

Shadows and Substance

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Preacher: Treg Hallman

[0:00] Good morning, church. It's my privilege to preach this morning from the book of Colossians. We've been working our way through this book, we've arrived at chapter 2, verse 16, and we'll finish the chapter this morning.

I would remind us that this is a letter from Paul that he has sent to a church, a group of believers that he doesn't personally know.

He knows some representatives from the church, but he sends this letter to them for encouragement and for instruction, for warning and for direction.

And we would remember that in the first two verses, this truth that he sent this letter to the saints, the saints, the believers that are gathered in this small, young church in this place called Colossae. And that will be important as we look at our text this morning. So if you would, in honor of God's word, I would ask you to open your Bible and look along with me, read along silently as I read the text.

[1:17] So if you would, in honor of the word, if you would stand as I read this morning. Chapter 2, starting with verse 16 through the end of the chapter.

Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism or worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why? As if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

Referring to the things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

[2:50] Let's pray. Father, I ask as we open your word that, Father, you would touch our hearts with these truths and that, Father, you would help us to embrace a faithful life in service and surrender to you.

Father, with thankful hearts, would you open our hearts to receive what you have for us this morning, I pray in your name. Amen. Y'all can have a seat. So as we start in this place in verse 16, you will notice the first word that we run into.

Therefore, which begs the question, all right, Paul, what are you getting ready to tell us? What is the conclusion that you're making? And we understand that the conclusion he's making is based on the truths or the statement that he's made before this word.

He is establishing the details of why he is making this conclusion, why he is leading this church in the way that we're about to read.

But so it begs the question, what did he say prior? What is it that he said that leads him to the conclusion that we're about to read? So we will need to turn back and I'll re-preach what Jonathan preached last week.

[4:09] Y'all ready? Not really. See, he's already preached this passage, so I'm going to go back and re-preach his passage. We're blending together. The point is this, is that we can't read just that section isolated by itself.

We need to know the context that we see in the scriptures here. And so I would take you back to, if you would look back at verse 13. Hopefully you'll keep your word open.

We will dance around a little bit this morning as we look at a couple of passages. Verse 13 says this, and he's speaking to the saints. He's speaking to Christians at this small little young church. And he says this, you saints, you were dead in your trespasses. You were dead. Interesting if you don't understand that he's talking about something spiritual.

He's not talking about they were physically dead, they were spiritually dead. So he says to them, you were spiritually dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, but God.

[5:14] Don't you love those two words, but God? It's like God intervened in this situation where these people were spiritually dead.

No hope for the future. No hope of salvation apart from the intervention of God. And so what did God do? Paul is sharing this with them.

You were dead, saints, but God did something radical in your lives. What did he do? He sent Jesus. Why did he send Jesus? Well, another question might be, what is it that he sent Jesus for?

What is it that Jesus accomplished for you, saints? He's bringing this to their memory. He's bringing it to the forefront because out of these truths, he's going to make some conclusions that are pertinent to you and me as well.

You know, Paul wrote this letter specifically to the Colossians and he's speaking specifically to them. But you know, God is speaking to us this morning. The word is not just for the people of that day.

[6:24] The word of God is for us. God uses the truths that are shared here that are able to be applied to where we are living today. So, saint, all of us, church, do you recognize, do you believe, do you understand there was a point in which you were totally dead?

It doesn't feel like it, does it? We still hurt. We still cry. We still struggle. We still, you know, celebrate at times, but we were dead spiritually. We were isolated, separated from God, enemies of God.

But it says, but God did this. He sent Jesus for you, saints. He sent Jesus for you. Why? What did he accomplish? Well, if we look backwards at what Paul has said, we could look back at the beautiful truth that he shared back in chapter 119 through 21.

He said this, you were reconciled. What does that mean, reconciled? That means you were not in relationship with God. You were separated from God. But he reconciled you through Jesus.

How? What did he do? He allowed you to be in relationship with God. How did he do that? Well, he says this multiple times in multiple places, reminding us.

[7:42] It was through his body, reconciled in his body of flesh by his death. Something happened when he died. He died for people that they might be forgiven.

