

What are the Shadows of Things to Come

Col 2:16,17 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*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

This passage of Scripture is one of the most hotly debated in the Christian world. What did Paul actually mean here? Is Paul relegating the gatherings of God's people found in the book of the law to the scrap heap as a bunch of legalistic bondage? Is Paul telling the believers to not let people of the world judge you in these things but judge each other instead? Is Paul saying the Seventh day Sabbath is no longer relevant to Christians because he uses the word 'Sabbaton' in his list?

The traditional Adventist perspective, not wanting to relegate the 7th Day Sabbath to being a shadow, explains that the Sabbath here refers only to the Sabbaths, or Sabbaton, during a feast. Sabbaton is a word used in Passover, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles – but is that really what Paul means here? To most Sunday Christians this seems a shallow defence. We will see that there is a better way to defend the Sabbath, which is no shadow, but it requires accepting increased relevance in the New Testament era of the other two items in the list.

The word Sabbaton [G4521] occurs 68 times in the New Testament. In 59 places, it means Seventh-day Sabbath. In 8 places it relates to the week connected to a Seventh-day Sabbath. So 67 of the 68 verses have a direct connection to the Seventh-day Sabbath. The only one left is Colossians 2:16. If the New Testament uses this word 67 times related to the Seventh-day Sabbath, would it be right to say that in this one occurrence it means something else? Consider also that the word Paul uses for Sabbath is exactly the same word used in the LXX for Sabbath in the fourth commandment.

To increase our curiosity of Paul's list we note the following regarding feasts, new moons and Sabbaths in the Old Testament:

1 Chron 23:31 And to offer all burnt sacrifices unto the LORD in the Sabbaths[H7676], in the new moons[H2320], and on the set feasts,[H4150] by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD:

This sequence also occurs in 2 Chron 2:4; 2 Chron 8:13; 31:3; Neh 10:33; Ezek 45:17; Hosea 2:11. In each of these cases the Sabbath means the Seventh-day Sabbath. Ezekiel 45:17 has the exact same sequence and could even have allusions to the meat and drink.

Eze 45:17 And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and (1) **meat offerings**, and (2) **drink offerings**, in (3) **the feasts**, and in (4) **the new moons**, and in the (5) **sabbaths**, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel.

In the LXX, the word for feasts [G1859], new moons [G3561] and Sabbaths {G4521} is exactly the same as what Paul quotes in Col 2:16. If all these passages in the Old Testament use this sequence to refer to the Seventh-day Sabbath, then why would Paul be using this list in a completely different way to the Scriptures he read? Why would he be using the word Sabbaton to mean something never used in the Bible elsewhere, unless he is only referring to the day of Atonement which uses the word also in Lev 23:32?

If Paul is actually meaning the Seventh-day Sabbath in Col 2:16, then the Sabbath would be listed as a shadow of things to come. However, Inspiration is clear about the Sabbath:

The Sabbath was committed to Adam, the father and representative of the whole human family. Its observance was to be an act of grateful acknowledgment, on the part of all who should dwell upon the earth, that God was their Creator and their rightful Sovereign; that they were the work of His hands and the subjects of His authority. Thus the institution was wholly commemorative, and given to all mankind. **There was nothing in it shadowy or of restricted application to any people.** PP 48.

Now we are faced with an interesting problem. Paul's use of the word Sabbath and his list of items from the Bible alone suggests that he is meaning the seventh-day Sabbath. If He is meaning the seventh-day Sabbath then it appears that the Sabbath is a shadow of things to come. We might be able to convince ourselves that the Sabbath points to the millennium of rest and our future gathering together in heaven, but that would be a *taste* of the future not a *shadow* of the future. It also places us in conflict with the Spirit of Prophecy that states there was nothing shadowy about the Sabbath. Ellen White's reference to not having a restricted application suggests she is connecting nothing shadowy to the entirety of the history of this world.

If we accept both pieces of evidence listed above, we are apparently placed in a very difficult situation. That is certainly the way I have felt, and this led me to seek the Lord in prayer and ask Him to reveal what is the answer to this difficulty. I know our Father hears our prayers, and as I awoke upon this Sabbath morning a flood of thoughts came to my mind that I think may resolve this issue.

