

Col 2:16-19, Warning against the Heresy: Two Dangers
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Overview

1. 2:4-4:1 works out the first two themes, chiastically. The Practice sections are marked by imperatives, and also make reference to the believer's Position in subordinate clauses.
 - a) 2:4-8, Practice
 - b) 2:9-15, Position
 - c) 2:16-4:1, Practice

2. 2:16-4:1 is dominated by imperatives (like 2:4-8), and internally is chiastically arranged, marked by three features:
 - a) Third person imperatives on the outside (2:16-19, 3:15-16), the only place these appear in the entire epistle;
 - b) Each of these uses [kata]brabeuw in 3pimpv (2:18; 3:15), and these are the only uses of this verb or its prepositional compounds in the NT!
 - c) Conditionals on the believer's union with Christ in Death and Resurrection in 2:20, 24

3. The themes of the two halves are different. The first 3pimpv and conditional warn about the false teachers and their doctrine; the second conditional and 3pimpv give the true teaching on godliness. These are the two themes of the believer's Practice that were introduced in 1:23 and already discussed in 2:4-8.

	3pimpv	condition
Negative (heresy)	2:16-19	2:20-23
Positive (godliness)	3:15-4:1	3:1-14

4. Today, focus on 2:16-19, the first half of the warning against heresy. Two parallel prohibitions, each countered by a reference to Christ in his proper position. In each case, observe the nature of the danger, its content, and Paul's response to it. *Technical note: in both cases, the response is expressed in a relative clause attached to the description of the danger. Thus Callow has missed the point of the shift, placing it too early.*

A. 16-17: Confusing Shadow with Substance

1. The nature of the danger: "Let no one judge you," call you to account, demand that you answer for something. Focus on the *accusation*. "You are guilty because you don't do X, Y, or Z."

As believers, we are naturally tender of conscience. Having recognized ourselves as terrible sinners, it is no great surprise to us to find yet another grain of the flesh lurking in us, and the HS makes us receptive to criticism from brothers and sisters so that we can become more like the LJC. But this virtue often gives Satan a line of entrance against us. By raising up some plausible-sounding injunction that really is without foundation, he can so burden us with guilt or distract us with ritualism that we lose all effectiveness for him. A criticism from someone ought to lead us to examine the Scriptures, not immediately to become guilty. If the Scriptures indeed condemn what we are doing, then repent and change--not because of what a person says, but because of the teaching of the word of God. If the Scriptures do not condemn it, then "let no one judge you."

2. The content of the danger: their failure to adhere to Jewish ritual.

a) The commands enjoined:

1) "Eating and drinking": the OT dietary law, which not only forbade certain animals, but also regulated drink. Blood in general, and wine to the Nazirite, were forbidden, and (Lev. 11:34) drink could be contaminated by being in a vessel touched by an unclean animal.

2) "Holyday, new moons, sabbath": the OT sacral calendar, with the three great feasts (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles), the monthly celebrations, and weekly activities. See *Lightfoot on why sabbatwn* here may be construed as singular.

b) These were particularly easy to press on the Colossians, since they could all be substantiated from the OT. But they ignored the great truth determined in the two conferences in the book of Acts: that Gentiles do not become Jews to receive Christ (Acts 15), nor do Jews become Gentiles in receiving him (Acts 21:18-25).

3. Paul's response: "these things are a shadow of the coming things, the body, that is, which is Christ."

a) *Technical note (not in sermon)*

1) While *de* is usually an interclausal conjunction, it can also occur between phrases that do not form separate clauses, as in Phil. 2:8. See Zerwick article 467. In this usage, it has an explanatory or progressive force, "and moreover," "and at that." This appears to be the sense here: "the body" further defines "the coming things."

2) Then the genitive can be appositional, "the sign of [which is] circumcision," "the city of [which is] Ephesus," "the body of [which is] Christ."

- b) The Jewish rituals were right in their place and time, as foreshadows cast by a coming body. Now that the body has arrived, the promised Messiah has come, we ought not to be bound by them.

(Note on typology: this verse indeed suggests that it is legitimate to search out the correspondence between the shadow and the reality. At the same time, does not the same argument that relieves us from obedience to the OT ritual also suggest that our time would be better spent meditating on the body than on the shadow?)

- c) Generalizing: There are significant differences between life under the Old Covenant and under the New, and we must beware of people who try to make us feel guilty for not living an Old Testament kind of life.

B. 18-19: Confusing Subjects with Sovereign

Same three points: the nature and content of the danger that they endure, and Paul's response.

- 1. Nature of the danger: "Let no one beguile you of your reward." The verb in 16 was legal; this one is athletic. It refers to the action of an umpire who disqualifies a participant and so prevents them from receiving their prize. The false teachers are hardly umpires, but by leading the Colossians astray, they might be able to cause them to be disqualified in the Christian life, and so lose the rewards that God is preparing for his children.

NB: the danger here is far more subtle--not an outward criticism, but a leading astray into harmful conduct.

- 2. Content of the danger: described by four participles, which outline the conduct of the false teachers, conduct that Paul fears may attract and entrap the Colossians. Each of the four participles analyzes the one that preceded, until by the last we see clearly what the error is.

- a) "delighting in humility and worship of angels." (Hebraism from XPC B-)

- 1) When is humility not humility? When you delight in it, take pride in it.
- 2) This humility asserted that they dare not go directly to God, but needed intermediaries.
- 3) These were the angels, whom even the Rabbis delighted to enumerate far beyond Scriptural revelation, and whom the gnostics worshipped.
- 4) The news media has taken attention of the current fascination with angels; modern man's way of getting a little spiritual "fix" without having to confront a holy and sin-detesting God.

