

Colossians 2:8-23

Verse 8:

--Paul began warning this church in 4-5 but really hammers down here. What we know of this false teaching is drawn by inference from this section. At the very least, it was a weird mix of Jewish and pagan practices.

--No true shepherd can be indifferent to the wolfish danger of false teaching and false teachers.

Acts 20:29-31: For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

--He tells them to **Beware!** Or **See to it!** to alert them to real danger. *Wrong ideas are a real danger to you!*

--**lest anyone cheat you.** . . The Greek word for **cheat** has the idea of *plundering* or *carrying away as plunder*. How is it that they are plundered?

--**through philosophy and empty deceit.** . . Philosophy is the wisdom of earthly men in relation to the divine or the meaning of life. Paul never links earthly philosophy with God's truth.

1 Corinthians 3:18-19: Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

--This so-called philosophy is void of any true spiritual knowledge from God. *Questions are not always a sign of intelligence. Philosophers have so many questions and so few answers!*

--**according to the tradition of men.** . . Traditions are received from others, usually passed down orally, and come with an air of being ancient, proven, and tested.

--Traditions—as bodies of truth—do not have to be sinful. Paul called the apostolic doctrines of Christ *traditions* as they had been received from Christ and passed down (**1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15**) and he also referred to the OT Jewish law as such (**Gal. 1:14**).

--When God's truth is being spoken of as tradition passed down, it is fine. The problem is that man-made tradition often displaces the word of God and becomes authoritative. This was Jesus' stern condemnation of the Pharisees.

Mark 7:8-9: "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."

--So many have been spiritually kidnapped through the ages by the subtle lure of tradition. They have forgotten or ignored the Word of God because the lore of tradition seemed more authoritative. *How many places in the world turn to tribal or pagan tradition when they feel like the Word of God is not enough?! Seems like a similar thing was happening in Colosse.*

--**according to the basic principles of the world.** . . the Greek word for **basic principles** (or your Bible might say *rudiments*) is a unique one only used a few times in Scripture. It seems to relate to the basics of something—we might say the ABC's. In **Hebrews 5:12** the word is translated: **the first principles.**

--I take this as an equivalent to our modern science. What we can know about the basics of our world. Those who will say we can trust observable nature or material things but not God.

1 Timothy 6:20-21: O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

--**and not according to Christ!** . . Paul makes it very clear that philosophy, tradition, and human science or scholarship are not to be exalted above the revelation of Jesus Christ! They are all second-class passengers. He can come down to their level, but they are not allowed up to His.

Verses 9-10:

--**(9) For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.** . . Instead, Paul reminds these Christians everything they need is to be found **in Him!** In Jesus Christ **dwells**—as a permanent dwelling—all the fullness of the Godhead!

--**all the fullness.** . . **bodily.** . . not just certain aspects. In heaven is the Son of God and Son of Man. The Godman. Divinity settled and dwelling in a resurrected and glorified body. The treasure in the treasure chest. We don't need to see the Father. We see Jesus Christ!

--**(10) and you are complete in Him.** . . We don't need philosophy, tradition, or science to supplement us or Jesus Christ. In Jesus alone are we complete! The language is that *you have been made full, are so now, and continue on so!*

John 1:16: And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

--Without Him, we are empty, lacking, and incomplete, but **in Him** we have more than we know. Our position in connection with Jesus Christ is so exalted! **In Him** was never said of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, or even the angels. But it is said of us!

--**who is the head of all principality and power.** . . He is the head of all supernatural authority and beings. We have no intermediary necessary to connect us to Him or His fullness.

Catholics, Orthodox, and unlearned tribal believers may be saved (some are and some are not), but they are lacking because they are turning to other intermediaries or sources of knowledge instead of Jesus Christ!

Verses 11-12:

--**(11)** Now Paul addresses what seems to have been a Jewish slant to this system of false teaching, reminding them that their spiritual life came through faith in Christ and not a physical act of circumcision.

