

## SHADOW VERSUS SUBSTANCE – A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS 2:16-23 (part 4 of 5)

As Paul identifies the content of the intimidating influence issuing from the false teachers within the Colossian church, it becomes clear that in the forefront of this heretical intrusion were a group of men known as the Judaizers. They professed faith in Christ, while also advocating for the observance of the ceremonial ordinances and dietary regulations of the Old Covenant; which, under the New Covenant, had become irrelevant (Acts 10:9-16; 1 Corinthians 7:19).

Paul refers to those observances as a “shadow” which was designed to point the Old Testament believer toward its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Thus, the contrast between shadow and substance. We as New Covenant Christians are living on the opposite side of the Cross. Our Savior’s redemptive work is not some future event which we can only view as a distant shadow. The light of the New Testament is brightly shining on the already accomplished redemption of Jesus Christ, enabling us to understand it in a manner that would have been impossible for the believer under the older and lesser covenant (Hebrews 8:13; 10:1; 1 Peter 1:10-12). As a result, every follower of Jesus throughout the Church Age must realize that submitting to these no longer relevant ceremonies and regulations will not help, but only hinder the Christian’s relationship with their Savior. Notice how Paul expresses it in Galatians 5:3-8 –

**“And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.**

Yet, the Colossians were being told the very opposite by these Judaizers, and were in danger of being led astray. The promise of something that would aid in their spiritual progress would actually promote a spiritual regression on their part. So, Paul warns them in v8 to “beware” of this evil influence and “stop” (v16) allowing it to move them away from the spiritual reality that was already theirs in Christ.

It isn’t difficult to reflect on what was being espoused back then and fast forward to what is happening here and now. When someone claims that he had a dream and received fresh revelation, beware of the validity of such a claim and the integrity of that individual. When observing so-called Christians treating mere men as objects of worship, turn away from such heretical and blasphemous behavior. When intimidating propaganda pours into your life from every direction on social media, realize that it is nothing more than demonic cunning craftiness, designed to confuse you. Steering clear of every possible pitfall in these last days will not be easy. Jesus warns us in Matthew 24:11, that in the last days before His return, many false prophets will arise and mislead many. So how can we survive and even thrive in such a time of spiritual chaos and confusion? We must be willing to “keep it simple.” This is precisely Paul’s admonishment to the Corinthians (who loved making it complicated), as well as all of us, in 2 Corinthians 11:3 –

**But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”**