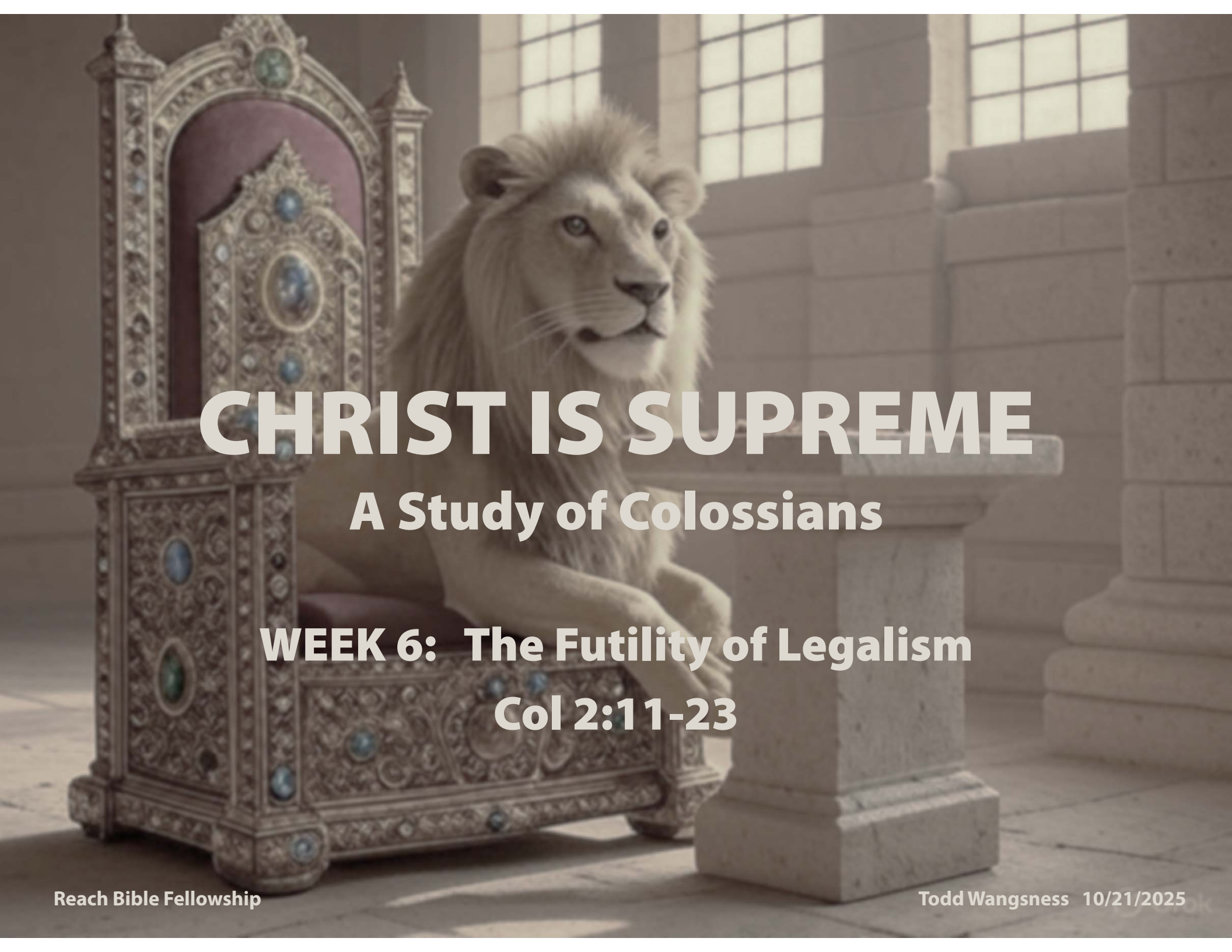


CHRIST IS SUPREME

A Study of Colossians

WEEK 6: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:11-23

Reach Bible Fellowship

Todd Wangsness 10/21/2025

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

WEEK	TOPIC	DESCRIPTION
Week 1	Overview	Overview of the book of Colossians
Week 2	Col 1:1 – 14	Introduction and God's Redemption
Week 3	Col 1:15 – 20	The Preeminence of Jesus Christ
Week 4	Col 1:21 – 29	The Mystery of the Ages
Week 5	Col. 2:1 – 10	Gnosticism is Alive and Well
Week 6	**Col. 2:11 – 23**	**The Futility of Legalism**
Week 7	Col. 3:1 – 17	Set Your Mind on Things Above
Week 8	Col. 4:1 – 18	Exhortation to Prayer and Final Greetings

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Notable quotes on Col 2:11-23

"Legalism is the religion of human achievement. It argues that spirituality is based on Christ plus human works... But Paul's blistering denunciation of legalism in Colossians 2:16–23 shows that it is utterly false and destructive, because it substitutes rules for a living relationship with Christ. Self-imposed worship, false humility, and harsh treatment of the body may look spiritual, but they are worthless against the indulgence of the flesh... Legalism cannot restrain the flesh; only the Spirit can."

