



Morningside Church

Sermon Discussion Guide

Title: Settling for Shadows of the Savior, Not the Substance

Date: June 2, 2024

Scripture Text: Colossians 2:11-17

Notes:

Some of the issues facing the Colossian Christians were cultural influences, both from pagan practices and Jewish tradition. They were being pulled to incorporate or replace sound doctrine with these worldly perspectives. Just because something sounds religious doesn't mean it is true. It must align with the teachings of scripture. Religious practices in and of themselves are not inherently wrong, as long as they are consistent with what is found in the Bible, i.e. Lord's Supper, baptism, weddings, etc. The trouble comes when these religious ceremonies are elevated to an inappropriate level and are seen as an essential element of salvation. Professing Christians can cling to these rituals instead of a relationship with Christ. These are the challenges faced by the Colossian church back then and the church today.

I. The Shadows (Colossians 2:11-12, 16-17)

Several religious practices/ceremonies are referenced in these verses. Circumcision ([vs. 11](#)), baptism ([vs. 12](#)), diet ([vs. 16](#)), and days ([vs. 16](#)). Each has a physical aspect, which can be meaningful when properly applied, and each has a spiritual aspect which can draw us closer in our relationship with Christ. When applied solely physically, is it only a shadow of the Savior.

Physical application: *circumcision* was established and mandated by God for entrance into the covenant community of His people, the Jews. *Baptism* has been practiced historically by John the Baptist representing repentance, and in the church symbolizing a Christian converts new relationship with Christ. *Dietary* restrictions and special *days* were practiced as described in the Mosaic law. None of these are an element of salvation.

Spiritual application: the *circumcision* of Christ is associated with "circumcision of the heart" ([Rom. 2:29](#)). It describes the believer's entry into the community of Christ's people, the church. Spiritual *baptism* is the immersion of the believer in the Holy Spirit, through Whom they are now equipped to live for Christ. As Christians, we are no longer subject to the requirements of the law, so no spiritual requirements for keeping *dietary* or special *days*. Although we may keep the Sabbath (Sunday) as a special day, we see in [Heb. 4](#) that Jesus is now our Sabbath. None of these are elements of salvation but each can represent the salvation that has already taken place.



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Notes:

- What does the term “*Shadow of the Savior*” mean?
- What could be other *shadows of the Savior* (religious rituals) people may cling to today?
- What would be potential attractions for people to cling to *shadows* instead of the Savior?
- Not all religious rituals are problems. When is it that a religious ritual becomes an issue?
- Describe a time when you clung to a religious ritual. What happened to ‘snap’ you out of it?
- How can we guard ourselves to not inappropriately observe or prioritize religious rituals?

II. The Savior (Colossians 2:13-15)

While we were dead in our transgressions (cut off from God), Jesus made us alive, forgiving all our transgressions. Nothing we did, it was all Him. It was by His redemptive work our certificate of debt (our sin debt) was cancelled. They were nailed to the cross. Jesus Christ alone is the essential element for salvation. This is the substance of the Savior.

- What does it mean that Jesus canceled our sin debt?
- Why was Jesus needed for our debt to be canceled. How come we couldn’t cancel our own debt?
- Why do people at times feel there is something they can do to help them get to heaven?
- What is the difference between religion and relationship?
- What can you do to build a better and more maturing relationship with Jesus?

In summary, Paul warns Christians not to be taken in by deceptive arguments. These claims are attractive, but are merely tricks: they sound true, but they are not. Arguing for self-denial, legalism, visions, and other practices only looks good to observers. None of these are the real source of spiritual growth. Paul emphasizes that Christ accomplished everything we need to be justified before God. As a result, there is no reason for believers to pursue these false shadows. We have the real substance: Jesus, so we should follow Him.