

Colossians 2:15–19

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 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. 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, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

Principalities Spoiled — the Triumph of the Cross

Verse 15 concludes the long doctrinal paragraph that began at verse 1 by showing one of the great results of the cross: the spoiling and public display of principalities and powers. When the Romans celebrated a military victory, they led their captives and the spoils of war through the streets — a public demonstration of power over the conquered enemy. The cross accomplished something analogous: the powers that had stood over men in condemnation and bondage were stripped of their weapons and paraded as defeated, led in triumph by it — by the cross.

Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that we still wrestle against principalities and powers in the heavenly places. But Colossians 2:15 supplies the ground on which that wrestling stands: those principalities are already spoiled, already defeated, already led in public triumph. The Christian wrestles not against a victorious

enemy but against one already stripped of his ultimate weapon. Colossians gives the completed work; Ephesians gives the practical conflict carried on in the light of that completed work.

Let No Man Therefore Judge You — The Therefore of the Cross

The word therefore in verse 16 connects directly to everything that preceded. Because the cross has accomplished all of this — the putting off of the body of the flesh, burial and resurrection with Christ, the blotting out of the handwriting, the spoiling of principalities — let no man therefore judge you in meat or drink, holy days, new moons, or Sabbaths. The cross does not lead back to these things; it leads entirely away from them. To treat these observances as spiritually required after the cross is to have missed the thrust of everything that went before.

These are shadows of things to come — but the body is of Christ. Note carefully: it says the body is *of* Christ, not the body *is* Christ. The new moon, the Sabbath, the feasts are shadows that point to a coming fulfilment — the renewing of Israel, the rest of God, the marriage supper of the Lamb. These things are still to come and will be fulfilled. But they are shadows; their substance is of Christ. To keep the shadow when the substance has come — or rather, to keep the shadow in anticipation of what is still coming — is to remain in the category of the carnal nation under trial, rather than stepping into the fullness of what the cross has secured. Israel will enter the good of these things spiritually when they are brought under the new covenant at the beginning of the millennium.

Let No Man Fraudulently Deprive You of Your Prize

Darby's rendering of verse 18 is sharper than the King James: *let no one fraudulently deprive you of your prize*. The prize is not a future reward to be earned — it is the present possession of what the Christian already has in Christ.

It is the inheritance put underfoot — every place the sole of the foot treads, that is the inheritance. The Israelite at Gilgal would stamp his foot and say: this is it, it is here now. To be drawn into the observances of verse 16 or the mysticism of verse 18 is to be robbed of the conscious enjoyment of that present possession.

The robbery is done under the cover of humility — voluntary humility and worship of angels. This has the appearance of modesty: approaching God through intermediaries, not daring to come directly, bowing before angelic powers. But it contradicts what Scripture gives us: boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19). What presents itself as humility is actually the will at work — doing its own will in humility, as Darby translates it. True humility bows to what God has said. This humility contradicts what God has said. It is therefore not humility at all — it is unbelief of God's word clothed in the appearance of holy modesty.

Not Holding the Head — and the Increase of the Whole Body

The root error behind all these things is stated in verse 19: not holding fast the Head. From the Head — from Christ — all the body is nourished and knit together through joints and bands, and increases with the increase of God. Every alternative to Christ, whether the Jewish observances of verses 16-17 or the philosophical mysticism of verses 18-19, is at bottom a failure to hold fast the Head. And when the Head is not held fast, something must fill the vacancy — and what fills it is always something from the flesh or from the world.

The joints and bands through which nourishment flows from the Head are members of the whole body — not of one local assembly. It is all the body that is here in view, the whole body of Christ on earth. Membership is of Christ — of His body — and that body is one, not many. Local assemblies are its expression in different places, on account of geography. But the nourishment that flows from the Head is for the whole body, and to interrupt it by a doctrine of local

independence is to cut off members from what the Head is supplying. The solution is not ecumenical patchwork among the parts — which always requires compromise — but holding fast the Head, from whom all flows.

— *Study ends* —