

Colossians 2:16-17.

16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17. Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

This is a radical statement for Paul's time. The Jews judged people all the time over these things. It was prescribed in Scripture that a person who didn't keep these laws could be killed. But Christ took all of these laws and nailed them to His cross (Colossians 2:14), **thereby freeing us from their observance.**

Most Christians have departed from the Old Testament laws concerning restrictions on what believers eat and drink, because of New Testament scriptures like 1 Timothy 4:1-5, where the Apostle Paul made it very clear that to practice the Old Testament dietary laws is a doctrine of devils. **\*\*\*Likewise, most Christians have realized believers have been redeemed from the Old Testament laws concerning special feasts and sacrifices every new moon.\*\*\*** Most Christians don't even know when the last new moon was. So, four of the five things listed in this verse have been recognized by the New Testament church, as symbolic, with their fulfillment in Christ. Therefore, we don't follow these Old Testament patterns.

But when it comes to the Sabbath, many New Testament Christians, exempt the Sabbath from this list, and the obvious truth that the Sabbath is only a shadow of things to come, and not the thing to come. This is inconsistent and hypocritical. If we are redeemed from the first four things listed in this verse, then we are redeemed from the Old Testament observance of the Sabbath too. Under our New Covenant with God, we now live in a continual Sabbath.

The conclusion that this argument and the picture that these Old Testament prophecies are painting is all about a rest in the Sabbath, that is now available to us in the New Testament, through faith in Christ.

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What is a shadow? It is not the real person or thing, but it gives us information about the real person or thing. If I was around the corner of a building so that you could not see me but you could see my shadow, then that shadow could give you useful information. It could tell you if I was moving or standing still. And if I was moving, it could tell you whether I was coming closer or moving away. It could provide you with vague information about what I looked like. But it's only a shadow.

If I walked around the corner and was in full view, it would be crazy for you to hug my shadow. Its only value is in the way it represents me. I would be the one you would want to greet and talk to. Likewise, the Sabbath, feast days, and the other things listed in Colossians 2:16 were shadows of New Testament realities. Those who cling to the shadow are missing the real person of Jesus and the rest that is now ours in Him.

The word “shadow” means “a faint indication”. When used as a verb, it means “to represent vaguely, mysteriously, or prophetically”. Each of the things listed in Colossians 2:16 served to represent something that the Messiah would accomplish. Now that Jesus the Messiah has come, the representation isn’t necessary. The New International Version translates this verse as “These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

A shadow is never as important as the person who casts it. **Those who cling to the Old Testament shadow are missing the New Testament reality found in Jesus.**

Jesus Christ is the body that cast all the Old Testament shadows. Now that we have Jesus Himself, why would anyone still cling to the shadow?

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Romans 14:14 says:

I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteem-eth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

This is quite a statement! Nothing is unclean. It is how we use a thing that makes it unclean.

The Old Testament Law declared many animals unclean, not because there was anything wrong with the animals, but because the Lord was making a point. In the New Testament, Paul revealed that every creature of God is good and that nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:4). Every creature of God has always been good, even during Old Testament times. However, the Lord wanted His people to be a holy people, separated unto Him even in the things they ate.

Therefore, He gave them dietary laws that pronounced certain animals as unclean so that they would be reminded, even as they ate, that they were not free to do whatever they wanted to do. They were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and they were to glorify God in every area of their lives (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Colossians 2:16-17 makes it very clear that these dietary laws were shadows of things that are now realities in Christ. Yet, just as with so many other Old Testament truths, the Jews had become engrossed in the observance of the ritual with no understanding as to what it symbolized. Likewise today, some Christians still hold to Old Testament ritual without any idea that the ritual has become reality in Christ.

In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul said that these things were shadows of things to come. If I were walking toward you but the corner of a building blocked your view, then my shadow could be very significant. It could show you that I was coming and how close I was, but once I came around the corner and was in view, it would be unthinkable that you would fall down and embrace my shadow. My shadow is meaningful only because it represents me. Once you could talk to me, my shadow would be meaningless.

Likewise, Old Testament rituals were significant before Christ came. They illustrated truths that were not yet in full view. But now that Christ has come, the rituals are meaningless and can be oppressive if they are wrongfully thought to be requirements for acceptance by God.

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John 5:16 says:

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

They didn't care about people. All they could think of was their rules that had been broken. One of the litmus tests for whether or not we are religious is whether we love people or our rules.

This instance happened around six months into Jesus' public ministry. John only recorded a few instances in Jesus' ministry during the next two years, and most of those are unique to John's Gospel. Then the Gospel of John joins the other Gospel writers in recording many of the events of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem.

