Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

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Spiritual Peer Pressure (part 1)

Colossians 2:16-17

1. Don't Love The Shadow (verses 16-17a).
2. Don't Miss The Substance (verse 17b).

One of the things that every child who enters the teen years encounters is the phenomenon known as peer pressure. It's the pressure from fellow friends to follow the crowd, rather than being an individual. Usually, this peer pressure has negative connotations. People often filter down to the lowest common denominator. It's the action that is on the edge that the crowd gravitates toward. "My parents are out of town, come to the party!" ""Here, try and smoke this! Everybody's doing it!" "Let's go to this movie. Tell your parents that you are going to see Bambi." The best advice that I can give you young people is from the pen of Solomon: "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Prov. 1:10). Don' t love the approval of men more than you love the approval of the Lord.

And as you adults know, peer pressure doesn't end when you graduate from high school. Nor does it end when you graduate from college, or get your first job. Peer pressure doesn't end when you are married. There's always the pressure to go with the crowd. There's always the pressure to see your children achieve for your own status in the community. There's always the pressure to purchase what you can't afford. There's always the pressure to keep up with the Joneses.

In the spiritual realm, it's no different. There are those who have come to experience something that they believe is the key for every believer in Christ to experience as well. There are others who have come to a certain knowledge of something that they believe is the key for every believer in Christ to know. With this knowledge or with this practice, they will often pressure others to conform to their ways of doing things. This is the situation that those in Colossae experienced. They were experiencing "Spiritual Peer Pressure."

There were those in Colossae who had grasped onto certain practices that they thought were mandatory for all followers of Christ to follow. As a result, they

were putting forth all sorts of religious practices that others were being pressured to follow (verse 20). When some in the church weren't following these things, they were being judged as a lesser Christian (verse 16). They were being looked down upon and made to feel inferior, as if they didn't quite measure up to everybody else (verse 18). I sense that there were some in the congregation who were beginning to crack and to give in to the pressure. They were being spiritually intimidated to follow in their ways. To these things, Paul gives them the following counsel, ...

> Colossians 2:16-23
> 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--things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 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. If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

My outline this morning comes in the form of two exhortations. The first is simply this.

1. Don't Love The Shadow (verses 16-17a).

I want you to imagine with me the following scenario. Imagine that I left on a trip for several days. Coming home, my wife came to meet me at the airport, late one afternoon. As I came to the baggage claim area, I picked up my bags and went outside, where we had planned to meet. In the distance, I saw our car and began walking toward the car. I saw my wife get out of the car, but had difficulty looking at her, as the sun was to her back and low in the horizon. So, I covered my eyes and looked at the ground as we approached each other. As I looked at the ground, I noticed there her beautiful shadow, that the sun was casting along the sidewalk. As

we continued to walk toward each other, I couldn't get my eyes off the shadow on the ground. When my wife and I finally came face to face with each other, I turned away from her and continued to marvel at the shadow. I dropped my bags and began to kiss the shadow on the ground. I began to feel what it felt like. I put my hand out and let the shadow fall on my hand, all the while ignoring my wife. Such actions you would certainly consider to be odd. But, this is exactly what was taking place in Colossae.

As you remember, the church in Colossae started when a man named Epaphras had come to them and preached the gospel to them. He told them of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, who had come to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He had told them of "the grace of God" that had brought the offer of forgiveness of sins through His shed blood to all who believe (Col. 1:6). He told them of how through faith in Christ, you can have the hope of heaven (Col. 1:5). Christ Jesus was placed before them. And many embraced the Savior. But, over time, there were others who came into their midst, who sought to distract the people of Colossae away from Christ and upon the shadow that He cast upon the ground. As a result, their interest in the sufficiency of Christ was being challenged. They were consumed (as verse 16 says) with eating and drinking and the keeping of festivals of all types: the yearly feasts, the monthly celebrations, and the weekly Sabbath. Paul says that such things "are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (verse 17). They loved the shadows, while ignoring the substance.

Let's look at these shadows. They fall nicely into two categories: diet and days.

1. Diet

Regarding the diet (which Paul refers to here as "food or drink") this is probably referring to the dietary laws as found in the Old Testament. [1] These regulations are given in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. When the LORD gave the law to the people of Israel, He gave strict regulations on the foods that they could eat as well as the foods that they couldn't eat. Some animals were considered "clean" and permissible to eat. Other animals were considered "unclean" and not permissible to eat.

