

Exegesis: Colossians 2:13-17
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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Examination of the Greek Text.....	2
Colossians 2:13-14 and the Cheirographon.....	3
Colossians 2:16-17	9

Introduction

Although very few Christians will deny that they must keep the Ten Commandments, when asked why they do not remember and keep Shabbat holy, one of the Ten Commandments¹, immediately these same Christians will search for any manner of verse excusing their neglect to obey this commandment.

Indeed, some Christians even say something to the effect that "Shabbat is for the Jews, not Christians." Is this really a plausible argument? After all, many Jews are Christians, i.e. believers in Yeshua as the Messiah. In fact, all the apostles were Jewish, and all authors of the books of the Bible were Jewish save Luke the physician. So, now, remembering and keeping Shabbat holy must somehow be relevant to Jewish Christians but not Gentile Christians? It's hard to fathom any more confusing and illogical belief than that.

One verse which these Christians quote as proof that they are not required to remember and keep Shabbat holy is Colossians 2:16.

Their argument essentially states: We are not to be judged on whether or not we keep Shabbat because the apostle Paul said (Col. 2:16), "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an feast, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath."

At first glance, it actually appears to be a convincing argument. It seems as though Paul is informing those in Colosse that nobody should judge them on what they eat or drink, and whether they keep the holy days, new moons, or the Sabbath. Thus, not only did they not have to keep the feasts, new moons, or Sabbaths, but they were not to be judged on eating unclean foods either. Could God really make a 180 on what He considered as the conduct of life His holy people were to live?

Examination of the Greek Text

Greek text:

¹ Exo. 20:8

¹³ καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστία τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν συνεζωποίησεν σὺν αὐτῷ χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα ¹⁴ ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ ¹⁵ ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρόρησίᾳ θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ ¹⁶ μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει ἢ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων ¹⁷ ἃ ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ

English transliteration:

¹³ kai hemas nekrous ontas en tois paraptomasin kai te akrobusitia tes sarkos humon sunezopoiiesen sun auto charisamenos humin panta ta paraptomata ¹⁴ exaleipsas to kath hemon cheirographon tois dogmasin ho en hupenantion humin kai auto erken ek tou mesou proselosas auto to stauro ¹⁵ apekduσαμενος tas archas kai tas exousias edeigmatisen en parresia thriambeusas autous en auto ¹⁶ me oun tis humas krineto en brosei e en posei e en merei heortes e neomenias e sabbaton ¹⁷ ha estin skia ton mellonton to de soma tou Christou

English translation:

¹³ And although you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he quickened [you] together with himself, forgiving us all the trespasses, ¹⁴ blotting out the handwriting with the decrees which was against us, which was an adversary to us, and he removed it from the midst, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having spoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them on it. ¹⁶ Therefore, do not let any man judge you in eating or in drinking, or in part of a feast, or a new moon, or a Sabbath ¹⁷ (which are a shadow of the coming things), but the body of Christ.

The highlighted portions of the translation will be discussed below.

Colossians 2:13-14 and the Cheirographon

Most Christians assume that the phrase "the handwriting with the decrees,"² or Greek χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν (*cheirographon tois dogmasin*), refers to the "Law of Moshe."

However, this assertion is easily refuted if one appreciates the context of Colossians 2. According to Paul, the believers in Colosse were being beguiled with enticing words³ and led away by the philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men.⁴ Finally, Paul also refers to the origin of the deception as the commandments and doctrines of men.⁵

Succinctly stated, nowhere in the entire Bible is the Law of Moshe (Torah) referred to as either the tradition, commandments, or doctrines of men. On the contrary, it is expressly stated to be God's Law⁶ which was given to the nation of Israel by the mediatorship of Moshe.

Thus, the burden of proof is on Christians who claim the phrase refers to the Law of Moshe to actually prove it is so, using the scriptures of the Bible as proof. However, such a feat is impossible considering that no evidence of such a claim exists in the Bible.

The Greek word χειρόγραφον (*cheirographon*) is derived from the root words χεῖρ (*cheir*), meaning "hand," and the nominative, singular, neuter, present active participle, γραφον (*graphon*), meaning "writing." According to Thayer's Lexicon, the Greek word *cheirographon* is "a note of hand, or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at an appointed time."