So we see the gospel. If we go back to 13, we look at this, that he made us alive. We were dead and he made us alive. How did he do it? He purchased us. He reconciled us. He put us back in relationship with God because of his sacrifice in our behalf.

How did he do that? He redeemed us. How do you redeem us? He redeemed us through the cross. Why did he go to the cross?

He went to the cross to pay for our sins. Our sins that separate us from God. He came that he might die in our place so that we might be forgiven and reconciled or put back in relationship to God.

And notice this beautiful picture in verse 15. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame.

[8:48] He disarmed them. It's as if we were subject to these rulers and these authorities, but he disarmed them. They didn't have any more accusations. They could not point a finger to us and say, see, you're guilty.

Why? Because he paid for all that on the cross and he gave us freedom through what Christ did on our behalf. We were forgiven. We were placed in relationship because of the work of God through faith.

You know, it's another beautiful truth. The reason he came, we back up a little bit back to verse 22, chapter one. He says, why did he do this? To present you holy and blameless.

You know, the beautiful picture of what Paul is sharing here, there's something radical that has happened in your life. And it's all because of what Jesus did for you. And you know what he's doing?

He's doing this work, this work of holiness and blamelessness. In one respect, he, his righteousness was imputed to us, meaning that we were not righteous at all.

[9:58] But because Jesus died in our place, he took his righteousness and gave it to us. He made us righteous. And holy, set apart for the purpose of God.

Do you see the beautiful truths that he's sharing this morning? I know he's, we've already preached on this and we're working our way up to this word, therefore. But based on these truths, Paul is making a conclusion or making a statement that we're getting ready to look at here.

And I want you to see four warnings that he gives this church. Four warnings and a question. Four warnings this morning and a question. The first warning is this, is watch the expiration date. Make sure you are aware of the expiration date. The second one is this, is don't chase after shadows. The two of them are linked very closely together this morning.

We're going to look at that as we look at verse 16. You hear the warnings of what he says? He says, don't let, don't let someone pass judgment on you.

[11:07] Don't let someone, verse 18, disqualify you. Back up to verse 8. See that no one takes you captive. Hear the warnings? Beware of these things.

What might that look like? What are the warnings, Paul? How might that play itself out? He says, watch out for those who say, you've got to do all of these things to be in right.

Bless you, God. What am I talking about? Look at verse 16 with me. Questions of food. Questions of drink.

Questions of festivals. Questions of new moons. And how you handle the Sabbath day. All of these things. What does that sound like to you?

Does it sound like the Greeks? No. Does it sound like pagans? No. What does it sound like? Sounds like the Jewish nation, doesn't it? So what is the trap for the Jews who come into the kingdom, who accept Christ as Lord?

[12:18] What's the trap for them? Do you know what they grew up in? They grew up in this system, this religion, this Judaism that said, you've got to do all of these things.

You've got to continuously not do this and you've got to do this. Like what? Well, think about the law that was in the first five books of Pentateuch.

What is the law? There was three components of the law. What are those three components? So you've got the moral law, you've got the civil law, and you've got the ceremonial law.

So the ceremonial law talks about all these things you have to do. You've got to waive this offering. You've got so many types of different things that you have to accomplish pertaining to obedience to the law.

You need to go to Jerusalem at least three times on three important festivals. These other things you have to do in order to be right with God. These rules.

[13:24] How does that sit with you after what you just heard that Christ accomplished on our behalf, behalf of the saints? Do you feel like today that you as a Christian today have a lot of rules you have to follow in order to be right with God?

In order for God to be happy with you? In order for you to be in right standing with God? Let me ask this way. Have you ever had anybody say, well, you shouldn't do that.

You ought to do this. You need to go do that. You need to accomplish these things. There's all these things, these religious things that you have to do. You know what? They're called traditions. We've got all these traditions that if you don't do that, God's going to be very disappointed with you. He's going to be very frustrated with you. He's going to be antagonistic towards you almost. You've got to make sure you accomplish these things, these traditions. You know, where do we hear that from?

We hear it from people in the churches. We've got to make sure we always do this and always do that. So in their day and time with the Colossians, there are a group of people, likely Jews.

