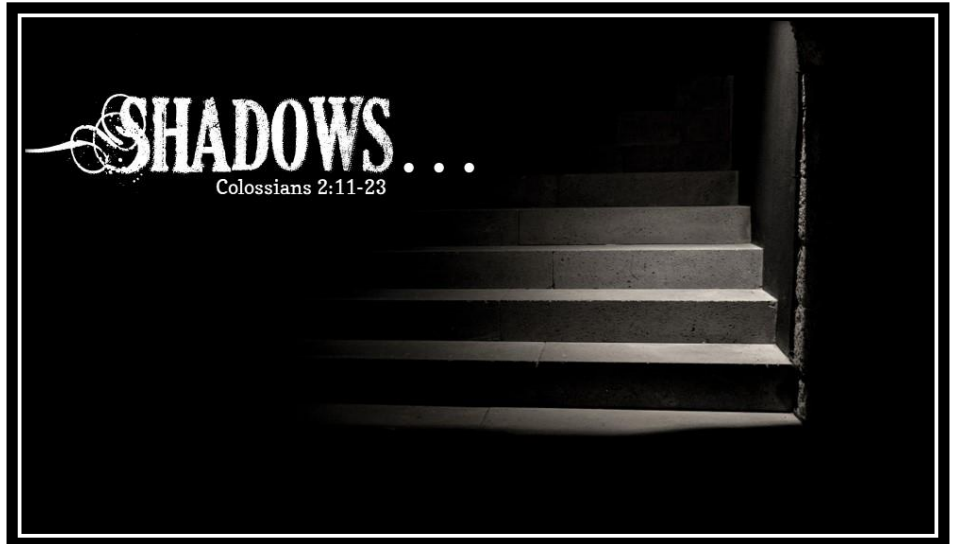


“Shadows...”

Colossians 2:11-23

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on July 30th, 2023



Colossians 2:11-23 *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. 16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. 20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

2:11

Circumcision was an Old Testament rite for the Jewish people. How is it that it shows up here in the New Testament and moreover what does it have to do with us today?

First of all, just what IS circumcision? No...not so much the physical aspect of this act, but what does it mean and what is it for as far as the average Jew is concerned? Well circumcision was a ritual given by God to His chosen people, but it was designed to represent a spiritual aspect; the “cutting away of the flesh.”

It also was a “covenant,” an agreement between God and the Jewish people that was given during the time of Abraham (see Gen 17). It was meant to be a physical sign of separation *unto* God, but it was to correspond to a spiritual and mental separation *away from* the world and the flesh also. And therein laid the problem. For the people went through the physical act, but the spiritual rarely followed. Sound familiar?

We don’t operate much today in the realm of “covenants” with God, but we should. This is no doubt because we don’t want any real responsibility to “step up” in areas of faith, holiness, and commitment and anyone who argues otherwise is labeled as legalistic. Yet covenants are one of the most important themes in the Bible—they are the key to God’s redemptive plan to restore humanity to its divine calling. Starting in Genesis, God enters into one formal partnership (i.e., covenant) after another with various humans in order to rescue his world. These “divine-human partnerships” drive the narrative forward until it reaches its climax in Jesus. The New Testament Covenant is the promise that God will forgive sin and restore fellowship with those whose hearts are turned toward Him.

A covenant is a relationship between two parties who make binding promises to each other and work together to reach a common goal. Again, therein lies the problem for us today, because no one really wants to make any promises, especially when they know up front that they are going to break them! Covenants define obligations and commitments, but they are different from a contract because they are relational and personal. Think of a marriage—a husband and wife choose to enter into a formal relationship, binding themselves to one another in lifelong faithfulness and devotion. They then work as partners to reach a common goal, like building a life or raising children together. It's not a *contract*, it's a *promise based on relationship*. How we appreciate and embrace *that* covenant, yet still we are quick to reject such with our Redeemer!

Covenant relationships are found all throughout the Bible. There are personal covenants between two individuals, political covenants between two kings or nations (e.g., King Solomon and King Hiram in 1 Kings 5), legal covenants with a nation (such as the laws about freeing Hebrew slaves), and so forth. Entering into covenants was a major part of what it meant to live in the ancient Near East. So God partnered with humans through a structure they already understood. Circumcision was one of these covenants. But circumcision for the Jew ultimately became a point of elitism and a source of pride. It became an element of prejudice and false supremacy.

Outward religious elements hold the same danger for us. We can look the part, go through the motions, and have all the physical appearances of Christianity, while never changing on the inside. That does not make these practices innately bad or worthless, however, what God wanted then and what he wants now, is a circumcision of the heart...a cutting away of the flesh of our hearts! (See Rom 2:28-29, Deut 10:16, 30:6)

We could use the word “sanctification” today on this matter, meaning “separated unto God.” Many would attempt to throw out the practice of covenants ...rid ourselves of all promises and relational obligations. But if we can unilaterally reject other past covenants, what is to hold us to this one...to “sanctification?”

