

Three Types of Legalism to Avoid (vv. 16-23)

Mosaic Regulations (vv. 16-17)

VERSE 16 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 [Sabbath days] (Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων [*neg me + conj oun + pro.nom.m.s. tis + pro.acc.p. su + pres.act.imper.3s. krino judge + prep en + noun loc.f.s. brodis food, meal + conj + prep en + noun loc.f.s. posis drink + conj e or + prep en + noun loc.nt.s. meros “in respect” + noun gen.f.s. eorte festival + conj e or + noun gen.f.s. neomenia new moon festival + conj e or + noun gen.nt.p. sabbaton*])--

VERSE 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (ἅ ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ [*pro.nom.nt.p. hos which + pres.act.ind.3s. eimi + noun nom.f.s. skia shadow + d.a.w/pres.act.part.gen.nt.p. mello be about + d.a.w/noun nom.nt.s. soma body; “substance” + conj de but + d.a.w/abl.m.s. Christos*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 16-17

1. “Therefore” (*conj oun*) ties what follows to the strategic victory over the hostile angelic entities made possible by the exaltation of Jesus Christ.
2. In v. 16 Paul admonishes the Colossians to not allow themselves to be coerced into observing Jewish/Mosaic ritual regulations.
3. “Let no one act as your judge” (*pres.act.imper. krino* ‘to judge’) means to stop (*neg. me*) allowing any individual to dictate absence from certain foods and drinks or to observe Jewish holy days.
4. In other words, these believers are to resist anyone who tries to bring them under things related to the age of Israel.
5. The Law of Moses contains a dietary code designed to illustrate the clean versus the unclean.
6. This code is found in Leviticus 11.
7. This code has been suspended according to the words of Jesus in Mk. 7:19 and Acts 10 and 11 where Peter was told that there was no longer any species of animal that was off limits for human consumption.
8. The Colossians were told otherwise by a false teacher(s).

9. Restrictions concerning drink appear in the Law with regard to priests (Lev. 10:9); and with regard to any liquid that comes in contact with a food or vessel that was considered unclean (Lev. 11:34, 36); and with the prohibition against drinking alcohol as per the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:3).
10. “In regard to” (*en mereti* adj. *meros*) introduces three dative nouns all of which are related to special days authorized under the Law.
11. “Festivals,” “new moon,” and “sabbath days” appear together in various OT texts (1Chron. 23:31; 2Chron. 24; 31:3; 2Kgs. 4:23; Neh. 10:33; Isa. 66:23; Ezek. 46:1; Amos 8:5).
12. The attempt to impose a “religious calendar” on the Colossian church is what Paul is referring to.
13. According to Rom. 14:5, 6 Paul allows believers the choice in observance or non-observance of special days.
14. The allowance is for Jewish converts who found it hard to break from the observance related to the Jewish calendar.
15. Paul’s position in Romans chapter fourteen is “live and let live” with regard to food and drink and special days (cf. Rom. 14:1-6; cp. v. 13).
16. In Romans 14 the one who abstains from certain foods (e.g., meat sacrificed to idols) and drink and who observes special days is considered the ‘weak believer.’
17. But here the situation is quite different in that it involved the imposition of these things on believers.
18. Participation in a prescribed religious calendar, even though taken from Scripture, would be a return to a practice connected to another dispensation.
19. The weekly Sabbath was not officially authorized as a commandment until the giving of the 10 commandments.
20. It is the only commandment of the ten that is not authorized for the Church Age.
21. We are not required to keep a Saturday or Sunday Sabbath as has been widely taught in Christian circles.
22. We do have a Sabbath according to Heb. 4:9 but it is not a day in the week but is related to Faith-Rest (cf. Heb. 4:10-11).
23. “Things” (pro.nom.nt.p. *ho*) refers to the five items mentioned in v. 16.
24. Paul classifies these “things” as “a shadow of things coming” (literally).
25. The noun “shadow” (nom.f.s. *skia*) and here has the sense of “foreshadowing.”
26. The phrase “of what is to come” or better “the things coming” refers to those things related to the 1st Advent with special emphasis on the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session of Christ.
27. It is used of a literal shadow in Mk. 4:32 and Acts 5:15.
28. The words “the shadow of death” in Matt. 4:16 and Lk. 1:79 refers to a death threat.
29. But here and in Heb. 8:5 and 10:1 it is used of the ritual code of the OT.
30. In Heb. 8:5 the noun is paired with “a copy” (noun nt.s. *hupodeigma*; also at 9:23).
31. This noun can be translated also as “pattern” or “example” (e.g., Jn. 13:15; Heb. 3:11; Jam. 5:10; 2Pet. 2:6).
32. We refer to these things as typology.
33. A shadow implies a reality.
34. Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law and that includes the ritual code
35. Believers of this dispensation are not to involve themselves in “shadows” as we have the reality in the person of Christ.

36. The phrase “but the substance (*to soma*) belongs to Christ” establishes the superior over the inferior.
37. It should be obvious that CA believers live in a superior dispensation with superior promises (cf. Heb. 7:19, 22; 8:6; cp. 11:40).