<p>χειρόγραφον, -ου, τό, (χείρ and γράφω), a handwriting; what one has written with his own hand (Polyb. 30, 8, 4; Dion. Hal. 5, 8; al.); spec. a note of hand, or writing in which one acknowledges that money has either been deposited with him or lent to him by another, to be returned at an appointed time (Tob. v. 3; ix. 5; Plut. mor. p. 829 a. de vitand. aere al. 4, 3; Artem. oneir. 3,</p>
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² Alternatively, "the handwriting in the decrees" (*tois dogmasin* is in the dative case)

³ Col. 2:4

⁴ Col. 2:8

⁵ Col. 2:22

⁶ cp. Neh. 10:29

The word is used twice in the apocryphal book of Tobit.

In [Tobit 5:3](#), it is written,

³ Then he gave him the handwriting [*to cheirographon*; τὸ χειρόγραφον], and said unto him, "Seek a man which may go with you, while I yet live, and I will give him wages, and go and receive the money."

In [Tobit 9:5](#), it is written,

⁵ So Raphael went out, and he lodged with Gabael, and he gave him the handwriting [*to cheirographon*; τὸ χειρόγραφον], who brought forth bags which were sealed up, and gave them to him.

The *cheirographon* in the book of Tobit was a receipt which allowed him to receive money from the person whom he presented the *cheirographon* to. It may also be referred to as a "bill of indebtedness" or "promissory note."

An equivalent Hebrew phrase כְּתָב יָד (ktav yad), meaning "writing of hand," is found in the Babylonian Talmud, and it used in the same sense – a promissory note or bill of indebtedness.

In the [Babylonian Talmud](#), Tractate Bava Batra, Chapter 10, Folio 175b, Mishna, it is written,

If a person produced against another his writing of hand [כתב יד] showing that the latter owes him a sum of money, he may recover it from his free property.

הוציא עליו כתב ידו שהוא חייב לו גובה מנכסים בני חורין

Here we see that one man produced a "writing of hand" (*ktav yad*) which showed that the other person owed him money. Thus, the "writing of hand" is clearly a promissory note or bill of indebtedness. The Greek equivalent would undoubtedly be *cheirographon*. As a Pharisee and one exceptionally learned in the oral Torah, the apostle Paul would have been certainly familiar with the role of the *ktav yad* in Jewish culture.⁷

⁷ For more information concerning the *ktav yad*, please read the [page](#) from Jewish Virtual Library titled, "Shtar."

The means by which the trespasses were forgiven is then stated in v. 14, wherein Paul states that "the handwriting with the decrees" which was "against us" was "blotted out." This same handwriting with the decrees is also said to have been an "adversary to us," and it was removed from the midst by "nailing it to the cross."

If the handwriting with the decrees (*cheirographon tois dogmasin*) was nailed to the cross, then this could only be referring to the Messiah's body which itself was nailed to the cross when he was crucified.

Accordingly, in 1 Peter 2:24, the apostle Peter writes,

²⁴ Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the cross, so that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes you were healed.

The *cheirographon* is essentially a catalogue or list of all sins which we have ever committed. According to Paul, the body of the Messiah himself represented our bill of indebtedness. The English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible seems to capture the meaning of the Greek word *cheirographon* by translating it as "record of debt."

As sinners, we are required to remit payment for our sins to God; however, the only payment suitable for sin is death.⁹ If we ourselves pay this payment of death, we remain dead in our sins¹⁰, subjugated by Sin unto death¹¹, without any hope of eternal life.

However, because of His love for us, the Father sent His only-begotten Son, the Messiah, to bear our sins on our behalf, thus forgiving us of our payment for our sins, and instead of eternal judgment, we receive eternal life vicariously through the atonement of the Messiah.

Those who refuse to believe in the Messiah and his atonement sacrifice on their behalf are still held accountable to God for their sins. Accordingly, God shall demand payment from them, the same payment the Messiah paid on the cross, whose sacrificed they are unwilling to accept.

⁹ Rom. 6:23

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 15:17-18

¹¹ Rom. 5:21 cp. Rom. 6:16

Irenaeus also interpreted the *cheirographon* to be a bill of debt which had been nailed to the cross which thus caused our sins and debts to be forgiven.

In [Against Heresies](#), Book V, Ch. XVII, Irenaeus writes,¹²

¹ And therefore in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become "the mediator between God and men;" propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and cancelling (*consolatus*) our disobedience by His own obedience; conferring also upon us the gift of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker. For this reason also He has taught us to say in prayer, "And forgive us our debts;" since indeed He is our Father, whose debtors we were, having transgressed His commandments.