Regarding the animals, who live upon the land, the LORD said that the Israelites could only eat those animals that have a divided hoof and chews a cud (Lev. 11:3). This meant that the Israelites could eat animals such as "the ox, the sheep, the goat, [and] the deer" (Deut. 14:4-5). But, they couldn't eat the camel, the rabbit, or

the pig (Lev. 11:4-7). Regarding the animals, who live in the water, the LORD also gave clear directions. They could eat only those animals that had fins and scales (Lev. 11:9). This means that the Israelites could eat fish of all kinds, such as: salmon, perch, trout, and tuna. But, they were prohibited from eating other forms of sea life: clams, shrimp, lobster, and catfish.

Among the birds, they had a few exceptions of what they couldn't eat. They couldn't eat an eagle or a vulture or an owl or and ostrich or a hawk or a sea gull or other varieties (Deut. 14:12-18). But, the chicken and turkey were permitted. Other animals on the prohibited list included moles and mice and lizards and crocodiles (Lev. 11:29-30). Regarding the insects, they were permitted to eat the crickets and grasshoppers (Lev. 11:22), but not much else. We might think that crickets and grasshoppers are pretty disgusting. But, in Biblical times, they actually ate these things. John the Baptist came on the scene eating "locusts and wild honey" (Matt. 3:4). My list here is hardly exhaustive, but it gives you an idea what sorts of regulations the LORD had given them to follow.

The question that always comes into my mind when thinking about these regulations is, "Why?" "Why did the LORD give these regulations to the people of Israel?"

Some have pointed out how modern research has demonstrated the health benefits of following the Levitical diet. I don't believe that this is an accident. Certainly, the LORD knew during the days of Moses the foods that were the most beneficial for our health. It is reasonable to assume that the Lord's commands are for the good of his people. Certainly, He desires His people to feel well and be strong. But, I don't believe that this is the heart of why God gave the Israelites these foods. There isn't anything in the texts to indicate this at all.

However, there is a textual hint in Leviticus 11 that perhaps helps us a bit to understand why these laws were given. It's given near the end of Leviticus 11, when God told the Israelites, "You shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45). I believe that this demonstrates that at the root of these eating regulations was the LORD's desire to teach the Israelites about His own holiness. Throughout Leviticus 11 (and Deuteronomy 14), you read of how some animals are clean and some animals are unclean. Those that are unclean are to be avoided at all costs, even their carcasses are not to be touched (Lev. 11:39; Deut. 14:8). The LORD was making a connection between God's holiness and the practice of

eating only of the clean animals. As they kept their distance from the unclean, it would teach them what it means that the LORDlikewise keeps Himself away from the unclean.

As you trace these eating regulations through the historical timeline of the Bible, you see that they are no longer mandatory for us today. When Jesus came, He abolished them. Perhaps you remember the day when Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?” (Mark 7:5). In the midst of the conversation that ensued, Jesus replied to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man” (Mark 7:14-15). In saying this, Mark comments that Jesus “declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19).

Jesus, was pointing out that the issue isn’t what goes into the body that is the issue in defiling a man. Rather, Jesus said, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23). This conversation of Jesus has to give us a hint as to what is going on with the original intent of these commands. It’s not a physical, biological defilement that takes place when you eat these unclean foods. You are defiled when your heart produces defiling words and thoughts and actions. It was never the physical defilement that restricted the people of Israel from eating these things. Rather, it was an object lesson for all of Israel to learn about the difference between clean (as the LORD is) and unclean (as sin is).

A few years later, Peter had an encounter with the LORD that helped to ingrain the fact that all foods are now clean. Peter was in Joppa, upon the housetop, where he had escaped to pray (Acts 10:9). While praying, he fell into a trance and "He saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air” (Acts 10:11-12). Picture this sheet, filled with clean and unclean animals: cows and sheep and goats and camels and rabbits and pigs and chickens and turkeys and vultures and owls and ostriches and sea gulls and crickets and grasshoppers and mice and lizards and crocodiles. And then, Peter heard a voice from heaven, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” (Acts 10: 13). Peter knew full well what was on that sheet. There were plenty of unclean

animals on that sheet that he wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. Understandably, Peter objected, saying, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean" (Acts 10:14).

