

Sermon or Lesson: Colossians 2:16-17 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Mere Outer Religious Practice Replaced By Inner Religious Devotion

READ: Colossians 2:16-17, with vv.13-14 for context

BACKGROUND:

- - There are people in our churches who use "fine-sounding arguments" to effectively persuade undiscerning believers into believing and adopting false doctrines, that are deceptive, contrary to Scriptures, and destructive to their spiritual well-being. (v.4)
 - - To help believers thwart the adopting of false doctrines, God has provided us with the written Scriptures, which contain teaching, warnings, and the true doctrines that we are to hold. (vv.7,8)
 - - Philosophies about the things of God that are based on humanistic sources are not acceptable to God, particularly because they are not properly based on "Christ" - the key to understanding God because Christ is God Himself revealed in physical bodily form. (vv.8,9)
 - - The fullness and the authority supremacy of the divine Christ are internally present within true believers, thereby available to help us successfully resist falling into false doctrines and deceptive philosophies. (vv.9-10)
 - - In and by Christ, God applies a working of His power to spiritually circumcise our deadness to sins and to raise us true believers to a regenerated newness of life, which additionally serve to assist us in resisting falling into false doctrines and deceptive philosophies about the things of God. (vv.11-12)
 - - Upon becoming a true believer in Christ, God removes our state of being spiritually dead, being under the Old Testament Law, being eternally accountable for our sins, and being defenseless to enemies who oppose God. (vv.13-15)
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v.16 - READ

[Lesson Question: Discuss, analyze, and formulate a generalized composite description for these items that are listed in this verse 16, and then utilize that description with other relating key phrases in Colossians to construct the doctrinal purpose that God is working to achieve in and through this verse 16.]

SECTION POINT: True believers are to steadfastly focus on improving their internal relational uprightness with God, and no longer focus on merely conforming to outer religious practices.

- - In consideration of the beneficial aspects of being made spiritually alive that Christ accomplished for us on the cross (as previously listed in verses 10-15), "therefore" we believers are not to return to that which we were liberated from.
- - Specifically, we believers are not to return to the compulsion to keep the "written code, with its regulations" - the Law "that was against us and that stood opposed to us". (v.14)

- - Christ "took away" the Law and its regulations, so that we believers are liberated to come alive spiritually, unhindered by the burden of meticulously keeping the Law and its regulations. (vv.14,13; cf. Galatians 5:1,4)
 - - Through Christ, we believers have forgiveness of all our sins, so "trying to be justified by [the] law" is not only futile and unnecessary, but furthermore it is counterproductive to our new aliveness in Christ. (v.13; Galatians 5:4)
 - - Specifically referred to here are regulations of the Law that are no longer required, such as: "what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day".
 - - God designed regulations, ceremonies, and rituals of the Law to accomplish specific purposes, such as: to improve one's spirituality, to commemorate a past religious event, to express one's faith, to become cleansed before God, to attain a higher level in one's relationship with God, and etc.
 - - Other regulations with similar purposes have been and are being added by humans, through such means as: human philosophies or human traditions (Colossians 2:8); expanding on regulations in the Old Testament Law; logical reasoning or worldly thinking (v.8); "fine-sounding arguments" (v.4); teachings of other religions; human-created myths and genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4); doctrines taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1); philosophies promoted by authors or celebrities or experts or conference speakers or cult leaders; and etc.
 - - True believers in Christ are "not to let anyone judge" them regarding these kinds of regulations.
 - - Believers are to resist succumbing to expectations, assertions, demands, pronouncements, and pressure from other people to conform regarding these kinds of regulations.
 - - Usually, the pronouncement is that if you fail to keep the regulation in the manner that is being prescribed by the proponents, then you are less spiritual or even sinful.
 - - Essentially, the approach that is promoted by the proponents is a works-based spirituality or outer religiousness - "Do this outward action and do not do this other outward action, and you will become more spiritual". (cf. Colossians 2:21)
 - - This compliance through outward actions is in contrast to the way we believers are to live out our faith as prescribed in Colossians here - striving to achieve and maintain an internal relational uprightness with God, thus being primarily a matter of the heart rather than a matter of mere outward actions. (e.g. - Colossians 2:6,7)
 - - The concept of "Christ in you" in verse 1:27 is the key: relate to God inwardly, because He is inside you - in "fullness" (v.2:10).
 - - Outward actions do not constitute one's true inner spiritual condition of the heart. (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7c)
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v.17 - READ

[Lesson Question: Discuss, analyze, and formulate the meaning of verse 17 in relation to its corresponding verse 16, and include aspects of the contrast between "a shadow" and "the reality".]

SECTION POINT: These regulations of the Law were designed to reflect the coming superior reality of "Christ in you".

- - These regulations of the Law that are listed in verse 16 are a "foreshadow" - "an imperfect imitation, copy, or reflection; a partial or guarded disclosure, prefigured indistinctly". (from Strong's #4639 - 'adumbration' (AHD))
- - These regulations were intended to be an imperfect imitation of what was to come in the future - a foreshadow of "Christ in you". (v.1:27)
- - These regulations, compulsions, and prohibitions of the Law had their purposes for a time, until now the authentic has come - the real original source, "the reality" of "Christ in you", the basis upon which and from which the regulations were created and established.