[14:38] There was a pocket of Jews in this area. And they were saying, wait a minute. Now, I know about Jesus. We know about Jesus. But you know you have to also do all these things because, look, it's in the Pentateuch.

It's written. You've got to do them. The issue is they didn't understand what those were intended for all along.

Did Jesus actually tell them that they needed to do these ceremonial things? Yes. Why did Jesus tell the nation of Israel that they had to obey these things? Why?

Because they were all pointing to something extremely important. Do you know what they were pointing toward? Jesus. They were shadows. So we read here in verse 17, these are the shadows

of things to come.

So here's the warning. The first one is the expiration date. Talking about don't, watch out for the expiration date. We talk about that with medicine and stuff.

[15 : 40] We look on the side of the bottle. What's the expiration date? If we pass it, we need to set aside. Foods like that, drinks like that, et cetera. So my point in this is there's an expiration on these ceremonial laws.

They were all shadows. What is a shadow? The second warning is watch out for the shadows.

What is a shadow? Well, I don't know if you all like me.

I used to watch cartoons a lot. I don't know why this one stuck out in my mind, but there was one cartoon where they were in a place that was somewhat, they were nervous already.

And there's this shadow that showed up on the wall of this creature that was just incredibly scary. I mean, the way his face looked, all the hands and the tentacles and all.

And they're seeing it on this wall, and it is literally 10 foot tall, and it's moving. And they are just ready to run and bolt out of there. And as they go to bolt out, guess what they see? They see a flashlight on the ground, and they see this little bug that's yay big.

[16 : 39] And because the angle of the flashlight and how far the bug was, how close the bug was, it shone on the wall as this humongous, scary-looking creature. And they were afraid of the shadow, but when they saw the thing that caused the shadow, guess what?

Oh, good grief. What were we worried about? Isn't that the way a shadow works? We see the shadow, but the thing that caused the shadow is what is important here.

And in relation to this, I would ask the question, what does the shadow of Jesus look like? What does the shadow of Jesus look like?

Well, so this whole concept of a shadow or typology that there's things in the Old Testament that point to Jesus.

You all with me? The Old Testament, the way that the whole nation was structured, the things that God ceremonially asked them to do, you know what they were pointing to?

[17 : 46] They were pointing to Jesus. They were the shadow. It's as if we were seeing the shadow move. It's the things that we've been told by God to do. But once you see the source of the shadow that is Christ himself, the shadow is insignificant, right?

All it is is something to say, hey, by the way, somebody's walking by. I wonder who that is. We're looking at the shadow and we're trying to assess what that is or who it is. We're trying to guess who made that big ugly shadow in that cartoon.

It was that little bug. Who made the shadow that looks like Jesus? Well, the sacrificial system, for instance. What was the sacrificial system that was put in place by God for the nation of Israel?

Is that they had to come and bring an animal or a dove and they had to bring it as a substitute for their sins so that they would be forgiven.

The whole concept of the Passover lamb, right? Is that the sins of the people were placed on the Passover lamb. You know, all of that was a shadow. Even though God says you have to do this on an ongoing basis, it was all pointing to Jesus.

[18 : 55] We think about the Ark of the Covenant. Yeah, we've been fascinated by that for years. At least I have. You know, we've got a movie that, you know, it depicts what they think it might be.

We know because the scripture said what's in there, right? And so how does that point to Jesus?

How is it the Ark of the Covenant, this thing, this physical item that was in the nation, that had a prized place in the nation, how did it point to Jesus?

What was in it? So the word was in it, right? The food was in it, the bread, the manna. And what else was in it? The rod that budded. So what are we looking at there?

The word is in Jesus, right? Jesus is the word of God. The life, that is the bread that gives life, was in the Ark of the Covenant. What is it? The bread gives life, but Jesus is the one that really gives life.

He's the bread of life. What else was in it? The rod that came back alive, this resurrection that pictured, this piece of stick that budded. It pictures the resurrection.

[19 : 56] And Jesus says, I am the resurrection. Remember what he said? He said to Martha, he said, your brother will rise. Well, I know he'll rise in the resurrection. I am the resurrection.

