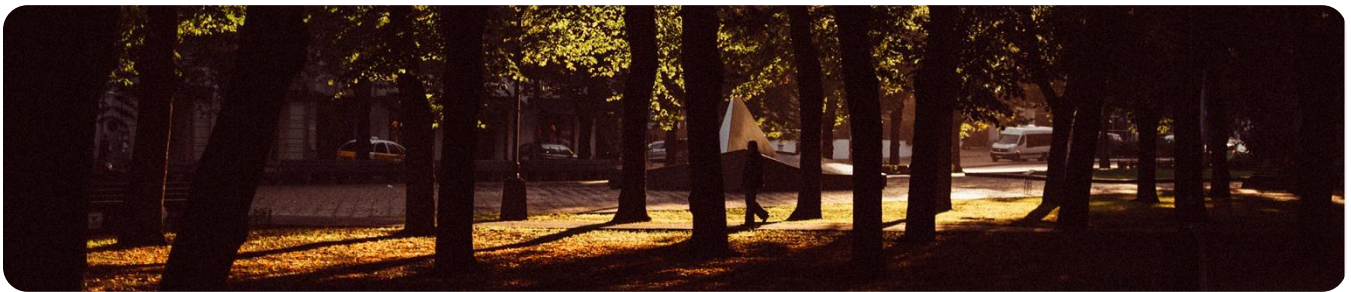


Preeminent. Christ's Place in The World

WEEK 9
**SHADOWS
VERSUS
SUBSTANCE**



"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." (Colossians 2:16-17).

At night, the darkness of the world hinders our ability to see what is around us, but shadows often help us discern that which is not directly visible to our eyes. A streetlight might cast the shadow of a four-legged creature, and we understand that a cat or a dog is standing just off to the side. The shadow of a winged creature may indicate that a bird or a bat is flying overhead. No matter the shadow we see, it usually provides us with enough information to understand something of the reality behind the shadow.

The New Testament often speaks of the old covenant saints as living in a time of shadows, particularly in regard to the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Mosaic law (Heb. 10:1–18). Such things were like shadows in relation to Christ because in them, the old covenant saints saw something of what would be required for their redemption. Seeing bulls, goats, sheep, and other animals offered up in the temple showed the people that the high price of death had to be paid to cover their sin. They did not yet fully understand that the only death that could

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23 **CORAM DEO**

In addition to a fuller experience of the Holy Spirit, new covenant saints have an advantage over old covenant saints in that we more clearly see God's work of salvation than those who lived before Christ. Let us be grateful for this and also thankful that we have God's completed revelation, the Apostolic word that shows us how to understand the Lord's acts in history. May we study the Apostles' writings diligently that we might know Christ truly.¹

pay for their sins would be the death of God’s Son in their place, but they did realize that life had to be given for atonement. The substance, the reality that these shadows anticipated, is Jesus, the One whose death alone is sufficient to pay for our redemption.

As the answer to question 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism tells us, these shadows were yet another way that God preached the holy gospel to the saints who lived before the incarnation. Colossians 2:16–17 is but one of many texts that the catechism cites to prove this point. In it we learn that no matter how important these sacrifices were, we make an error if we locate this importance in the ceremonies themselves and not in their ability to point people to the Messiah. Nothing in the Law was ever revealed as an end in itself but was given to show us our need for Christ and the work He would do on our behalf (Gal. 3:23–29).

God preached the gospel for centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus, but in Christ Jesus He fulfilled what He had been saying all along, proclaiming the truth of salvation in Jesus alone most clearly (1 Peter 1:10–12). Let us be thankful that we live today when the fullness of the gospel is available to all the people of God.

OPEN IT



1. Would you describe yourself as strict or lenient? When does your demeanor manifest this characteristic most?

2. By what criteria does the world measure a person? What criteria do you use to measure who a person is?

READ IT | Colossians 2:16-23

EXPLORE IT



3. What things should **not** be the basis of our walk with God?
4. According to verse 18, what three things caused the false teachers to be “puffed up”?
5. What part of the body keeps all things nourished and held together?
6. According to verse 23, why would people be so quick to fall for such teaching?

GET IT

See To It

Paul gives a serious warning for continual vigilance, for you to keep your "spiritual radar" continually on high alert. Paul is saying we need to keep our "spiritual antennae" in the "receiving mode" with the filter of discernment turned "on" so that we can filter out the wisdom of man. An unguarded mind, even of a believer, is subject to deceit, misunderstanding, and confusion, which inevitably results in false doctrine and false (sinful) living.¹

Each of us has someone in our life who sets standards for us, who knows the right way to act, the right choices we should make. Maybe that person focuses on small things—whether or not you should have a second piece of pie—and maybe they focus on larger issues—how you parent, or what you should do on Sunday. The Colossian church had a group of people attempting to guide their decisions, and Paul here provides them with a proper perspective. The bottom line is our relationship to Christ: that must determine what we do and how we do it.²

7. Why are we so quick to allow others to “pass judgment” on our lives?

How does one combat against allowing others to have the power of definition when it comes to our holiness?

