

A Shadow of Things to Come!

One Particular Passage in Colossians 2 is the Focal Point for all who Attempt to Discourage Observance of the Biblical Holydays. Astute Students will see in this Mention a GREATER Significance than is Allowed by 'Fundamentalists'.

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As the Christian Church embraced Apostasy with ever increasing fervency, Biblical practices, such as Sabbath and Holyday keeping became regarded as irrelevant, even becoming outlawed by the time of Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. Reformations notwithstanding, these basic Biblical practices never regained the practical interest they once saw in the early New Testament Church. It is the rare congregation in this age that recognizes the value of their observances.

In regard to perpetuating these "Old Testament" practices, evangelical types today will quickly turn to Colossians 2 to justify their contemptuous regard for any vestige of these in modern practice. A Sabbath Day aversion is predictable, but even among Seventh-Day observing congregations, the same disregard for Annual Holydays is often very apparent.

Few places in the New Testament mention Holydays as an aggregate set of observances as we do today, though there are many instances where these days, long observed in Israel, are individually mentioned and shown to be held in noteworthy regard by the New Testament Church. For examples, the Day of Pentecost ¹ which would've involved noting when the Wave Sheaf Offering was kept each year, and the Passover, ² named as being observed by Jesus and His disciples the evening in which He was condemned, and by the Gentile Corinthian Church ³ decades later. Other mentions, of Paul hastening to be in Jerusalem to

keep the Feast of Pentecost ⁴ and in another place, a reference is made to the Day of Atonement. ⁵ All being occasions well-known in the Church in the first century.

Now we could say that these early converts, being mostly Jewish in background, were merely keeping things they were familiar with, that they weren't required to perpetuate, except we can establish that they kept them, in some cases, slightly differently than their 'majority' Jewish counterparts. What would be the point of re-establishing more correct dates and times with 'updated' practices, if they were being phased-out of Christian practice? Secondly, Gentile congregations are instructed on the proper observance of Passover, for instance.

(An un-noticed subtlety built-into the Gospel of John, not usually brought out when these things are discussed, is the framework around which the fourth Gospel is written. Nearly all the narrative in that book revolves around events related to the Holydays. John moves from Holyday to Holyday time-frames in each of his presented topics. Something 'anti-legalism' devotees aren't particularly looking for. (One 'traditionally derived' date is also used as a point of reference in 10:22.))

Similarly, we can see Sabbath observance continuing all through the New Testament Era, that time-frame during which the 27 new books were being added into the canon. Paul continued preaching ⁶ every Sabbath among the predominantly Gentile disciples and provided explicit instructions for

¹ Acts 2:1

² Matthew 26:17, 18, 19, Luke 22:7-15, etc.

³ 1st Corinthians 11:2, 17-30

⁴ Acts 18:21

⁵ Acts 27:9

⁶ Acts 17:2, 13:42 & 44, 15:21,

Passover observance⁷ even AFTER having declared himself henceforth as going to the Gentiles.⁸

If there was sentiment to ‘do away with’ these observances, (in favor of other non-biblical ones?), it didn’t surface in time to become apparent before the book of Revelation put a wrap on the New Testament in the mid-90’s AD. But that’s what so many **think** we have evidence of in Colossians 2.

But what is this mention of ‘*holydays, the new moon, or sabbath days*’ intended to cause **us** to think? Mention of this passage by religious types is always with the intent to turn us away from any thought of looking into their meaning, and, (*gasp*), any consideration of observing them! And they are able to get away with their explanations so long as we remain incognizant of what the book of Colossians is trying to counter. It isn’t that we don’t know or can’t know, it’s that so many don’t **want** to know.

From an introduction prefacing the book of Colossians, a 1994 Zondervan Press, *King James Bible*, has this interesting admission: “...Paul addressed certain problems in the church at Colossae, in particular some false philosophy being taught there. Later these teachings would be known as *Gnosticism*. In general, Gnosticism was the belief that matter is evil and spirit is good, the body being a prison for the soul. Philosophers who tried to combine this belief with Christianity insisted that Jesus could not have had a human body (since bodies are evil) and therefore could not have been crucified. Paul countered this teaching by affirming that God in all his fullness dwelt in the body of Jesus (1:19 & 2:9), and that it was His death in the body that reconciles us to God (1:22)...” In other words, an admission that it was not Old Testament practices that was the object of Paul’s refutation, though that case is routinely and incessantly made the modern day application. Gnostic philosophy was Paul’s target!

