



Would you please explain the meaning of Colossians 2:16-17?

We have explained this passage, in detail, in our booklets, "Is That in the Bible?--Man's Holidays or God's Holy Days," and "God's Commanded Holy Days." In these booklets, we show from Scripture that Colossians 2:16-17 does not teach--as many have erroneously concluded--that the weekly Sabbath and the seven annual Holy Days are no longer binding; in fact, correctly understood, that particular passage teaches the exact opposite.

First, we want to quote from our booklet, "Is That in the Bible?--Man's Holidays or God's Holy Days," which contains a more general discussion of the passage. This will be followed by a very specific discussion of, among other concepts, the grammatical structure of the passage in the original Greek, as quoted from our booklet, "God's Commanded Holy Days," revealing in much detail the intended meaning of that Scripture.

To begin with, please note the following excerpts from our booklet, "Is That in the Bible?--Man's Holidays or God's Holy Days":

"In the New King James Bible, Colossians 2:16--17 reads as follows: 'So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival [margin: 'feast day'] or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ'...

"Let's first look at the phrase, 'the substance is of Christ.' The word 'is' is not in the Greek. It was added by the translator in an attempt to make the meaning clearer; however, this addition has, to the contrary, confused and perverted the meaning. Without the word 'is' in that particular phrase, it simply states, '...but the substance of Christ.' What is the substance of Christ?...

"The literal meaning for the word 'substance' is 'body.' The Greek word here is 'soma' and is otherwise translated as 'body' throughout the New Testament, and especially in the letter to the Colossians... With that understanding, let us turn again to Colossians 2:16--17, where Paul says: 'Let no one judge you... regarding a festival or Sabbaths... but the body of Christ.' In other words, let no one, except the body of Christ--the Church--judge in those matters. The Church--the body of Christ--the preserver of the truth--CAN, and should, judge in that regard.

"The Colossians were criticized by their opponents, not by Paul, when they kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days (Note that Paul refers to 'Sabbaths'; that is, to both the weekly and the annual Sabbath or Holy Days.) Paul is essentially saying to them: I am speaking on behalf of the Church when I tell you that you should continue keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, as this is what the Church has judged and resolved to do, based on the Scriptures.

"Colossae was a predominately Gentile city, although some Jews undoubtedly lived there as well. The Christian converts in Colossae had begun to keep the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, and Paul essentially told them: 'Don't listen to your former friends and your relatives who try to convince you not to keep those "Jewish traditions"--but rather, listen to what the Church is telling you'...

"What did Paul mean when he described these things as being a shadow of things to come? The weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days have tremendous meaning for us today. They foreshadow events to occur in the future at a time when the whole world will be ruled by Christ and taught by Him to keep God's Law--including the weekly and annual Sabbaths--as God's people already do today.

"Rather than doing away with the keeping of the Sabbath and Holy Days, Colossians 2:16--17 teaches the exact opposite. It teaches us not to worry about people who say that we should not do so, but rather to concern ourselves with the truth of the matter, which is being taught by Christ's Body--

the Church...

"Some tried to convince the Gentile Christians in Colossae to cease from keeping the weekly and annual Sabbaths. Others went to the opposite extreme--they tried to convince the Gentile Christians in Colossae that they had to fast on the weekly and annual Sabbaths.

"Since both the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are Feast days, the Christians in Colossae kept them, of course, as FEAST days. They would eat and drink on those days (except, of course, during the 'Fast'--on the Day of Atonement). Some, though, apparently criticized them for that, teaching that no eating and drinking should take place on any of those days.

"Colossians 2:16, correctly translated from the Greek, states: 'Let no one judge you regarding eating and drinking.' Paul is addressing here the ACT of eating and drinking, not the KIND of food and drink being partaken of. Some critics felt, however, that Christians should fast on those days, rather than eating or drinking anything. Notice Paul's reference to this kind of self-imposed ascetic, or austere, religion in Colossians 2:20--23 ('...why... do you subject yourselves to regulations--"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men?').

"Paul told the Colossians to continue keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days in the same way as they were doing it, rather than listening to those who were trying to tell them not to do it at all, or not to keep them as feast days..."

As mentioned, our booklet, "God's Commanded Holy Days," discusses the passage of Colossians 2:16-17 in greater detail. For the spiritual benefit of our readers, we would like to quote from this more detailed, albeit perhaps somewhat technical discussion, to destroy any doubt as to what Colossians 2:16-17 is REALLY teaching:

"Colossians 2:16--17 reads, in the New King James Bible, as follows: 'So let no one judge you in food or

in drink, or regarding a festival [margin: 'feast day'] or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ'...

"If you have a New King James Bible, you might want to check the margin. It says there that the literal meaning for the word 'substance' is 'body.' That is correct. The Greek word here is 'soma,' and it is otherwise translated as 'body' throughout the New Testament.

"Limiting this discussion just to the letter to the Colossians, the New King James Bible has translated the word 'soma' consistently as 'body.' Only here, in Colossians 2:17, it is translated as 'substance.' Why? Simply because the translators did not, and do not, understand the meaning of the passage.

"Notice it for yourself. Notice, too, what is being referred to when the phrase 'body of Christ' is used elsewhere in the following passages:

"Colossians 1:18: 'And He is the head of the body ['soma' in Greek], the church.' Christ is identified here as the Head of the body, which is the Church.

"Colossians 1:24: 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body ['soma' in the Greek], which is the church.' Again, we see that the body of Christ is identified here as His Church.