The Sabbath was first mentioned in Scripture in Exodus 16 when the Lord started miraculously providing the children of Israel with manna in the wilderness. The Israelites were commanded to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day because God would not provide any on the seventh day. Shortly after this, the Lord commanded the observance of the Sabbath day in the Ten Commandments communicated to Moses on Mount Sinai on the two tablets of stone. In this command, **God connected this Sabbath day with the rest that He took on the seventh day of creation**. Throughout the Old Testament, the keeping of the Sabbath was to be strictly enforced, as can be seen in Numbers where a man was stoned to death for picking up sticks on the Sabbath day.

As revealed in Colossians 2:16-17, **the Sabbath was symbolic**. According to Exodus, one of the purposes of the Sabbath was to give people and their animals one day of physical rest each week. Today's medical science has proven that our bodies need at least one day of rest each week to function at their peak. Deuteronomy 5:15 also clearly states that the Sabbath was to serve as a reminder to the Jews that they had been slaves in Egypt and were delivered from bondage not by their own efforts, but by the supernatural power of God. However, in the New Testament, an even clearer purpose of the Sabbath is stated. In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul revealed that the Sabbath was only a shadow of things to come and is now fulfilled in Christ. **Hebrews 4:1-11 talks about a Sabbath rest that is available to all New Testament believers but not necessarily functional in all New Testament believers** (Hebrews 4:9-11). This New Testament Sabbath rest is simply a relationship with God in which we have ceased from doing things by our own efforts and are letting God work through us (Galatians 2:20 and Hebrews 4:10).

The Old Testament Sabbath was a perfect picture of this New Testament relationship. While all the other nations of the world were working seven days a week, God's people worked only six

and dedicated the seventh day to worshipping their God. The natural mind would say they wouldn't fare as well, and yet they were blessed above all nations of the earth. The Jews were also commanded to let their fields lie idle every seventh year and call the whole year a Sabbath unto the Lord. No crops could be sown, no vineyards could be pruned, and no fruit could be gathered. The Lord blessed the Jews with three times the normal harvest in the sixth year to sustain them through the sixth and seventh years and into the eighth year while their crops were growing again. This was an undeniable witness that it was the blessing of their covenant God and not their own efforts that produced this prosperity. Thus, God illustrated to all people who lived under the Old Covenant that salvation was the work of God and not of their own efforts.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had missed the true meaning of the Sabbath and had become obsessed with the legalistic keeping of the Sabbath laws and their own volume of interpretations of these laws. They were more concerned with their traditions than they were with people, and they received some of Jesus' most stinging rebukes.

The Sabbath was a covenant between God and the nation of Israel. The New Testament church is not mentioned observing the Sabbath. The Sabbath is only mentioned in the book of Acts in connection with the Jews and then only twice more in the New Testament (Colossians 2:16 and Hebrews 4:4), explaining this relationship to which we now have access. There were even admonitions given to the New Testament church not to esteem one day above another (Galatians 4:9-10 and Colossians 2:16-17) but warnings not to condemn those who do (Romans 14:5-6).

The present-day church does designate the first day of the week as a day of rest and worship. This fulfills one of the stated purposes of the Sabbath, as listed in Exodus 23:12, and is good. But when these truths about the Sabbath that we've expounded aren't clearly understood, our Sunday observance becomes ritualistic and displeasing to God (Isaiah 1:13). The Sabbath is not a day but rather a relationship with God through Jesus.

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If Colossians 2:14-16 were not true, then we should all be Seventh Day Adventists. Only God can "blot out" what He has written. God told Israel to make a distinction between clean and unclean food so that He might make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Deuteronomy 14:2 and 21). Under the New Covenant, however, the wall of partition that separated Jews from Gentiles has been broken down so that all may have equal access to God. God hears and answers prayers whether or not we've eaten pork, worshiped on a certain day, or kept the feast days.

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This is in reference to the Old Testament laws concerning meats that could and could not be eaten. The definitive chapters concerning this in the O.T. are Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21. Rabbits, camels, pigs, and other animals were forbidden among beasts of the field. Among the animals in the water, lobsters, shrimp, oysters, and anything else that didn't have

scales or fins was considered unclean. In the bird kingdom, all birds that were scavengers were forbidden. Any animal that had paws was unclean, and all creeping things such as snakes, snails, and turtles were unclean.

Although these dietary laws were strictly enforced in the O.T., Paul revealed in the New Testament that it was a doctrine of devils to command anyone to “abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:3-4). Peter was shown in a vision that God had cleansed things that were considered unclean in the O.T. (Acts 10:10-16 and 28). All these things were symbolic.

