



[Colossians 2:16-17](#)

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

New King James Version

For centuries, people have tried to use [Colossians 2:16-17](#) to say that Christians are not required to observe the [Sabbath](#) and holy days. This distortion stems partly from a misunderstanding of [Colossians 2:14](#), which many claim says that the law was abolished and nailed to the cross, and partly from having a carnal mind, which is enmity against [God](#) and His law ([Romans 8:7](#)). They reason that Paul is saying in verse 16, "Therefore [since the law is done away] don't let anyone condemn you for eating unclean meats or not observing the Sabbath or holy days." Consequently, they interpret verse 17 to mean that Paul dismisses the Sabbath and holy days as unimportant symbols of future events, while emphasizing that the only truly substantive Christian need is belief in Christ. From this, they conclude that we should not concern ourselves about these days because, since Christ died, their observance is not required. This is not true.

The Colossians had been significantly influenced by pagan philosophies that taught that perfection could be achieved through self-denial and abstinence from pleasure. As a result, Colossae tended to be an ascetic community which adhered to a religion of severity, and its citizens thought anyone who was religious should behave as they did. Many of the people who had come into the Christian church in Colossae had brought their pagan philosophies with them, and they soon began to have an adverse influence on the entire congregation at Colossae. Paul corrects the people in the church who were doing this in [Colossians 2:20-23](#). It appears some of the people had begun thinking that this self-imposed asceticism could somehow contribute to their [salvation](#) and had begun turning away from trusting in Christ. They had more [faith](#) in their unchristian works. Paul warns them about this in [Colossians 2:8](#).

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Colossians 2:16-17 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

God had called the people in the church at Colossae out of their pagan, ascetic way of life, and they had begun to learn how to enjoy life in a balanced manner as God intended. This included eating meat, drinking wine, and enjoying food and [fellowship](#) when observing God's Sabbath and festivals.

Because the converted Colossians were learning how to enjoy life as God intended, the people in the ascetic community began to look down on them and condemn them. In addressing these problems, Paul reminds the Colossians that they are complete in [Jesus Christ](#); they have no need for the pagan philosophies of this world ([Colossians 2:9-10](#)).

Paul explains in verse 16 why they need not be bothered by the attitude of the Colossian society toward their practices and way of life in the church. To paraphrase, "Do not worry about what the people in the community think about your enjoyment of eating good food, drinking wine, and joyously celebrating the Sabbath and the festivals. Christ has conquered [the world](#) and all of its rulers, so we do not need to be concerned about what the world thinks about us."

In verse 17, Paul mentions that the Sabbath and holy days are "shadows," symbols or types, of future events in the plan of God. The Sabbath is a type of the Millennium when Jesus Christ and the saints will rule the world for a thousand years. The holy days symbolize various steps in the plan of God and remind us annually of God's great purpose in creating mankind.

A literal translation of the last few words of [Colossians 2:17](#) reads, "but the body of Christ." What is the body of Christ? [1 Corinthians 12:27](#) shows that the body of Christ is the church! The exact same Greek expression that is translated "body of Christ" in [1 Corinthians 12:27](#) (*soma Christou*) is used in [Colossians 2:17](#). Paul tells the Colossians that they should not let any man judge them or call them into question about these things but rather let the church make those judgments. He is pointing the members to the example of the spiritual leaders of the church who set the tone and pattern of worship on the Sabbath and holy days, exhorting them not to worry about what anyone in the community thinks about them. A similar exhortation is given in [Colossians 2:18-19](#)

Far from doing away with the observance of the Sabbath and holy days, [Colossians 2:16-17](#) is one of the strongest proofs that the early church kept these days and that Paul taught the Gentiles to keep them.

— Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

To learn more, see:

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