

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you talk about God's word and Pastor Brian's message with friends and family. You of course can use your own questions, but we'd like to give you this tool to encourage Biblical fellowship and discipleship in your circle of relationships. ***Enjoy discovering more about Him!***

"SHADOWS AND SUBSTANCE" | COL. 2:16-23 | PASTOR ANDREW LACASSE

WARM-UP QUESTION:

What is a ridiculous rule you've been asked to follow?

3:16-18

In what ways have you seen or experienced people judging those who have found freedom in the gospel?

What rules or cultural values do you see yourself or others mixing into the gospel?

3:19-23

In what ways has Jesus changed you from the inside?

What gospel-centered advice would you give someone wrestling with the "indulgence of the flesh."

In what areas is God inviting you to come closer to Him?

Announcements

Prayer Meeting, CK/Youth Summer Events, CG Facilitators, VIDEO, *office closed, Armenia team.*

Armenia: Please pray for Larry and Donna Hansen and Mike and Niki McMullen as they serve alongside Jeff and Paula Thompson in Armenia at the Mercy Projects Youth Camp. Many of the students attending have heard about Jesus but do not yet know Him personally. Please pray that God would open their hearts to the Gospel and that lives would be transformed through the love, truth, and ministry of the team. Also pray for safety, strength, wisdom, and encouragement for each member of the mission team as they faithfully serve.

Travel dates are July 8 through the 23rd

Colossians 2:16–23 Shadows and Substance

16 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. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 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, 19 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.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

“Therefore” (Context and Review – this is very much the same thought process as the passage covered last week)

Because of ever spiritual gift we have in Christ, how we are rooted and built up in Christ.

Christ is all sufficient – we have no need to add human philosophy or anything else to Him.

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What was going on: Legalism and Syncretism

The Bible is applicable across time and place, challenging all cultures as well as drawing out the truth from any culture. But when we bring it into a **new context**, we always have to navigate legalism and syncretism.

Legalism seeks so hard to not be like the world or the old ways that it **builds extra rules for safety**. The key to seeing legalism is that it is **externally-focused**.

<SLIDE>

- It fears being infected.

Legalism will bypass good if there is a risk of bad. (It has no FOMO and no adventure). **E.G. the Catholic practice of communion in one kind.**

- It is concerned about image.
- It seeks to sanitize the environment.
- It seeks to control behavior.

What the legalism looked like in Colosse: questions of food and drink, festivals, New Moons, Sabbaths, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch”

“DO NOT” – defining holiness by what we are not.

<SLIDE> **Syncretism** seeks to utilize the old ways by overworking any touch points, effectively **letting the culture change the gospel** rather than vice versa.

Syncretism is more complicated and often more subtle. It is a “buffet approach” (e.g. **Hindu view of Christ as avatar of Krishna**).

- Wants its cake and to eat it too.
- Prefers culture to gospel.
- Often based on fear.
- Ignores sources and outcomes.

What the syncretism looked like in Colosse: (yes, Judaism syncretized) and likely nature idolatry, prayer to angels, asceticism, mystic visions.

Prayer to angels is a little unclear historically but we know that it is to God that we pray. Just as we do not need to pray to saints, we don’t pray to or look to angels or even “angel numbers” for direction or power, but to Christ.

Asceticism is the practice of an ongoing causing of suffering to one’s body for spiritual holiness and growth.

Not bad to a point, but not a way of life (we will come back to this).

Mystic visions is a tough thing to translate (what were they doing as a result), but the basic intent of Paul seems clear – **we do not seek subjective experience (much less private experience) but seek Christ** who has already appeared.

Even when we are open to the work of the Spirit and His miraculous work in us, this is never our primary or regular way of finding Him.

- Rather than through subjective and questionable experience, we find Him in Scripture.
- Rather than through a private vision, we find Him in the Church community.
- Rather than through trying to force Him into our schedule, we submit to His relating to us.

“Elemental spirits”

It helps to keep in mind the religious world of the Colossians. Paul seems to be writing to a mixture of Jewish and Greco-Pagan mindsets. He is very possibly intentionally vague or broad in his application. Both Judaism and Greek/proto-gnostic thought are controverted here.

Taken broadly, it's very possible that Paul is using this term to mean both the basic form of religion followed by the Jews and former Jews and the **nature-based, evil and idolatrous** form of religion followed by Greeks and former Greeks.

