

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 1 of 13

As we come today to our final message on the dangers of legalism, let me read for you once again the passage that we have been studying together, Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven. And as always, if you are able to do so, I hope you will follow along in your personal copy of God's Word as I read. Colossians chapter two, beginning at verse eleven, the Apostle Paul writes this:

In Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] 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, 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.

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, 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. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [that is, in the Cross].

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Colossians 2:11-17)

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 2 of 13

The Context: Satan's Triple Threat

Let me remind you again of the context of this passage. In Colossians chapter two, the Apostle Paul is warning and encouraging believers to put up and keep up a strong battle front against three things that Satan uses to undermine the faith of individual Christians, and to undermine the testimony of the church. These are Satan's triple threat to the Christian and the church.

We looked at threat number one in a previous part of this series. Threat number one is the danger of embracing worldly philosophy instead of the person of Jesus Christ. The answer to worldly philosophy is the fullness that is in Christ alone.

We are looking at threat number two at the present time. Threat number two is the danger of embracing legalism instead of the saving work of Jesus Christ. The answer to legalism is the finality of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners.

And beginning in our next message, the Lord willing, we are going to begin dealing with threat number three. Threat number three is the danger of embracing man-made doctrines instead of the truth of Jesus Christ. The answer to the deception of man-made doctrines is the truth that we find only in Christ Himself and in the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word that He has given to us.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 3 of 13

The Christian's Stand Against Legalism

And so today we are coming to the last two verses of this section of Colossians chapter two on the threat of legalism that Satan often uses to try to destroy the faith of individual Christians and the testimony of the church. Paul gives us this great and decisive concluding statement in verses sixteen and seventeen:

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Here is the consummation of Paul's great inspired statement to us about the evil of legalism. Here is the action that you as a believer need to take. Here is the strong battle front that you need to put up, and keep up, against this threat of Satan.

This is a very emphatic statement in the original language. Do not let anyone, under any circumstances, set himself up as a judge over you because you turn away from the shadows of the Old Covenant ceremonial system, to the reality and the fulfillment that is the very essence of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Don't trade the substance that you have in Christ for the shadows of the old rituals. Don't trade the finality of the Cross for the futility of a works-based religion.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 4 of 13

Christ Is All, Christ Has Done All

Christ has done everything that needs to be done to accomplish your salvation, your sanctification, and your ultimate glorification. God in Christ has disarmed Satanic principalities and powers. Satan and his forces want to bring you back into legalistic bondage. Do not exchange the freedom that Christ has purchased for you with His own blood, for a set of obsolete regulations that can do nothing beneficial for you.

Do not once again try to erect the barrier between you and God that God Himself, in Christ, has taken out of the way and nailed to the cross. God in Christ has taken the Old Covenant system of types and shadows and ceremonial requirements out of the way. Those things stood between mankind and direct access to God. But now God has taken those things out of the way. He has nailed all of that to the cross of Christ. Christ has opened the "new and living way" for us to come directly into the very throne room of God, into the heavenly Holy of Holies.

Don't try to make your own way to God. The new and living way is not Christ-plus. The new and living way is not something else instead of Christ. The new and living Way is Christ alone. In Hebrews chapter ten, beginning at verse fourteen, the writer tells us:

But this Man [Jesus], after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. . .

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 5 of 13

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:12-14, 19-23)

Dear friend, you cannot be as faithful as God. Your own faithfulness cannot substitute for God's faithfulness. Your own faithfulness cannot add anything to God's faithfulness in Christ.

There are some in the church today who are teaching that you need to add your faithfulness to Christ's faithfulness. But God will have none of this. God's Word declares that our righteousness, our law-keeping, means absolutely nothing, absolutely zero, when it comes to the matter of our salvation. Christ's righteousness, Christ's perfect law-keeping, Christ's unfailing faithfulness in all things, even to the death of the Cross – that is everything. There is nothing else.

Don't try to make something else, dear friend. Don't try to make another way! That is the path to destruction. That is the path to Hell. Trust in Christ alone! Rest in Christ alone! Jesus paid it all! God owes you nothing, because you have given Him nothing that counts toward your salvation. You owe everything to Him.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 6 of 13

The Significance of a Shadow

Now before we leave this passage, I want to call your attention to the great and final point that Paul makes here. Notice what he says in verse seventeen. He says that these things of the Old Covenant system – the keeping of dietary regulations, the keeping of the religious celebrations of the Jewish calendar, the monthly sacrifices at the new moon, the weekly sacrifices of the seventh day – all of these things, Paul says, are “a shadow.” They are “a shadow of things to come.”

Now, what is the significance of the word “shadow” in relation to the things that Paul mentions? Well, the word for shadow in the original Greek is the word *skia*. It is the word that is used to speak of the image that is cast by an object because light passes over it. The shadow that is cast represents the basic form and outline of that object.

Notice this carefully: The shadow is not the object itself. It is a simple representation of something far more complex, which is the object itself. A shadow is the forerunner of the object itself.

Let me give you an illustration of this. Picture yourself standing in a room. The door is open, and there is light coming from outside that doorway into the room. And you hear someone coming down the hallway toward the room that you are in. Now because of the light that is coming from outside the room, what is the first thing you are going to see as that person approaches the door? You are going to see his shadow on the floor. That is where our idea of the word

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 7 of 13

“foreshadowing” comes from. You see the shadow of something that is coming before it actually comes.