You know that the Ark of the Covenant is pointing to Jesus? It was telling the nation that in Christ are all these three things. And they're just pictured as a shadow in the Ark of the Covenant.

I could go on and on. A couple more. A veil. The veil of the temple. What did it perform? What was the temple itself? By the way, all the items in the temple pointed to who? Jesus. They're all shadows.

And the veil is similar. What did the veil do? It protected the people from the glory and the holiness of God. It separated the people from being consumed by the holiness of God.

God was on the other side of the veil. But when Christ died, what happened to the veil? It was torn. You know what it was? It was a picture pointing to Jesus. That there was coming a time when the veil of his flesh would be torn.

[20 : 55] And when it was torn, it would open the doorway for us to be in the presence of God. Even the priesthood that was put in place by God.

The priesthood was put in place. Why? To administer to these ceremonial things. And they would pray for the people. They would sacrifice for the people.

They would intercede in a way before the people. What was that pointing to? It was pointing to there was going to be a high priest. It was pointing to Jesus, the priest, the high priest of our profession.

What did Jesus offer? You know, the priest in the old day would offer these animals that came. And they would only temporarily bring forgiveness. But when Christ offered himself for us, it gave us permanent access and forgiveness.

His offer was the offer of his life and his body. Do you see how you can take the ceremonial laws in the form of tradition nowadays?

[22 : 09] You say, you've also got to do this. This is essential to relationship with God. This is essential to being God's people. This is essential to being accepted by God. You know, the answer is no, it's not.

Why do we choose to add anything to this concept of we're accepted by the Father? What causes us to be accepted? Jesus and Jesus alone.

There's nothing that needs to be added, not only for salvation, but once you're in the kingdom, there's nothing that needs to be added for you to be accepted with Christ. I will say this for me, my personal story is that when I became a believer, it was radical.

It was different. I knew for sure the next day I was in the kingdom. Thankfully, there was someone there to validate that. But I was a different guy. I changed. It was amazing.

But you know what? For eight years, I worked so hard to make God happy. I realized I need to do all these things in order to make God happy. I mean, I was reading a lot and I was listening a lot and I was going out helping a lot and I was doing all these really good things.

[23 : 15] But you know my motive? I was wanting to do something that I could offer to God. I said, look what I'm doing for you. And you know what happened? Eight years later, crash and burn. You know how tired you get when you're working that hard?

And you know when it's out of self-effort, you get more and more and more tired? Eight years in, I said, I'm done with this thing. I'm done. I can't do this anymore. I'm worn out.

If I had known it was going to be this, I don't know. Even though my life was different, I'm worn out, wiped out, tired and afraid. And then by the grace of God, part of that whole equation for me to understand is that God sent someone to said, to really reveal to me, it's not about what you do to make him happy.

Guess what? He's already happy. Because Jesus already did all that. He shed his blood for you. You're accepted. You're a son. You've got entrance to it anytime you want to come before the throne of grace.

You don't have to earn a thing. Jesus earned it for you. Now you have to live for him because your heart desires it. In matter of fact, he'll give you the desire and he'll give you the power to be faithful to him.

[24 : 22] You don't have to conjure it up in your own strength. So my point, the warning that Paul is sharing, I believe, is this.

Is that beware of this concept that you have to do more to be accepted, to be right with God, to be close to God.

It is man's system. But guess who's behind that? You know what? We've got a crafty, crafty enemy. I often think about Revelation 12. It's this allegory. And at the end of the allegory, 12:17, it says this, And the dragon went off to make war against the offspring, that is those who trust in Jesus as Lord

and Savior.

He went off to make war to people that are already Christians. He's at war. Is Satan trying to keep people out of the kingdom? Absolutely. Is Satan trying to destroy the lives of those who are in the kingdom?

[25 : 30] Absolutely. Absolutely. He doesn't want you and I to enjoy the freedom that's been purchased for us. He wants to enslave us.

How does he do it? He's crafty. The third warning is this. So you've got, watch out for the expiration date. I didn't even finish that.