The gospel is **universally and constantly challenging**. It gets contextualized, drawing out beautiful truth in a culture or philosophy - bringing it to fruition, and re-routing all falsehood. This is an ongoing process as culture changes, the gospel goes to new lands, and we explore the multifaceted riches of Christ's work for redemption.

? **Where do you tend to lean, or where do you lean currently?** (This can be a pendulum).

? **What extra and external rules have you relied on for holiness?**

? **What philosophies and values from culture have you tried to mix with the gospel?**

Brian gave a great list last week: Jesus + performance, experience, secret knowledge, self, success, identity, materialism, busyness, moralism.

<SLIDE> **“Let no one pass judgment”/ “Let no one disqualify you.”**

Passing judgment is more about opinion and shame. Disqualifying is more an excommunication, a breaking of ties.

Do you find yourself under judgment? **Differentiate from conviction** in your own heart – that could be the Spirit leading you away from sin and to Him.

But is someone is seeking to put you under their rules and not God's. We play an unnecessary game of spiritual **Stratego**.

The person who makes you feel guilty is probably **a guilty person** (Pastor and Professor Steve Brown).

Newer believers find themselves on both sides of this equation. So do older believers, but they are dangerously more set in their ways.

Some of you have been “disqualified” by **family of another faith**. You may have lost a lot to follow Jesus. God sees and will richly reward you. Be careful of falling into some new falsehood after that.

Do not disqualify yourself through **self-righteousness**.

- Nothing, not even purity, will be enough.
- We need to repent not only for our bad deeds but for our reasons for doing good. (Keller)
- Human religion tries to get God to respond to us while the gospel invites us to respond to Him.

<SLIDE> Jesus is the Substance

All the Israelite ceremony and structure is a shadow of Christ.

While it would take too long (come take Unfolding Gospel or do some research) – the whole Jewish religion and the entire storyline of the Old Testament is leading to Jesus. He was the hero and the point all along.

Not like a cartoon where the answer was in you all along, but in Him.

You cannot bear the weight of being the hero of your life.

Greek hopes were a shadow of Christ. Paul likely uses “shadow” to speak to the **Greek mindset that sought a perfect world.**

One irony is that the **gnostic mindset** was that the physical is bad - thus part of the resistance to it? But the gospel takes it in a different direction, showing that the material things are red herrings. They are not the point, thus resisting them is not the point.

Religious discipline is a shadow of Christ. Elsewhere, Paul says that to the pure all things are pure and whatever is not of faith is sin.

True spirituality does not come by compliance with laws (which are only a shadow) but by connection with the Life (who is the reality).- Norman L. Geisler

Jesus purifies rather than being concerned about impurity.

Actually, He was made impure ritually by a leper, the woman with a flow of blood, and a dead girl (two of these in one day!).

Moreover, He was made a curse and sin for us, that we might be the righteousness of God (Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21).

In human religion, you can only take away bad, never add good.

Jesus transforms the heart.

The abstinence methods seem to be helpful and in some way they aren't to be fully discounted, obviously (see James). So what is Paul saying here in that they only appear wise and are of no help?

- If it's not one thing it's another (*epithumia*).
- R.J. Whaley: it is not the hook or the bait that catches a fish, it is hunger.
- If the problem is external, then the legalist controls the environment and feels not only safe, but self-satisfied. If the problem is internal, no amount of external manipulation can help.
 - Perhaps Paul is using "the flesh" here in a spiritual sense, where they were using it in a more literal sense.
 - "The basic thing nobody asks is why do people take drugs of any sort? Why do we have these accessories to normal living to live? I mean, is there something wrong with society that's making us so pressurized, that we cannot live without guarding ourselves against it?" -John Lennon
- The irony here is that while these false teachers thought they were purifying people, they were actually adding to the pure gospel.

Nutrition facts for water:

Calories: 0

Total fat: 0g

Sodium: 0mg

Total Carbohydrates: 0g

Protein: 0g

Gal. 5:16: But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

We do not seek to see God in shadowy visions but through Christ's revelation.

We do not seek purity through avoidance but through Christ's transforming power.

We do not seek qualification through religious observance, but through Christ's obedience.

Prayer: Repentance and Transformation

Communion

Instead of spiritually competing with, judging, and disqualifying each other, you bring us together around you.

Bread:

Instead of shadow, we take His body. Instead of looking to anything else to add in, we eat the unmixed bread. Instead of “do not taste”, we taste that He is good.

Cup:

Instead of being disqualified, we are declared righteous in Christ's blood. Instead of “do not touch”, you draw so near to us that you are in us and we are in you.