Ascetic and Idolatrous Practices Versus Genuine Spirituality (vv. 18-19)

VERSE 18 Let no one keep defrauding [cheat] you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels (μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, [*adj.nom.m.s. medeis no one + pro.acc.p. su + pres.act.imper.3s. katabrabeuo cheat; “defrauding you of your prize” + pres.act.part.nom.m.s. thelo “delighting” + prep en + noun loc.f.s. tapeinophrosune false humility; “self-abasement” + conj + noun loc.f.s. threskeia worship + d.a.w/noun gen.m.p. angleos*], **taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind** [ἃ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεύων, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ [*pro.acc.nt.p. hos + perf.act.ind.3s. horao see + pres.act.part.nom.m.s. embeteuo take one’s stand + adv eike in vain; “without cause” + pres.pass.part.nom.m.s. phusioo “inflated” + prep hupo + d.a.w/noun gen.m.s. nous mind + d.a.w/noun gen.f.s. sarx flesh + pro.gen.m.s. autos*]),

VERSE 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God (καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὖξει τὴν αὖξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ [*conj + neg ou + pres.act.[part.nom.m.s. krateo hold fast + d.a.w/noun acc.f.s. kephale + prep ek + pro.abl.m.s. hos + adj.nom.nt.s. pas + d.a.w.noun nom.nt.s. soma body + prep dia + d.a.w/noun gen.m.p. sundesmos ligament; chain + pres.pass.part.nom.nt.s. epichoregeo support, supply + conj + pres.pass.part.nom.nt.s. sumbibazo bring together, hold together + pres.act.ind.3p. auzano grow, increase + d.a.w/noun acc.f.s. auzesis growth + d.a.w/noun abl.m.s. theos*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 18-19

1. The second listing of false teachings and practices is introduced by a rare (1x) verb that has a sports background.
2. The verb is a present imperative (3s.); the verb (*katabrabeuo*) means ‘to cheat’ someone out of something.
3. Most translations understand it as meaning “robbing [someone] of a prize.”
4. The verb *brabeuo* occurs 1x in Col. 3:16 where it is translated ‘rule’ (“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body, and be thankful.”).
5. There is the noun *brabeion* which means ‘a prize’ in 1Cor. 9:24 and Phil. 3:14 which refers to the ultimate reward bestowed on believers at the Bema Seat otherwise known as ‘the crown/wreath.’
6. The Colossians are here told the consequences of coming under the influence of false teachers if the situation is not reversed.
7. It means loss of the ‘prize/crown’ at the Rapture.
8. For a parallel warning see Rev. 3:11 (“I am coming quickly, hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”; cp. 2:10).
9. Other references to this reward include: “Phil. 4:1; 1Thess. 2:19; 2Tim. 2:5; [pres.ind. *stephanoo*]; 4:8; Jam. 1:12; Rev. 4:4, 10.
10. “Taking delight” (pres.act.part. *thelo*) refers to the enjoyment false teachers get out of “self-abasement,” “worship/adoration of angels,” and a claim to special powers (e.g., visions).
11. For these types it is the lust for approbation.
12. The noun translated “self-abasement” (loc.f.s. *teinophrosune*) is a synonym for humility and is used in a good sense in Col. 3:12; also Acts 20:10; Eph. 4:2; Phil. 2:3; 1Pet. 5:5.
13. But here and in v. 23 it is used in connection with something to be avoided.
14. In v. 23 it is connected with “severe treatment of the body” which indicates the practice of asceticism.

15. Putting this together with the claim of visionary experiences it is deduced that extreme treatment of the body leads to visions.
16. The “worship (noun *threskeia* worship, religion; Acts 25:5; Jam. 1:26, 27) of angels” probably points to the invocation of angels, and the ascetic practices associated with this ‘worship’ were supposed to induce these encounters.
17. This religion of angels that was introduced to the Colossian church and appears to have both Jewish and pagan influences.
18. It is has been shown that there was at this time a Phrygian Judaism in Asia Minor.
19. That is, Jewish angelology as influenced by Hellenistic demonology.
20. The practice that emerged in Colossae was a syncretistic man-made religion.
21. In a word, what these false teacher(s) were doing was of an idolatrous nature—the adoration and invocation of spirit beings.
22. It is possible that an angel-cult involving the adoration and invocation of angelic beings is behind the rules and regulations repeatedly noted in this section (vv. 16, 20, 21, 23).
23. The upshot of all this is that the individual(s) Paul is speaking out against, spend so much time in speculations about angels, and in celebrating that fact that the law was given by them (cf. Acts 7:53), that they were in effect worshipping angels instead of God!
24. Paul is not here simply referring to Torah observance as there was a certain amount of syncretism based on the experiences claimed by the false teacher(s).
25. Paul continues to expose these teacher(s) for their promotion of visionary experiences in their angel-cult.
26. The words “taking his stand on *visions* which he has seen” has in the Greek a neuter plural pronoun that has no antecedent.
27. It refers to that which these visionary experiences revealed.
28. The pronoun is followed by a perf.act.ind.3s. of the verb ‘to see’ (*horao*).
29. A rendering: “the things which he has seen...”
30. The words “taking his stand” is the pres.act.part. *embeteuo* which only occurs here in the NT.
31. This verb is used in the LXX of Josh. 19:49 of “entering” into the Promised Land.
32. The practitioner(s) of this cult claimed to be entering into the heavenly realm through visionary experiences to gain possession of that which escapes mere mortals.
33. The Colossians are to resist such practices since in Christ they already have all they need since in Him all wisdom and knowledge dwells (cf. 2:3).
34. Paul concludes v. 18 with a description of such individual(s) showing them to be colossal fakes and frauds.
35. “Inflated (or “conceited”) without cause/reason by his carnal mind” points to the baseless assertions of the false promoter of this angel-cult.
36. Presenting himself as humble through ascetic practices (v. 18), he is in fact consumed by pride (pres.part. *phusioo* .
37. “Without cause” (adv. *eike*) shows this individual up as not even having anything that one who is conceited might point to.
38. His arrogance has no basis and that makes him a liar as well.
39. His mind is infected with the carnal.
40. “By his fleshly mind” (*hupo tou noos sarkos autou*) indicates an STA fabrication.
41. “And not holding fast to the head” (pres.part.nom.m.s. *krateo* hold to, hold fast”) is a negation that has as its antecedent the false teacher (v. 19).

