

Centrality of the Son: A Study of Colossians
Gravity of False Sons

Colossians 2:16-23

Gravity of False Sons

2:16-19

Therefore no one is to 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. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

Colossians 2:16-19

In these three verses, Paul focused his attention on the implications of his teaching for Christian living. The major themes are the same as in the soteriological section (2:8–15). Here Paul discussed the Colossians' relationship to the law (2:16–17) and to the supernatural powers (2:18–19) which were so much a part of the false teaching. The tone changes in these verses. Two commands predominate (vv. 16, 18). They form the two reference points for discussion. The first section concerns asceticism (2:16–17); the other, angel-worship (2:18–19).

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

While believing that his mysticism brings him in touch with some "higher" reality, a legal mystic **has actually lost connection with the Head** (Christ) who alone supplies life for it to grow **as God causes it to grow** (cf. John 15:1–5). True spirituality does not come by compliance with laws (which are only a shadow) but by connection with the Life (who is the reality). Without a vital connection to its Head, the body of Christ cannot grow. Using a parallel image, Jesus said, "I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Asceticism was growing in paganism, and many viewed it as a means of achieving spiritual power or revelatory experiences. But this text clearly refers to Jewish customs; although much of Palestinian Judaism opposed asceticism, Judaism and Christianity in other parts of the Empire often took on the characteristics of the surrounding culture, and pagans sometimes associated local Judaism with asceticism (even linking the sabbath with fasting, although the forms of Judaism we know about would not have fasted on the sabbath). Gentiles mocked Jews as separatists especially on three issues: circumcision (2:11), special laws about food and drink, and special holy days. The "new moon" celebration was used to greet each new month; the sabbath was a weekly festival.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

Some members of the congregation were critical and dominating. Paul addressed this first because of the persuasive power of these attitudes. Obviously these people held strongly to their beliefs and were convincing in their propagation. Paul's basic command confronted the entire congregation: "Do not let anyone judge you." It is an awkward statement. No one can control the attitudes or actions of another. The individual responses to those who judge could be controlled, and that was Paul's real concern. He warned the church to make sure it did not give in to the persuasion of this philosophy. It was not to be brought under bondage to these teachings by willingly submitting to regulations which seemed spiritual. Such a critical spirit was exactly contrary to the freedom for which Paul fought so energetically.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Gravity of the Son

2:20-23

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Colossians 2:20-23

Asceticism is a man-made system of rules (often taken out of context from God's Law) **based on human commands and teachings**. The persistent example of legalism in the New Testament was the Old Testament command of circumcision which God intended for the Jews as a *sign* of faith (Rom. 4:11) but which the legalists wanted to make a *condition* of grace (Gal. 2:21). Living by **such regulations** or self-made religion has a certain **appearance of wisdom** (*sophias*; cf. Col. 1:9; 2:3, 4:5), but it has absolutely no **value in restraining sensual indulgence**. "Sensual indulgence" is literally "the flesh" (*sarkos*; cf. 2:11, 18). For denying the body its desires merely arouses them, as is well known by many who have tried to lose weight by sticking to rigid diets. Neglecting the body, Paul argued, does not nourish the spirit.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Our focus on Christ provides
order to our life with God.

Q1. What are the false sons in our culture and churches?

Q2. How can we know if we are trusting in false sons?