"Colossians 2:19: '... and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body ['soma'], nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.' Again, the reference is to the spiritual body of Christ, the Church.

"Finally, let's notice Colossians 3:15: 'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body ['soma']. We all belong to that one body--the Church, of which Christ is the Head.

"These Scriptures clearly show that the references in that letter to the body of Christ is to the Church

of Christ. With that understanding, let us turn again to Colossians 2:16--17, where Paul says: 'Let no one judge you... regarding a festival or Sabbaths... but the body of Christ.' In other words, let no one, except the body of Christ--the Church--judge in those matters. The Church, the body of Christ, the preserver of the truth, can and should judge in that regard...

"It is interesting that Greek scholars recognize--in simply looking at the Greek structure of the sentence--that the first part of the statement, 'Let no one judge you...' requires a second statement to explain who should do the judging.

"Professor Troy Martin wrote an article entitled, 'But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col. 2:17),' which was published in the Journal of Biblical Literature in the Summer of 1995. In that article, he confirms--based on the Greek structure of the sentence--that the second part of the statement in Colossians 2:16--17 explains who is doing the judging.

"He first points to a parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 10:24 that states: 'Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well being.' In order to understand this passage correctly, one has to repeat in the second phrase the opposite of the beginning of the first phrase. In other words, the clear and intended meaning of this passage is: 'Let no one seek his own, but let each one seek the other's well being.'

"This Scripture is grammatically structured in the same way as Colossians 2:16--17. Therefore, according to Professor Troy in regard to both 1 Corinthians 10:24 and Colossians 2:16--17, 'The verb judge determines the action that is forbidden [by the first phrase = let no one judge you...] and then enjoined [or commanded, by the second phrase].'

"With this understanding, the sentence in Colossians 2:16--17 has to read this way: 'So let no one judge you... regarding a festival or Sabbaths..., but let the body of Christ judge you.'

"Professor Troy gives a second example to prove

this conclusion, namely Romans 14:13, which reads: 'Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.' In the Greek, the word for 'judge' and 'resolve' is exactly the same, namely 'krino.' This word is used in Colossians 2:16--17 and translated there as 'judge.'

"Romans 14:13 tells us that we must not judge one another, but that we must judge how not to become a stumbling block for others. This statement in Romans 14:13 is identical in structure with the structure used in Colossians 2:16--17. No one is to judge the Colossians regarding the Sabbath and the Holy Days, except for the body of Christ, the Church. This means, then, that Colossians 2:16--17 says exactly the opposite from what critics of the Sabbath and the Holy Days want us to believe. The Colossians were not criticized for NOT keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, but rather, they were criticized for KEEPING them.

"Comparing Romans 14:13 with Colossians 2:16--17, Dr. Troy concludes that Paul is telling the Colossians in Chapter 2 that they should not let a man judge them for keeping the Holy Days and the Sabbath, but that the Church--the Body of Christ--should judge this matter. The Colossians were criticized by their opponents, not by Paul, when they kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Paul is essentially saying to them: I am speaking on behalf of the Church, when I tell you that you should continue keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, as this is what the Church has judged and resolved to do, based on the Biblical Scriptures.

"The Church [of God] has understood the correct meaning of this passage in years past. In 1976, Herbert Armstrong, late Pastor General of the Church of God, wrote a booklet entitled, 'Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days--Which?' On page 35 he writes: 'So these little-understood verses ought to be translated clearly: "Let no man therefore judge you... but [rather let] the body of Christ [determine it]." Let Christ's body judge these church matters. Greek scholars recognize that the last clause "but [rather] the body of Christ" demands that a verb be added, but have often not

seen that the missing verb should be supplied from the most logical and grammatical parallel clause so as to read properly, "Let the body of Christ judge [these matters]."

"Unfortunately, a few years after Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, the wording of this section in the same booklet was changed. A new and unauthorized explanation was given regarding Colossians 2:16, paving the way, of course, for subsequent drastic [erroneous] changes. The revised wording was: 'Therefore the Christians at Colossae were not to let themselves be taken to task by heretical teachers concerning matters such as eating, drinking, holy days, new moons and Sabbaths... After all, how could such matters possibly transcend Christ? He is the body, the substance, the very center of God's plan of salvation. All else is a mere shadow that holds no value as a replacement for him!...

"What did Paul mean when he described these things as being a shadow of things to come? Let's review once again the insightful comments of Prof. Troy in the above-mentioned article. He states: 'These Christian practices may comprise the shadow, and they are not presented negatively except by the opponents...The tense is present [Note carefully that the text reads, 'these ARE,' not 'WERE' 'a shadow of things to come'], and affirms that these things are now shadows. [Some] commentators translate the past tense and conclude that these stipulations have ended now that the true substance has arrived since they were only shadows... In spite of this..., the text affirms a present... validity to the shadow.'

"The weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days have tremendous meaning for us today, foreshadowing events to occur in the future, when the whole world will be ruled by Christ and taught by Him to keep God's Law--including the weekly and annual Sabbaths--as God's people already do today.

"Rather than doing away with Sabbath and Holy Day keeping, Colossians 2:16--17 teaches the exact opposite. It teaches us not to worry about people who say that we should not do so [or who try to

convince us of their personal ideas as to HOW and HOW NOT to keep these days], but to concern ourselves with the truth, as taught by Christ's Body--the Church..."

In conclusion, Colossians 2:16-17 teaches without a shadow of a doubt that true Christians are obligated and commanded to continue keeping the weekly Seventh-Day Sabbath and the seven annual Holy Days.

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