³ Therefore, by remitting sins, He did indeed heal man, while He also manifested Himself who He was. For if no one can forgive sins but God alone, while the Lord remitted them and healed men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of man, receiving from the Father the power of remission of sins; since He was man, and since He was God, in order that since as man He suffered for us, so as God He might have compassion on us, and forgive us our debts, in which we were made debtors to God our Creator. And therefore David said beforehand, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD has not imputed sin;" pointing out thus that remission of sins which follows upon His advent, by which "He has destroyed the handwriting" of our debt (*cheirographum debiti*), and "fastened it to the cross;" so that as by means of a tree we were made debtors to God (*debitores Deo*), [so also] by means of a tree we may obtain the remission of our debt (*debiti remissionem*).

Likewise, Augustine does not allude to the *cheirographon* as the Law, but rather, as the "handwriting of the paternal debt." Although he does not refer to the *cheirographon* in the exact manner as Irenaeus (i.e., a bill of indebtedness), he does interpret it as a bill of debt.

In [Against Julian](#), Book 1, Chapter 2, Augustine writes,

¹² Latin text available [here](#).

...so may they scorn your slanderous vain talk, not inventing a natural principal of evil, with the Manichaeans, and in no way doubting, according to the ancient and true Catholic faith, that Christ in blotting out the handwriting [*chirographo*] of the paternal debt is the liberator of infants.

sic spernent vestra calumniosa vaniloquia, ut neque cum Manichaeis astruant mali naturale principium, et secundum antiquam et veram catholicam fidem nullo modo dubitent Christum in evacuando chirographo paterni debiti liberatorem credere parvulorum.

The most noteworthy case for the interpretation of the *chirographon* as a "bill of debt" which is a catalogue or list of all our sins can be found in the writings of Hippolytus in his commentary on the Book of Daniel, in which he quotes Colossians 2:14.

In [On Daniel](#), Chapter 2, §15, Hippolytus writes,

But who has blotted out our transgressions? Paul the apostle teaches us, saying, "He is our peace who made both one;" and then, "Blotting out the handwriting of sins that was against us."

The Greek text states, "ἀπαλειψας το καθ ημων χειρογραφον των αμαρτιων, ο ην υπεναντιον ημιν."

Observe that Hippolytus writes "handwriting of sins" not "handwriting of decrees." Therefore, he reckoned the *chirographon* to be a bill of indebtedness which listed our sins, which was blotted out by the Messiah upon the cross.

Colossians 2:16-17

English translation:

¹⁶ Therefore, do not let any man judge you in eating or in drinking, or in part of a feast, New Moon, or Sabbath ¹⁷ (which are a shadow of the coming things), but the body of Christ.

The following chart lists a few translations from the more popular versions of the Bible:

Version	Translation
KJV	¹⁶ 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]: ¹⁷ Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [is] of Christ.
NKJV	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.
NASB	¹⁶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— ¹⁷ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.
NIV	¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Colossians 2:16 is mistranslated in the majority of English translations by the words "meat" and "drink." Had the apostle Paul desired to say "in meat or in drink," he would likely have written something similar to the Greek expression found in Hebrews 9:10.

In Hebrews 9:10, it is written,

¹⁰ *which stood only in meats and drinks [bromasin kai pomasin; βρώμασιν καὶ πόμασιν], and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.*

The Greek word *bromasin* used in Hebrews 9:10 is derived from the noun βρῶμα (*broma*). Out of the seventeen times *broma* is used in the NT, it is translated as "meat" sixteen times and once as "victual."¹³

The Greek word *pomasin* is derived from the word πόμα (*poma*). It is used once elsewhere in the NT and translated as "drink." It is used four times by Philo and translated as follows: *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, §147: "draught" (πόμα); On

¹³ Per KJV English translation.

Drunkenness, §95, "cup" (πόματος); *On Dreams*, §2.248: "draught" (πόματος), §2.249: "draught" (πόματος).¹⁴

It is likely that the phrase *en brosis e en posei* used in v. 16 is referring to "in eating or in drinking" as it is in Romans 14:17 ("the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking"). The believers in the Church were being judged, not on what they ate or drank, but rather, for the very fact that they were eating and drinking during holy occasions (such as the feasts, New Moons, and Sabbaths).