- b) This delight in humbly worshipping angels rather than God himself resulted from an intrusion into unseen things. People

will not be content with "the things that are revealed," but insist on pushing into "the secret things [that] belong unto the Lord our God," Deut. 29:29. Thus the enthusiasm with visions.

- c) But how could a truly humble person dare to go beyond God's revelation? Answer: they aren't really humble. In fact, they are "vainly puffed in up in their fleshly minds." The truth of the gospel is just too simple for them. They want a hierarchy of angels because "one mediator" would be too easy; they must press into unseen things because just taking God at his word would be too straightforward. They are too smart, too sophisticated for such simplistic solutions ... an attitude that Paul traces to "their mind of [controlled by, dominated by] the flesh," cf. Rom. 8:7, that mind which is enmity against God, not subject to his law.
- d) And that brings us to the final step of Paul's diagnosis: fleshly pride must mean an attempt to evade God's control, and in particular a refusal to "hold fast the head," the LJC.

3. Paul's response

- a) They have chosen to worship angels, when they could worship Christ, whom he has just (2:10) called "the head of all P&P." Why worship angels when we have access to their sovereign?
- b) Christ is "head" not only of the P&P, but also of the church (1:18), and in forsaking him they forsake the only source of strength and support. (For the idiom of the body here, compare Eph. 4:16.) To use and maintain a machine, one must understand how it is build and how it works. The false teachers do not understand the basic structure of the church, and so cannot contribute to its successful operation.

1) Parts: "joints and bands." Follows a long-standing tradition in Gk medicine, which distinguishes two basic mechanisms that unite the body: the points of contact between the components and the cohesive mechanisms that bind them together. (See Lightfoot for documentation.) "Joints" emphasize the distinction of the elements that meet, while "bands" keep them working together. The church is not a homogeneous monolith, but a complex of different members that ordinarily would fly apart. God's purpose is that these members should articulate and be bound to one another to form a productive organism.

NB: The metaphor here is not that the believers are "joints and bands," but that between the believers as members of the body (1 Cor. 12), God has provided mechanisms to function as "joints and bands."

a> The "joints" are the points at which you and I must deal with one another. Our gifts are for one another; if we

do not interact, they are of no profit. Where are your joints? With whom are you articulating? "Reach out and touch someone."

b> The "bands" are what holds us together, in spite of our natural tendency to isolate. Perhaps includes our meetings together; informal prayer times during the week; deliberately praying for one another.

c> Note that all the joints and bands draw DIRECTLY from the head. Can't say, "I'm the foot, and have access to the head only through the leg." Acc. to Paul, the joint between the foot and the leg draws directly from the head, as do the bands that connect them. (And he's right; that's the role of the nervous system--to give direct connection from the head to every part of the body.) If any part does not hold fast the head, its function will be impaired, and the body as a whole will be ill.

2) Process: The joints and bands provide two things from the Head: supply of nourishment, and structural integrity. In Eph, the point is that if we don't exercise our gifts in the body, these two things will not happen. Here, the point is that they depend on our holding fast the LJC. If he is not at the center of our attention and affection, if we do not honor him above all else, if we are gathered unto anything but him, we will starve and our members will fall apart.

3) Purpose: "increase with the increase of God." How important is the last phrase, "of God." Many kinds of increase can be achieved without holding fast the head, but it is not the increase of God. Conversely, the kind that God wants can only be achieved if we focus our attention on the LJC.

c) *Application*: Clearly, if angels are an inadequate substitute for the LJC in our attention, how much more are the other centers around which people tend to build churches (doctrinal distinctives, charismatic leaders, buildings)? God help us to forsake every other ground of gathering and cleave to the LJC alone, both as a group and in our individual devotional lives.

C. Summary

1. Let no man judge you. Be open to criticism, but let it point you to the Scripture, to which alone you are subject.
2. Let no man disqualify you by directing your attention away from the LJC toward any subordinate.

Analysis

Only 2 out of 29 imperatives come before 2:26 (in 2:6,8). 2 in 44

vv; 27 in 51 vv. Here and 3:15-16 are the only 3rd person imperatives in the book.

Two prohibitions, each countered by a reference to Christ in his proper position. The first error is in not distinguishing along a temporal axis; the second, in not making distinctions between things that differ now.

- A. The error of confounding the shadow with the substance (diachronic).
 - 1. 2:16 Mh\ ou)^n tis u(ma^s krine/tw
 - a) e)n brw/sei
 - b) kai\ e)n po/sei
 - c) h)\ e)n me/rei
 - 1) e(orth^s
 - 2) h)\ neomhni/as
 - 3) h)\ sabba/twn,
 - 2. Contrast p
 - a) 2:17 a(/ e)stin skia\ tw^n mello/ntwn,
 - b) to\ de\ sw^ma tou^ Xristou^.
- B. The error of confounding the body with the head (synchronic)
 - 1. 2:18 mhdei\s u(ma^s katabrabeue/tw
 - a) qe/lwn e)n tapeinofrosu/nh| kai\ qrhskei/a| tw^n a)gge/lwn,
 - b) a(\ mh e(o/raken e)mbateu/wn,
 - c) ei)kh^| fusiou/menos u(po\ tou^ noo\s th^s sarko\s au)tou^,
 - d) 2:19 kai\ ou) kratw^n th\n kefalh/n,
 - 2. e)c ou(^ pa^n to\ sw^ma ... au)/cei th\n au)/chsin tou^ qeou^.
 - a) dia\ tw^n a(fw^n kai\ sunde/smwn e)pixorhgou/menon kai\ sumbibazo/menon