As I was going back and forth in my mind I reminded myself of the texts that have clear references to Gnostic Christianity.

Col 2:8 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.

Can we refer to the Law of Moses as philosophy and traditions of men?

Moses did not leave them to misconstrue the words of the Lord or to misapply His requirements. He wrote all the words of the Lord in a book, that they might be referred to afterward. In the mount **he had written them as Christ Himself dictated them.** 1MR 114

Christ dictated these to Moses. We can't possibly call the book of the law of Moses the traditions of men and the elements of the world. But this certainly can be talking about Gnostic teachings coming into Christianity. What were some of the key teachings of Gnosticism?

- The material world is bad, the spirit world is good. The material world is under the control of evil, ignorance or nothingness.
- A divine spark is somehow trapped in some (but not all) humans and it alone, of all that exists in this material world, is capable of redemption.
- Salvation is through a secret knowledge by which individuals come to know themselves, their origin and destiny.
- Since a good God could not have created an evil world, it must have been created by an inferior, ignorant or evil god. Usually the explanation given is that the true, good God created or emanated beings (Archons) who either emanated other Archons or conjugated to produce them until a mishap by Sophia (Wisdom) led to the creation of the evil Archon who created our world and pretends to be God. He hides truth from humans, but sparks of

Sophia in some humans fill them with an urge to return to the Pleroma (divine realm) where they belong.

These ideas had implications that could not be squared with either the Old Testament or apostolic writings, which is why early Christians rejected them.

What Were Some Implications of Gnosticism?

Since Gnostics held matter to be corrupt, they considered the body to be corrupt, too. The trend of some Gnostics was to teach that there is no harm in indulging fleshly desires since the body is utterly corrupt and beyond redemption anyhow. Other Gnostics, perhaps the majority, held that the body must be kept in check by strict asceticism. Whether one chooses plan A or plan B, the underlying doctrine makes it impossible to understand how God could become a true man with a fleshly body in Christ Jesus. (www.christianity.com)

Several of these ideas found their way into parts of Christianity. This process was beginning during the time of Paul, but a complete system of Gnostic Christianity did not develop until the 2nd Century. Yet we have evidence in the New Testament that the apostles were fighting a prototype of these ideas.

1 Tim 6:20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of **science** [G1108] falsely so called:

The word science in this passage is actually the word Gnosis from which the word Gnostic comes from. Paul warns Timothy against false Gnosis, or Gnostic ideas.

As mentioned above, the idea of the material world being evil led Gnostic Christians to reject the true doctrine that Christ came in the flesh or could have a material existence. This is the reason Paul states

Col 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

The apostle John also combats this teaching, labelling it the spirit of antichrist.

1 John 4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

For Paul to say Christ was the fullness of divinity physically was utter heresy to the Gnostics and this is further proof that Paul is addressing Gnostic teaching. Some further implications of Gnostic Christian teachings were:

“Gnostic Christians were passionately opposed to the Old Testament and Hebrew Religion. If the material world is altogether evil, then its creator Yahweh and his religion must be absolutely evil as well.” Alan Knight, *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* (2003) p 39.

“Gnostic Christianity always favoured the idea that spirituality is solely internal.” *ibid* p 75.

“Spirituality is not to be found in the material experience of life nor in any of the rules that the Bible or any persons use to try to legislate material conduct.” *Ibid* p 43.

To the Gnostic Christian eating and drinking material things is not part of worship; these things are symbols of slavery to the material world. Therefore, ‘Touch not, taste not, handle not’ material things in your worship. Focusing solely on the internal spiritual experience is the key for the Gnostic Christian.

Is there more evidence of Paul speaking against Gnostic Heresy?

Col 2:18 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.

Gnostics had a teaching about emanations from God called Aeons.

Aeons bear a number of similarities to Judaeo-Christian angels, including roles as servants and emanations of God, and existing as beings of light. In fact, certain Gnostic Angels, such as Armozel, are also Aeons. [Wikipedia – Aeon (Gnosticism)]

We have evidence of worshipping of Angels amongst Valentinian Gnostic Christians. Valentinus lived from 100AD till 160AD and was rumoured to be a student of a man who was a student of Paul. His teaching is a development of the Gnostic teaching of Aeons that existed during the time of Paul.