I can sympathize with Peter. Growing up, alcohol simply had no part in our home. In fact, in my whole entire life, I have probably had about a half a glass of beer and only a few sips of wine. Should the Lord appear to me in a vision with beer and wine on a sheet and tell me to drink, I would find it very difficult to drink. It's not that I believe it to be wrong, for the Bible nowhere condemns the consumption of alcohol. (Certainly, there are some clear warnings about drunkenness, to which any drinking of alcohol could easily lead, and I do believe that there is a certain amount of wisdom in abstaining from alcohol, for danger of falling into this sin).

I remember a few years ago having a kidney stone. I was in great pain. Someone recommended to me that I might try drinking some beer. It might loosen me up and relax me, and allow the kidney stone to pass through my system. The counsel was probably good counsel. But, as I pondered the option, it was difficult for me to even think about doing it. It's not so much because I believe that alcohol is wrong and intrinsically evil. But rather, because I have never drunk any such things in my life. For me, such a thought is difficult even to imagine.

And so, I can relate to Peter when he absolutely refused to kill and eat these unclean animals. Then, the voice repeated, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15). As Peter was sill resistant, the exchange between him and the voice happened three times, until finally, "the object was taken up into the sky" (Acts 10:16). The fullness of the meaning of the vision was made clear as Peter was miraculously summoned to Caesarea to preach the gospel to a group of Gentiles (Acts 10:17-48) to whom "God granted ... the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). The gospel went out to the Gentiles, who at one time were considered to be unclean (Acts 10:28), but who had now been granted repentance. Likewise, the food, which was at one time considered to unclean, is no longer unclean, for God has cleansed it (Acts 10:15).

Though Peter knew these things theologically, certainly he found that practice of such things very difficult. He had never eaten pork in his life, as it was a part of his upbringing. But now, God had declared it to be clean. And there would be situations in which it would probably be proper for Peter to eat such things, particularly if he were among a Gentile church.

We get an insight into Peter's difficulty with these things in Galatians 2. Apparently, he had ministered to the churches in the Galatian region. There were many Gentiles in the churches where he was. It became Peter's habit to "eat with the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:12). Now, we don't know for sure if he ate any of the previously forbidden food or not, but I would suspect that he did. And then, some Jews came into these regions where Peter was ministering. When they came in, Peter "began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing [them]" (Gal. 2:12). Evidently, Peter's fear came from the reaction that the Jews might have in they knew that Peter was eating with the Gentiles.

In other words, you might call this "Spiritual Peer Pressure" was causing Peter to abandon his freedom in Christ and fall back upon the dietary laws of the Old Testament. But, we even get a hint that Peter went further than this. Peter was urging the Gentiles "to live like the Jews" (Gal. 2:14). It may well be that as the Jewish people came into the city, Peter was pressing the Gentiles to conform their diet to the rules and regulations of the Old Testament.

When Paul found out about this, he confronted Peter "to his face, because he stood condemned" (Gal. 2:11). Peter was guilty of loving the shadow and seeking to have others focus their attention upon those things that are of no importance. Please take a moment to feel the weight of this statement. Peter "stood condemned" for his actions of imposing these regulations upon others. This is exactly what was happening in Colossae. Those in the church were feeling the pressure to conform their "eating and drinking" to the requirements of the Old Testament law. Those who weren't doing so were being judged by those who were following the Old Testament law. Look at verse 16 (of Colossians 2), "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink."

Now, certainly, there is freedom in following the Old Testament diet. If you have a desire to eat in accordance with the laws of the Old Testament, there is absolutely nothing wrong with this. In fact, it may well be that it will improve your health and make you feel better. You have the freedom to choose what goes into your body through your mouth. Peter had the freedom to eat and drink whatever he wanted to do. However, it wrong to seek to intimidate others into keeping such dietary laws, as if they are identifying marks of spirituality. When you cross that line, you are beginning to love the shadow, rather than the substance. You are beginning to stray from the gospel of the sufficiency of Christ. Not only might this be true of diet, but, it also might be true of ...