Covenants innately contain at least one “if.” In truth, scripture is full of these relational qualifiers...the “if’s” of God.

“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

“If my people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” 2 Chr 7:14

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. (Deuteronomy 11:26, 27, 28, and 13:18, 15:5)

If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers...(I Samuel 12:14, 15)

If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,” says the LORD of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. – Malachi 2:2

The word ‘if’ is interesting. It actually is one of the most important words in the Bible because it speaks directly to our responsibility to God. Most promises in the Bible have conditions and the word ‘if’ speaks to those

conditions. Our responses to God's commands affect our relationship with Him and determine our receiving from Him.

Jesus actually used the word 'if' all the time. Almost half of the 574 occurrences in the New Testament are in the four Gospels. Jesus always put the 'if' on man's side and never on God's side. Our "completeness" in Christ is reflected here in that in Christ we are whole. We have been given both the position and the power to walk a separated, "sanctified" life. But as always, the choice to actually live it out is ours to make. You know: **"if."**

2:12

Baptism too, is symbolic of this "new covenant" through Jesus Christ. While it too is a physical act, it is also intended to be so much more. Baptism is to be an outward sign of an inward work. A reflection of our hearts desire; to both share in his death, as well as His resurrection; a new life!

Rom 6:3-5 says *"Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was."*

This all renders silly the argument of what is "proper" baptism; immersion or sprinkling, etc. 1 Corinthians 10:2 tells us, in relation to the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea; *"they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."* And we know that the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea without getting a drop of water on them, because they crossed the sea on "dry ground!" No amount of water can bury a person in Christ or make him alive in Christ. We can claim, "Hey! I've been baptized and sanctified." And that's all well and fine, but have you been "crucified?"

Gal 2:20 says *"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

2:13

NOTE: "HE" has "made us alive" together in HIM! Why? Because we have been baptized? Because we've been circumcised? Because we go to church, or tithe our money, or serve in the body? NO: Because we have "been forgiven..." and He did that all himself. We just acknowledged such, accepted such, and let the power of such do its work in us and through us.

2:14

What "handwriting" is he referring to? The "handwriting" of the written code; the law given to Moses, the regulations and rules that governed the life of a child of God, and on many levels still do today.

The Old Testament law was given not in the hopes that any would or could follow it, for no one could and no one can. Rather it was to express the standard that must be met to approach a perfect and holy God. If we fail in following all the rules and reg's perfectly, then we had better find another path to perfection, because such is required to be in His presence! The law was to serve therefore to show us how, if left to ourselves, we fall so grossly short of the minimum standard in our own works and righteousness and to show us how desperately we need Jesus Christ and HIS righteousness to ever commune with the true and living God!

Rom 6:14 - *Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.*

Rom 8:3 - *The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.*

Now...in this new “covenant” we are to live “in the Spirit”

Gal 5:16-17 - *So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.*

Since we are now complete in Christ, every believer is able to walk in holiness, just as Jesus did. We are “set apart for God”...out of love, not out of slavish fear that was the result of the law.

Am I free then to live as I please now? Am I free to renegotiate the covenant as well as the Christian life as a whole?

Gal 5:13 – *“...you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.”*

2:15

This verse reveals that Christ and His work on the cross has effectively “disarmed” Satan, or at least his war against us. Oh, he still fights! But he no longer has the teeth...his power in our lives has been broken if we are willing to live in that victory. And “victory” is just what it is. For the cross was anything but a defeat for Christ and for us. Rather, it was the deciding moment in the war for our souls.

Yet so many of us continue to fight a battle that has already been won. We try and try through our own efforts to be and to do that which is now the position and work of the Holy Spirit. Many of us continually attempt to “renegotiate” our agreement with God...it's no longer a covenant but merely a “wink and a nod.” A mere “ideal.” We then spend a lifetime trying to hold onto the blessings of redemption while actually living something “easier.” Can you be saved and not be truly in love? So if love is not motivating you to lay literally *everything* on the table out of a passion for Christ and his lifestyle, then are you really saved or are you just still lost in the rules and regulations...still playing the game of bargaining and compromising?

2:16 -17

Paul had written to the believers in Colosse about their perfect position in Christ; the “completeness” of their salvation, and thus their very lives in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They were “whole” in Him. Their salvation was complete, their standing before God was secured. They now had “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” (2 Pet 1:3)

In that wholeness, that completeness, *and only in that wholeness*, we are now truly free. The law was still alive and still in effect, so only in genuine salvation was and is such freedom found. This is not a matter of saying some magic “sinner's prayer” words and then I can live in any way that I want in the flesh! Salvation will profoundly alter an individual's passions and course of life. If I have been reborn, then I have died to this world...*my* world. In Christ there is no longer the push and pull of negotiations with God. Everything belongs to Christ, and every decision places Him first and foremost. In an effort to hang on to morsels of our old lives, we fail to know this freedom of true redemption and we fall again under the law if we ever left it in the first place...