“Valentinian Christians took part in sacraments that culminated in a divine marriage ceremony in which they were spiritually married to angels. A male convert would be married to a female angel, and a female convert to a male angel.” Ibid p 102

There is nothing in the book of the law that commands the worship of angels. It commands the worship of God only.

Col 2:20-22 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 the using;) after **the commandments and doctrines of men**?

We see in this passage the terms ‘touch not, taste not, and handle not’ are enveloped in the terms:

- (1) The rudiments of the world
- (2) The commandments and doctrines of men.

It is fairly safe to say that the terms ‘touch not, taste not and handle not’ are connected to commandments and doctrines of men, stemming from the rudiments of the world. The Gnostic Christians would have found the material aspects of Hebrew worship offensive and would have judged them for eating and drinking or feasting during religious or social gatherings. The cry would be heard to ‘touch not, taste not, handle not.’

It is possible the Jews might also accuse Christians of partaking in a Communion of eating and drinking sacred things outside of the instrumentality of the Levitical priesthood. Adam Clark also makes this comment:

These are forms of expression very frequent among the Jews. In Maccoth, fol. xxi. 1: “If they say to a Nazarite, Don’t drink, don’t drink; and he, notwithstanding, drinks; he is guilty. If they say, Don’t shave, don’t shave; and he shaves, notwithstanding; he is guilty. If they say, Don’t put on these clothes, don’t put on these clothes; and he, notwithstanding, puts on heterogeneous garments; he is guilty.” Adam Clark commentary on Col 2:21.

Jews might also accuse Christians about not including the sacrifices during Sabbath, New Moon and feast days which Christians saw as fulfilled in Christ. The sacrifices were definitely shadows of things that were fulfilled in the death of Christ (Dan 9:27). So Paul is addressing both Gnostic Christian attacks as well as Jewish Legalistic attacks regarding eating and drinking at religious gatherings.

This brings us to the heart of the issue in Colossians 2. Let's read the passage again.

Col 2:16-17 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 is of Christ.

I want us to notice four key things in this passage:

- (1) The use of the word *respect*.
- (2) The use of supplied punctuation, the colon, giving what follows the sense of defining what has just been stated and the capitalisation of the word 'Which' giving the impression of a new sentence.
- (3) The use of the word 'but'.
- (4) The supplied word 'is' in relation to the body 'is' of Christ

1. The Use of the word *Respect*

Let us look at how the word *respect* is used in other places in the New Testament. This is what it says about this word in the Strong's G3313:

From an obsolete but more primary form of *μειρομααι* *meiromai* (to *get* as a *section* or *allotment*); a *division* or *share* (literally or figuratively, in a wide application): - behalf, coast, course, craft, particular (+ -ly), part (+ -ly), piece, portion, respect, side, some sort (-what).

This word is translated part (24x), portion (3x), Coast(3x), behalf(2x) respect(2x) misc(9x). Here are some examples in the New Testament:

Matt 2:22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into **the parts** [G3313] of Galilee:

Luke 15:12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me **the portion** [G3313] of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

Luke 24:42 And they gave him **a piece** [G3313] of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

In Matt 2:22 and Luke 15:12 the word is translated with the definite article 'the' but Luke 24:42 does not use it. The use of the word part or portion requires in English that we identify the part with either a definite or indefinite article. The context of Paul's usage would favour a definite article but either way is fine. With this knowledge let us apply this to the text.

Let no man judge you in meat or drink or in **[/the parts/the portion/ a piece]** of a feast, new moon or Sabbath

The use of the words meat and drink gives the context for the next word *respect* which means he is speaking to a certain part of the feasts, new moons and Sabbaths.

2. The Use of Supplied word *days* and colon

Now we need to realise something fairly significant: the word 'days' and the colon are supplied. They don't actually exist in the text. I use e-sword for my online Bible and supplied words are in grey.

Col 2:16 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*:

Notice that the colon is supplied. It does not exist in the text. This significantly alters the meaning of this sentence. If we take this out and then allow the sentence to continue by placing a non-capital for the word 'which' we see something quite profound.

