

Colossians 2:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

Analysis

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances. Paul argues from believers' death with Christ. "If ye be dead" (ei apethanete, εἰ ἀπεθάνετε) uses first-class condition assuming truth: "since you died." Union with Christ's death (2:12) severed connection to "rudiments of the world" (apo tōn stoicheiōn tou kosmou, ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου)—either elementary principles or spiritual powers governing this age.

"Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances" (ti hōs zōntes en kosmō dogmatizesthe, τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε) questions inconsistency: dead to the world but living under its regulations. Death severs obligations; corpses don't follow rules. Spiritually, believers died to this world system with Christ, liberating them from its religious requirements. Returning to such regulations denies their death-union with Christ.

Historical Context

Ancient religions prescribed detailed regulations governing diet, ritual, calendar, and conduct, promising spiritual advancement through observance. Judaism had detailed ceremonial law; Greek mystery religions required initiatory rites and taboos; pagan cults featured complex ritual systems. Paul argues that death with

Christ liberates from all such systems—believers live under grace's freedom, not religious performance's bondage.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What religious rules do you follow thinking they advance your standing with God beyond Christ's finished work?
2. How does understanding your death with Christ affect your response to legalistic religious requirements?
3. Where do you still live as though you hadn't died to the world's religious systems?

Interlinear Text

Eἰ	οὖν	ἀπεθάνετε	σὺν	τῷ	Χριστῷ	ἀπὸ	τῶν
if	Wherefore	ye be dead	with	G3588	Christ	from	G3588
G1487	G3767	G599	G4862		G5547	G575	
στοιχείων	τοῦ	κόσμῳ	τί	ὡς	ζῶντες	ἐν	κόσμῳ
the rudiments	G3588	of the world	why	as though	living	in	of the world
G4747		G2889	G5101	G5613	G2198	G1722	G2889
δογματίζεσθε							
are ye subject to ordinances							
G1379							

Additional Cross-References

Colossians 2:8 (References Christ): Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Colossians 2:16 (Parallel theme): Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

Colossians 2:14 (Parallel theme): Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

Galatians 4:3 (Parallel theme): Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

Hebrews 13:9 (Parallel theme): Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

1 John 5:19 (Parallel theme): And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

John 15:19 (Parallel theme): If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

2 Corinthians 10:3 (Parallel theme): For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

James 4:4 (Parallel theme): Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Galatians 6:14 (References Christ): But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.