2. Days

Paul mentions three other items in verse 16 that can be used to spiritually intimidate others as well. “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” (Col. 2: 16). These are referring to the days on the Old Testament religious calendar (1 Chron. 23:32; 2 Chron. 2:4; 31:3; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11). When Paul mentions the festivals, he is speaking about the yearly celebrations, like Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. When Paul mentions the “new moon” celebrations, he talking about the ceremonial activities that took place on the first day of each month (Num. 10:10; 28:11). When Paul mentions the “Sabbath day,” he is talking about the weekly Sabbath rest that God gave to the Israelites.

Like the dietary laws, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with these feasts and festivals and days of rest. Now, of course, there needs to be some adjustment made in light of the cross. The sacrifices shouldn’t be repeated, because the cross was the ultimate fulfillment of every sacrifice ever offered up to the LORD, and rendered them obsolete. In Hebrews 10 we read that "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). And yet, "by one offering, [Jesus Christ] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Any sacrifices today for sins would be an abomination to the Lord, clearly stating that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ isn't sufficient. Furthermore, when celebrating the Passover, it should be in line with the words and actions of Jesus during the Last Supper, so that it doesn’t merely point to the redemption of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but to the greater redemption that is found in Christ.

But, other than that, there is no reason why the celebration of the Jewish religious calendar should be prohibited in any way. In fact, it can be very helpful for us to reflect once a year upon the ultimate day of atonement to which the yearly feast points. It could be helpful for us to celebrate the feast of booths, in which the Jewish people lived out of their regular homes in tents to remind them that they wandered in the wilderness for years. This same practice might help us to realize that our sojourning on earth is but for a small time. So, should you feel that you want to keep the religious calendar of the Old Testament, feel the freedom to enjoy these things. In fact, there are churches that do this. They are called Messianic Jewish churches. They seek to pull in much of the Jewish culture into their services and church calendars each year. There is nothing wrong with these congregations.

The apostle Paul often kept many of the Old Testament regulations and ceremonies. For instance, when he was off on his second missionary journey, he made great efforts to be back in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). He wanted to be there for the Jewish feast, along with many of his kinsmen. This principle extends to other matters of the law as well. There is nothing wrong today with taking the vow of a Nazarite. Paul did this when he returned back to Jerusalem to demonstrate his solidarity with the Jewish people (Acts 21:23-26). There is nothing wrong today with being circumcised, even later in life. Paul urged Timothy to be circumcised, as it would help his ministry among the Jewish people (Acts 16:3). Though, it must be mentioned that Paul didn't compel Titus to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3), so it can hardly be seen as mandatory. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with attending a synagogue. On numerous occasions, Paul did this and used it as an opportunity to speak to those who were gathered about Christ.

So, if you want to engage in these activities, please feel the freedom to do so. However, please realize that there is a two-fold danger with these things. The first danger is that you become captivated by these things. The Jewish culture and the symbolism of these feasts and festivals begin to consume your attention. You begin to love the culture. You begin to love the Old Testament feasts. You begin to lose the significance of the cross of Christ. You begin to neglect the cross of Christ. You begin to love the shadow and miss the substance, which is the precise danger that Paul puts forth before the Colossian believers (2:16). Subtly, you can begin to trust in your own righteousness in keeping these things. There are those who have begun to involve themselves in these churches and learn about the Jewish culture, and ultimately end up forsaking Christ and embracing Judaism. Lest you think that this is far and remote, there are family members of people here at church right now who have experienced these things.

A second danger is that you begin to think that others are missing out in their Christian walk because they aren’t involved in these activities. As a result, you begin to have a judgmental spirit toward those who choose not to celebrate these things in the way prescribed in the Old Testament. You begin to judge others for not celebrating the Passover each year. You begin to judge others for not keeping the Sabbath.

In my own personal experience, this is a great danger. In my Christian walk, I remember thinking about the Sabbath issue. I remember reading some things about it. I remember hearing some messages about it. I remember beginning to make some changes in our house to keep Sunday as a day of rest. I had concocted in my mind some things that I thought should be done on the Christian Sabbath and some

things that I thought were permissible on the Christian Sabbath. This took place for a couple of months, perhaps a year or so. It wasn't at all a hard stand that I took at home at all, but, it was something that I thought would be profitable for us to follow through. It caused some contention between my wife and I in the home. It was not a good time for our marriage.