Some Christians insist that Colossians 2:16 allows them to eat whatever foods they so desire, as though Paul is saying that one should not be judged on what they eat or drink. This is unlikely for one simple reason: it's not possible that believers would have been judged on what they were drinking (i.e., "drink") for the simple fact that the Bible nowhere declares any liquids unclean (as it does animals). Thus, they weren't judged for eating unclean meats and eating unclean liquids – there are no drinks considered inherently unclean in the Torah! The translation only makes sense when understood in the sense of "in eating or in drinking."¹⁵

The Greek phrase ἐν μέρει (*en merēi*) is translated as "in respect,"¹⁶ but this same phrase is most often translated as "particular" or "in part" in the writings of Philo in which the same Greek phrase is written fifty-nine times.

The following is a list of the translations of the Greek phrase *en merēi* in the writings of Philo.

Book, Section	English translation ¹⁷
On the Creation, §41	"in turn"
On the Creation, §76	"distinctive"
On the Creation, §99	"in no part"
On the Creation, §167	"partly"
Alleg. Interp. I, §1	"particular"
On the Cherubim, §5	"particular"
On the Cherubim, §6	"particular"
On the Cherubim, §51	"particular"
On the Cherubim, §71	"particular"

¹⁴ According to the English translation of Charles Yonge.

¹⁵ Note that the Westcott-Hort states "in eating and in drinking," implying that the Colossians were doing both during the feasts much to the dismay of certain individuals who frowned upon such conduct.

¹⁶ Per KJV and several other translations.

¹⁷ Per Charles Yonge.

On the Cherubim, §86	"individual"
On the Cherubim, §127	"particular"
That the Worse, §5	"improvement"
That the Worse, §76	"individual"
On the Posterity, §7	"in parts"
On Husbandry, §7	"in its turn"
On Husbandry, §53	"individual"
Concerning Noah, §2	"individual"
Concerning Noah, §11	"particular"
On Drunkenness, §91	"partial"
On Drunkenness, §119	"particular"
On the Confusion, §21	"in its turn"
On the Confusion, §46	"particular"
On the Confusion, §99	"particular"
Who is the Heir, §20	"this earth"
On the Change, §130	"particularly"
On Dreams, §2.12	"alternately"
On Dreams, §2.133	"in turn"
On Abraham, §5	"inconsistent"
On the Life of Moses I, §191	"by turns"
On the Life of Moses I, §217	"by turns"
On the Life of Moses I, §218	"by turns"
On the Life of Moses I, §218	"by turns"
On the Life of Moses II, §52	"particular"
The Decalogue, §19	"particular"
The Decalogue, §175	"particular"
The Special Laws I, §1	"particular"
The Special Laws I, §156	"by turns"
The Special Laws I, §226	"in his turn"
The Special Laws I, §247	"in its turn"
The Special Laws II, §103	"by turns"
The Special Laws II, §103	"by turns"
On the Virtues, §81	"separately"
On the Virtues, §101	(untranslated)
On the Virtues, §222	"in turn"
On Rewards and Punishments, §7	"particular"
On Rewards and Punishments, §67	"particular"
On Rewards and Punishments, §85	"in turn"
On the Eternity of the World, §64	"in their turn"
On the Eternity of the World, §73	"individual"
On the Eternity of the World, §74	"alternations"
On the Eternity of the World, §82	"particular"
On the Eternity of the World, §146	"in its turn"
On the Eternity of the World, §148	"in turn"
Flaccus, §5	"in turn"
Flaccus, §90	"variety"

Flaccus, §171	(untranslated)
Gaius, §158	"in turn"
Gaius, §227	"in their turn"
Gaius, §350	"in turn"
Gaius, §350	"in turn"

More than likely, Paul is commanding the Colossians not to let anyone (but the Church) judge them in "eating or drinking" or "in part of a feast, New Moon, or Sabbath." The part of these holy days which they were judged by others was perhaps related to eating and drinking during these feasts – something which would have been frowned upon by those practicing a "voluntary humility"¹⁸ which involved a "neglecting of the body" (i.e., asceticism).¹⁹

Since the English translations vary for v. 17, there is no other alternative but to parse the Greek text.