Colossians 2

Reviewing the passage from which the key verse is extracted, we read this: 8: “*Beware lest any man spoil you through **philosophy** and **vain deceit**, after the **tradition of men**, after the **rudiments of the world**, and not after Christ.* 9: *For in him dwelleth all the **fullness of the Godhead bodily**.* 10: *And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:* 11: *In whom also ye are circumcised with the **circumcision** made without hands, in putting off the body of the **sins of the flesh** by the circumcision of Christ:* 12: *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.* 13: *And you, being **dead in your sins** and the **uncircumcision** of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having **forgiven you all trespasses**;* 14: *Blotting out the handwriting of **ordinances** that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, **nauling it to his cross**;* 15: *And having spoiled **principalities** and **powers**, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over **them** in it.* 16: *Let no **man** therefore judge you in **meat**, or in **drink**, or in **respect of an holyday**, or of the **new moon**, or of the **sabbath days**:* 17: *Which are **a shadow of things to come**; but the body of Christ.*¹⁰ 18: *Let no **man** beguile you of your reward in a **voluntary humility** and **worshipping of angels**, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his **fleshly mind**,...*” (KJV throughout, emphasis added.) It continues: 19: *And not holding the Head, from which all **the body** by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, **increaseth with the increase of God**.* 20: *Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the **rudiments of the world**, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,* 21: *(Touch not; taste not; handle not;* 22: *Which all are to perish with*

⁷ 1st Corinthians 11:2, 17-30

⁸ Acts 18:6 & 20:7-13 Considering this narrative carefully, it is apparent that the ‘breaking bread’ would have begun in the afternoon of the Sabbath, in order for the ‘midnight’ hour to be within the ‘first day of the week’. Otherwise, we would have been looking at a ‘service’ that lasted 15 hours to extend thru to midnight, then another six or so hours to ‘the break of day’. An unlikely scenario, though it is the opinion of some!

⁹ This expression: ‘*the fullness of the Godhead bodily*’ is a direct reference to Gnostic thinking, which accounts for the erroneous conclusion that Christ wasn’t God but and IF He was, He never could have been manifest in a body of flesh! This is the same issue that John dealt with in 1st John 4:1-7.

¹⁰ The ‘*is*’ inserted in most versions obscures the intent of this statement, that the Church should judge how the Saints observe these things, not ‘outsiders’. “*Let no **man** therefore judge you...but the body of Christ.*” (The ‘body of Christ’ is the Church. Col. 1:24)

the using;) **after the commandments and doctrines of men?** 23: Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”

Avoiding the Obvious

Though there is **abundant** evidence in this passage that Paul was refuting *philosophical beliefs* common in the world of his day, evangelicals incessantly disregard many ‘overt clues’ and make application as though it was in regard to ‘Jewish’ customs and teachings instead. Phrases like *philosophy* and *vain deceit, the tradition of men*, derived from *the rudiments of the world*, (the fundamental elements of human culture), and if that wasn’t explicit enough, *principalities, powers, voluntary humility* (self-denial) and *worshipping of angels, intruding into those things* which aren’t substantiable, (invented theologies) of *vainly puffed up fleshly minds, the rudiments of the world*, (repeating it again, to show that the object of his condemnation hasn’t changed) **after the commandments and doctrines of men!** Could the true source of these false theologies be made clearer?

But even if there was some discernable reference to ‘Jewish’ beliefs, (keeping in mind that Gnosticism (which heavily influenced *Hellenistic* philosophy, the primary cultural influence of the day) had powerfully infiltrated the thinking of first century Judaism), it still wasn’t a refutation of true Biblical practices. Otherwise we’d have to allege that Paul was assailing the Old Testament religion as ‘*vain, humanly derived traditions*, that were ‘*against us*’ (v. 14) created by mere men. (as opposed to, for example, the Sabbath, which was created ‘*for us*’! (Mk. 2:27)) Religious people might find comfort in that supposed ‘anti-legalistic’ assessment of what Paul was saying, as it seems to justify their negative biases, but there is way too much in the passage which indicates that he was instead referring to Gnostic theology and practice: **the commandments and doctrines of men!**

But while religious apologists wax eloquent against the Laws of God, using Colossians 2 as justification, a potent statement is made which blows right by most readers. In the process of criticizing these

‘*rudiments of the world*’, which were by then contaminating Christian beliefs, he points out something rather profound. Referring to **holydays, the new moon, or the sabbath days**, he says, these ‘**are a shadow of things to come**’! Now if such things were ‘done away’ and no longer relevant to the Church, why would he say that 28 years after the cross? In other words, these observances have contained within them a veiled allusion to greater truths! They’re ‘outlines of future events’, to put it in more modern terms. They **foreshadow pending realities**. That being the case, why then would God want them abolished and abandoned?

Christians love to jump on the word ‘shadow’ as though it means there’s *no reality* to it, the exact opposite of what Paul was saying! If you were walking down a dark street, and you saw the ‘shadow’ of a mugger poised with a knife cast across your path from a backlit alley, would you take that shadow seriously, or would you take the attitude, ‘*that’s not anything I need to be concerned about, that’s only a shadow*’! If that were the case, someone walking with you with more sense would likely say, what do you mean ‘only’? Just because something is sketchy doesn’t mean it’s worthless.

