

COLOSSIANS

ABOVE ALL



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Paul writes to the church at Colossae to show that Jesus Christ is greater than Caesar and what they already have in Christ Jesus is sufficient and supreme. Jesus truly is above all other rulers. His kingdom reign is above all governments. His work is above all other accomplishments. And all who are in Christ can live a life above all that the world offers. And that greater life can be experienced and expressed in everything we do, everywhere, every day.

PART 6: SHADOWS AND SUBSTANCE

Read the text: Colossians 2:16-23

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 and 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 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.

Here, Paul specifically turns to the false teaching he referenced in 2:8 with a strong exhortation: Do not let anyone judge you. The two categories of false teaching are around food and drink and the observance of religious festivals or days. Paul clarifies that these are only shadows of things to come whereas the substance belongs to Christ. In other words, the Jewish festivals and religious days were always pointing forward to the true and greater reality in Jesus Christ. With Christ we died to the world and its regulations and practices that may have seemed wise, but only promoted self and self-effort, and had no power to truly change our lives. Any religion, belief or practice that leads us to put trust in self and self-effort will lead to us disconnecting to Christ and will only produce worldly living and fleshly results. Jesus is the true reality and when we connect to and depend on him, we can die to the world and our flesh and flourish in the middle of this world.

Discussion Questions:

These questions are written for DNA groups, but you can use them in any setting, including missional communities. Because they were written for the intimacy of DNA friendships, you may need to adjust for larger groups.

1. This passage is all about people trying to change themselves apart from Jesus. Paul says their attempts “are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” What are the areas of your life where you feel like you’re stuck or you’re not seeing any change in your life? Be honest and specific.
2. What are the modern-day rituals you sometimes think may make you more acceptable to God or may produce change (get you unstuck) if you just do them the right way?
3. Do you seek life change by human effort, apart from the power of God? What does that look like? What role does our effort play in pursuing change in our life?

4. If real change or growth comes from “holding fast to the Head,” how do you do that? What does it practically look like to hold fast to Jesus Christ?

5. What is the difference between putting your hope in “rituals” to produce change in your life and committing to disciplines or practices that will help you hold fast to the Head, Jesus Christ? How do you know when you’re doing one or the other?