

Colossians 2:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Analysis

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Paul concludes by exposing asceticism's failure. These practices "have a shew of wisdom" (logon men echonta sophias, λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας, "have appearance of wisdom")—they look impressive, disciplined, spiritual. "Will worship" (ethelothrēskeia, ἐθελοθρησκεία, "self-made religion"), "humility" (tapeinophrosynē, ταπεινοφροσύνη), and "neglecting of the body" (apheidia sōmatos, ἀφειδίᾳ σώματος, "harsh treatment of body") create appearance of advanced spirituality.

But they are "not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (ouk en timē tini pros plēsmonēn tēs sarkos, οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός). This difficult phrase likely means: not valuable for restraining fleshly indulgence. Despite impressive appearance, ascetic regulations cannot actually transform character or defeat sin. They produce external conformity while leaving the heart unchanged, even feeding spiritual pride through religious achievement.

Historical Context

Throughout church history, ascetic movements promised spiritual advancement through physical deprivation: monasticism, extreme fasting, celibacy, poverty vows, self-flagellation. While discipline has legitimate role (1 Corinthians 9:27),

asceticism as path to holiness consistently fails, either producing legalistic pride or collapsing under human weakness. True transformation comes through Spirit-empowered faith working through love (Galatians 5:6), not fleshly religion.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What religious practices do you emphasize for their impressive appearance rather than genuine spiritual effectiveness?
2. How do you pursue holiness—through external rule-keeping or internal transformation by the Spirit?
3. Where might ascetic practices in your life feed pride rather than produce genuine humility and love?

Interlinear Text

ἄτινά ἔστιν λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας ἐν
Which things a shew G3056 indeed have of wisdom in
G3748 G2076 G3303 G2192 G4678 G1722

ἐθελοθρησκεία καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνη καὶ ἀφειδία σώματος
will worship and humility and neglecting of the body
G1479 G2532 G5012 G2532 G857 G4983

οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός
not in honour any to the satisfying G3588 of the flesh
G3756 G1722 G5092 G5100 G4314 G4140 G4561

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 4:8 (Parallel theme): For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Colossians 2:8 (Parallel theme): 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 2:18 (Worship): Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

Colossians 2:22 (Parallel theme): Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

1 Timothy 4:3 (Parallel theme): Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

Ephesians 5:29 (Parallel theme): For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: