Colossians: Identity in Christ
Lesson 5 “Substance Over Shadows”

I. Review

A. Background - Last week we began studying the book of ***Colossians***, which was a letter Paul wrote to the church in Colossae when he was imprisoned in Rome in 62 A.D.

1. Paul did not found this church. It was founded by one of his disciples, Epaphrus (who was from Colossae). He met Paul in the revival in Ephesus (which lasted from 52-55 A.D) and then he moved back to start a church and bring the hope of Jesus to him community.
2. Paul wrote this letter from Rome to strengthen this church and deal with some issues this church was facing. The main issue was **syncretism,** which is the mixing the worship of Jesus Christ with beliefs, values, practices, or worldviews that compete with Him.
    a. In that day - legalism, gnosticism, mysticism, folk superstition, angel worship, and asceticism.
    b. In our day - consumerism, politics, psychology, self-help, new age, and modern cultural values (ex: marriage) so Christianity is diluted.
    c. Last we looked at **Colossians 2:4-10** and how we are now complete in Christ and talked about how the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ and how we are complete in Him. Paul both taught and warned the Colossians to stay rooted in Christ so they would not be pulled away by false religion, empty philosophies, legalism, mysticism, or the thinking of the world around them.

B. Tonight, the rest of ***Colossians 2*** and Paul’s instructions to this church to value the substance of Christ over the shadows of the law and emptiness of worldliness.

1. ***Verses 11-17*** Paul uses several metaphors over the next few verses to contrast the freedom of the new creation in Christ verses living under the law.
    a. ***Verse 11*** Under the law, when a man was circumcised, his foreskin was cut away. Now, we are circumcised with a circumcision without hands where God cuts out our old nature when we profess faith in Christ. **Ephesians 2:1-3.**
    b. ***Verse 12*** Our old man was buried in baptism (He’s dead) and we have now been raised to life in Christ and have a new nature.
    c. ***Verse 13*** We are now alive together with Him in the Spirit and seated in Heavenly places. Why don’t we feel it? Unnerved mind. Ex: Jekyll and Hide.
    d. ***Verse 14*** The handwriting of requirements that was against us is the 10 commandments (Law/Old Covenant). Ironically, many want to hang it in

our schools today, but Paul says God nailed it to the cross and took it out of the way.

i. The law was a ministry of death - **2 Corinthians 3:6-11**

ii. **Colossians 2:14 NLT**

e. ***Verse 15*** Jesus spoiled/stripped principalities and powers (Satan and the demonic realm) by taking away their weapon (accusation). That was removed at the cross! He triumphed over them (threw a parade in hell) at the cross. Jesus partied hard, but sadly many of us missed the party!

f. ***Verse 16*** The holy days, new moon ceremonies, and Sabbaths are all referring back to the Old Testament law. Today we focus on tithing, church attendance, personal actions of holiness to have favor with God.

g. ***Verse 17*** All of these things are simply shadows that point to Christ.

i. Under the Law, Israel observed shadows and symbols like the Sabbath, Passover, food laws, and the scapegoat, but in the New Covenant, Jesus fulfills them all—He is our rest, our Passover Lamb, the One who cleanses us, and the One who carried our sins away forever. **The law is a shadow that lacks substance.**

ii. Shadow/Substance example

h. ***Verse 18*** Pious self-denial is a fruit of legalism or asceticism. Both Jewish legalists and mysticists got involved in angel worship. **All of this diminishes the finished work of the cross. This cheats us out of our reward.**

i. ***Verse 19*** When we get into legalism, mysticism, or angel worship we stop holding fast to the Head - Jesus!

i. Jesus is the head and we are the body so if we want to function properly we need to receive direction from the Head (can't go our own way).

ii. God nourishes the whole body and knits together the whole body, which causes is to grow (increase).

j. ***Verses 20-22*** Tell us that we died from the principles of the world so why put ourselves back under the law like that will do us any good. Don't touch, taste, handle modernized don't watch a baseball game, don't go to the beach, don't enjoy the good things of life. **People do this though when they focus on the shadows and stop clinging to the head.**

i. Principles - **(Stoicheion)** – refers to elementary principles, basic systems, or religious structures people use to try to earn standing with God.

k. ***Verse 23*** Man-made religious rules—like forbidding marriage, avoiding certain foods, harsh self-denial, and mystical practices—may appear spiritual and wise outwardly, but they have no power to truly transform the heart or overcome the flesh because real transformation only comes through Christ. **Form of godliness that denies the power.**

III. Conclusion - God never intended for us to keep chasing shadows when the substance has already come in Jesus. The Law contained shadows that pointed people to Christ, but legalism, mysticism, angel worship, and man-made religion only distract us from Him and pull us back into bondage and darkness. Real freedom, transformation, and spiritual growth are not found in rules, self-denial, or spiritual hype—they are found in holding fast to Jesus, because He alone is the substance everything was pointing to.

IV. Discussion Questions

1. What was your top takeaway from tonight?
2. What are some modern-day "shadows" or religious performances people can rely on instead of resting in Christ?
3. Why do you think legalism and self-denial can appear spiritual even when they fail to truly transform the heart?
4. How does understanding that Jesus fulfilled the Law change the way we view things like Sabbath, food laws, and religious traditions?
5. What does it practically look like to "hold fast to the Head" (Jesus) in everyday life instead of drifting into worldly thinking or religious striving?