Let no man judge you in meat or drink or in the part of a feast, new moon or Sabbath which are a shadow of things to come

Did you catch that? Paul is speaking about the part of the feasts, new moons and Sabbaths that are a shadow of things to come. Since Paul's main concern is dealing with Gnostic Christians aversion to things material, his reference to meat and drink is more likely related to every day eating and drinking in social settings which the Gnostic minded Christians, who had an ascetic focus, would have discouraged.

The fact that Paul lists eating and drinking first suggests that this is the highest area of concern and that this theme carries into the other items in the list even though they are not considered shadows. The items that would have directly related to the shadow of things to come are the parts of the Feasts, New moons and Sabbaths that are material in nature since the Gnostics focused solely in the internal or spiritual when it came to worship. The most obvious examples of this would be the eating and drinking "part" of a feast. Remember that, according to Leviticus 23, new moons and Sabbaths are also feasts.

3. The Use of the word *but*

We now need to come to terms with the word *but* because this is the conjunction expressing the relationship to *the body of Christ*.

The word "*but*" in this passage is "*de*" [G1161] This is what Strong's says about it:

A primary particle (adversative or **continuative**); but, and, etc.: - also, and, but, moreover, now [often unexpressed in English].

So this word is not necessarily adversative or contrary to what was just stated, but can also mean a continuation or explanation. This is where a semi-colon could be inserted in English to explain what was just said. Notice some uses of the word *but* [G1161] in the New Testament.

Matt 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; and [G1161] Isaac begat Jacob; and [G1161] Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

See how the word is used to mean a continuation as a result of what just was stated. Isaac begat Jacob as a continuation of Abraham begetting Isaac. In this case it is used as a continuation. It makes no sense in this case to say:

Matt 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; **but** Isaac begat Jacob; **but** Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

There are places where a 'but' would be better to use. Jesus uses it carefully in Matthew 5:

Matt 5:38-39 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
(39) But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

The word *but* that Jesus uses is G1161. If He wanted to completely counter what was said previously He would have used another word, a word that he used when countering Satan:

Matt 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but[G235] by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

This word G235 is *alla* and this is what Strong's says about it:

Neuter plural of G243; properly other things, that is, (adverbially) contrariwise (in many relations): - and, but (even), howbeit, indeed, nay, nevertheless, no, notwithstanding, save, therefore, yea, yet.

If Jesus wanted to completely counter the phrase an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth He would have used G235 *alla* as this is a complete negation, but Jesus uses the word *de*. This allows Jesus to counter the interpretation given to people by the Pharisees and at the same time continue and expand the actual meaning of the book of the law when it said 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' See Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20 and Deut 19:21. The meaning of this passage was not to strike people at all. The law was designed as a deterrent to strike anyone, but the Jews had twisted it into a teaching on revenge. So this little word *de* is very important and it has serious implications in a number of places where something is read only as adversarial, when it also includes continuation.

With this in mind we are ready to complete this sentence.

Let no man judge you in meat or drink or in the portion of a feast, new moon or Sabbath which are a shadow of things to come; **more over** the body of Christ.

So what does the *body of Christ* relate to? Paul is the only one to use this term and he uses it four times apart from Col 2:17:

Rom 7:4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.	Christ condemned sin in the flesh and purchased out freedom. The term body of Christ means the literal body of Christ that took our nature and then took that body to death in order to give us life.
1 Cor 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?	This is a reference to spiritual body of God's people (the church) in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells.
1Co 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.	Again a spiritual reference to the church
Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:	Again a spiritual reference to the church

Eating and drinking of bread and the cup of new wine are symbols of our entry into the body of Christ and reveal the fact that we have accepted His death on our behalf. They symbolise that we have joined Him in death that we might be raised with Him.

Rom 6:4-5 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

They are symbols that Christ dwells in us and that we are therefore part of His body. Notice what Jesus says.

John 6:55,56 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

Again Paul connects these emblems to our communion in Christ.

1 Cor 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

The death, burial and resurrection of Christ, symbolised in these emblems, is the first fruits which makes certain the future resurrection of the saints at the second coming.