Parsing:

a [ἃ] = nominative plural, neuter, relative pronoun; "which"

estin [ἐστιν] = 3rd person, singular number, present tense, indicative mood; "[which] are"

skia [σκιὰ] = "a shadow"

ton mellonton [τῶν μελλόντων] = present tense, plural number, active voice participle, masculine gender, genitive case; "the coming things" (see below)

to de soma tou Christou [τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ] = ? (see below)

The Greek phrase *ton mellonton* is a present participle used substantively, as evidenced by the definite article which precedes it; it should be translated as "the coming things." The same present participle is translated as "things to come" in Rom. 8:38 [μέλλοντα], 1 Cor. 3:22 [μέλλοντα], Heb. 9:11 [τῶν μελλόντων], Heb. 10:1 [τῶν μελλόντων], and Heb. 11:20 [μελλόντων].²⁰

The phrase "the coming things" suits the translation of a present participle moreso than the phrase "the things to come." The English word "coming" is indeed a present participle. The definite article indicates the addition of the word "the," thus "the coming," but when the present participle is employed substantively, it acts as a noun, thus "the coming things." This possesses the same meaning as "the things to come," but

¹⁸ Col. 2:18

¹⁹ Col. 2:23

²⁰ Heb. 9:11 and 10:1 use the same Greek phrase τῶν μελλόντων

it is a more literal and appropriate translation of the present participle employed substantively.²¹

The Greek word δὲ (*de*) is simply a conjunction ("but") placed within the phrase τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (*to soma tou Christou*).

The following is a list of the translations of the Greek phrase τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (*to de soma tou Christou*) according to the more popular translations of the Bible:

Version	Translation
KJV	but the body [is] of Christ
NKJV	but the substance is of Christ
NIV	the reality, however, is found in Christ
NASB	but the substance belongs to Christ
ESV	but the substance belongs to Christ
RSV	but the substance belongs to Christ
ASV	but the body is Christ's

As you can see, the translations vary greatly in meaning.

The following is a list of the scriptures which contains the phrase "[the] body of Christ" or something very similar (e.g., "the body of Jesus Christ"):

Verse	English	Greek text	English transliteration
Rom. 7:4	the body of Christ	τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ	<i>tou somatos tou Christou</i>
1 Cor. 10:16	the body of Christ	τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ	<i>tou somatos tou Christou</i>
1 Cor. 12:27	body of Christ	σῶμα Χριστοῦ	<i>soma Christou</i>
Eph. 4:12	the body of Christ	τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ	<i>tou somatos tou Christou</i>
Heb. 10:10	the body of Jesus Christ	τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	<i>tou somatos tou Iesou Christou</i>
Col. 2:17	?	τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ	<i>to soma tou Christou</i>

Romans 7:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:16 refer to the actual body of Christ, in addition to Hebrews 10:10 which adds the word "Jesus" in the phrase. On the other hand, both 1 Corinthians 12:27 and Ephesians 4:12 refer to the Church which is the spiritual body of the Messiah.

The Greek phrase τοῦ σώματος (*tou somatos*) is in the genitive case in Romans 7:4 because it is preceded by the Greek preposition διὰ (*dia*).

²¹ Philo uses the same Greek phrase τῶν μελλόντων twelve times.

It is in the genitive case in 1 Corinthians 10:16 because it is preceded by *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*) in a genitive construct phrase (i.e., "fellowship of the body of Christ." This causes both phrases "the body" and "Christ" to be in the genitive case.

It is in the genitive case in Ephesians 4:12 because it is preceded by *οἰκοδομὴν* (*oikodomen*) in a genitive construct phrase (i.e., "the edifying of the body of Christ"), exactly in the manner of the previously mentioned verse of 1 Corinthians 10:16.

Yet again, it is in the genitive case in Hebrews 10:10 because of the genitive construct phrase (i.e., "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ").

In reality, however, the literal translation of the phrase *τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* is "the body of the Christ." Most translations neglect to translate the definite article preceding the Greek word *Χριστοῦ* which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, meaning "Messiah" or "anointed one." Contrary to popular belief, the word "Christ" is not a name of Yeshua ("Jesus").

As the chart illustrates, the English translators of the various Bibles have no basis for translating the Greek phrase *to soma tou Christou* in Colossians 2:17 as anything but "the body of the Christ" or "the body of Christ." It is the same exact expression found in at least five other scriptures, all written by Paul (except, perhaps, for the epistle to the Hebrews). The phrase "the body of Christ" refers to the Church in Colossians 2:17. The translations of the KJV actually comes closest to the Greek, except it adds the linking verb "is" which is absent in the Greek text (as noted by "is" being enclosed in brackets).

There is certainly no basis for translating the Greek word *soma* as "substance," as the Greek word would have been *οὐσία* (*ousia*), a word used twice in the New Testament, 211 times by Philo, and a word which well known to later Christian theologians, particularly those who authored the Nicene Creed (they used the word often). These theologians referred to Christ as being *ὁμοούσιος* (*homoousios*), that is, "of the same substance" or "of the same essence" with the Father.

Therefore, the following is the English translation of Colossians 2:17:

¹⁷ (which are a shadow of the coming things), but the body of Christ.

