

Colossians 2:16-23

Week 6 - Trading Legalism For Leadership

Learning Objectives

- Recognize Christ as the only way to God, rejecting legalism or any other earthly path.
- Consider Christ's place as the head of our lives, and identify the idols that we are tempted to replace Him with.

Pray for your time together as a group.

? Have you ever used a virtual reality headset? If so, what was your experience like? If not, are you interested in trying one out? Why or why not?

Read Out Loud: The passage that we're about to read addresses a group of people in Colossae who are living in the "virtual reality" of following religious traditions as a means of finding favor with God, instead of living in the true reality of the Gospel, with Christ as their leader and sole path to the Father.

Read Aloud: Colossians 2:16-19 (NIV)

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

In verse 16, Paul provides a few examples of practices that believers should not be judged upon: *Religious festivals* refer to Jewish feasts, *New Moon* refers to monthly celebrations, and *Sabbath day* refers to the observance of the seventh day of the week. These were practices false teachers were insisting new believers should follow in order to be Christians. Verse 18 refers to another practice: the worship of angels. One interpretation is that these teachers were calling on angels to ward off evil spirits instead of calling on Jesus (and that they did this to an extent that it resembled worship). Angel worship could also be based upon the visions they claimed to have seen (verse 18), or it could stem from their false humility, which may have included the claim that humans are not spiritual enough to approach God directly. *Bible.org. Colossians Series, Lesson 13.*

? Why does Paul state that the Colossians should not be judged based on what they eat, drink, etc.?
(Hint: Reread Col. 2:13-15)

Possible Answers: Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross paid our debts to the Father in full, and therefore, there are no longer legal demands on those who have exchanged their sinful record for Christ's spotless one. This is why Paul can state that Christ has "disarmed the rulers and authorities" by dying on the cross.

? Paul's audience includes both Jews and former pagans. How do these false teachers present a roadblock for both groups?

Possible Answers: Jews may believe that they need to continue following their traditions to be right with God and remain His chosen people. These teachers are encouraging Jews to continue looking backward to focus on their heritage instead of Christ's work on the cross. In addition, the former pagans may be hearing that they need to start from the beginning, and become Jewish converts, before becoming a part of God's kingdom through Christ.

? What alternative does Paul offer to both the Jews and the former pagans?

Possible Answers: He offers the reality of Christ to replace the shadows of tradition and ethnic heritage.

? What does it mean that Christ is "the head" of the body?

Possible Answers: Col. 1:18: "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." The body is represented by the Church, and Christ represents the head. The head provides wisdom and direction, enabling the rest of the body to function.

? What happens when Christ is replaced as the head?

Possible Answers: Similar to a physical body replacing its given head with a foreign one, death and decay would replace growth, nourishment, and appropriate direction. There is no inbetween state that can be maintained when connection with Christ is replaced, just as there is no inbetween state when a physical head loses connection with its physical body.

? Why are we tempted to replace Christ's leadership in our lives with a set of rules?

Possible Answers: It often feels simpler to follow a list of dos and don'ts than to maintain a focus on our relationship with Christ, trusting that direction and obedience will follow. The first approach, although incapable of sanctification, seems the more practical and logical option.

? Although modern believers may not struggle with putting the observance of Jewish traditions in place of trusting Christ, what do we attempt to replace Christ with instead?

Possible Answers: Service to the church, public perception of our Christian lives, financial success as a church, church membership statistics.

Optional Transition: The first half of our passage deals with people insisting on following a certain set of rules and their motivation for doing so. The second half explains why we don't need to follow these rules in light of what Christ has done for us.

Read Out Loud: Colossians 2:20-23 (NIV)

²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²² These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. ²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

? What value is there in following rules and regulations in everyday life?

Possible Answers: Public safety (traffic rules, crime prevention), keeping order instead of allowing chaos (lines at stores), privacy (passwords, security measures).

? Why aren't the regulations described in this passage helpful in our fight against sin?

Possible Answers: Rules and regulations imposed by human beings are often most concerned with our appearance and well-being in the public sphere. They are not set up to change our inmost thoughts or actions behind closed doors.

? How can we live free from these useless rules?

Possible Answers: Submit to Christ as the head of our lives. We have died with Christ (vs. 20), and we no longer need to rely on tradition or rituals. Christ's headship means we can live a life honoring to Him by obeying Him. Our hearts will be changed by the Gospel and our actions will change by extension.

? How can we identify our cravings for the approval of others and trust Christ's leadership in our lives instead?

Possible Answers: We can seek to understand where we gravitate toward legalism and hand those areas over specifically to Christ. From that place of self-understanding, we can confess to fellow believers and create an environment of trust and grace instead of false or misinformed perceptions.

Questions For Discussion And Accountability

? What is one area where you can focus on trusting Christ's leadership this week?

? How can your small group encourage you and provide accountability as you seek to open up this area to Christ?