Paul had laid out the facts: we are, if truly reborn, in the eyes of our Creator, a “completed” work. That in sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ ...symbolically in baptism, and actually in our hearts, as well as the “circumcision” of the heart...the “cutting away” of the controlling flesh, we thus share (“joint-heirs”) in the perfectness of Jesus Christ forever and completely!

Because of this surrender, we are free. No longer under the rituals and rules that made us more or less adequate to stand in the presence of God. We are now driven by, and controlled through, the love we have for Him. Law and rules are no longer required because Jesus is first in everything. But if we are not so controlled, the law still

exists to show us how far we are falling short...and that should concern us. Hence the 'purpose of the law' in the first place.

Outside of a passion controlled, relationship-based living, we fail miserably. We know the truth! Our righteousness just doesn't crack it. We can't earn our keep! Our works are referred to as "filthy rags." (Note Romans 14:17, Rom 14:3)

That's not what Christ wanted nor *wants* for us! We are to have a relationship with Jesus, not with the things that are merely shadows! How many of us seek a connection, a *bond*, with the trappings of faith, over one with the object of our faith? We focus on ...*and struggle with*, our service, church attendance, works participation and financial giving hoping that God will be pleased with us. It's like buying your kids a bunch of stuff to replace the lack of love expressed and time invested.

Not only is this deeply unsatisfying, but one can never hold out...sooner or later we begin to compromise and seek to renegotiate our "contract." We don't want to lose our benefits, *mind you*, but we would like to maybe serve less, give less, sacrifice less, be less...all in all... well...*less*. If the recipient was your girlfriend, what would be the clear message? And yet we think we can pull the wool over the eyes of the Messiah!

All in all, the problem lay in the fact that our relationship is with the shadows not the real McCoy. If I'm in love, I have no problem serving, giving, spending time with, sacrificing, etc. I don't even realize it because all of it is just exercised so I might be with the one I love. And none of it is really necessary because the one I love loves me back and that love does not hinge upon what I do or what I give. But I keep on so that I might be where the one I love is, and sharing in the passions of the same!

Why would we now try to hold on to a shadow when we have the real thing available to us? Why do so many guys find it so much easier to chase porn than invest in a real relationship with a living and breathing female? Because porn is easier...it takes less time and investment. Less pressure. Less expense. And that all ok because there is no love involved here, just lust. There is no "other" involved here, *just me*. Apply all that to one's faith and you have a clear picture of what Paul is driving at.

2:18

"Your reward..."

What reward? The reward of joy and abundant life! That awesome reward of being in love!

"false humility"...This means a ruse...a fake. A lying humility. One that may play well in public but God knows better. When you are truly in love, one of the overwhelming experiences is coming to the great realization that you don't deserve the other person and are not worthy of him or her. It's a natural aspect of true love! It certainly is a part of a relationship with Jesus Christ! But only a *true* relationship will garner such a response, not a shadow relationship. A false humility and an "under-the-rug" pride is a sure sign that you don't really know the Son of God. When the prophet Isaiah came into the presence of God, his response was *true humility*! (Isaiah 6:5 "Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies." But that didn't stop him from doing. Quite the opposite! "Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."

2:19-20

And what is the root of all this antagonism? They were trying to be something on their own and under their own power. They were not "holding onto the head." They were embracing the shadows of the real thing. The attributes, the passions, the actions, the responses that come forth from a relationship... but it is ultimately void of one thing...a relationship, a *love*!

Hold onto the head! You cannot avoid that up close contact if you are holding onto my head! Not my shadow...but me. The real thing.

“You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on...” Why do you keep on? Maybe because you *haven't* really died to this world, but are in fact playing both sides. You are having a spiritual affair with another.

2:21-22

Because you don't smoke or don't eat Twinkies, that doesn't make you more spiritual! It may make you healthier than others or in better physical condition, but it doesn't make you closer to God, nor does it make Him love you more.

Mark 7:17-20 *“...Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd, and his disciples asked him what he meant by the parable he had just used. “Don't you understand either?” he asked. “Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.” (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.) And then he added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you.”*

What is the answer for us? Are we to give ourselves over to a life undisciplined or one free to indulge in whatever we desire, all with the cry of “freedom in Christ” upon our lips? Paul...and Christ Himself is saying that if you are truly in love...truly born again...truly in a relationship with Him, there is no risk of that.

Gal 5:16 ... *“Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.”*

And why is this necessary?

Gal 5:17 -18 *“The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.”*

2:23

These things we do outside of the spirit...outside of a love relationship we often look good from the outside, especially in “will worship.” That's worship that you have decided for yourself that has little to do with Jesus Christ, and our true relationship with Him. It's a funny thing to watch that play out in people!