1Co 15:22-23 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (23) But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; **afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.**

In partaking of the death and resurrection of Christ through these symbols we express the Christian hope of future victory over death at the coming of Christ. So these emblems are a shadow of things to come and this is partly why Paul states:

1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, **ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.**

Our Lord Jesus also expresses this theme in this way:

Mark 14:25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

The bread and the cup are shadows and have no virtue in them to save the soul; they are symbols of the death and resurrection of Christ. His resurrection makes certain the resurrection of the saints at the Second Coming as well as the complete and open fellowship of the body of Christ each Sabbath and New Moon appointment in the heavenly kingdom. In a broader sense the eating and drinking done in a festive spirit during Feasts, New Moon and Sabbaths are a shadow of our gathering together in one body after the second coming. There is no virtue in eating and drinking, but these material things connected with the worship of God's people give us a taste of the future kingdom of God. The Gnostics would have discouraged any focus on eating and drinking at religious gatherings or food and drink having any part in worship because for them the spiritual is to be separated from the material, whereas the Hebrew minded Christian would see these material things as simply part of their complete Christian experience because the material world is not evil but the creation of God.

How wonderful it will be when the entire body of Christ will be united together in one place to praise and worship God and His Son.

The nations of the saved will know no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons [733] of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming. "There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death." "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord." "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." "The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of His people." PK 732,733

There is an alternate idea that the term *body of Christ* simply means the church and this term is to be connected with the idea of judging or deciding for you how to engage in public worship related to these issues. This may be a reference to the body of Christ coming together at the Acts 15 council to decide on certain protocols for Gentile converts, but there is no direct association for this. While it is possible to view it this way if we allow for a double meaning in the text, there are dangers that this could open the idea that personal conscience in worship should be dictated by the majority of the body of believers, and this is something I think is problematic.

4. The Supplied word *is*

You might have noticed in my last quoting of Col 2:16-17, I left out the last supplied word '*is*'

Let no man judge you in meat or drink or in the portion of a feast, new moon or Sabbath which are a shadow of things to come; **more over** the body of Christ.

Surely we are much safer to seek to gain understanding of Scripture with as few supplied words and punctuation as possible. Inserting the word *is* in combination with an adversarial meaning of the word *but*, the phrase *body of Christ* is placed in opposition and contrast to the words *shadow of things to come*. It makes the shadows a negative thing as opposed to the body or substance which is a good thing. This reasoning process perfectly suits the Gnostic Christian mindset that sees material things as negative and spiritual things only as positive.

At another level the Greek mind would tend to see shadows as negatives due to one of Plato's fundamental teachings concerning the "*Allegory of the cave*."

Plato has Socrates describe a gathering of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all of their lives, facing a blank wall. The people watch shadows projected on the wall by things passing in front of a fire behind them, and begin to designate names to these shadows. The shadows are as close as the prisoners get to viewing reality. He then explains how the philosopher is like a prisoner who is freed from the cave and comes to understand that the shadows on the wall do not make up reality at all, as he can perceive the true form of reality rather than the mere shadows seen by the prisoners. *Wikipedia – Allegory of the Cave*

So the Greek mind would see shadows as part of the enslavement of the mind, and therefore when reading a text like Col 2:16-17 it would be natural to read the shadows in an antagonistic relationship to perceived reality.

If Paul wanted to emphasize a contrast he would need to have included a word in Greek like G2076 *esti*. This word is not included and therefore '*is*' should be taken out. With the removal of the word '*is*', the words body of Christ become a natural progression of *shadow of things to come*. It should be evident that the more supplied words there are provided in a passage the more likely the translator is beginning to become interpretive of the text rather than just translating the original author.

So in conclusion the Gnostics were judging the Christians for connecting material emblems to their worship, which they considered bondage. It is also possible that the Jews and some Christians were judging the Church for not gathering on these days to do the rituals of their forefathers. This included sacrifices and offerings that were part of the shadowy sacrificial system that was no longer required. Either way, Paul is not addressing the *timing* of the days of the feasts, new moons and Sabbaths, but is addressing the controversy of what was to be *done* on those days regarding eating and drink and the portion of the feasts that related to eating and drinking which was very much part of the feasts and the communion service.

So if we show proper '*respect*' for Paul's use of that word in Col 2:16, we find that this question has a solution that will address all the major issues at hand.