

“Christ Is All and In All”

Paul’s Exhortations to Hold Fast to Christ #3

“Let no man judge you...”

Intro: Paul’s letter to the Colossians was intended to help them overcome the influence of false teachers working among them. His exhortations in chapter two get to the heart of his concerns as he urges them to hold fast to Christ. Each of these exhortations can give us insight as well into how to avoid the influences of false religion. We’ve considered the first two exhortations:

Walk in Him

Let no one take you captive

Now let’s consider the third exhortation:

Therefore let no one 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. (Colossians 2:16-17)

The error that challenged the Colossians’ faith

Scholars have tried to identify the specific religion troubling the Colossians based on Paul’s exhortations; but it does not seem likely that we will ever know the exact source or identity of the threatening belief system. What we can see is that it appears to be a syncretism of the teachings of various religions, combining features of cultural paganism, Jewish legalism and an altered “Christianity” into a combined philosophy. The approach seems to be, “Let’s take the best of all the religions and put them together”.

Clearly a part of this new system of belief was insistence that the ceremonial Laws of Moses be kept as a means to greater holiness. The false teachers apparently urged the practice of the OT:

Food laws

Let no man act as your judge in regard to food and drink

There were under the Law the regulations of food, distinguishing between “clean” and “unclean” foods. There were also prohibitions for those under Nazarite vows to drink or eat grape products.

Religious holy days

or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day

The Jewish festivals like Passover, First fruits, etc. were celebrated annually. There was at the beginning of each new moon (month) a special convocation. And there was the weekly rest on the Sabbath Day.

Perhaps the false teachers were using these Jewish ordinances as a way of incorporating Jews into their “multicultural” philosophy.

Those who did not practice these things were condemned for their unwillingness to perform them.

One of the ways that false teachers sometimes manipulate God’s people is through the intimidation of condemnation.

Satan knows that no one really likes to be condemned; therefore he uses the psychological pressure of this to persuade people to compromise.

Thus, Paul writes, “*let no one act as your judge...*”

The truth that supported the Colossians’ faith.

The first reason that the Colossians should not allow anyone to condemn them is because of what they already knew about Jesus! Notice again the “*therefore*”.

Paul had just shown the Colossians why they should hold fast to Christ. Because of:

- His nature
- His provision
- His authority
- His salvation
- His victory

But notice in particular that Christ’s salvation related specifically to the issue of their accountability to and condemnation by the Law. *having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:14)*

Paul had shown that the Law itself, as the written revelation of God’s moral requirements, was judging both Jews and Gentiles accusing them of sin. Paul calls it a “certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and hostile to us”. And so because of their sin, the Law, as the written decrees of God, was like an unpaid creditor calling for payment or punishment! Paul had shown that Jesus had by His death on the cross removed the Law as a basis for righteousness and instituted instead a righteousness by faith in His sacrifice.

Therefore Paul says, “Let no man now judge you by what has been removed as a basis for judgment!”

The second reason that the Colossians should not allow anyone to condemn them is because of what the food laws and festivals of the Law really were.

things which are a mere shadow of what is to come;

The food laws and the festivals of the Jewish Law were not ends within themselves but means to an end.

The food laws were intended to keep the Jews separate as a people from the association of the pagan world in order that they might not come under its influence.

The festivals were intended to keep them separate as a people from the religion of the pagan world in order that they might not come under its influence.

They were shadows of a “body” to come.

The imagery of a “shadow” and “body” or “substance” should be clear to us. As a boy I remember

in the Hitchcock movies the appearance of a “shadow” on the wall. Everyone knew that lurking somewhere unseen was a predator or attacker waiting to strike. The “shadow” clearly point to “a body” or “substance” to come. So likewise the Law was a shadow of something even greater, the Savior Himself who would separate His people from the world (not by foods) by real holiness and reveal to them the “true” worship in spirit and in truth, not the earthly festivals of the Law.

Application (How can our knowledge of this exhortation help us?)

Even the legitimate revelations of God must be considered in context and applied accordingly.

The food laws and festivals that God had revealed to the Jews were a part of what was holy, righteous, and good. But they were not intended to be applied to and obeyed by the followers of Christ.

Ironically many faiths still today go to the Law to find practices for the disciples of Jesus.

Seventh day Adventists and other Sabbatarians, in direct contradiction to Paul’s statements in Colossians, bind the Law’s celebration of the Exodus upon disciples reinterpreting it as a memorial of the creation.

Roman Catholicism and various other religious denominations have likewise used the Law’s features to create “Christian symbols” (like holy water, incense burning, candle lighting).

Many religious groups appeal to the Law as precedent for the practice of worship with instrumental music by the church.

The point of Colossians is that even those things commanded by God in the OT may give way to higher and greater principles. It is not God’s will that such practices be bound upon disciples.

Conclusion: Knowing what Paul writes in Colossians makes us wiser in dealing with false religion. We must always be alert to this misuse of God’s law when taken out of its context!

Paul’s solution is clear: Hold fast to Jesus Christ and listen to Him! We must continue to do only that which comes by the authority of Christ and His apostles!