

My view on Colossians 2:16-22. Who was Paul talking to? Why? What was he trying to convey or correct? How do these words apply to us today?

As I understand it, Paul was writing his letter to the Jewish Christians in the small city of Colossae (in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey) from his prison cell in Rome, about 30 years after Christ's Crucifixion. Some scholars speculate that there were perhaps 30-100 Christians there at the time.

He was writing to them to strengthen and encourage his audience, to help protect against false teachings, and to affirm the central role and supremacy of Christ. According to Matthew Henry, "The design of the epistle is to warn them of the danger of the Jewish zealots, who pressed the necessity of observing the ceremonial law; and to fortify them against the mixture of the Gentile philosophy with their Christian principles"

The section of the letter that we call Colossians 2:16-23, is a warning about a specific spiritual problem affecting the Church of Colossae, namely legalistic judgement about what to eat or drink, the observance of Jewish feasts, etc. Many Jews insisted that Jewish ritual compliance was necessary for salvation. But Paul said that these were only a "shadow of what was to come." In other words, the strict adherence to the 613 commandments found in the Torah should not be considered necessary, now that Christ is in the picture.

As I see it, this passage warns the Colossians against confusing discipline of following those rules with holiness. So, "People of Colossae, focus on Christ, and don't be fooled by those that say you must follow those Jewish rituals."

Today, those practices ordered toward God and exemplifying our cooperation with God's graces (fasting, praying, Mass, sacraments, feast days, sacred seasons, etc.) do indeed have value. Today's rituals, prayers, and rules in the Church are good because they can bring closer to God. Nevertheless, we should still be wary about prayers or rituals simply for appearances sake.

-Rick