Ignorance Compounds Ignorance

But what do we know about the Holydays and the Sabbath? Are these in fact outlines of future realities? Detractors love to quip that these things are ‘all fulfilled’. “They are *all fulfilled in Christ*”! Well, if that was true, they **should** be able to **explain** their fulfillment. Practical fact is, the ONLY Holyday which is closest to being ‘*all fulfilled*’ is Passover, and that one they seem to **want to keep**, though referring to it by different names. (*Communion*, a word used only twice, or more commonly, the *Lord’s Supper*, found just once in reference to this observance, avoiding *Passover*, which is used directly of it more than twenty times!) If ‘being fulfilled’ justifies discontinuance, why is it religious people seem to want to **keep** the one that is the most fulfilled of any of them?

Let’s go through each Holyday and see if we can explain **if** and **how** each Holyday is ‘fulfilled’. The first are the **Days of Unleavened Bread**; That seven day week which pictures the **process** of

completely extracting sin from our lives. Is that process completed? In us? In the rest of the world?

Pentecost; (The Feast of Firstfruits) Representing the first harvest of souls. Is that event fulfilled? Or is that still ongoing? (Notice the word: first.)

The **Feast of Trumpets;** on the new moon, beginning the seventh month, picturing Christ's return. On this ('last trump') God's Saints are resurrected to immortal life, given Spirit bodies, and rise to meet Him in the air. (Phil. 3:21) Is that all fulfilled?

The **Day of Atonement;** which pictures driving out Satan from society, a 'fast day', which Christ intimated would be kept as a **fast** until He returns. Is that fulfilled? Is Satan removed and bound yet?

The **Feast of Tabernacles;** seven days portraying the seventh millennium, the Kingdom of God and the thousand year reign of Christ and His resurrected Saints on Earth. Is that age all fulfilled?

Then, finally, the **Last Great Day;** a day which provides a resurrection of all those who never had opportunity for salvation and affords them that opportunity at last! Is that all fulfilled?

The suggestion that the Biblical Holydays are 'all fulfilled' has to be one of the dumbest premises to ever muddy-up the pond! But it flies among those who never observed them, were never taught when and what they are, let alone what they **mean!** The Holydays are a set of interrelated days, the first set of which pictures the process of personal salvation, and secondly, the fall set, pictures the plan for projecting salvation's opportunity upon the entirety of humanity: all who ever lived who were never called.

Observing the calendar (the new moons, as the Biblical Calendar is lunar, not solar like our secular calendar) provides a framework for placement of Biblical Holydays in their respective seasons. (They reflect harvest cycles, which illustrate God's TWO Harvests of saints for His Kingdom.)

Lastly, the weekly Sabbath, which honors the Creator (who created it by resting on the seventh day) repeats the seven day pattern which foreshadows the seventh Millennium which is the **thousand years** of Christ's rule on Earth with His resurrected Saints, harvesting the rest of humanity.

All of the agitation with intent to 'do away with' Holydays and Sabbaths using Colossians 2:14 as basis is blown away by the revelation in verse 17. That these '***are a shadow of things to come!***' Days which contain a revelation within themselves: Days and observances which teach basic aspects of our redemptive process (some people object to the word 'process') and which outline the Glorious future God has in mind for His Saints and ultimately all who have ever lived, no matter in what era.

These days are **not** 'fulfilled', but remain a potent teaching tool, illustrating God's Master Plan. Fulfillment then can't be a valid reason for abandonment, as they aren't fulfilled, and those occasions which present the greatest degree of 'fulfillment', Christian society seems to **want to continue observing:** Passover (but under a covert name and on unbiblical dates), and Pentecost, which saw 'partial fulfillment' in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is essential to any truly '*unleavened*' existence.¹¹ And that also on inappropriate dates, as when '*new moons*' aren't regarded, the Holyday Calendar can't be properly determined.

Not Hard to be Understood

Paul was known for theological concepts which were 'hard to be understood' (2nd Pet. 3:15-16) which the unlearned and unstable 'wrest'. (He was a trained theologian after all.) The idea that Biblical Holydays, observed with the appropriate calendar, and even the weekly Sabbath illustrate important truths, apparently is too complex for some to fathom. Problem is, when warping (wresting from proper venue) doctrinal premises, it distorts the picture in other areas as well. (For example, try to reconcile the idea of spending eternity in heaven with the millennial Kingdom or with the fundamental doctrine of the Resurrections from the dead.)

Observing these days isn't for the purpose of 'earning' but for 'learning'. God has a **Plan** for His Creation. His Holydays foreshadow that Overall Plan in clear and logical form. **Ω**

¹¹ The Corinthian Church is seen observing Passover and the Days of unleavened Bread (1st Cor. 5:7-8) as instructed by Paul (1st Cor. 11:23-31) he even instituting a new form of service, to be observed 'in the same night in which He was betrayed': The evening of the 14th day of the first month.