



GREATER THAN • COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY • COLOSSIANS 2

Greater Than Your Religion

A guided conversation from the August 9, 2026 sermon by Jay Reynardus

SUMMARY

Jay came to faith as an adult, opened 1 Peter because it looked short, and ran straight into Peter quoting Leviticus: "be holy, for I am holy." His reaction was honest — "Be holy? That's a thing?" He knew he was many things; holy was not one of them.

So he did the reasonable thing and built a list. Go to church. Feed the poor. Stop the Friday nights that ran till four in the morning. It was not a stupid list. He called it the religion of Jay, and he could not keep it — he kept doing the very things he had already decided he was finished with.

That is the exact problem Paul takes apart in Colossians 2:16-23. Teachers at Colossae were saying it was wonderful the church had Christ, and now here is what a serious believer also does: keep these festivals, watch what you touch, deny the body. Paul does not call the additions too strict. He says the whole approach is the wrong category of thing.

His central image is a shadow. The festivals and food laws "are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." The word for substance is soma — body. A body stands in the light and throws a shadow. The shadow is not a lie; it tells you someone is there. But once the person walks into the room, you do not keep talking to the shadow.

Then five reasons the list fails, and a verdict that is not hedged: these things are "of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." Not less effective. No value. So what is the answer? "The answer is not a what. The answer is a who." Union with Christ is the foundation, communion with Christ is the means, and holiness is the result — the way fruit appears on a branch whose only job is to stay attached.

PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

Father, we come carrying lists we wrote ourselves and cannot keep. Loosen our grip on them. Show us where we have been trying to manage ourselves instead of holding fast to your Son, and grow in us the holiness that only comes from being near you. Amen.

Everybody has a list they wrote for themselves — be more patient, be less on your phone, be the person who has it together by now. What is one item on yours, and how long has it been there? Share it around the room before you open the passage.

SCRIPTURE KEY SCRIPTURES**COLOSSIANS 2:16-17 (ESV)**

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

COLOSSIANS 2:19 (ESV)

...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

COLOSSIANS 2:20-21 (ESV)

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations — "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"?

COLOSSIANS 2:23 (ESV)

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

PSALM 1:3 (ESV)

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

JOHN 15:5 (ESV)

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

DISCUSS DISCUSSION**01 THE LIST YOU WROTE**

Jay called his "the religion of Jay," and it failed — not because he was lazy, but because a list has no power to change the person keeping it. What did you put on your own list in the ice breaker, and what has keeping it actually produced?

02 NOT TOO STRICT — THE WRONG CATEGORY

Paul does not say the additions at Colossae were too demanding. He says they are "of no value." Why is that a harder thing to hear than being told to try harder?

03 SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

Read v17 again. A shadow is real and it tells the truth — it just is not the person. What good thing have you been treating as the substance when it was only ever pointing you to Christ?

04 HOLINESS IS BEING, NOT DOING

In Exodus the tongs and the spoons are called holy, and they do nothing at all. If holiness is a state rather than a performance, what changes about how you approach this week?

05 THE BRANCH'S JOB

"The branch does not manufacture fruit. The job of the branch is to drink from the vine and hold the fruit." Where have you been asking the branch to do the vine's work?

06 A LOVE GREATER

Chalmers argued you do not break a chain by gritting your teeth but by coming to love something else more. Is that a relief or a frustration to you — and why?

APPLY LIFE APPLICATION

The passage moves from what cannot change you to what actually does. Three ways to put that into practice this week.

- 1 Retire one item** Take one thing off the list you named in the ice breaker — not because it is bad, but because you have been trusting it to do something it cannot do. Write next to it what Colossians 2:19 says actually produces growth.
- 2 Trade fighting for feeding** Pick the one sin you keep returning to. Instead of adding a new restriction this week, add a daily five minutes of looking at Christ — a Gospel passage, a hymn, prayer. Report back to the group on what shifted.
- 3 Stay planted** Psalm 1's tree does nothing but stand where the water is. Choose one ordinary rhythm — a meal, a commute, a walk — and attach Scripture or prayer to it every day this week. Proximity, not effort.

Paul is not asking the Colossians to try harder at holiness. He is telling them holiness is not manufactured at all — it grows out of union with Christ, the way fruit grows on a branch that simply stayed attached.

REMEMBER KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ A self-made list has no power to change the person keeping it.
- ▶ Holiness is a state of being before it is anything you do — the tongs and the spoons are holy and they do nothing.
- ▶ The shadow was never a lie; it was pointing at the body. The body is Christ.
- ▶ The answer is not a what. The answer is a who.
- ▶ Union is the foundation, communion is the means, holiness is the result.
- ▶ You do not break a chain by gritting your teeth. You break it by loving something greater.

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Lord Jesus, you are the substance every shadow was pointing to. We stop trying to manufacture what only you can grow. Keep us attached to you, make yourself bigger in our sight than the things that hold us, and let holiness follow from being near you. Amen.

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