I distinctly remember coming to have an incredibly judgmental attitude toward those doing any work on Sunday. I'd drive by the super market and notice the crowds and in my heart would identify everyone who was shopping on that day as a sinner. I would be inside at home and hear a lawnmower fire up. In my heart, I would despise my neighbor for mowing his law on the Sabbath, because that was wrong to do. I noticed how judgmental my heart became toward others. I noticed how righteous I thought my heart to be. As a result, I found that much of my focus was upon the shadow of external rules and regulations, and not upon the substance of Christ and the gospel. What I missed was the Biblical position on the Sabbath, which Paul gives for us in Romans 14. Consider his words.

> Romans 14:1-13
> Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live," says the Lord, "every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of

himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

Please realize that the context here in Romans 14 isn't exactly the same as we have in Colossians, chapter 2. However, there are enough similarities to help us to understand the Biblical position on diets and days. Consider the similarities.

1. First of all, there are discussions and debates within the church about eating. Some believe that you can eat certain things. Some believe that you can't (verse 2). In this context, Paul isn't talking about feasting in a Jewish festival. Rather, the discussion is evolving around meat sacrificed to idols. Nevertheless, the principle the Paul puts forth is still the same.

2. There's also this discussion about days and devotion to the Lord. Some believe that one day is more important than another. Some believe that every day is alike. This is talking about the religious days on the Jewish calendar, and particularly, Sabbath day, as the day comes up each week. Some view the Sabbath day as a mandatory carryover from the Old Testament. Others don't. Rather, they view every day as entirely given to the Lord (verse 5).

3. Throughout this entire passage is the thought of one believer judging another believer because they come to different conclusions about these diets and days. Paul's admonishment is that you shouldn't judge the individual who is acting within the sphere of his conscience. Notice how often Paul mentions this aspect of judging another on issues of Christian liberty:

- Verse 1 - Accept the one who is week in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.
- Verse 3 - The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats.
- Verse 4 - Who are you to judge the servant of another?
- Verse 10 - Why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?
- Verse 13 - Let us not judge one another anymore.

The main idea here is this: regarding the areas we have of Christian liberty (i.e. of eating or drinking or celebrating specific days), each of us will stand before the Lord regarding the way that we live. We don't need to be constantly evaluating

how others are living, that we might instruct them in a better way. Such an attitude will only bring us to condemn those individuals in our hearts. Rather (as verse 12 says), “Each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” In other words, “You don’t have to worry about these things. The Lord will take care of them.”

What has always impressed me about this passage is Paul had every opportunity to set forth what is right to eat and drink. He also had every opportunity to settle once and for all the issue of the Christian Sabbath. He easily could have pointed to the fourth commandment and said, “There is a day that is above the other days. It is the Christian Sabbath, which is to be celebrated on Sunday. You shall do no work on that day.” But, he didn’t do this. Rather, he said in verse 5, “One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.”

In other words, **the Biblical position on these issues is that there is no position.** It is permissible to eat or not to eat. It is permissible to elevate one day above the others or to hold every day elevated. The reason why there is no position is because each of these issues pointed to Jesus Christ. Clean and unclean foods teach us how we need to be clean and holy, like God is clean and holy. The only way to obtain that cleanliness is through the cross of Christ. The Sabbath rest that the Jewish people were to enjoy weekly is not enjoyed fully in Christ Jesus alone, as we rest from our works (Heb. 4).

The warning is this: we must not push our agenda or our convictions in these areas upon others. We must not judge others who don’t agree with us in these areas. If others in the church judge us for our activities, we are to ignore their judgment of us. We are to judge them by confronting their judging of us over issues of Christian liberty. We are to tell them and submitting to such things isn’t going to make us more righteous. We are to tell them that they are loving the shadow and missing the substance.

It is so easy to love shadows. It is easy to grow in love with the form, rather than the function. It is easy to trust in methodologies, rather than in the meanings. It is easy to go through the ritual, rather than embrace the reality. It happens like this: we fall into our routines of the way we do things we do and the things that we avoid and the way we do things. We then begin to think that the activities we do are the key to our relationship with the Lord. For instance, we can think that a specific method of prayer is the only way. We can think that our plan of reading the Scripture is the only way. We can think that our style of worship is the only way. We can think that verse-by-verse preaching is the only way. [2] We can think

that our philosophy of parenting is the only way. We can think that our philosophy of schooling is the only way. We can think that we have the right Bible translation, attempting to get others to read the translation of our choice. We can think that we have figured out what clothing attire pleases the Lord. The list can go on and on. Welling up in our mind, then, is the thought that those who don't do things the way that we do them must be wrong. We begin to judge them for it.

