

Colossians - A Study Of The Apostle Paul's Letter To The Church At Colosse
Jesus As Creator And Reconciler Of The Universe
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Centennial, CO
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Lesson Eight – True Freedom

Colossians 2:16-23 – Reality Is Found In Christ

1. Who was Paul speaking of when he used the term *anyone* in reference to those who were judging the Colossians?
2. Where did the ideas for the activities mentioned in verse 16 come from?
3. Why are these activities referred to as a *shadow of things to come* in verse 17? ¹
4. How is Jesus the culmination of the *shadow of things to come*?

¹ Paul's words here show the essential Christ-centeredness of the Hebrew Scriptures, also of their worship rituals and their prescriptions for ritual cleanliness. These rituals and prescriptions are not sinful – they *were* commanded by God – but neither are they absolute, for they are incomplete without Christ and were an interim arrangement until His coming. These Old Testament practices, the apostles tells us, were a *shadow of the things to come*. The phrase *the things to come* is very nearly a technical term for the messianic age and the kingdom now inaugurated by Christ. Concordia Commentary – Colossians, Pg. 118.

5. What role does *false humility* play when someone outside of the Christian faith encourages or tempts a Christian to repudiate their faith?
6. What are some examples in our contemporary world of persons or groups that exhibit such *false humility*?
7. Paul mentions the worship of angels in verse 18. How does such worship call into question the supremacy of Jesus Christ? ²
8. What activity comes to your mind as you read Paul's warning that the temptations of others not *disqualify you for the prize*?
9. In what way is the Christian faith like an athletic event?

² Paul makes this reference to angel worship because it was a common practice among the adherents of Gnosticism and contributed to the "Colossian Heresy" that was attempting to influence Paul's readers. In our current day we hear of people describing interactions with angels by such activities as seeing them, speaking to them, and calling upon them in need. Clearly, such claims detract from the supremacy and the centrality of Christ.

10. How do the following passages help you to understand your Christian faith?
- A. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- B. Philippians 3:14
11. What other characteristics are mentioned in verse 18 of those who tempt us away from Christian faith?
12. Why do you think such people go into such detail in describing *what he has seen*?
13. What is the result of such thinking in those who think they have “seen it all” according to verse 18?
14. What are some examples of this that you can point to?

15. Who or what is “god” in the lives of such people and what is the object of their worship? ³
16. What indication is there in verse 19 that shows the most damaging aspect of the thinking in questions 13, 14 and 15?
17. What does **Ephesians 4:15-16** tell us about the importance of the Head of the body?
18. According to verse 19, what are the effects of the **Head** on the rest of the body?
19. How does the **loss of connection with the Head** characterize the greatest error of the Colossian Heresy?

³ As a self-devised method of obtaining divine approval, the regulations of such worship **do not have any value**. Such **worship** is human, not divine in origin. It is oriented by the Law, not Gospel. It seeks salvation through works, not faith.

When one hopes to overcome his sinful condition and alienation from God by his own, self-willed practices – however stringent and noble they may appear to human judgment – he actually indulges one particularly sinister aspect of his condition, namely, the hubris of thinking he can save himself. Such **self-willed worship** (2:23) rejects God’s design for salvation and gratifies the **flesh** just as much as the most open libertinism. Concordia Commentary – Colossians, Pg. 123.

20. What do the following passages say and how do they work to make the point Paul makes in verse 20?
- A. Romans 6:1-14
 - B. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15
 - C. 1 Peter 3:18
21. What question is Paul asking in verse 20?
22. What are current examples of how people live in submission to the *principles of this world*? ⁴
23. What ultimately happens to the *principles of this world* according to verse 22?

⁴ Hence, the apostle's question points out the absurdity of submitting to regulations that belong to a manner of life that no longer has influence over his readers. Concordia Commentary – Colossians, Pg. 123-124.

24. Read **2 Timothy 4:1-5**. What does this section from Paul's letter say about the *principles of this world* and what we as Christians, and pastors of Christians, should be prepared for as we live our lives of faith?
25. For what reason does Paul mention *harsh treatment of the body* in verse 23? ⁵
26. What does Paul say is the result of such *harsh treatment of the body*?
27. What are some current examples of *harsh treatment of the body* that demonstrate that asceticism is practiced today?

⁵ Asceticism was a component of the Gnostic presence in the midst of the Colossians and taught that denial of certain comforts and stringent discipline of the body to the point of painful and even injurious treatment was a sign of spiritual and physical discipline and devotedness.