--***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.*** . . Paul says they were circumcised in a surgical procedure ***made without hands*** (spiritual, not physical) by surgeon Jesus Christ.

--What Christ removed in this spiritual procedure was not a piece of their literal flesh but ***the body of the sins of the flesh***—that being, their very fleshly nature! They were now born from above by the Spirit of God (**Rom. 8:3-4+9**).

--**(12)** This reality of their old man being dead was pictured in their baptism. Paul wants to remind them! ***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.***

--Paul makes it clear that ***faith*** in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection—as pictured in their baptism and not circumcision—is what changed their lives and saved them. Their old life was now over, and a new life had begun.

--All of that happened spiritually in Jesus Christ and in obedience to His teachings. Not by any philosophy, tradition, or science proposed by this false teaching.

Verses 13-15:

--**(13)** Now Paul reminds them where we all were before Christ found us! This is our state outside of Jesus Christ—dead spiritually and uncircumcised in our flesh—meaning our unregenerate nature very much alive and controlling.

--We are all sinners, whether our sins are obvious or not. Every field has weeds, whether they are showing or still seeds. The sinful nature of our flesh is the same. It's just a matter of maturity.

--What changed things? ***He has!*** Who has made us alive? ***He has made*** (us) ***alive together with Him!*** How? ***Having forgiven you all trespasses.*** . . Notice that wonderful word ***all!*** *You should search for all of the "*all's*" in this book and note their specific uses. Good homework!*

--**(14)** ***having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.*** . . The law was ***against us*** and ***contrary to us***. The law can only bring the knowledge of *sin*, not *salvation*.

Romans 7:9-10: *I was alive once without the law, but then the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.*

--Jesus took the ***handwriting of requirements***, which was a signed acknowledgment of debts to be paid (some think it may have referred to the crime written and nailed to the cross), and dealt with it Himself.

--It is very important to remember that the Bible *does not* teach that God simply forgives sins. The Bible teaches Jesus Christ *paid for* our sins and, therefore, justly forgives (**Rom. 3:23-26**).

--**(15)** Most commentators consider this to be one of the more difficult verses in this epistle.

The question is: What spiritual events Paul is referring to?

-Is Paul referring to Jesus' victory over death? ***Hebrews 2:14-15***

-Is Paul referring to Jesus' struggle against spiritual beings that tried to hold Him from the cross or in death after the cross? ***Acts 2:23-24***

--Either or both could be involved. Honestly, the spiritual conflict surrounding the cross far transcends our view and thoughts. What do we know? We know that Jesus cast off all supernatural powers working against Him, making a spectacle of them, and leading us as the victorious Strong Man (**Mt. 12:29; Lk. 11:22**).

2 Corinthians 2:14: Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

Verses 16-17:

--**(16) So** . . . Since forgiveness and law requirements were settled by Jesus Christ on the cross, we cannot judge one another on these things. They are no longer (they once were for the OT Jew) an expression of true faith.

--**let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival of a new moon or sabbaths...**

--Now God demands faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. We no longer need to **judge** or be *called to account* for religious observances. We don't keep the law to get to God, appease God, or obtain salvation.

--There are some that still think we need to keep the Jewish dietary law, festivals, or even the Sabbath—Seventh Day Adventist or Hebrew Roots movements. Protestants can easily judge one another over things like Christmas or Easter, etc.

--All of this religiosity was over. ***Romans 14:1-13***

Galatians 4:10-11: You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

--**(17) which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is Christ** . . . All these religious observances related to the law were, at best, only a shadow of the things to come. Christ Himself is the body or *substance* that casts the shadow. Apart from Him, and His literal coming and work, none of the law had any meaning!

Hebrews 10:1: For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

--Focusing on the law observances—for righteousness—is like loving someone's shadow more than them! ***Pictures of food should make me hungry for real food!***

Verses 18-19:

--**(18) Let no one cheat you of your reward** . . . Paul was worried that they would miss out on the eternal reward of the faithful Christian life by being cheated through false worship.