Can I unwind for a second? Sorry. I think there's something important I need to share about the expiration date. Let me just share it and I'll share the third warning here. The expiration date, the whole concept is this, that once the shadow that pointed to Jesus, Jesus, the object that created the shadow is here, the shadows are obsolete.

They're done away with. All of the ceremonial law is obsolete. Jews, you don't have to obey the ceremonial laws anymore.

They're obsolete because the one that they pointed to is here. He's Jesus. Unfortunately for the Jewish nation, they didn't accept him. They didn't see him as the Messiah he was. It's sad to me, but there are some who have come into the faith.

[26 : 37] God has people, Jews, that actually come to understand who Christ is and that he was the Messiah and they trust and believe. But the challenge is, are you still going to do all those ceremonial things that you had to do or all those traditions that you think are important?

The answer is, please don't. Paul is saying, don't listen to them. And he's saying, watch out for the shadows. The shadows are gone. It's obsolete. And the third one is this. Sorry, I had to back up. The third warning is this, that lies come in different flavors. The lies come in different flavors. What do I mean? Where are the lies coming from?

They're coming from the father of lies. Who is that, Satan? Satan's very crafty in what he tries to do to trip up his church and make them ineffective, to cause all manner of discord, and to get them running after something that has nothing to do with the honor and glory of God.

And so what does he do? He brings out these things. If you'll look with me in verse 18, there's those, these false teachers who assist on asceticism. What is that? We need to, in essence, destroy our body because there's nothing good in it.

[27 : 49] Cut yourself, do whatever you've got to do to prove to God, look how holy I am. Look how committed I am. I'm going to do these things out of my own self-effort. It's Satan sending the line and us buying into it.

And Paul said, don't listen to those teachers. I don't care what their suit looks like and how nice the clothes they wear and how educated they are. Don't listen to the lie.

But there's more here. It's these, the worship of angels that's going in detail about visions as if, man, you won't believe the vision I had.

Man, I must, he must love me more. I must be close. I must be honored more because look what, look what I had. You know, it's a puff up thing. It's pride.

This sensuous mind. Satan uses all manner of religions to keep people from understanding and believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[28 : 53] Isn't it odd that he would use religions for that? How many religions are you aware of that lead people astray down a road that doesn't lead to salvation?

He's going to use that in the world as widely as he can. And Paul is saying to the church, don't buy into these lies.

Yeah, it looks like this or it looks like this. It looks like this or it looks like that. All of them are lies. They're different flavors for different days. Don't believe any of them. Listen to what we shared earlier.

The point that he made and now the conclusions he's made. What was the point? Jesus did it all for you. You don't have to add anything to that. And then in verse 19, the fourth one, don't stunt your growth.

Four warnings. The fourth is don't stunt your growth. What do I mean? Well, look with me at verse 19. He's encouraging them.

[30 : 01] He's warning them, really, about not holding fast to the head. What does that mean? Who is the head? It's Jesus. And how is it that we don't hold fast?

That we don't keep our eyes fixed on the author and perfect of our faith, Jesus? How is it that we think that there's some other thing that we can do to grow spiritually, to grow closer to God? Let me ask you a question. What do you think it is? What are the tricks that the enemy might use in your life to keep you from growing closer to the Lord? Let me just say this. The growth, the true growth of the church comes from the Lord. It says it, doesn't it? He says, warning to the Colossian church, I'm warning you not to hold on to anything. Don't let go of Jesus. Don't let go of that. The whole body is nourished by Jesus. The whole body is linked together and unified by Jesus.

[31 : 09] Don't be distracted to go chase after something else thinking that's going to help you to grow closer to God. It's not. So let me do this. Let me bring this home to us.

How is it that we're going to spiritually grow as an individual and as a church? What is it that's going to yield growth? Human effort and activity? Going to do something good in the community? Is that honorable? Yes. Does God sometimes send us to do that? Yes. Does it elevate your status with God? Not at all. How is it that we're going to grow spiritually? Let me ask a question. Do you feel like that there is growth going on in your life? I would share this. The word of God is living and active, sharpening a two-edged sword, pierces to the dividing center of soul and spirit and joints and marrow. It's profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

[32 : 18] It says, you know where we're going to grow? It's the very words of God. If you want to grow, I'll tell you the thing that I would encourage you to do more than anything else is read and read and read and read and read.