- **John MacArthur**

"Legalism is dangerous because it substitutes shadows for substance, regulations for relationship, and rituals for reality... Paul warns that these 'do not handle, do not taste, do not touch' rules are based on human commands and teachings, not divine truth.. Ascetic legalism appeals to the fleshly mind because it makes a person appear spiritual without requiring true inner transformation... It has no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh; in fact, it often feeds pride."

- **Warren Wiersbe**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:11-12 ***In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.***

- **The false teachers at Colossae integrated gnostic teachings with a syncretic blend of Jewish legalism**
- **They insisted that converts must follow the Circumcision along with the rest of the Mosaic Old Testament requirements**
- **The gnostic false teachers said that keeping the Law was required to make them more 'spiritual'**
  - **They taught that – if they were circumcised and followed the strict Judaic dietary laws – the converts would join a group of *enlightened* spiritual elites!**
  - **This teaching was different than the Judaizing teachers of Galatians, who maintained that keeping the Law was required for salvation**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Circumcision		
Category	**Jews**	**Believers**
Internal/External	External	Internal (of the heart)
Body Part	A particular body part	The 'whole' body of sins
Method	Done by hands	Done without hands
Efficacy	No spiritual help in conquering sin	Delivers Believer from power of sin

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

- ***"buried with Him in baptism"***
  - **Paul was describing both a literal and figurative view of baptism**
    - **<u>Literal</u>: We get baptized (immersed) to publicly declare our allegiance to Jesus Christ**
    - **<u>Figurative</u>: At regeneration (Justification), we are baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ**

      — 1 Cor 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
- **When Jesus *died and rose again,* He won a complete and total victory over sin *and* our sin nature, the Law, and Satan!**
  - **He died for our sins (Justification)**
  - **He also died unto sin (Sanctification)**
  - **Our *sin nature* is 'done away with' (*Rom 6:6*)**
  - **We have *died to the Law* (*Rom 7:6*)**
  - **The authority Satan and his evil spirits had over us is terminated (*Heb 2:14*)**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:13-14 ***And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 <u>having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us</u>, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, <u>having nailed it to the cross</u>.***

- ***"wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us"***
  - **In the 1st Century, when a person was crucified, the officials would place a placard above the person on the cross detailing the charges against him**
    - ***Mat 27:37 And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.***
  - **God has taken the *charges* against us and *nailed them to the cross!***
  - **We are freed and forgiven! Hallelujah! Paid in Full!**
    - ***2 Cor 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.***
    - ***Heb 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.***

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:15 ***Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.***

- **Jesus had three tremendous victories as a result of the Cross**
  1. **He *disarmed the principalities and powers***
     - **Satan can only use the weapons we give to him**
     - ***Rom 6:13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.***
  2. **He *made a public spectacle of them***
     - **Jesus exposed the vileness and depravity of Satan and his cohorts**
  3. **He returned to glory in a great triumphal procession**
     - ***Eph 4:8 "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."***

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:16-17 ***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.***

- ***"which are a shadow of things to come"***
  - **All the things Paul mentions in these verses point to Jesus Christ and are only shadows of a coming reality**
- ***"but the substance is of Christ"***
  - **Jesus Christ is the substance … or the reality that is casting the shadow!**
- **Humans love to adhere to *religious rules and traditions***
  - **It inflates the ego and enables the devotee to *feel* religious and promotes self-righteousness**
- **By subjecting ourselves to rules and regulations … we are effectively telling Jesus, "Your sacrifice wasn't good enough! I need to add my works to your sacrifice!"**
- **There is also a tendency to *judge* others upon what we think they should or should not be doing**
- **Also, at times we allow the judgment and condemnation of others to influence what we do and think … even if misdirected or misapplied**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:18-19 ***Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.***

- ***"Let no one cheat you of your reward"***
  - **Athletic phrase … refers to an umpire disqualifying a contestant for not following the rules**
  - **A Believer who fails to obey God's directions does not *lose his salvation***
  - **Rather, he forfeits the honor of winning a prize … he loses the reward he otherwise would have received**
  - **There will be degrees of glory in heaven**
  - ***"Though every vessel of mercy shall be full in heaven, yet one may hold more than another."* -- Thomas Watson**
- **Legalism – in its many forms, will rob us of our reward**
- **Paul emphasizes that external machinations to puff us up are futile!**
- **He maintains that we should *hold fast to the Head!***

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Col 2:20-23 ***Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and [n]neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.***