¹ http://preceptaustin.org/colossians_28-15.htm

² http://www.ridgepoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Disc_Guide_The-Supremacy-Part-Two_Jan-19.20-Feb-9.10.2013.pdf

How do we discern the difference between biblical accountability and passing judgment on each other?

*In light of the substance of who Jesus is and what He has done, all the false teachings are exposed as mere shadows (Colossians 2:17). They may appear to be wise, but in fact are foolish. They speak of power, but are really impotent to change us. Paul dispels four of them here— **Traditionalism, Legalism, Gnosticism and Asceticism.***

8. Read Colossians 2:9-15. In what ways does Paul prove that Jesus is “the substance” and all that we need as Christians?
9. In verse 16, Paul shares about 3 things that are “a shadow of the things to come.” How does a robust understanding that Jesus is “the substance” keep us from falling to the shadows that abound all around us?

The apostle tells us that tradition is no substitute for truth (Colossians 2:8). Jesus had strong words for those who hold to human traditions above divine revelation. He called them hypocrites and charged that they “honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Mark 7:6). Adherence to empty traditions leads to hollow philosophy while faith in God’s Word leads to holy living.³

10. When can traditions be good? How can they become harmful?
11. From a human perspective, how can holding to certain traditions make us look holy?

We also learn that rules cannot replace relationship. Religious legalism says “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (Colossians 2:21). The Jewish version of this imposed strict regulations on what to eat and how to keep the Sabbath and certain festivals (2:16). But this focus is all wrong. God is our Father and wants to build relationship with us as His children. Rules have their proper place in this family, but they are not the main event. In fact, rules without a relationship result in rebellion. So Paul commands us not to let anyone judge us in regard to keeping all the religious rules. Instead we should focus on growing in God’s love and grace, and let His love compel us to obey Him from our hearts.⁴

12. How do spiritual rules cause our relationship with God to suffer? How do these rules impact our relationship with others?
13. What is the difference between obedience to Christ and legalism?

Another warning here is that spiritual knowledge often leads to spiritual pride. False teachers in Colossae encouraged the pursuit of special knowledge (Greek gnosis). Their teaching became known as “Gnosticism” and called for mystical experiences with angels and the spiritual realm to gain this knowledge. But what was the result? “Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head. . .” (Colossians 2:18b-19a). Spiritual pride is a terrible and deadly sin—it disconnects us from Christ our Head! We can avoid it if we consistently follow Jesus’

³ <http://www.church-redeemer.org/alt-sermons-page/the-book-of-colossians-going-deep-growing-strong-lesson-4/>

⁴ <http://www.church-redeemer.org/alt-sermons-page/the-book-of-colossians-going-deep-growing-strong-lesson-4/>

example of love and humility, allowing His fullness to satisfy us, instead of chasing spiritual experiences and empty “special knowledge.”⁵

14. What is it about knowledge that lends itself to pride? How do we seek knowledge in humility?

15. How does spiritual pride affect others, and how does it affect our own walk with Christ?

Asceticism [(uh- set -uh-siz-uhm)]

*An austere, simple way of life in which persons renounce material pleasures and devote their energy to moral or religious purpose.*⁶

Finally, Paul tells us that harsh physical treatment is not God’s pathway to spiritual training. Asceticism teaches that we can restrain sensual desires by physical punishment. The problem is that this does nothing to address the human heart where sinful desires originate, so it lacks “any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:23). Our only hope is to be changed from the inside out (not the outside in), and only Christ in us can do this. He trains our hearts and minds in righteousness so that we want to glorify God with our bodies and we have the power to carry this out (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).⁷

16. How can lives that abstain from aspects of life in this world become counterproductive to the walk with Christ and our mission as a church?

How do we balance “being in the world and not of the world?”

17. At the end of this passage, in verse 23, we are told that these practices will fail in the end. When have you seen attempts to “restrain sensual indulgence” through rules fail?

How can rigid rules of avoidance actually end up promoting indulgence?

18. In what practical ways can we “hold fast to Christ our Head”?

How does this relationship allow us to remain connected, nourished and growing in our walks with Him?

19. What connection can be made between the perils in verse 8 and his emphasis in the preceding verses?

⁵ <http://www.church-redeemer.org/alt-sermons-page/the-book-of-colossians-going-deep-growing-strong-lesson-4/>

⁶ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/asceticism>

⁷ <http://www.church-redeemer.org/alt-sermons-page/the-book-of-colossians-going-deep-growing-strong-lesson-4/>