

Position Paper

Colossians 2

1.

When a disciple first begins to keep the Sabbath, his or her Evangelical neighbors will inevitably attempt to correct—to them—the disciple’s errant ways by turning to Colossians 2:16–17: “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”

What does Paul mean when he continues, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Col 2:18–19)?

If Christ is the substance or reality of those things that are physical; if a disciple is to hold fast to the Head, can the disciple ignore a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath and still hold to the Head, Christ Jesus? Can a disciple hold to the Head and not walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6)?

Paul expresses the concept that those who say they are of Christ ought to walk as Jesus walked when he says,

“I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:16);

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1);

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph 5:1);

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil 3:17);

“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1 Thess 1:6);

“For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” (1 Thess 2:14);

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:7–8);

“Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I [Paul] committed any offense” (Acts 25:8).

No Christian can walk as Jesus walked or imitate Paul as he imitated Jesus and not keep feasts, new moons, and the Sabbaths of God. So on the text’s surface, 1 Corinthians 2:16–17 does not justify ignoring, say, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. To use the text to justify ignoring Moses is to twist Paul’s epistles to the disciple’s own destruction, which is the error of lawless people who have lost their stability (2 Pet 3:16–17).

It cannot be logically argued that accepting Christ as the person’s Savior satisfies the obligation to follow Paul as he followed Christ, especially if the disciple continues to live as a son of disobedience, as a Gentile, a person of the

nations. In fact, the neglected question is has one really accepted Jesus as his or her personal Savior if the person will not walk as Jesus walked—and the answer is that the person hasn't! The person lies to him or herself if the person believes that as a disciple he or she can continue to live as a Gentile.

When approaching Paul's epistle to the Colossians, the first thing that must be discerned is the epistle's audience—to whom is the epistle written?

In his greetings, Paul writes, "To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae" (1:2), with the implication that there were some brothers who were not faithful. So in his greetings, Paul recognizes that the saints at Colossae are under stress or duress to that state Paul adds that "their hearts may be encouraged" (2:2) and, "I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments" (2:4). So an endtime reader of Paul's epistle can take from the letter the existence of *plausible arguments* being used against the faithful brothers, with the suggestion being that these plausible arguments were being made by unfaithful brothers and former friends of these faithful brothers; that these arguments were based in "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition" (2:8).

The faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae were not former Pharisees or Sadducees; they were not Israelites of the lost tribes; they were Gentile converts. They were Hellenists, mostly Greek in ancestry, and all were fully engaged in the paganism of ancient Asia Minor prior to being called by God. They were not Israelites who kept the feasts of God, or the new moons, or the Sabbaths of God. Rather, they were like those at Ephesus about whom Paul writes, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph 2:1–3). Specifically, about the faithful brothers at Colossae, Paul says, "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he [Jesus] has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which, I, Paul, became a minister" (Col1:21–23).

The gospel proclaimed to the faithful at Colossae was the same message that Paul proclaimed everywhere, and the gospel Paul proclaimed was that "all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:12–13).

If the faithful at Colossae were once sons of disobedience (i.e., "alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds") but were reconciled "in order to present [themselves] holy and blameless and above reproach," then the faithful were doers of the law, justified by having the works of the law written on their hearts: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show

that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:14–16), and “For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law” (vv. 25–27).

If Paul’s message is consistent—and it is—then both circumcised and uncircumcised are justified when, by faith, they are doers of the law, and they are condemned when they do not keep the law ... will the person who lusts after another person be holy and blameless and above reproach before Christ Jesus? No! The person commits adultery with the other in the person’s heart (Matt 5:28) even though no adultery is committed in this world: the person will not be blameless, for in the heart that is circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands (Col 2:11) adultery has been committed.

Which commandments can the person circumcised of heart (i.e., the spiritual Jew — “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter” — Rom 2:28–9) transgress and still remain holy and blameless before the Father and the Son?

What is at issue in Paul’s epistle to the faithful brothers at Colossae is remaining holy and blameless and above reproach before God, not before other men (or women); not before unfaithful brothers, family, or former friends and neighbors.

Plausible arguments based on human philosophy and empty deceit, have caused these faithful brothers to waver. Paul writes, “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of this world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’ (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings” (Col 2:20–22).

Paul establishes an opposition between *human precepts and teachings* and the word of the Lord as delivered through Moses and later Christ Jesus. Do clean meats come to Israel through human precepts and teachings? Or do they come to Israel so that Israel can be holy as the Lord is holy (Lev 11:44–45)? Peter writes, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:14–16).

If a person is honest with Paul’s epistle, the person has to conclude that *questions of food and drink* (Col 2:16) are not about clean or common meats, but about *regulations according to human precepts and teachings* (v. 22), regulations that “have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but ... are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (v. 23). Now, if a person concludes that the books of Moses [the Torah that, according to the promise of the New Covenant, will be written on hearts and placed in minds — Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10] constitute a *self-*

made religion or asceticism, then the person will logically conclude that the questions of *food and drink* stem from Moses. But if the person holds that Moses spoke with the Lord and that Jesus is the prophet promised by Moses, then what Paul writes excludes Moses from *regulations that have an appearance of wisdom*.

Paul goes on to write, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... [p]ut to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:1, 5).

The faithful brothers at Colossae were at one time sons of disobedience, following the ways of this world, committed to self-made or human religions—they were pagans in the theological sense of the word—and they were being troubled, once they became Christians, by their former friends as well as by unfaithful brothers. They were being troubled through plausible arguments that humanly seemed reasonable; they were being judged by these former friends and unfaithful brothers as to the festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths they, now that they had converted, were keeping. And Paul tells them not to let anyone judge them. They have a judge if they hear Jesus’ words and do not keep them, and this judge is the word [message] that He spoke (John 12:48). Moses will be a witness against them if they do not believe the writings of Moses (John 5:45; Deut 31:26), and the word or message that Jesus left with His disciple will judge them.