Therefore, anyone who uses the O.T. dietary laws for anything other than symbolism that finds its complete fulfillment in Christ, is in error. Those who preach that the dietary laws were for health reasons are missing the point that Paul was making in these verses.

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The “drink” that Paul was referring to here is a little ambiguous. There were drink offerings required in the Old Testament, but these were nearly always referred to as “drink offerings.” The only other restrictions on what could be drunk are total abstinence of any drink made from grapes for those who took a Nazarite vow and a total ban on blood.

Just as the other things listed in this verse, abstinence from certain drinks was symbolic and finds its New Testament fulfillment in Christ. The O.T. abstinence pictured the separation described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31.

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In Leviticus 23, there were seven feasts listed that the Jews had to observe:

- 1). the Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5, see John 2:13).
- 2). the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8), which immediately followed the Passover and became part of the Passover feast.
- 3). the feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:9-14).
- 4). the feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-21), which was also called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9-12).
- 5). the feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6).
- 6). the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32, 16:29-34; and Numbers 29:7-11).
- 7). the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-43, Numbers 29:12-40, and Deuteronomy 16:13-15; see John 7:2), which was also called the feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:39-43).

It was mandatory for all males to come to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which probably included the Passover), the feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Ingathering, which was also called the feast of Tabernacles, or Booths. See Exodus 23:14-17.

The Jews later came to commemorate the feast of Purim (Esther 9:24-32), which celebrated Esther's victory over Haman, and the feast of the dedication (see John 10:22), which celebrated the re-purification of the temple under the Maccabees.

\*\*\*\*\*Paul made it clear that the observance of holy days was an individual decision not to be imposed on others or forbidden to others (see note 3 at Galatians 4:10, note 8 at Romans 14:5, and note 9 at Romans 14:6).

Galatians 4:10 says:

10. Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

11. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Paul was rebuking the Galatians for trying to incorporate observance of the Old Testament Law into the Gospel that he had brought to them. Here, he named some of the things they were proclaiming had to be done to receive right standing with God.

The observance of days refers to keeping the Sabbath. Observing months and times is a reference to the new moons (Numbers 10:10, 1 Chronicles 23:31, and Psalms 81:3) and feasts (i.e., Passover, Firstfruits, etc.). Observing years refers to the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee of Leviticus 25. Paul made it very clear that the keeping of these rituals is not necessary for salvation. Those who preach that it is are dangerously close to having their faith in Christ voided (Galatians 2:21), as Paul described in the next verse.

There is no doubt that Paul considered these Galatians to be born-again Christians. He was the one who founded the churches of Galatia. He spoke to them as believers in this letter. Yet, it is also clear that Paul was in doubt about the state of their salvation. This reveals that salvation is not an irrevocable gift.

Paul went on to say in Galatians 5:10 that he was confident the Galatians would stand firm in the Gospel. So, in the end, Paul believed they were still standing in faith that Christ was their Savior. However, his statement here reveals that they were dangerously close to rejecting their salvation.

Salvation is secure for those who keep their faith in Christ, but as we can see through the opinions expressed by Paul here, it is possible to renounce faith in Christ. Legalism taken to the extreme can lead people to becoming reprobate.

Romans 14:5-6 says:

5. One man esteem-eth one day above another: another esteem-eth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6. He that regard-eth the day, regard-eth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eat-eth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eat-eth not, to the Lord he eat-eth not, and giveth God thanks.

On other occasions, Paul called it bondage to observe special days (Galatians 4:9-10). Once again, this must be denoting people who were observing certain days as a mere conviction and not a command. Personal conviction and doctrinal truth are two different things.

Verse 6 verifies that these observances of certain days and abstinence from meats were not done in a legalistic manner that caused people to think they were earning salvation. They were doing these things as unto the Lord.

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Burnt offerings were to be made every new moon (1 Chronicles 23:31). Some believe that Psalms 81:3 links the feast of Trumpets (see note 25 at this verse) to the Seventh New Moon offering, making that feast a new moon feast (New Unger's Bible Dictionary).

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Each of the five things listed in this verse was a shadow of Christ (see note 28 at Colossians 2:17). The dietary laws, feast days, new moon offerings, and the Sabbath all represented Christ and what He would accomplish (Hebrews 4). Now that we have the person of Christ, each one of these things has now served its purpose and is no longer necessary to observe.

Most agree with this regarding the first four things listed in this verse, but many Christians still proclaim the Sabbath is a day that must be observed. However, this is not so. The Sabbath was a picture of a relationship with God that Jesus has now opened to all who believe. The Sabbath was only a picture and is now fulfilled in Christ (see note 12 at Romans 14:14