- **Though we are *in the world* physically … we are not *of the world* spiritually**
  - ***Joh 17:15-16 "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."***
  - ***Col 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love***
- **Asceticism (and other forms of legalism) give the adherent a *form of godliness,* but it is *not* true worship of God**
- **Our true worship is *in Spirit and in Truth!***
- **True worship places Jesus at the center and places new desires within the Believer**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Heretical Teachings of False Religions (in general) …

- **Denying the Deity of Jesus Christ**
  - **Mormonism – Jehovah's Witnesses – Islam**
- **Denying the Trinity**
  - **Mormonism – Jehovah's Witnesses – Islam**
- **Promoting Additional Writings (Teachings) that Supersede the Gospel**
  - **Catholicism – Mormonism – Jehovah's Witnesses – 7th Day Adventists – Islam**
- **Teaching that Salvation is by Faith + Works**
  - **Catholicism – Mormonism – Jehovah's Witnesses – 7th Day Adventists – Islam**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Catholicism …

- The Doctrine of Justification by *Faith + Works*
  - Council of Trent—6th Session, Canon 9: *"If anyone says that…the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification…, let him be anathema."*
  - Council of Trent—6th Session, Canon 12: *"If anyone shall say that… justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema."*
- The Doctrine of *Scripture + Canons and Decrees of the Church*
  - Council of Trent—7th Session, Canon 4: "If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law [canons and decrees of the Church] are not necessary for salvation but…without them…men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of justification…let him be anathema."
- The Doctrine of *Purgatory*
  - Council of Trent—6th Session, Canon 30: "If anyone says that…after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema."
- The Doctrine of *Mary as an Advocate*
  - Decree on the Invocation of Saints: "The saints… offer up their prayers to God for men… It is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them… especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, who is the Advocate of sinners."

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Mormonism …

- **The Nature of God: Mormonism Teaches Polytheism / Exaltation of Man**
  - **God the Father was once a man who progressed to godhood (Joseph Smith, King Follett Discourse; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345).**
  - **Faithful Mormons can become gods of their own planets (Achieving a Celestial Marriage manual; Lorenzo Snow: "As man now is, God once was…").**
- **The Person of Jesus: A Created Being, Not the Eternal God**
  - **Jesus is a spirit child of Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, created in the pre-existence (Gospel Principles, ch. 2).**
  - **He is the literal son of God in the flesh (via physical union between God and Mary — Journal of Discourses 1:50–51, Brigham Young).**
- **Salvation by Grace vs. Salvation by Works + Ordinances**
  - **"It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23).**
  - **Baptism, temple endowments, and eternal marriage are required for exaltation (D&C 131:1–4; 132:16–17).**
- **The Bible vs. Additional Scriptures**
  - **The Bible is true "as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8).**
  - **But the Book of Mormon, D&C, and Pearl of Great Price are also scripture and clarify/correct the Bible.**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Jehovah's Witnesses …

- **Deity of Christ: Jesus Is Jehovah, Not Michael the Archangel**
  - **JW Teaching (Reasoning from the Scriptures, p. 218; Insight, Vol. 2, p. 394): Jesus is Michael the archangel in pre-human form.**
  - **He is "a god" (John 1:1 NWT), created, not Almighty God.**
- **The Bodily Resurrection: Jesus Rose Physically, Not as a Spirit**
  - **JW Teaching (You Can Live Forever, p. 143): Jesus' body dissolved into gases or was hidden by God.**
  - **He rose as a spirit creature (Michael again).**
- **Salvation: By Grace Through Faith, Not Works + Organization**
  - **JW Teaching (Watchtower, Feb 15, 1983, p. 12): Salvation requires faith + works + loyalty to Jehovah's organization (the Watchtower).**
  - **Only 144,000 go to heaven; others hope for paradise earth.**
- **The Trinity: One God in Three Persons (Not Three Gods)**
  - **JW Teaching (Should You Believe in the Trinity? brochure): The Trinity is pagan, unbiblical.**
  - **Father, Son, Holy Spirit are separate beings.**

