

SHADOW OR REALITY?

Col. 2:16-23

We live in an age of warnings and warning labels.

Everywhere we go we are protected from ourselves.

Manufacturers are so afraid of lawsuits they cover containers and products with warning labels.

Recently I read a four page instruction manual. Two pages were filled with warnings about what NOT to do with this product. The warnings concluded: *"It is unlawful to use this product except as described in this manual!"*

We need to know dangers in spiritual realm. **THREE WARNINGS** to protect us from theological concepts that might harm us. **"Let the one "buying in" beware!"**

In preceding section, Paul tells how God sent him as a minister of the Gospel (1:23)

As such, Paul proclaims good news: the complete provision which is ours in Christ

First he shows the content of that revelation (1:24-2:15).

Then practical implications; how we should live in the light of all Christ has done for us (2:16-4:6).

[In presenting the content, he laid out first two principles about Christian living ...]

FIRST PRINCIPLE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING:

Like salvation,

TRUE SPIRITUALITY IS THE RESULT OF FAITH,

NOT WORKS. 2:6-7

SECOND PRINCIPLE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING:

TRUE SPIRITUALITY IS THE RESULT OF CHRIST'S WORK

2:9-10

He has provided *EVERYTHING* we need!

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROVISION IN CHRIST

2:16-4:6

If we're complete, if we're in Christ, if we've died & risen with Him, *HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?* Paul answers this question from several perspectives.

First, negative:

We shouldn't allow anyone to judge us with respect to the old rules.

THIRD PRINCIPLE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING:
TRUE SPIRITUALITY IS NEVER THE RESULT OF LEGALISM

2:16-23

One Christian leader shares: "I was raised in a church atmosphere where ... the don'ts were all I heard. To be a Christian meant not being able to do many of the fun things most kids enjoyed.... I ended up with a list of demands with no dynamic to live them. I became hostile to man-made religion.... The result of the judgmentalism of the advocates of the "rules-religion" drove me from the Christ they wanted me to know."

For many Christians, living the Christian life is the same as keeping a list of rules.

To follow Christ is to lose the joy of living.

"It takes all the fun out of life!"

Paul wants to correct this impression.

True spiritual life is life in Christ – NOT legalism, nor a list of rules to keep.

Therefore, we shouldn't submit to anyone's list of rules.

[That's the basis of Paul's first warning:]

DON'T LET ANYONE JUDGE YOU 2:16-17

Human nature thrives on legalistic religious duties. The flesh is weak when it comes to doing spiritual things, but it is strong on emphasizing religious rules and regulations.

Following religious routine inflates egos and makes people self-righteous.

Response to legalistic approach to Christian living is in preceding verses.

That's why Paul introduces this warning with a *"Therefore, . . ."*

We avoid the legalists' criticism by recognizing the basis of living:

- a. **Christ was the totality of God**
- b. **We are complete, when we are in Him.**

WE LACK NOTHING!

We don't have to be intimidated by legalistic critics. We have everything we need to stand before God, because He sees us "in Christ."

Judaizers were judging **religious practices – their ceremonial laws.**

The legalists were judging them concerning **food and drink.**

JGod had made a distinction between "clean" food and "unclean."

The Jews increased the list and added to the rules.

Paul had already revealed that what we eat or drink doesn't make us spiritual. *1 Cor. 8:8: "Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do."*

All food and drink are lawful.

Hughes: "Dietary principles are a good idea. Eat too many Twinkies and you will no longer be "twinkletoes"; too many Snickers are no laughing matter. But dietary discipline is NOT a sign of spirituality.

The legalists were also observing **religious holidays**.

God established certain days for religious activities (Lev. 23)

Israel added other days that were special to them.

They began a New Moon celebration, like pagan nations around them, in addition to their day of rest (Sabbath) celebrations. **Is. 1:13-14**

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations -- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

Pharisees added regulations & watched people closely. God gave His celebrations to teach spiritual truths that would be fulfilled later.

Their traditions were a mere shadow of what was to come. In 35 years of ministry I have had many opportunities to travel. At first it was great to meet new people and see new places. How-

ever, as many of you know, that gets old! I began looking for chances to come home early.

On several occasions I have come home early, without telling Helen, to surprise her. After a prolonged trip, I come quietly into the house, moving toward the kitchen where Helen is busy doing something. As I get close I see her shadow on the wall. What excitement! I keep moving closer. Suddenly I enter the kitchen and throw my arms around . . . her *shadow!!!* It's so exciting to give her shadow a big hug, after not seeing her for so long! Right? Is that what I do? *I don't think so!*

When I come back from a trip, I don't want hugs from the shadow. I want to hug my wife!

Legalists are "hugging a shadow" when the essence has already come.

They're clinging to the wrong thing.

It's time to let go of the shadow and take hold of the reality.

Since we are complete in Christ, we shouldn't allow anyone to judge us on rituals.

Those were mere shadows of the reality.

Now that we have the real thing, why should we go back to a shadow?

**LEGALISTS CLING TO THE SHADOW
INSTEAD OF TO THE REALITY
WHICH IS ONLY FOUND IN CHRIST**

DON'T LET ANYONE DISQUALIFY YOU 2:18-19

Judges (referees) in athletic contests decide who deserves the prize.

They are responsible to watch those who compete to assure that everyone plays by the rules, and to eliminate those who don't.

In the spiritual battle, the fundamental rule for success is to be "IN CHRIST."

Religious movements propose a different path.

They encourage us to work harder to earn the prize.

