

Leader's Guide

Session 5: Colossians 2:16–23

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Since our sinful selves died with Christ, we're freed from human rules and we now walk in the way of the Spirit, which is the only true way to shed our old selves and avoid falling back into the patterns of the world.

Head Change: To know that the foundation of our faith is not what we do, but who we follow.

Heart Change: To feel joy in the freedom from human standards of Christianity.

Life Change: To shed human religious rules and return to Jesus, the foundation of our faith, in all we do, say, and think.

OPEN

When you were a kid, what was your attitude toward the rules? Were you a rule follower or a rebel or something in between?

Has your attitude towards the rules changed at all over the years? If so, how?

Paul continues to combat the false teaching the Colossians faced in the section of Colossians we're reading today. He's going to talk about how human rules are inadequate to save and aren't necessarily founded in Christ.

READ

Read Colossians 2:16–23.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Louie’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Louie answers the following questions.

Is following Jesus only about doing things for Him? Why not?

What’s the significance of the illustration about the two kids mowing the lawn?

Show Session 5: Colossians 2:16–23 (12 minutes)

DISCUSS

The first verse in the section we’re studying today begins with “therefore,” signaling our need to look back at the previous verses. That’s why Louie started off the session by reviewing what we’ve been talking about in Colossians.

How would you summarize in your own words the main points of Colossians so far?

The main message of Colossians is Jesus is supreme over all things. He defeated the grave and every spiritual authority when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. He’s our firm foundation, the one we should base our lives on.

Read verses 16 and 17.

What’s the significance of the religious rituals for Paul? (He says they’re a shadow of the things to come, namely Christ.)

Lined writing area with 20 horizontal lines for notes.

Why would Paul tell the Colossians to not let anyone judge them on their diet or religious celebrations? (He’s reminding them their religious practices aren’t the point of being a Christian—the point is to follow Christ and allow Him to reign supreme over your life.)

What are some of the external religious practices we tend to advocate for in the Church today? Would you say those practices have a foundation in Christ? Why or why not?

Read verses 18 and 19.

There was a group of people who tried to disqualify the Christians in Colossae by pushing their ideas of asceticism, or severe spiritual self-discipline, and the worship of angels. **How does Paul describe these people? (He says they are puffed up, unspiritual, and disconnected with the Jesus.)**

Read Colossians 2:8.

How does this verse connect to the two verses we just read?

The false teachers mentioned in these verses did not rely on Christ at all—they based everything on their own human insight. Even so, it seems the Colossians believed them enough to cause Paul to write them about it. We can fall into the same trap today. **We’ve already talked about some of the external religious practices, but what are some other areas the Church has drifted away from Jesus?**

Why do you think we can sometimes follow teachers like the ones described in verse 19? What about them is appealing? Why are they harmful?

Verse 19 makes it clear that Jesus supports and holds us together, and God brings us growth. **What are some ways you’ve experienced the growth God provides through Jesus?**

GO DEEPER

Learn more about the body of Christ in these verses: Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 4:1–6

How has God designed His body? Why does He give everyone different gifts?

Who is the source of strength and unity for the body? (Christ)

What are some of the gifts God has given you? How do you use those gifts to build up the body of Christ?

God is the one who gives us spiritual gifts for the good of the body. He’s also the source of our growth and unity. God designed the Church to rely on Him entirely—it’s by His grace alone that we are able to love each other and carry Christ to the world.

Lined writing area consisting of 25 horizontal lines for student responses.

Spiritual growth happens on an individual level and also on a corporate level through the Church. While it's sometimes difficult to see the spiritual growth of the global Church, the local church gives us a small glimpse of how God's working in His Church. **How have you seen God grow your local church in spiritual maturity?**

Read verses 20–23.

According to these verses, should we still submit to the human-made rules? Why not?

As Louie mentioned, the Colossians were being held by a false teaching, which said there were extra rules and practices necessary to gain access to Jesus. **Are there any practices we have to adopt in order to be saved by Jesus? How does adding requirements to salvation twist the gospel into something it's not?**

From these verses, it's apparent that the false teachers were telling the people they needed to do certain things to improve themselves. But as Paul pointed out, the rules were selfish, harsh, and lacking of any real value. **What are some "rules" of cultural Christianity that could be categorized in the same way?**

Walking with Jesus looks different for every believer. There are some things we all do—like reading our Bibles, praying, and exercising spiritual disciplines. But even those practices look different for each individual. We don't all have to walk out our faith in the same way. **What are some the unique aspects of your walk with Jesus? Would you say those things would absolutely work for or have the same effect on every believer? Why or why not?**

The last verse says the human rules the Colossians followed were useless in self-discipline. **In what ways, if at all, have you seen a lack of self-discipline in your life? What are helpful ways to exercise self-discipline?**

The core message of this passage goes back to what we've been discussing in this series: the supremacy of Jesus. Louie shared the story of two neighborhood boys who mowed their lawns—one did so out of fear, the other out of love. **How does the principle from this illustration—that we should do things for God out of love for Him—tie into the passage we read today?**

In Christ, our salvation is sealed. We don't have to work to earn His love or approval. We also don't serve human—or any other—authority any longer. We submit to Jesus only, which is why Paul urges the Colossian church to no longer follow the world's empty rules. But, as Louie said, our internal transformation does influence our external actions — we should still pursue holiness. What's different is our attitude.

How is your attitude different when you do something out of love for Jesus versus doing something out of obligation?

How could you live in a way that reflects you've died to the things of this world this week? What worldly standards of spiritual success do you need to let go of?

Paul's main criticism of the false teachers was they weren't connected with the Head, or Christ. **What could you do this week to remain connected to Jesus?** (Some examples are included in the Live it Out section.)

LAST WORD

Jesus secured our salvation through His death and resurrection. He defeated every spiritual authority and gives us new life when we choose to follow Him. We are no longer bound to the authorities and rules that once imprisoned us—we've died to them with Jesus. But we sometimes find ourselves submitting to the rules of the world, just as Paul cautioned the Colossians against in verse 20. Instead of planting our foundation in the shaky things of this world, we must remain connected to the Head—Jesus Christ. In Him, we find freedom from sin, wisdom for daily life, and strength to pursue holiness. Let's rely on Him this week.

LIVE IT OUT

Pray: Pray for God to reveal the ways you’ve been submitting to the rules of this world rather than to Christ this week. As He shows you, confess sin and pray for Him to teach you to remain connected to Jesus.

List: Make a list of all the things you think are necessary for being a “good Christian.” Take some time to investigate Scripture to see what’s true about your list (Ephesians is a good place to start) and pray God renews your perception of salvation.

Confess: Sit down with a trusted Christian friend this week. Reread this section of Colossians and confess how you’ve been submitting to the rules of the world rather than to Christ. Pray for each other.

Reflect: Choose a worship song that talks about the gospel story. Listen to it this week to remind yourself to remain connected to Christ.

Connect: Set aside time this week to connect with Jesus. Fill your time with Him with prayer, Scripture reading, and reflection.