And even if you don't understand it, all of the depth of it, read it anyway. And you know what happens over time is the Holy Spirit exposes the understanding of the word and the living word, it gives life.

Christ says, I'm the bread of life. He's the word of God. How are we going to grow spiritually? By feasting on the word of God. Why do we devote ourselves to preaching the word of God? Because it's food for us. It's a source of growth and maturity. You know what? You can't ever spend too much time in the word in this respect. It'll never return void. If you chase hard after God through reading his word and listen to the Lord as you read the word, isn't that what the Holy Spirit does? It makes it come alive.

[33 : 19] It's as if God's speaking to us. That's the growth individually. But you know it's the growth of the church too. The growth of the church is through Christ and his word. Verse 20.

Here's the question. And so four warnings, don't let false teachers take you down this road that locks you up in slavery. And then the question is this.

Why do you submit to regulations? You see it in verse 20? Paul said, if in Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, these worldly living, worldly ways, why?

As if you were still alive in the world, it's still a worldly one. Why is it that you submit to regulations? Such as you can't handle that. You don't taste that. Don't touch that. Again, in the context of what he's sharing, he's asking this question.

[34 : 23] Why do you submit? You're allowing yourself to be under the authority of these lies, these teachers that are telling you stuff that don't honor God and don't help you grow.

Why do you submit to regulations? According to human precepts and teaching. They appear on the outside as having some wisdom. You look at verse 23.

They have the appearance of wisdom. But they're driven by man. So I want to close with this.

I want to focus your attention on this. Let no one pass judgment on you. How is it that people can pass judgment on you anyway? The judge of all, God, the judge of all, has already accepted you. He's accepted you in Christ based on what Christ has done. Don't let anyone pass judgment on you. It's like Paul saying, don't be caught up with what they're telling you you've got to do. Don't be tricked by their methods.

[35 : 29] Let no one disqualify you. Let me ask this question. If you're in the kingdom, can you be disqualified from Christianity? Can you be disqualified from salvation? No one can disqualify you.

God has already, I mean, Christ has already died for you. You're a child. You're an heir. You're called by his name. You're destined for heaven. You're one of his. Who's going to disqualify you from that?

Nobody. So what is Paul saying? He's saying this. I would word it this way.

So since we are united with Christ, why would we submit to regulations established by men? Will these things cause us or enable us to be closer to God?

No. We need to know who we are and what was accomplished by Christ for us so that we don't fall prey to the lies of false teachers. Amen?

[36:33] Let's pray. Father, forgive us when we wander astray chasing after good-sounding, plausible arguments.

Father, we chase after philosophies and human tradition, things that enslave us, things that we feel like we have to do.

Father, forgive us that we fall captive to those things. God, I pray that you would give us insight and wisdom to not chase after any of those things, but make you the focus of our heart and our lives.

God, that you would be preeminent in our lives. Father, we would serve you and you alone as Lord.

God, help us to grow. Help this body of believers to grow by focusing on your word.

God, I pray that your word would transform us, that our minds would be transformed by your word.

And that, Father, we present ourselves as living sacrifices to you. God, we would say, here we are.

[37:40] I'm yours. Use me however you want to. God, I pray that you would teach us from your word. Lord, you would open our mind that we might understand the depth of your word. And that, Father, we would surrender ourselves to you and your kingdom.

Father, I pray that you would protect us. God, I confess that often we can be enticed by good-sounding arguments.

Father, I pray that through your spirit you would make us aware of things that are not a part of your word and things that are lies, subtle lies, bold lies.

God, open our eyes to see and we would not walk those roads. I pray that we would be focused on you and you alone. And, God, we give you thanks for what you've done for us, that you've done it all.

Father, you have, through your Son, caused us to be forgiven. And, Father, you've reconciled us to yourself, that you've bought us with the blood of our Savior, Jesus, that you're doing a work in our lives to make us holy and blameless before you.

[38:49] God, we give you thanks that you love us in such a way. And we praise you in Christ's name. Amen.