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

7th Day Adventists …

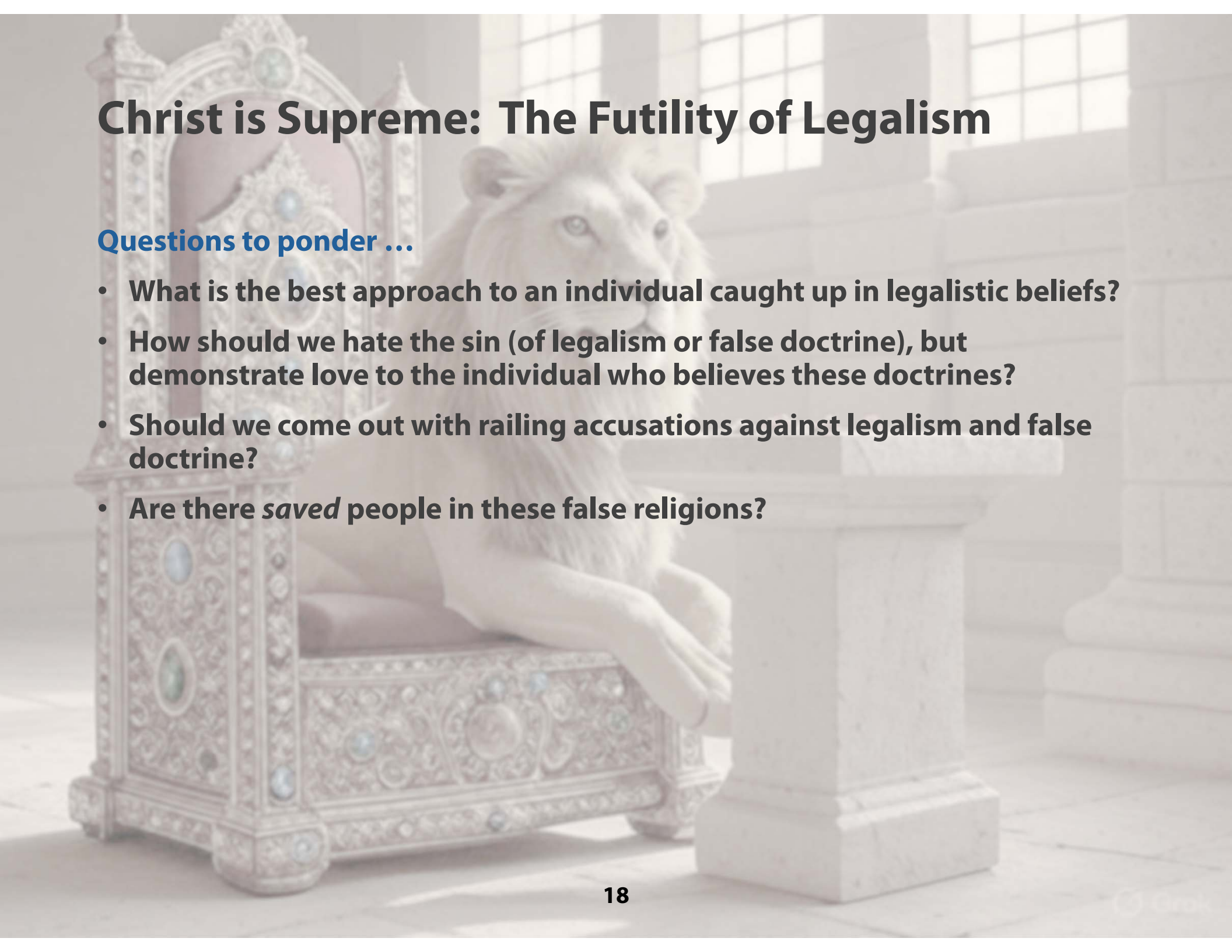
- Ellen G. White: Infallible Prophetess or False Teacher?
  - Ellen White is the "Spirit of Prophecy" (Rev 19:10 misapplied).
  - Her writings are "authoritative," a "continuing and authoritative source of truth" (Fundamental Belief #18).
  - Visions interpret Scripture and are required for full understanding.
  - Failed Prophecies of Ellen White
    - 1844: Christ would return after the "Great Disappointment" (Early Writings, p. 67).
      → Failed
    - 1856: Some at the conference would see Jesus return (Testimonies, Vol. 1, p. 131–132).
      → All died
    - Civil War: England would declare war on the North (Testimonies, Vol. 1, p. 259).
      → Did not happen
- Salvation: Faith + Law-Keeping (Sabbath as Seal)
  - Keeping the Sabbath (Saturday) is the "seal of God"; Sunday worship is the "mark of the beast" in the end times.
  - Final salvation depends on obedience to the law, especially the 4th commandment.

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism

Islam …

- The Crucifixion: Historical Fact vs. Qur'anic Denial
  - Surah 4:157: "They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but it was made to appear so to them."
- The Deity of Christ: Son of God vs. Mere Prophet
  - Surah 5:75: "The Messiah… was only a messenger."
  - Surah 112:3: Allah "neither begets nor is begotten" → Rejects "Son of God."
- Salvation: Grace vs. Scales of Deeds
  - Salvation by faith + good deeds weighed on a scale.
  - No assurance—even Muhammad said: "I do not know what will be done with me" (Surah 46:
- True Islam Adherents are to *kill* 'Polytheists' Unless they turn to Islam
  - "And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. -- Translation (Sahih International)

Christ is Supreme: The Futility of Legalism



Questions to ponder …

- What is the best approach to an individual caught up in legalistic beliefs?
- How should we hate the sin (of legalism or false doctrine), but demonstrate love to the individual who believes these doctrines?
- Should we come out with railing accusations against legalism and false doctrine?
- Are there *saved* people in these false religions?