But then that person who is standing outside the doorway is going to come into the room. And when he comes in, you are going to see not only the shadow, you are also going to see the person who cast the shadow. You are going to see the actual person. And so now you are going to see clearly the relationship between the shadow on the floor, and the person who casts the shadow. You are going to see that they are one and the same. But you are going to see that the shadow was only an outline, only a representation, and now you see all the detail, all the fullness, all of the reality, of the person himself.

That is the picture that Paul is giving us in Colossians chapter two, verse seventeen. Here is what Paul is literally saying in the original Greek: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the One who casts that shadow is Christ.”

That is the meaning of the word in verse seventeen that is translated “body” in the Old King James Bible and “substance” in the New King James. The word in the original language is the word *soma*, or body, and one of the meanings of that word in the Greek is “that which casts the shadow, as distinguished from the shadow itself.”

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 8 of 13

Now, we need to remind ourselves of the nature of shadows. Sometimes the light is bright and intense, and so it casts a shadow whose outlines are sharper. They are a more clear representation of the actual object. But sometimes the light that is cast is muted and diffused, and so the outlines of the shadow are less vivid.

So it is with Old Testament types and symbols. Everything in the Old Covenant ceremonial system was a shadow of Christ. Some of those shadows were more vivid than others. But you don't really fully appreciate or understand that until the reality comes, until the Person who has been casting the shadow is finally visible. And so it is as we look at the person and work of Jesus Christ.

New Testament Saints' Great Advantage

People sometimes ask the question, "What is the great difference between the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints?" Well, the main difference is that the Old Testament saints had the shadows, and New Testament saints have the substance. The Old Testament saints trusted in the Redeemer who was to come. But they only saw Him in terms of sacrifices and ceremonies. They saw Him only in outline. They saw things that were a representation of Him, and a representation of things in Heaven. They saw the shadows.

But New Testament saints have a great advantage. We have the full revelation of the One who cast those shadows. We have the person of Jesus Christ come in the flesh. We have the perfect law-keeping of Jesus Christ fulfilling the perfect obedience to all of the old ceremonies, a perfect obedience that neither we nor the

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 9 of 13

Old Testament saints could ever offer. We have the perfect, once-for-all atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints.

You see, the tabernacle and the Old Covenant system were the pattern of things in Heaven, and a pattern of the atonement of Christ. God told Moses to see to it that he made the tabernacle and all of its symbolic furnishings according to the pattern that God showed him on Mount Sinai, and that pattern was a pattern of the heavenly tabernacle, the heavenly Holy of Holies, the place where Christ Himself, our great High Priest, would offer His own shed blood on the heavenly mercy seat to atone for our sins once and forever.

The Transition From Shadows to Substance

When Jesus came into the world, it was the time of transition from shadows to substance. The One who cast the shadow was now standing at the door. John the Baptist and Jesus Himself both proclaimed that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven, was now at hand. It was near. It was approaching. The transition from types and figures and shadows to the reality, the substance was taking place.

Just a few hours before He went to the cross, Jesus said this to His disciples, John chapter 16, verse 25. He said, thus far "I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father."

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 10 of 13

And after His death and resurrection, Jesus began to do that. The reality had now come. The One who had cast the shadow was now fully visible. And so on the day of His resurrection, Jesus joined the two disciples who were on the road to Emmaus. And as they walked along He began to talk with them, and it became clear that these disciples were still living on the shadows.

We read of this in Luke chapter 24, beginning at verse 19. The two disciples said that they had hoped that this Jesus of Nazareth might be the One who was going to redeem Israel. But, they said, our "chief priests and rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him...[and] today is the third day since these things happened."

And they went on to say this: "Certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." And clearly, these disciples did not understand the significance of these things. They were still living on the shadows.

But then we read that Jesus "said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 11 of 13

In other words, Jesus led them through the Old Testament Scriptures, and He showed them that He was the One who had cast all those shadows of things to come. But now, the Christ has suffered, and He is about to enter into His glory. The reality, the substance, had come.

Don't Try to Live on Shadows

Dear friends, legalism is a continual grasping after shadows when the reality has come. A shadow is only a representation of the reality. A shadow is only an outline, the details are limited. A shadow cannot do anything for you. The shadow of an automobile cannot take you from one place to another. The shadow of a medicine bottle cannot cure disease.

The shadow of what was to come in Christ could not take each and every believer directly into the throne room of God. These foreshadowings of the Cross could not deal once and for all with sin.

We read in Hebrews chapter ten, verse one that "the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never... make those who approach perfect." Only Christ can do that. Not Christ-plus. Not something or someone other than Christ. Only Christ Himself. He is the reality.

Today there are many people within the visible church, and even whole segments of the visible church, who want to live on the shadows of legalism. It is as though these people want to ignore the fact that we have the entire written

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 12 of 13

Word of God. It is as though they want to ignore the fact that we have this great Divinely-inspired 27-volume commentary on the Old Testament, called the New Testament.

Dear friend, do not be taken in by the kind of thinking that puts us back under the Old Testament system. Listen to the Word of God in the opening verses of the book of Hebrews:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Dear friend, don't try to live on shadows. Let no one even *try* place you back under that old system in any respect. Let no one tell you that you need anything for your salvation instead of Christ. Let no one tell you that you need anything for your salvation in addition to Christ.

Let no one tell you that you need anything for your present sanctification other than Christ and His written Word and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Series: *Colossians 2 – Truth Above All*

Title: "From Shadows to Substance" (Colossians 2:16-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/11/2011

Page 13 of 13

Let no one tell you that you need anything for your ultimate glorification except the perfect and all-sufficient person and work of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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