.

“¹ O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ² This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain. ⁵ He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ⁶ Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ⁷ Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. ⁸ And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed. ⁹ So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. ¹¹ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is evident*: for, The just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:1-11).

Completeness (“perfect,” v 3) does not come through religious ritual, ceremony or obeying laws. If a person’s participation in religious rituals or ceremonies could make him right with God, what was the purpose of Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection?

“²⁸ He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: ²⁹ Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. ³¹ *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews. 10:28-31).

Trusting in anything other than a finished work of redemption in the blood of Christ is a denial of the finished work of Christ and is an insult against the grace of God. The *theory-ology* of legalism said Christ died for our sins, but the believer stills needs to eat the foods ordained in the Old Covenant, keep certain holy days, be circumcised and offer the necessary sacrifices in order to be right with God. Many early Christians (especially Jewish believers) were deceived into believing this, resulting in misplaced faith. This misplaced faith kept them from true faith and truly being saved (“born again”).

“¹ Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. ² For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:1-4).

The day of the “new moon” referred to in Colossians 2:16 was placed alongside the Sabbath as a day of importance. Special messengers were established to watch for the exact time of its beginning. The original intended purpose was to remind Old Covenant believers to diligently watch for the coming of Messiah to establish His Kingdom on earth. This purpose was completely lost in misunderstanding.

“¹ Thus saith the Lord GOD; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened. ² And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of *that* gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. ³ Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the LORD in the sabbaths and in the new moons” (Ezekiel 46:1-3; compare I Kings 8:14, 22; II Kings 11:14, 23:3).

“Sabbaths” were weekly Sabbath days. These Sabbath days had also come to mean the exact opposite of what God intended them to mean.

“¹² And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ¹³ Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that *ye* may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you. ¹⁴ Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it *is* holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth *any* work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days may work be done; but in the seventh *is* the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶ Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, *for* a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷ It *is* a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:12-17).

To work on a Sabbath day signified in a physical way that an individual had not entered into God's provided rest. This physical rest was a "shadow" of a believer's completeness, which would be provided in the substitutionary work of Messiah. Working on the Sabbath manifested an inadequate faith that brought a death sentence upon that person. The leaders of the Old Covenant had come to teach that keeping the Sabbath was part of the process of salvation (keeping the Law), which was a complete misrepresentation of its purpose.

All of these Old Covenant practices were just types that were fulfilled in the finished work of Christ. They were shadows of that future reality. When you see a shadow there must be a body of substance that casts it. Christ and His finished work at Calvary are the "body" (Col. 2:17). The "body" refers to the believer's completeness in the reality of Christ's finished work of redemption.

The warning against legalism is about being careful not to confuse the shadows with the "body." Do not rely on the shadows (*religious rituals and ceremonies*) for your completeness. The shadows cannot provide completeness. Any religious practice that does not testify to our completeness in Christ, denies that completeness. To accept the "shadow" over the reality is to reject the reality for the "shadow."

If your completeness is not based solely upon the finished work of Christ offered as a free gift of grace and received by simple, but absolute faith, it is not Biblical completeness and your Christianity is not Biblical Christianity.

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. ² Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. ³ For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. ⁴ Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. ⁷ Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? ⁸ This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. ⁹ A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:1-9).

Trust in any religious ritual, ceremony, or any attempt at self-righteousness for completeness before God is evidence that faith is not in Christ for that completeness, but in religious "works of righteousness." Just a "little" (any) of that misplaced faith "leaveneth the whole" of that person's faith. In other words, the whole of that person's faith is equal to no faith at all.

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians
Chapter Eleven
The Devastating Influences of False Doctrine

1. What are ethics (moral rules governing actions and responsibilities) based upon? _____

2. What are the three areas of false teaching that Paul warns about in Colossians 2:14-23?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
3. What is the result of the acceptance of any of these false teachings in regard to Paul's teaching that the believer is "complete" in Christ? _____

4. In Colossians 2:16, what does it mean, "Let no man therefore judge you"? _____

5. What is meant that the things listed in Colossians 2:16 were only "a shadow of things to come"? _____
What causes the existence of a shadow? _____

6. What does the word "body" in Colossians 2:17 refer to theologically (compare verse 10)? _____
What is the basis of the believer's completeness in Christ? _____

7. Read Galatians 3:1-3. According to these verses, what cannot provide completeness? _____

8. If a person's participation in religious rituals or ceremonies could make him right with God, what was the purpose of Christ incarnation, death and resurrection? _____
9. Read Hebrews 10:29. From your understanding of this verse, what will be the end result of accepting the false teaching about any one of the practices listed in Colossians 3:16? _____

10. Read Ezekiel 46:1-4. What was the original intended purpose of watching and observing the days of the "new moon"? _____
11. Read Exodus 31:12-17. What was the original intended purpose of keeping the Sabbath and why was a death sentence upon those who failed to keep one? _____

12. Read Galatians 5:1-9. What does trust in any form of religious ritual or practice say about our completeness in the work of Christ? _____