That's not the way God established. We will never please Him by our efforts.

The judge will eliminate us for not keeping all the rules of the contest.

Those who take away our prize distract us from the way to earn it, presenting their own strategy.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO WANT TO TAKE AWAY OUR PRIZE:

1. "**Humility**" – used to convince others – to manipulate!

Like Pharisees, leaders make a public spectacle of humility, but it's false!

They're proud of their humility!

Like author everyone was talking about years ago: *Humility and How I Attained It*

My favorite chapter was the last: "How You May Be Like Me!"

2. "**Worship of angels.**"

Some commentators: worship by humans, to angels, as "emanation" between God and man.

Simpler alternative fits Paul's day: Pharisees believed angels worship God; our religious activities participate with them in worshipping God.

3. These folks based their view, not on God's Word, but rather, **based on their own experience**, on the things they had seen.

Paul would respond: we submit our experience and ideas to God's Word.

4. Fourth, they had a **swollen head**.

Pride unfounded – no real basis for it.

Their attitude was stimulated by their flesh.

[First 4 characteristics: system looks good; sounds logical; *feels* right. But, ...]

5. [. . . finally, what was lacking was more important than what they had.]

They had **lost contact with the Head**, the Source of true spiritual growth.

Their activity was useless in their attempt to draw near to God.

Only by being linked with the Head is the body nourished and able to pull together to accomplish all God wants to accomplish through it.

Spiritual growth isn't the result of our efforts.

GOD causes His body to grow, both as individuals and corporately.

The different parts of the body each contribute. But they all have to be in touch with The Head

Bernard of Clairvaux: “We drink of Thee, the Fountain-head, And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.”

In summary, legalists delve into asceticism, experience, and arrogant attitudes.

The result: their followers lose their prize. Hinder growth God wants in us.

**LEGALISTS CHEAT US OUT OF THE PRIZE
AND ROB US OF THE JOY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

DON'T SUBMIT TO MAN-MADE RULES 2:20-23

We reject them because we have died with Christ 20-21

Those who have trusted Christ are identified with Him in His death. 20a

Since we have died with Christ to the principles of this world, we ought not to submit ourselves to its rules.

“Basic principles of this world,” we usually think about “worldly” lifestyle.

Those who live by these principles:

Not people who DO participate in pagan activities, rather, those who DON'T participate! They follow human regulations that seem good.

It has its own seductiveness. It says: “*I'm going to get to God on my own terms.*” People love it! Asceticism feeds the flesh by starving it!

The world's principles attempt to satisfy God by means of our own efforts.

You don't lose the prize by disobeying the rules. It's the legalistic system that robs us of the prize!!!

Legalism is a giant “backward step?” Remember “Mother may I?” —“Take 1 giant step backward!!!”

We have liberty in Christ; everything has been made new in Him.

How are we going to go back into slavery to the legalistic system which says: “Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”

WE have died with Christ to that kind of rules 2:20-21

We reject them because they are based on man-made standards 22

*THE RULES deal with things that are **temporary***

They are based on human standards

The rules don’t come from God; they come from man.

They are based on human opinions, not on God’s Word.

“Commands” isn’t the word to identify O.T. commands, but the one in Is. 29:13, and that Christ used in Matt. 15:9, to identify human commands.

The rules are temporary and man-made, *so why dedicate so much effort to them?*

We reject them because they don’t give the power we need 23

They look good. They look spiritual.

Although rules and regulations have value, they have a major weakness: *the rules can't provide the power to obey them.*

Most of us learn that denying the body its desires merely arouses them.

Dieting--when we try to lose weight by rigid diets, what happens? **The same is true with other desires of the flesh. Just trying to deny them won't overcome the desires, it makes us want more!**

All they do is condemn us, because *we can't keep the rules!*
Cp. Rom. 3:19-22; Rom. 7 Ex. the fishing cottage

**THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH LEGALISM:
IT DOESN'T PROVIDE THE POWER TO KEEP IT!!**

Jerome, the early church father: Having lived a wild life in his youth, after he became a Christian, fled all contact with this gross world. He went to live in a cave near Bethlehem, where he sought to subdue his carnal nature by fasting almost to the point of starvation. Exhausted and weary, he fell asleep and dreamed he was still rioting with his earlier companions. **The flesh cannot be starved into subjection. It cannot be improved by subjecting it to rules and regulations!**

You shut yourself up in a monastery to escape the world, only to find that you have taken the world in with you!
So then, what IS the solution?

The complete provision we have received in Christ.
Maclaren: "Only one thing will put the collar on the animal within us, the power of the indwelling Christ."

Those who are in Christ, are **already** complete.

WE LACK NOTHING!

If we are COMPLETE, what should we do about it?
How should we live?

Several years ago I preached this. Afterwards 3 people came up to me and told me, “but you can’t preach this way because people will get the idea they can live however they please, if they don’t have to obey the rules!!!”

There are still those who would place us under the yoke of slavery.

They want to put us on a list of rules.

Others do it to themselves:

“Just tell me what the rules are!”

Christian living isn’t about playing by the rules.

It’s a relationship.

It’s based on trust. We trust Him.

We live on the basis of gratitude, in order to please Him.

We don’t live to earn points with God.

We live by faith, to glorify, honor, and please Him.

WE ARE ALREADY COMPLETE IN HIM.

We lack nothing.

Now our life becomes a celebration. A continuous action of thanksgiving for what He has **ALREADY** done for us.

What are some man-made rules we hear in our religious culture today?

How should we respond when we hear such rules?