

Further Bible Study Questions

- A) Read Colossians 2:9-12. The practice of circumcision was an incredibly important aspect of being a part of God's "promise" people (covenant people) in the Older Testament (Genesis 17:10-14, 23-27; Exodus 4:25, 12:44, 48; Leviticus 12:3...). The practice identified every Jewish man as being part of a larger community of faith, of being part of God's chosen people. Further, the true meaning of circumcision was not limited to the flesh, but also to the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 44:7). While the circumcision of the heart did not replace the act of physical circumcision, each reflected the other. In the Newer Testament, physical circumcision is clearly not required (Romans 2:25-28), but we are still called to have an outward expression of our faith which reveals the "true circumcision of our hearts" (Romans 2:29). That call is to be baptized. Do you think baptism is the New Testament's version of circumcision? Have you been baptized? Why or why not? Are you living out your baptism, is your life one which is "circumcised of heart?"
- B) Legalism is when we mix following a set of rules with the purity of what God provided and Christ accomplished through the cross (read Colossians 2:16-19). However, there are many Christian organizations which require a "code of conduct" in order to be a participant or employee. For instance, at the seminary which I attend, the students are asked to not drink alcohol while enrolled as students. When I was an undergraduate student at a Christian University, we were required to not participate in any "social dancing" on threat of expulsion. Are these kinds of rules legalistic? How does the world relate to rules such as these? Should we have rules such as these for Christian organizations or churches?
- C) Do you find yourself being legalistic with others? Do your scruples cause you to have a difficult time with those who are outsiders to the cause of Jesus Christ? One of the unfortunate repercussions of legalism is that Christians seem to relate poorly with those who are not already followers of Christ. Is this a source of struggle for you? How can you combat this tendency, and remain "connected to Jesus Christ" (2:19)?

Stoopid Religion

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**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.
THESE ARE A SHADOW OF THE THINGS
THAT WERE TO COME; THE REALITY,
HOWEVER, IS FOUND IN CHRIST.
~COLOSSIANS 2:16-17 (NIV)**

1) Jesus Works Are Completely Sufficient

- A) The essence of the Great News of Jesus Christ (viz. the Gospel) is described in Paul's writings as consisting of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (cf. 1st Corinthians 15:1-4). This content is the substance of the Christian faith!
- B) When a person responds to God in faith (trust, cf. Ephesians 2:8), they identify completely with **all** of aspects of Jesus Christ, they are literally "in Christ" (Galatians 2:20).
- C) Thus, when we observe the "works of Christ," we are studying our own spiritual DNA, our own identity "in Christ" (Colossians 2:9-12).

- D) This is what Paul has in mind when he describes the implications (DNA characteristics) of the "fullness of Deity" (Colossians 2:9) for those who are "in Him" (2:10-12).

- E) There is a nuance in Paul's "Gospel" words against those who might want to "Judaize" (make Jewish) following Christ with moral obligations from the Older Testament (e.g. circumcision, 2:11).

2) God's Provision Is Completely Sufficient

- A) In an effort to establish a strong foundation against false teachers, Paul moves from the physical realities of the Gospel (death, burial, resurrection) to the deeper realities of what was accomplished through Jesus Christ (2:13-15).

- B) Of particular note is God's initiation to non-Jews ("uncircumcised of your flesh," 1:13) with the Gospel (cf. Romans 5:8).

- C) We can see the "why" of God's initiating in the dismantling of the "debt consisting of decrees against us" through the death of Christ on the cross (Colossians 2:14).

- D) Instead of viewing the cross of Christ as being a great defeat, Paul "reverses" the visual imagery of the cross into one of revered victory and triumph (1:15). The cross of Christ becomes the greatest image of victory for all those who are "in Him."

3) Legalism, Adding ANYTHING To Salvation, Is Death

- A) Despite the sufficiency of Christ's Work & God's Provision,

there were some who wanted to add "moral obligations" to salvation (2:16-18). This is known as legalism, "depending on rules or laws in conjunction with personal faith for salvation."

- B) Paul takes aim at three deadly legalistic practices (2:16-18):
 - i) Limiting people from certain "food or drink" for the sake of their faith in Christ (2:16*).
 - ii) Requiring the observance of "sacred" holidays or Sabbath practices (2:16).
 - iii) Requiring ecstatic "spiritual" experiences in a manipulative and/or condescending manner (2:18).

- C) Each of these legalistic requirements (in some capacity, influenced by Judaizers), are associated with "the elementary principles of the world" (2:20, cf. 2:8), the exact things from which we are freed from being "in Christ."

- D) Rather than live our faith according to these things which are "destined to perish" (the rules, regulations, moral code, 2:22), we are called to "stay connected to Jesus Christ" (2:19).

- E) Where rules can only provide a "shadow" of a true relationship (1:17), we are called to "grow with a growth which is from God" (2:19). Ditch the religious rules, and return to the adventure of an authentic relationship in Christ!

* The apostle lays down the principle of Christian liberty: don't let anyone sit in judgment on you. In writing to Corinth and Rome, where Christians had scruples about food and drink as well as the observance of holy days, Paul introduces the further principle which might impose a voluntary limitation on one's Christian liberty, i.e. "the strong" should go out of their way to avoid offending the tender consciences of "the weak" or scrupulous (Romans 14:1-15:13; 1st Corinthians 8-10). But at Colossae the scrupulous were threatening to impose their rigid principles on the rest of the congregation. Christian liberty needed to be asserted in the light of false attempts to undermine it (Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary, Colossians & Philemon*, page 139).