

Colossians 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Analysis

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Paul explains these practices' proper role: "shadow" (skia, σκιά) versus "body" (sōma, σῶμα, "substance/reality"). Shadows have shape without substance; they point to real objects casting them. Old Testament ceremonies shadowed coming reality—Christ's redemptive work. Now that substance (Christ) has arrived, insisting on shadows makes no sense.

"The body is of Christ" (to de sōma tou Christou, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ) means the reality belongs to Christ—He is the substance all ceremonies prefigured. Sacrificial system? Fulfilled in Christ's once-for-all offering. Sabbath rest? Realized in Christ's rest from redemptive work. Festival calendar? Accomplished in Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Why return to shadows when possessing reality?

Historical Context

Hebrews develops this shadow-substance distinction extensively (8:5; 10:1), showing how Old Testament priesthood, sacrifices, and tabernacle typologically anticipated Christ's superior work. Paul applies identical logic to ceremonial practices. This doesn't make Old Testament irrelevant but reorients its significance—valuable as preparation and anticipation, but fulfilled and surpassed in Christ. Reading Old Testament through Christ reveals its ultimate meaning.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you read Old Testament law—as binding command or Christ-fulfilled shadow revealing gospel truth?
2. What religious shadows might you emphasize while neglecting the substance (Christ) they point toward?
3. How does recognizing Christ as substance affect which spiritual practices you prioritize?

Interlinear Text

ἃ	ἐστὶν	σκιὰ	τῶν	μελλόντων	τὸ	δὲ	σῶμα	τοῦ
Which	are	a shadow	G3588	of things to come	G3588	but	the body	G3588
G3739	G2076	G4639		G3195		G1161	G4983	

Χριστοῦ

is of Christ

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Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 10:1 (Parallel theme): For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

Hebrews 8:5 (Parallel theme): Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

John 1:17 (References Christ): For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 9:9 (Parallel theme): Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

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