

Colossians Bible Study

2:16-23

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print.**

1. In verse 16, Paul refutes another error of the Colossian Judaizers – their insistence that the keeping of certain OT laws and ceremonies had to be added to faith in Christ if believers were to be saved. Why did God originally give laws and ceremonies to His people?

Exodus 12:25-27

Deuteronomy 4:5-6

Deuteronomy 10:13

Galatians 3:24

2. In verse 17, Paul says that the OT laws and festivals “are a shadow of the things that were to come.” Read Hebrews 10:1. What does Paul mean when he says these laws and ceremonies are a “shadow”?
3. How has Christ’s coming changed these “shadows” and their importance?
4. Greeks were fascinated by the unknown spirit world. Records of the early church in the area of Colosse indicate that worship of angels and spirits was a real problem. Based on Paul words in verse 18, we can gather that some of the false teachers present in Colosse claimed, in “false humility,” that since they were unworthy of going to God directly, they could instead go to Him through His angels. Paul tells the Colossian Christians: Don’t let such false teachers “disqualify you for the prize.” In other words, don’t let anyone make you feel unworthy of eternal life because you believe in the “simple” Gospel. It is only through faith in the true Gospel that one can be saved.

Read verses 18-19. What is the real problem with anyone who does not base his faith and salvation on Christ alone?

5. People today who base their faith on human knowledge, wisdom, and regulations have lost their connection to Christ Jesus, the Head. How might we, as Christians connected to Christ, reach out to such people with the true Gospel message?
6. Verses 20-21 related back to the truth Paul established in verses 12-14. Paul again reminds the Colossians that since they through Baptism, died with Christ to sin and all the physical customs of this world (“basic principles”), they have been set free from any power things of the world could ever have over them. These regulations of the false teachers (v. 21) required people to treat their bodies harshly because of their belief that

all physical matter was evil. What does God think about the physical world? See Genesis 1:31.

7. Because we have been set free from sin and have been bought back for God by Jesus Christ, how does God want us to view ourselves and the food, drink, and all other things He has created for us?
1 Corinthians 6:20

1 Corinthians 10:25-26, 31
8. In verses 22-23, how does Paul further describe the restrictions the false teachers tried to impose on the Colossian Christians?
9. Many religions in the world today impose harsh restrictions on their believers. Think about Paul's words concerning life with Christ as expressed throughout chapter 2. What guidelines does Paul give that can help us test religious teachings to see if they are truly Christ-centered?

The Christian faith will not be replaced by man-made religion. Over the centuries, many have claimed to have found a substitute for Christ and His forgiveness: e.g., rationalism, evolutionism, socialism, and postmodernism. Sometimes these ideas are very impressive, and the lifestyles they conceive become extremely popular. But St Paul wrote, "Let God be true though everyone were a liar" (Rm 3:4). These waves of man-made religion always end up breaking apart upon God's truth in Jesus, who "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). • Thank You, Lord, for granting me faith and preserving my faith with the wisdom and substance of Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Some Answers to the above Questions:

1. God gave many "ceremonial" laws to His people, primarily as "pictures" to point forward to the coming Savior. Some of these laws set the nation of Israel apart, and reflected God's wisdom and understanding to other nations. God gave these laws also as a means to keep His people separate from the pagan behavior around them. The moral Law – the Ten Commandments – remain in force also today. They are not the same as the "ceremonial" and "political" laws which not binding today.

2. All the features of the OT laws and ceremonies were to remind God's people of His promise to send a Savior and to make them more eager for the Savior's coming.

Paul taught that OT events, practices, and messages have their full meaning and realization in Christ (Rm 15:4; 1Co 10:1–11). An engaged couple who must spend time apart might cherish each other's photo. But after they are married and living together, it would be odd to devote the same attention to the photo. "Scripture

itself has abolished the Sabbath Day. It teaches that since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted” (AC XXVIII 59). (TLSB)

3. When Paul wrote his Epistle, Jesus, the “reality,” had arrived. Every OT law and ceremony (shadow) had been fulfilled in Him. It was foolish for the false teachers to insist on keeping these “shadows,” for in doing so, they were ignoring Jesus and His complete fulfillment of the shadows as our perfect Savior. Such insistence also threatened the true faith in Christ that the Colossians had received because it denied the all-sufficiency of Christ and promoted a religion not based on God’s grace and faith but based on human tradition and regulations.

4. A person who does not base his faith and salvation on Christ alone is unspiritual and is inflated with a false sense of his own importance. Such people have lost their connection with Christ, the “Head.” Because they are disconnected from Christ, they will no longer grow in Him, but will wither and perish.

Humility in which one delights is of necessity mock humility. Paul may refer to a professed humility in view of the absolute God, who was believed to be so far above man that he could only be worshiped in the form of angels he had created. Second-century Gnosticism conceived of a list of spirit beings who had emanated from God and through whom God may be approached. (CSB)

5. We need to kindly yet firmly tell such misguided people the truth of the Gospel over and over again. When Paul refuted the heretical teachings that threatened the Colossian church, he did not repeat the false teachings. Instead, he presented in a clear manner who Jesus Christ truly is and what He has done as our Savior. We can follow Paul’s example in our own witnessing by using God’s Word to present to others who Jesus is as well as tell of His love for all people. The Holy Spirit promises to help us whenever we share the Gospel. His power will work in the hearts of those who rely on human knowledge to help them understand and trust in God’s knowledge and wisdom. This will connect them to Christ.

6. Everything that God created was “very good.” God’s creation was perfect. The sins of the human race is what ruined the perfection of God’s creation.

7. Everything in the world belongs to God. He has given us all things in this world to enjoy – to His honor and to His glory.

8. Paul says the restrictions of the false teachers are “destined to perish” (v. 22). While they have the “appearance” of wisdom, they are truly worthless because they cannot control sinful desires. Such restrictions were invented by men and are not from God.

Those who seek salvation through their own efforts gravitate toward external exercises that are easily seen and measurable. (TLSB)

9. Some guidelines that can be gleaned from chapter 2: Are the teachings based on human knowledge or are they based on Christ (v. 8)? Do the teachings look to Christ as true God, the Head of every power and authority (vv. 9-10)? Do the teachings emphasize the power of Christ's death and resurrection as the true way we are forgiven and saved (vv. 12-14)? Do the teachings rely on external observances, regulations, and customs, or do they rely on Christ as the all-sufficient Savior (vv. 16-17)? Do the teachings require worship of angels or other spiritual beings instead of Christ (vv. 18-19)? Do the teachings have many restrictions concerning the use of the physical gifts God provides, or do they promote enjoyment of God's creation to His glory (vv. 20-23)?