Q: Given that the proper translation is "the body of Christ" (i.e., the Church), how should one then interpret the verse?

¹⁶ Therefore, do not let anyone judge you in eating or in drinking, or in part of a feast, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath ¹⁷ (which are a shadow of the coming things), but the body of Christ.

There are essentially two thoughts embedded within these two verses. One thought is about the judgment of believers concerning the feasts, New Moons, and the Sabbaths. Paul commands believers not to let any man judge them but the body of Christ. Essentially all English translations garble the meaning of Colossians 2:16-17 because they assume Paul commands the Church to not keep the feasts (etc.), and they neglect to observe the two distinct thoughts within these two scriptures.

The "body of Christ" (believers) is placed in antithesis to "any man" (nonbeliever). The following is an example of antithesis in the NT scriptures.

In 1 Corinthians 7:19, it is written,

¹⁹ The circumcision is nobody, and the uncircumcision is nobody, but keeping of the commandments of God.

The meaning of the verse is clear: whether one is Jewish (the circumcision) or Gentile (the uncircumcision) is irrelevant, but keeping the commandments of God is what is relevant.

With respect to Colossians 2:16-17, no man had the authority to judge regarding eating and drinking or in part of a feast, New Moon, or Sabbath but the body of Christ (the Church) itself.

Thought 1: Do not let any man judge you...but the body of Christ (the Church).

Thought 2: In part of a feast, New Moon, or Sabbath...which are a shadow of the coming things.

This means that Paul gave the Church the authority to judge believers regarding the observance of the feasts, New Moons, and Sabbaths. However, the unbelievers outside the Church ("any man") did not have such authority. There is absolutely no indication that the Church believers were not observing the feasts, New Moons, or Sabbaths. To

assert otherwise demands an eisegetical interpretation of the scripture. Paul clearly enjoined the Church to "keep the feast" of Pesach.²² There is no reason why he would have commanded the Church not to keep the other feasts, especially since he imitated the Messiah²³ by keeping the feasts himself.²⁴ Finally, Paul, who did not lie²⁵, proved that he himself "walked orderly and kept the Torah."²⁶

The second thought is a parenthetical interjection by Paul describing the feasts, the New Moons, and the Sabbaths. He states that they are a shadow of the coming things. Most Christians will admit that the feasts all point to the Messiah, and this is the exact meaning when Paul writes that they are shadows. The feasts, New Moons, and Sabbaths point to certain events which have been fulfilled and are yet to be fulfilled in the life of the Messiah and his body (the Church). They are important because they cause us to be established in our faith and continue in the hope of eternal life, patiently awaiting the return of the Messiah and the establishment of his Messianic kingdom.

For example, Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, is a shadow of the Millennial rest during the 1,000 year reign of the Messiah in the Messianic kingdom.²⁷ Every time we observe Shabbat, this causes us to remember and remain steadfast in our faith.

For this reason, Paul writes that they ARE a shadow of the coming things. Paul uses the present tense, not the aorist²⁸ tense. Paul wrote long after Messiah had died, resurrected, and ascended to heaven. By using the present tense to describe the feasts (etc.), Paul establishes the fact that they were not abolished, otherwise Paul would have said, "The feasts (etc.) WERE a shadow of the coming things," with the implication that they are no longer relevant. Yet, Paul did not state anything to that effect.

In summary, to assert that a believer cannot be judged on whether they keep the feasts, New Moons, or Sabbaths is not the meaning of the scripture in Colossians 2:14-17. To suppose such a meaning, one must assume that the Church believers to whom Paul was writing were not keeping the feasts, New Moons, or Sabbaths. However, Paul clearly

²² 1 Cor. 5:7-8

²³ 1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1

²⁴ Paul kept Passover (1 Cor. 5:7-8), Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6), Pentecost (Acts 20:16), Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9), and Shabbat (Acts 17:2, 18:4, etc.). Scripture is silent regarding Paul's observance of the other feasts, but it was not the sole purpose of scripture to prove Paul's observation of holy days (this should be quite obvious).

²⁵ Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20

²⁶ Acts 21:20-26

²⁷ As it is written (Psa. 90:4), "...a day is like a thousand years..."

²⁸ The Greek tense most similar to the English past tense.

commands them to keep the feast of Pesach, so this clearly cannot be the case. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that they were not abiding by the commandments in the Torah which Paul said were God-inspired and profitable for doctrine.²⁹

²⁹ 2 Tim. 3:14-17