

Can you explain Colossians 2:16-23?

Written by Joshua Antilla

The first word in verse 16 is “therefore.” When you see this word in scripture, it is a directive to go back and read what was written prior to its appearance.

So we go back and read all of chapter 2. We find out that Paul’s purpose for writing the letter of Colossians was to encourage the believers of Colossae. He wanted them to have the full assurance of understanding which would lead them to a true knowledge of Messiah (2:2). He encouraged them to continue to walk with Jesus, being firmly rooted in Him and established in their faith (2:6-7). He warned them to not be overcome or swayed by philosophy and empty deception – according to the tradition of men and the basic principles of the world rather than according to Jesus (2:8). He then continued with an explanation of how they were once dead in their sin but were made alive through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus paid the penalty for their sins; He nailed the curse of death to the cross (2:11-15).

At this point Paul says, “Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day...” (Col. 2:16)

Modern day Christians may read this and think Paul is telling them they can eat whatever they want and worship whatever day they want.

But remember, we read in Chapter 2 that people were trying to deceive and mislead the believers into following man’s tradition and the basic principles of the world. We see this again when we jump forward to 2:20 – “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’”

What exactly were the deceivers teaching? We don’t have specifics, but we do know Paul was encouraging these people to walk as Jesus walked, having been firmly rooted and now being build up in Him (Col. 2:6-7).

How did Jesus walk? WWJD? (What would Jesus do?) At the time of this writing, the New Testament did not exist. Scripture was (and still includes) the Old Testament – Torah, Prophets, and the books of writings. This is the scripture Jesus studied, lived, and taught. And if that is what He followed, shouldn’t we? After all, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reads, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that a man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

So let’s take a look at what Jesus would have followed in regard to food and drink, festivals, new moons and Sabbath.

Leviticus 11 is the basic outline of what God considers to be food. He outlines what we can and cannot eat. In your question you mentioned that Pastor Daniel stated, “you’re not supposed to eat pig.” That is correct. Leviticus 11:3 reads – “Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat.” This does NOT include pig; for although it has a split hoof, it does not chew the cud. According to God, pig has *never* been food and did not become food just because Jesus died for us and nailed the curse of death to the cross.

As for the Sabbath, we can go back to creation and read how God made the seventh day holy (Gen. 2:3). He later included it in the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20:8). Throughout scripture He stresses the importance of this day and expects His people (believers) to observe it. Here are just a few verses: Genesis 31:12-18; Isaiah 56:2, 6; and Jeremiah 17.

The new moon marks the beginning of each new month. Genesis 1:14-15 tells us that God put the lights in the heavens to separate the day from the night and for them to be signs for seasons and days and years. Numbers 28:11-15 discusses the offerings that were to be made during the new moon. Psalm 81:3 tells the people to blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. It was and is a day to be recognized.

Leviticus 23 explains the festivals of God: Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles. Christians today often say these are the festivals of the Jewish people. However, Lev. 23:1-2 reads: The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ‘The Lord’s appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations – My appointed times are these...’” God is addressing the entire crowd of people which included native born and sojourners. We see in the Exodus 12:38 that it was a mixed multitude of people that left with the Israelites out of Egypt. Several times throughout scripture God reiterates these times as being perpetual statutes throughout your generations (Lev. 23:14).

With all this said, I want to finish by quoting Col 2:10: “and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.” Jesus is all we need! He is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6)! We are not to follow man’s traditions or the world’s principles. We are to follow God and His ways!

Please understand – obeying God is not something we do to earn salvation. Rather, once we have accepted the grace extended to us and have become a believer, we walk out the Word of God in obedience, showing our love for Him and our thankfulness for what Christ did on our behalf.

John 14:15 – If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

1 John 5:3 – For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.