If Moses does not bear witness against the Jew circumcised of heart; if the disciple hears the voice of Jesus and believes His words, which are the words of the Father, the disciple will pass from death to life without coming under judgment (John 5:24), for the testimony of the person is not enough to condemn the person. A second or a third witness is needed to establish the condemnation.

Disciples know, from Paul’s recording his chiding of Peter for his hypocrisy, what gospel Paul and Peter taught to Gentile converts, which would have also been taught to the faithful brothers at Colossae. And that gospel would have outwardly uncircumcised Gentile converts at Antioch living as Judeans (Gal 2:14).

When those of the Circumcision Faction came from Jerusalem to Antioch, Peter separated himself from the converts because they were still outwardly uncircumcised, and Paul had harsh words with Peter for doing so. Peter was wrong. What Peter did not then realize is that the world is divided into Gentiles (the peoples of the nations), Judaism, and the Church of God, with the difference between Judaism and the Church being outer versus inner circumcision, a difference that alters the application of Moses, not his importance, for Moses doesn’t get a person into God’s rest but only to the figurative plains of Moab. Moses, however, gets the person to these spiritual plains of Moab so that the disciple can follow Jesus into the Promised Land. Disciples cannot enter into God’s rest by invading from the sea coast, or by coming by way of the coastal plain. The Promised Land is the Land beyond the River Jordan, not the River Styx, and a person can see how easily a Greek philosopher could bring damnable heresies into the Church of God.

The Gentile converts at Colossae, uncircumcised by their parents, had been circumcised of heart when their hearts were cleansed by faith (Acts 15:9). Their

inner new selves, born of spirit as sons of God, were circumcised by their spiritual parents, the Father and His Christ, and their inner new selves were to live as Judeans, what Paul and Peter taught the converts at Antioch. Thus, a war was initiated between the law of God in the minds of these Gentile converts and the law of sin and death that continued to dwell in their fleshly members. Paul speaks of this war that he doesn't understand (see Rom 7:15–25), for the disciple will not be liberated from indwelling sin and death until the Second Passover liberation of Israel. Until then, the mind will want to obey God and the body will desire the things of this world.

The mind, the outward representative of the inner new self, was set free from bondage to disobedience when the record of debt with its legal demands (legal claim against the life of the person) was satisfied by Christ's death on the cross ... all of humankind (i.e., the descendants of the first Adam) was consigned to disobedience or given to the Adversary as his bondservants so that God could have mercy on all (Rom 11:32); all of humankind is "naturally" born as sons of disobedience. They are born spiritually dead; they are the dead about whom Jesus said, "Follow me, and leave the dead [τῶν νεκρῶν] to bury their own dead [τῶν νεκρῶν]" (Matt 8:22).

The inner old self is *dead*, and is as unable to heal itself as a corpse is unable to heal the wound from which it died. But the inner new self is alive: the inner new self is the inner old self that has been raised from the dead by the Father (John 5:21) even though it continues to dwell in a *dead* tent of flesh. It received a second breath of life when it received the breath of God [πνεῦμα θεοῦ]. And when made alive, it was not born as a bondservant to the Adversary; sin no longer had dominion over the inner self (Rom 6:14). This new inner self was not born under condemnation (Rom 8:1). However, by returning to disobedience; by presenting the inner self as an obedient servant of sin, the person condemns the inner new self that is a son of God—and no further sacrifice remains for the person. Paul writes,

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:16–18)

Having been set free from sin by the record of debt with its legal demands being canceled—being nailed to the cross—disciples triumph over the demonic prince of the power of the air, but these same disciples will snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by returning to disobedience.

It is to dead tents of flesh that the Son will give life when he gives life to whom He will (also John 5:21) when judgments are revealed upon His coming (1 Cor 4:5). Until then, the fleshly bodies of disciples will remain mortal even though the living new self has life in the heavenly realm as a son of God. Thus, at the Second Passover, when disciples are liberated from indwelling sin and death through being filled with spirit (i.e., baptized in the divine breath of God), the flesh will remain mortal but will be as the mind has been; i.e., free to keep the laws of God.

By his own admission, Paul did not understand why his fleshly body would not obey the desires of his mind (Rom 7:15). Knowledge of Israel's Second Passover liberation from indwelling sin and death was concealed from him, as was realization of how much time would pass before Christ Jesus would return. Paul laid the foundation for the spiritual house of God (1 Cor 3:10–11), but he did not build the entirety of the house of which *Philadelphians* would be pillars (Rev 3:12) that stand on the foundation laid and reach upward to support the endtime harvest of firstfruits: the ceiling and roof of the house.

Those endtime false brethren who use Colossians to create plausible arguments for why disciples do not have to walk as Jesus walked or copy Paul as he imitated Jesus will twist all of Paul's epistles into instruments of their own destruction. They are as Peter labeled them,

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Pet 2:10–16)

The Lamb said to the angel to the church in Pergamum, “But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality” (Rev 2:14).

Those false brethren who use Colossians to cause disciples to stumble as Balaam caused ancient Israel to stumble are servants of the Adversary who have disguised themselves as servants of righteousness as the Adversary himself appears as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14–15). Their end will correspond to their deeds, for they as teachers of lawlessness will be denied when judgments are revealed regardless of the mighty deeds that have done in the name of Jesus (Matt 7:21–23). Faithful disciples should not even pray for them, for such prayers will not be heard.

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