

Q. Colossians 2:16-17 says, "Let no man therefore judge you in eating, or in drinking, or with respect to a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day, which ARE a shadow of the things TO COME; but the body is Christ's" (CAPS added). Doesn't this mean that the shadow is still for today, that the dietary laws and days of the Old Testament should still be observed, and that the things to come are still in the future (for example, at Christ's second coming)?

A. Sabbath keepers believe that the Sabbaths of the Old Covenant still need to be kept, and they point to these two verses as evidence. Let's see what Paul intended.

Speaking of food and drink and the keeping of feast days, new moons, and Sabbath days, Paul uses the present tense when he says, "which are a shadow" (Colossians 2:16-17). The Greek word for "are" is *estin*. This refers to the practice of this shadow by Jews and probably some Jewish Christians in Paul's time. Of course, there are Jews and Christians who observe this shadow even today. But this does not mean that they should be doing so, or that they should have been doing so in Paul's day. These things are a shadow, and this shadow has its origins in the Old Testament as "a shadow of the things to come." These things in the Old Covenant were a shadow of the things to come in the New Covenant. "But the body..." that is the body that gives substance to these New Covenant things, "is Christ's." It all centers on Christ.

In other words, people try to say that the words "which are a shadow of the things to come" make the shadow the things we should be keeping now and the things to come things that are still in our future.

Thus, this interpretation is used as an argument for keeping Sabbaths. But the tenses are the way they are because,

1. People were continuing to follow Old Covenant laws concerning food and drink and days. Thus, Paul wrote, "which are a shadow."
2. These things started under the Old Covenant as "a shadow of the things to come." This looking ahead is to be seen from the perspective of the Old Covenant, not Paul's time or our time. I will give you an example.

The Passover looked ahead to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. That is what the Passover did; that was its very purpose. That looking ahead was inherent to it. But now, "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). If someone were to keep the Passover today, if he were biblically honest, he would still have to say that the Passover looks ahead to Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. Because Christ has already been sacrificed, this makes no sense. But that's the point.

The Passover most certainly is not a picture looking *back* on Christ's sacrifice. It was never instituted as such. It is through the Lord's Supper that we remember Christ's death (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). But the Passover looks ahead, and since what it looks ahead to has already happened, it is absurd to continue keeping it. But people do continue to keep it, so that we can say that it is a shadow of the thing (Christ's sacrifice) to come. Yet, since Christ has been sacrificed, that shadow is outdated. It has been replaced by the reality.

What is true in this example of the Passover is true of all of the Old Testament practices. They are fulfilled in Christ and defunct.

3. Therefore, Paul ends verse 17 by stating, "but the body is Christ's." Jesus Christ has come and fulfilled the shadow; He replaced these Old Covenant practices with the reality they only foreshadowed.

So, the answer to the question is no. The shadow is not still for today, the dietary laws and days of the Old Testament should not still be observed, and the things to come that Paul was referring to came with Jesus Christ and the institution of the New Covenant.

**Peter Ditzel**