

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

So how does a sincere Christian avoid the variety of pitfalls mentioned by Paul in Colossians 2:16-23? We know from 2 Corinthians 11:3 that we must keep our Christian life simple and pure, as an expression of our single-hearted devotion to Christ. Yet that is easier said than done due to the undermining influence of sin in our lives. But there is a clear-cut and straight-forward solution to the problem of the sin nature in the life of the Christian. To be sure, it is not a promise for sinless perfection, but a provision for a consistent and faithful walk with our Savior, presented to us by the apostle Paul in Romans 6:11, where we read this –

“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

This “reckoning” (KJV) must occur on a daily basis by an act of faith on the part of the believer. The maintenance of that commitment then continues by submitting to the control of the Holy Spirit, moment by moment (Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:16). This is the only solution endorsed in the New Testament for the problem of sin. Our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection on our behalf (Romans 6:1-10), gives us the capacity, by means of the new nature, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to confront and overcome the problem of sin (Romans 8:1-4).

Any attempt to achieve victory over sin outside of that daily identification in our union with Christ, under the control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, will end in failure. By the very definition of the term, such efforts constitute LEGALISM; in that they consist of an undertaking to live for Christ in the flesh, by means of our own will-power and self-discipline, rather than by relying upon the spiritual resources provided for us in this union with our Savior.

Such a legalistic lifestyle on the part of even the sincerest Christian is equivalent to that of an unbeliever engaged in one of the many popular programs for self-improvement, based on one’s own human potential. This is when Christians and non-Christians alike, can become vulnerable to the latest gimmick which promises to add something more to your life as it currently stands. Go vegan. Do yoga. See a psychiatrist; you may have a disorder. No kidding. It’s called SIN. Give money to this ministry and you will get back double. Go hear a guy who claims to have died and talked with Jesus. It will change your life. There is no end to the persuasive and deceptive gimmicks which Satan offers in seeking to lead us astray.

But through our union with Christ, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, God’s plan for each of us consists of a lifestyle of simplicity and purity; as an expression of one’s unmitigated, undivided, single-hearted devotion to our Savior and Lord. It will not mean a life of sinless perfection, but one of spiritual consistency, growth and forgiveness, for those times when we do sin. If you have been seeking to live for Christ on the basis of will power and are trapped in a legalistic bondage that isn’t working; you must begin to think of the concept of “will power” in an entirely different way. IT IS YOUR WILL, BUT IT IS GOD’S POWER! The power for a spiritually successful Christian life doesn’t have its source in you and what you can do, but in God and in what He can do by means of His power at work in and through you. Your will is involved in that it must be engaged in a cooperative effort between yourself and God. But it is His power not yours. The apostle Paul describes this process at work in his own life in Colossians 1:29 – **“For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”** As it was for the apostle Paul, a spiritually successful Christian life is also possible for each of us.