

SHADOW VERSUS SUBSTANCE – A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS 2:16-23 (Part 3 of 5)

In Colossians 2:13-15, Paul reminds the Colossians and us of the reason why we don't need anything more than a personal faith in Christ and His redemptive work on our behalf! It has accomplished all that we need to live in the fullness of God's blessing for each of our lives. In Paul's day, false teachers were promoting the need for something more by means of this Colossian heresy, encouraging the believer to participate in a hybrid cult of Greek philosophy, Old Testament Judaism and pagan mysticism; warning the Colossian Christians that involvement in such a cultic belief system would not enhance, but only diminish their relationship with Christ.

In our day, the promise of something more continues to be offered by a new generation of false teachers, claiming that a simple walk with Christ is not enough. There is something more to be had by an involvement with political activism and submission to the insidious influence of secular psychology. We can rightly call this current hybrid manifestation the "American Heresy," since it has its source in the many Evangelical pied pipers residing within our nation. When will we learn that nothing more can be gained from our participation in this modern-day cult? It has resulted in a profound diminishment of the spiritual strength of the body of Christ, hindering the advancement of His cause in our nation and throughout the world. This passage in Colossians should serve as sufficient warning to all of us. The two primary admonitions are found in Colossians 2:8 and 2:16-17, where we read the following –

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

In v8, the present active imperative “blepete” can be translated as “beware;” indicating that the danger is very real, not merely hypothetical. It is coupled with the present active participle “sulagogeo,” which speaks of the act of kidnapping someone. In this instance, the attempted captivity is for the purpose of removing these Christians from the realm of Biblical Christ-centered truth and imprisoning them in a culture of falsehood. The contemporary term of “brainwashing” would serve as an appropriate synonym. It is exactly what is happening to Christians today. Verse 16 provides us with a more complete picture of the danger which so concerned Paul. It too is in the present active imperative “krineto” in the negative, as Paul calls upon the Colossian Christians to **STOP** submitting to the judgmental influence of the false teachers whose goal was to lead these believers astray. The closest modern-day equivalent would be that of being “bullied,” so that under such an intimidating influence, they would be misled into believing falsehoods about the person and work of Christ. It is high time for our current generation of Christians to break free from this captivating bondage and intimidating influence of the “American Heresy.” How?

By standing up to those Evangelical bullies who have been manipulating and misleading you for so long!