

FPFWC Christian Development



Christ Frees, Law Enslaves

November 2023

Fall Quarter

November 18, 2023

Lesson #3 – Freedom from the World

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Colossians 2:16-23

ICE BREAKERS-

1. How should a believer stay on track spiritually and grow in their faith?
2. How do you ensure that you are seeking the Spirit's guidance and not relying on your own efforts?

Key Verse: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.”Colossians 2:6–7a

LESSON BACKGROUND –

The apostle Paul wrote the epistle of Colossians in the first half of the AD 60s. The recipients of the epistle were a community of believers in Colossae (see Colossians 1:1–2), a city in modern-day Turkey. When Paul composed this letter, he had not yet visited the area (see 1:4–7; 2:1). He likely penned the letter while under arrest (see 4:3) in Rome (see Acts 28:16, 30).

Whether or not Paul ever visited Colossae is unknown, but he had heard from others about the faith of the Colossian believers (see Colossians 1:4). He intended the letter to encourage the Colossians (2:2–3) and address false teachings that had infiltrated the church (see 2:4–5)

The exact nature of the false teaching in Colossae is unknown. Most of our modern-day understanding comes from reading the letter of Colossians and drawing informed conclusions based on the addressed topics. Taking this approach, we can assume that both Jewish and pagan teaching in Colossae threatened to lead the believers astray. This syncretistic belief system was comprised of various elements from different religious and philosophical traditions that were not rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The false teaching likely included aspects of Judaism. Paul provided correctives regarding lifestyle markers that distinguished Jews from Gentiles, such as circumcision (Colossians 2:11–15), dietary restrictions, and the observance of holy days (2:16). However, other aspects of the false teaching, such as angel worship (2:18) and misdirected fasting (2:23), mirrored pagan philosophies and cults. Paul proclaimed this belief system “philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men” (2:8). This belief system concerned Paul because it added requirements for believers beyond God's work through Christ Jesus.

Colossians 1:15–22 and 2:6–15 feature Paul's corrective to the Colossians regarding Christ's preeminence. Christ has made believers complete (Colossians

2:9–10) and raised them to a new life (2:12–14). Further, He has triumphantly “spoiled principalities and powers” (2:15). These other philosophies, beliefs, and practices had taken the Colossians spiritually captive. If they continued to follow the false teachings, they would essentially deny the power of Christ’s work.

LESSON COMMENTARY

Colossians 2:16–23 : Christ’s Supremacy over Legalistic Religion (2:16–23)

These verses provide all that is known about the false teaching that threatened the church. First are warnings (vv. 16–19), then a rhetorical question that acts as a command (vv. 20–22), and finally a short response (v. 23).

2:16–19. First, the Colossians are to be on guard against someone who requires that they obey OT law (e.g., food, drink, Sabbath). The whole law, as a mere shadow, looked forward to Christ and to what was to come (Heb 10:1). He is the substance—the real thing that casts the shadow (v. 17). We look to Him; He alone is our Judge. Second, the Colossians should guard against anyone who “condemns” (NLT) them by requiring an ascetic religion known for self-abasement and the worship of the angels (v. 18). Three errors characterize this false teacher: (1) false visions, (2) human arrogance (inflated, fleshly mind), and (3) departure from Christ, the head (v. 19). In contrast, real growth in godliness requires holding fast to Christ.

2:20–22. Paul appealed to the readers’ experience of Christ: they died with Christ and so have been freed from “the elemental forces” (HCSB; see comments on 2:8–10). The forces require legalistic religion that follows the commandments of mere men (v. 22). Since the Colossians were thus joined with Christ (cf. 2:12–13), they should not submit ... to decrees (v. 20). These decrees probably required abstaining (Do not handle!) from certain food and drink (2:16).

2:23. Paul admitted that from a human perspective such an ascetic self-made religion gives the appearance of wisdom. But the appearance is deceptive. Abstaining from certain things (food, drink, 2:16) and giving severe treatment to the body in fact are useless in a person’s fight against fleshly indulgence. What actions are useful in such a fight? They appear next.

LESSON NUGGET - In view of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, Paul wanted to stress the danger of going back to a legalistic relationship with God, so he warned the Colossians. “Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

There are those today who still desire to judge us. They stress their belief that we are still bound to keep the Sabbath, for instance. But the Sabbath, as a day of rest, was just a shadow of Christ, who would give us true rest. He is our Sabbath. Don’t let anyone judge you.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*