

**BETHEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP  
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**“Two Dangers to Avoid”  
Colossians 2:16-19**

From the flashing red signals at a railroad crossing to the numerous labels associated with prescription drugs, warnings are a part of daily life. We teach our children to heed them, and hopefully set before them a good example to follow, because warnings can be a matter of life or death.

The spiritual life also has its dangers and warnings, especially when false teachers begin to make their presence known. As we have previously seen, the false teachers in Colossae posed a very real threat to the church, and for that reason Paul has already warned his readers about them (2:8). In the verses that are now before us, he goes on to give additional warnings about the dangers they pose to the spiritual wellbeing of all believers, then and now (vv. 16-19).

From all that we can tell, this teaching was a strange mixing of Christianity with an ounce of Jewish legalism and a smidgen of pagan asceticism. Yet its effect was essentially to dethrone the Lord Jesus from His supreme place as Head of the Church (1:18-23) and to deny that He was all anyone needed (vv. 14-15). For that reason, students of the New Testament have referred to this kind of error as “the Colossian heresy.”

In light of this context, Paul’s point could not be clearer. Because Christ is sufficient for every spiritual need, no one has the right to judge believers according to a list of laws and rituals (vv. 16-17). Furthermore, no one has the right to disqualify believers from advancing in the faith because they are not submitting to standards that God has never imposed or to mystical “visions” that He has never given (vv. 18-19). None of these things can move us one inch closer to God. Why not? Because the true path to spiritual maturity is holding fast to Christ as the Head, not following misguided human rules.

**I. The First Warning: “Let No One Judge You” (vv. 16-17)**

Apparently, these false teachers were advocating a number of Jewish observances, arguing that these were essential for one’s spiritual development and growth. But Paul counters this teaching by pointing us to Christ. One of the most helpful explanations of these verses is found in the ESV Study Bible notes:

The old covenant observances pointed to a future reality that was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 10:1). Hence, Christians are no longer under the Mosaic covenant (cf. Rom. 6:14-15; 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:4-18; Gal. 3:15-4:7). Christians are no longer obligated to observe OT dietary laws (“food and drink”) or festivals, holidays, and special days (“a festival . . . new moon . . . Sabbath,” Col. 2:16), for what these things foreshadowed has been fulfilled in Christ. It is debated whether the Sabbaths in question included the regular seventh-day rest of the fourth commandment, or were only the special Sabbaths of the Jewish festal calendar.

Historically, John Calvin argued for the former viewpoint. He believed that the weekly Sabbath, like all other ceremonial laws of Judaism, was fulfilled in Christ and therefore no longer in force today. For him, Sunday was a distinctively Christian day of worship, known as the Lord's Day (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book II, chapter VIII; 31-34). Years later however, the English Puritans departed from Calvin's view and argued that the opposite was true. The weekly Sabbath has not been abrogated; it's simply been "changed into the first day of the week" (Westminster Confession of Faith, XX1.7). Therefore, the *entirety* of the Lord's Day is to be observed as "the Christian Sabbath."

Practically speaking, however, there really should be little difference among committed Christians when it comes to viewing Sundays as a day of worship and rest: "Although the Sabbath has been abrogated, there is still occasion for us: (1) to assemble on stated days for the hearing of the Word, the breaking of the mystical bread, and for public prayers (cf. Acts 2:42); (2) to give surcease (cessation) from labor to servants and workmen. There is no doubt that in enjoining the Sabbath the Lord was concerned with both."  
(Calvin, Institutes, II; VIII; 32)

## II. The Second Warning: "Let No One Disqualify You" (vv. 18-19)

In the world of athletics, an umpire or referee throws someone out of the ballgame for having violated the rules of the sport. These false teachers were doing something similar: they were apparently teaching that the Christians at Colossae had failed to meet the standards of true discipleship and were therefore spiritually disqualified from advancing in the faith. The only problem was that their standards were not Biblical standards. This particular brand of legalism included a lifestyle of "asceticism" (ESV)/"self-abasement" (NASB) and the "worship of angels," all based on alleged "visions" they claimed to have seen (v. 18). If there ever was an example of spiritual snobbery, (the "haves" vs. the "have-nots"), this would be it.

Their fundamental problem, as verse 19 makes abundantly clear, is that these teachers were detached from the spiritual life and resources that can only come from Christ. (In fact, all false teaching can be traced to this root problem.) However, Christ is also the source of life for every member of the Body (its joints and ligaments) so that it grows and matures. As someone has once said, healthy growth in a spiritual body is by *nutrition*, not *addition*! Staying in healthy touch with the Head of the Body through corporate worship, prayer, and yielding to His Word alone is our protection against any legalistic system and our provision for fruitful function in the Church of Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that Charles Wesley sang:

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;  
More than all in Thee I find."