42. This means that the promoter of this angel-cult was someone who was connected with the local assembly.
43. To describe him as not holding fast to the head can only mean that this individual is a believer!
44. What does it mean to “hold fast?”
45. Since a believer is not required to maintain the salvation adjustment to God as per the doctrine of eternal security, “holding fast” has to do with maintaining Ph 2 spiritual momentum by following the Bible doctrine to the end (cf. 2Thess. 2:15 “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold (pres.imper. *krateo*) to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.”; Heb. 4:14 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”; Rev. 2:25 “Nevertheless who you have, hold fast until I come.”; 3:11 “I am coming quickly, hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”).
46. So “not holding fast” assumes that the false teacher was at connected to the head being a member of the body.
47. “The head” refers to Jesus Christ following the body metaphor of Christ and the Church (cf. vv. 8-10, 15).
48. “The head” is an appropriated metaphor that points to the ultimate and final authority in matters of faith and practice.
49. Also, “the head” is the source on which the body is dependent for its well-being.
50. The head is the determinative part of the body.
51. Believers are dependent on Christ, the head of the church, illustrated here with a physiological metaphor.
52. “From whom” refers back to Christ, the Head (v. 19b).
53. The metaphorical situation presented here with its positive spiritual benefits only takes place for the members (believers) of the body when individual believers are holding fast to the head.
54. Ideally, it is God’s will for all believers to hold fast to the head by adhering to sound doctrine (e.g., the mind of Christ).
55. Each believer in Christ is an individual part of the body of Christ (cf. 1Cor. 12:12-26).
56. “The entire body” refers to the church in time made up of believers in Jesus Christ.
57. “Being supplied” (pres.pass.part. *epichoregeo* supply, support) refers to the necessary spiritual support needed to make holding fast a reality.
58. This verb refers to that which is necessary to accomplish an objective (cf. 2Cor. 9:10; Gal. 3:5; 2Pet. 1:5, 11).
59. Next comes a participle dealing with unity within the body—“being held together” (pres.pass.part. *sumbibazo* unite).
60. We saw this verb at 2:2 is connection with Paul’s prayer wish for the Colossians (“that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit (united) together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, *that is Christ Himself.*”

61. This verb is used in a variety of contexts as per: Acts 9:22 “But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by **proving** that this *Jesus* is the Christ.”; 16:10 “When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, **concluding** that God has called us to preach the gospel to them.”; 19:33 “Some of the crowd **concluded** *it was* Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward, and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.”; 1Cor. 2:16 “For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL **INSTRUCT** HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.”).
62. Eph. 4:16 is especially pertinent to what we have here in v. 19 (“from whom the whole body, being fitted and **held together** by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”).
63. The human body (e.g. skeletal frame) has “joints and ligaments.”
64. Following closely Paul’s physiological metaphor these “joints and ligaments” must represent certain believers as over against those that fall into a different classification.
65. How then does “joints (*aphe*) and ligaments (*sundesmos* bond, band; ligament) “supply” and “unite” the body?
66. What function do these believers perform on behalf of the body?
67. Since each individual member of the body possesses a spiritual gift(s), then these “joints and ligaments” must refer to communication gifts (cf. 1Cor. 12:12ff. and Eph. 4:8, 11-13).
68. The final clause in v. 19 specifies and makes clear that Paul is indeed talking about spiritual growth for the members of the body.
69. “Grows (pres.ind.3s. *auxano*) with a growth (noun *auxesis* growth)” has as its antecedent “the entire body.”
70. We are talking here about believers growing up from immaturity to maturing through the intake and application of Bible doctrine.