Difference between misbelievers and disbelievers—still, false doctrine has consequences!

--How are we cheated? **Taking delight in false humility.** . . . Religious legalists—like the Pharisees of old—are very proud of their “false humility” as evidenced in their man-made lawkeeping.

--**False humility** is so-called because it is uncalled for by God. It ends up producing “inner rings” of prideful and hypocritical religious elites. *We are the only true church in the world!*

--**and worship of angels.** . . . Another “inner ring” of false teaching related to the worship or service of angels. We don’t know all this looked like, but most think they were some type of intermediary because God was too holy or too far away to interact with the sinful material world.

--This was a common cultish form of worship in the early church. Irenaeus (130-202 AD) in *Against Heresies* writes: “Nor does she {the church} perform anything by means of angelic invocations, or by incantations, or by any other wicked art; but directing her prayers to the Lord who made all things...”.

--Most of the cults and false religions today began with some type of angelic activity. Supposedly, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mohammed, the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith (Mormons), and similar experiences are referenced with Charles Russell (Jehovah’s Witnesses), Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science), and others!

--The minute the focus becomes angels and not Jesus Christ, something is terribly wrong! All heavenly angels reject worship.

Revelation 22:8-9: Now, I John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

--Jesus Christ is higher than all angels (**Heb. 1:4**), we will judge angels (**1 Cor. 6:3**), and angels are servants to men (**Heb. 1:14**). Nothing the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ, us, or angels leads to angel worship—or angel focus.

Galatians 1:8-9: But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

--**intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.** . . . the minute a carnal man steps into “spiritual” realms and thinks he can discover truth, he is a prideful fool. We don’t know anything about the supernatural world save what Jesus tells us!

--Beware of any “spiritual knowledge” that goes beyond the bounds of the Bible! *Even near-death testimonies of heaven!*

--Emmanuel Swedenborg claimed that the room darkened and a man appeared to him claiming to be his guide into the real “spiritual meaning” of the Bible. God opened his eyes so that he could visit heaven and hell and speak with angels and demons to reform Christianity.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15: For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

--(19) **and not holding fast to the Head.** . . The highest Being in all creation is the embodied, resurrected, and glorified Son of Man. If we take another head, then we belong to another body! What happens if we are disconnected from Him?

--**from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.**

--False teaching dislocates us from Him. It hurts our growth in the body. It hurts the health we give to the body. We miss out on our nourishment and the nourishment God has designed us to be in relation to others.

Verses 20-22:

--Paul asks one very important question, bringing them back to his argument in **11-15**.

--**Therefore, if you died with Christ from.** . . (insert here anything that is not directly a commandment of Christ or His apostles) **the commandments and doctrines of men.**

--Who are we subject to? The Lord Jesus Christ alone! Then, in regard to any religious or spiritual worship, we must ask: *Where do Jesus or His apostles command this?*

--The "Church" has absolutely no right to "decree" any religious rite or ceremony without the Head's clear command. We can agree to a method of worship or liturgy (as every worshipping body must), but we cannot demand our tradition as righteousness if we cannot point to a clear command of Christ or His apostles.

1 Timothy 4:1-5: Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own consciences seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Verse 23:

--These self-imposed laws **have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.**

--All worship of God must be taught by God. *That is why you will hear the same old stuff from us: read your Bible, pray, serve God, be filled with the Holy Spirit, share your faith, etc.*

--All man-made religion is all for show. There is no true self-mastery in it! Self-mastery only comes from self-surrender to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. God alone can spiritually remove the body of our flesh—the only true answer to dealing with our sinful nature.

--Does refusing to eat pork products deal with the desires of my flesh? Does it give me a new heart of flesh and put a new spirit within me?

--What is the sad history of the Catholic church's false teaching of celibacy for priests? It has an appearance of wisdom but has been of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. *We all have our own little versions of tiny legalistic requirements!*

--God knows best because God knows the truth: Legalism is an indulgence of the flesh.