-- Notice the contrast between "shadow" and "reality":

- - - - Christ is the "reality", the substance that has form in existence and has supremacy in all that is real;
- - - - the regulations of the Law are a "shadow" of Christ, a reflection that points to Him, a precursor and advance indicator of Him and His supremacy in all that is real; (from Strong's #4983; cf. v.1:18)
- - - - the "reality" original source, that which has substance, is far better than its shadow, that which is a reflection of it;
- - - - the "reality" original source has arrived and is here now; but its "shadow" has receded into the past;
- - - - the "reality" original source has been activated; but its "shadow" has been retired;
- - - - the "reality" original source has the authority; but its "shadow" has been stripped of its authority.

- - Believers are to shift away from following the shadow, the reflection, and instead shift onto following the reality, the original source substance from which the shadow is derived.

- - So, following the regulations of the Law is to be replaced by following Christ, who is in you.

- - And, consequently, mere outer religious practice is to be replaced by inner religious devotion.

- - God is instructing us believers to pursue this inner aliveness and fullness in Christ that we have been given, and not allow the opinions of other people to pressure us into abandoning or diluting this pursuit. (vv.13,10,16)

BIG IDEA: Believers are to resist pressure to conform to the regulations of the Law because the regulations lack the superior reality of "Christ in you" that believers now possess.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS:

- - For those of you who are true believers in Christ Jesus, what are your beliefs about whether or how the Old Testament Law applies to you?

- - Do you agree with verse 14 that the "written code, with its regulations", have been canceled for you because now you have aliveness in Christ?
- - Do you agree that you are no longer compelled to keep the regulations, compulsions, ceremonies, rituals, and prohibitions of the Law because they have been replaced by "Christ in you"?
- - Do you agree that God wants you to pursue inner religious devotion, which is superior to and has replaced mere outer religious practice?
- - Do you agree that you are not to believe nor engage in other regulations with similar religious purposes that have been added by humans, such as: human philosophies or human traditions (Colossians 2:8); expanding of regulations in the Old Testament Law; logical reasoning or worldly thinking (v.8); "fine-sounding arguments" (v.4); teachings of other religions; human-created myths and genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4); doctrines taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1); errant philosophies promoted by authors or celebrities or experts or conference speakers or cult leaders; and etc.?
- - If you hold any regulations or philosophies or traditions or beliefs or doctrines that God does not approve of herein, what should you do with them immediately? Are you ready and willing to comply with God in this regard? Now?
- - If so, take a few moments right now and ask God to search your heart and reveal to you any regulations that you hold that He does not approve of. (PAUSE - give them time to process this with God.)
- - If you hold any regulations that God does not approve of, make a choice to reject them right now, and then confess and renounce them in prayer before the Lord. (PAUSE - give them time to process this with God.)
- - When you go home today, are there any religious-related materials that God does not approve of that you need to dispose of, such as: videos, songs, pamphlets, books, tracts, posters, and etc.? The moment that you arrive home, immediately find those items and destroy them. Do not procrastinate, because you may forget to do this later.
- - When you go home today, are there any people who pressure you or incite you to conform to any regulations or philosophies or traditions or beliefs or doctrines that God does not approve of herein? The moment that you arrive home, immediately delete their entry from the contact list on your phone and block them from texting or calling you. Do not procrastinate, because you may forget to do this later.
- - When you go home today, are there any meetings that you need to remove from your schedule that promote any regulations or philosophies or traditions or beliefs or doctrines that God does not approve of herein? The moment that you arrive home, immediately find your schedule and remove those entries from it. Do not procrastinate, because you may forget to do this later.
- - And conversely, is there any good Bible study that you could attend that has substantial Bible teaching with sound doctrines and plentiful appropriate applications? The moment that you arrive home, immediately find your schedule and add an entry for that Bible study on it. Do not procrastinate, because you may forget to do this later.
- - For those of you who are not true believers in Christ Jesus, at any time during your life, have you been searching for more in life?
- - In your searching for more in life, have you experimented in various ways to find something substantial that fills your needs, that fills and satisfies the void that you have in your life?

- - Perhaps you are here today because you are continuing to search, and up until this point in your life, you have not found anything that satisfies for the long-term the void that you have in your life.
 - - Perhaps, you have experimented with various mind-altering drugs or alcohol, that filled and satisfied you for a few hours, but then when you came back to reality, you were empty again.
 - - Perhaps, you have experimented with one or more vices (sinful practice, habit, or activity), that initially seemed to fill and satisfy you, but then after a while, you realized that each of them in actuality generated dissatisfaction, with craving for more.
 - - Perhaps, you have experimented with various philosophical systems or various religions of the world, that initially seemed to fill and satisfy you, but then after a few months, you realized that each of those philosophical systems or religions lacked substance that would genuinely fill and satisfy you long-term.
 - - But notice that this religion that you have been hearing today offers something radically different than other religions - it offers "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27), a reality consisting of an internal indwelling of Christ, in power and fullness of God (vv.2:9-10), to bring you alive spiritually (v.2:13).
 - - By God's design, only "Christ in you" can fill and satisfy that void that you have in your life, that you have been searching for but have been unsuccessful in finding - up until now.
 - - Perhaps a wise choice for you would be to keep coming back to this meeting each time so that you can learn more about how you can obtain for yourself this reality, this "Christ in you".
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