It all gets back to this: a preoccupation with things that should direct us to Christ. Instead, we focus on the things that ought to draw our attention to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. And so, Church family, "Don’t Love The Shadow" (verses 16-17a). My second point is also a warning.

2. Don't Miss The Substance (verse 17b).

In verse 17, we read of how these things like food or drink or festivals or new moon celebrations or Sabbath days “are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

The foods and the feasts all anticipated something that would come. They were looking toward the future. They were pointing toward the coming of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus came, all eyes should be off the shadow and on the substance. When you focus your time and effort on the shadow, you are obscuring the importance of the substance. But, Jesus is everything to us.

He is our hope of heaven (Col. 1:3). He is the one who came and rescued us when we were in the grip of the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13). He is the one who brought us into His kingdom (Col. 1:13). He is the one who came and redeemed us when we were deep in our sins (Col. 1:14). It is only through the blood of His cross that we have peace with God (Col. 1:20). He is the one who made reconciliation between us and God (Col. 1:22). In Jesus Christ is hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). In Him we have been made complete (Col. 2:9). He canceled out our certificate of debt (Col. 2:14).

This isn’t mere theological mumbo-jumbo. This is reality! Jesus Christ was a real man, who walked the earth two-thousand years ago. He was the fulfillment of all the prophecies. You could have touched Him, talked with Him, and felt His embrace. This is the point of 1 John, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, ... what we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you" (1 John 1:1, 3). Jesus Christ is reality. He is our substance.

The danger of getting our eyes off of Christ is that we being to place our trust in those other things that are capturing our attention. We begin to trust that our righteousness comes from these things, rather than through the blood of Christ. In Luke 18, we read of a parable that Jesus told that helps to illustrate these things very well.

> Luke 18:10-14
> [Jesus said], "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Here was the point of what Jesus was seeking to illustrate. The righteous things that the Pharisees were practicing had caused them to lose focus on the most important thing: being justified before God. Please understand that there is nothing wrong with these righteous things that the Pharisee was doing. It is good not to be a swindler. It is good to act justly. It is good not to be an adulterer. It is good to fast. It is good to pay tithes. But, it is bad to trust in these things!

This was the fundamental error of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. "They trusted in themselves that they were righteous and vied ithers with contempt" (Luke 18:9). When you view yourself as righteous and when you view others with contempt, you will neglect the substance of our faith, which is Jesus Christ.

Let me say it as clearly as I know how. Apart from Christ, we are lost in our sins. Apart from Jesus, we have no hope either in this world, or in the next. Let’s keep our minds focused on the Savior, that the shadows don't displace the subtance! And when the "Spiritual Peer Pressure" comes from others, who seek to influence us into focusing our attention upon some righteous activities as the key to our relationship with the Lord, may the Lord give us strength to focus our attention upon Christ.

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[1] It must be noted that there are many theologians who think that Paul is referring to the practice of abstaining from foods and drinks. However, I take these things to be referring to the Jewish dietary laws. The close connection that these items share with the Jewish feasts and festivals later in this list demonstrate that it should be taken to describe the Old Testament laws. Furthermore, Paul says that these things are "shadows" pointing to Christ. But, abstaining from food and drink isn't anticipating Christ. Furthermore, Paul will later mention the practice of abstaining in verse 21. There is no need to repeat it here.

[2] I remember graduating from seminary and thinking that I had everything right about ministry and ministry methodology. I had been well trained to preach through the Bible verse-by-verse (a method, by the way, that I am committed to as helpful in our day and age). However, I held my own convictions about methodology so high that I spoke very badly of the ministry of Charles Spurgeon, perhaps the greatest preacher who ever lived, because he didn't follow my methodology. Spurgeon's own testimony is that he took every text of Scripture and used it to preach Christ crucified. One can hardly fault such a methodology (i.e. 1 Cor. 2:2). But, in my arrogance, I had faulted his methodology, because I had focused upon the form, rather than the function.