**Colossians**

**Complete in Christ**

Lesson #4 (Col 2:1 – 2:23)

Hints of the theological problems in Colossae:

*“I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.” (Col 2:4 ESV)*

*“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” (Col 2:8 ESV)*

*“16 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. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col 2:16-17 ESV)*

*“18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 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.” (Col 2:18-19 ESV)*

Last Week Paul explained to the church how he had been ***“agonizing”*** for the church in Colossae. He then began to point out desires he had for them. If you remember, we looked at the first two:

**Desire #1 –** **Vs 2** - That their ***hearts may be encouraged…***

**Desire #2 –** **Vs 2** - That they would be ***knit together in love.***

***1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving***.

**Desire #3 – VS 2 –** That they would (reach) attain: ***all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

Paul wants the believers in Colossae to **reach**, **attain**, **apprehend**, the riches that come from a full assurance of who Christ is (chapter 1 vs 15-19) and what Christ has done for us (chapter 1 vs 12-14 and 20-23).

It is vitally important to understand who Christ is and what Christ has accomplished. The key points that almost every cult have in common is one or both errors:

1. They minimize the deity of Christ
2. They minimize the saving work of Christ

Christ is the ***mystery*** of God and full knowledge of who He is and what he has done for us is the thing that can bring you true assurance (confidence).

Vs **3 -** Paul writes of Jesus, ***in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

Jesus is the source of all true spiritual knowledge; we can be sure that many of the false prophets taught some other source of wisdom and knowledge.

**Desire #3** That they would (reach) attain, a **settled assurance!**

**Vs 4 - 5** brings us (almost in passing) to the first real hints of issues in Colossae.

**Vs 4 –** Paul writes, I am saying all this to prevent you from being, the Greek word is **παραλογίζομαι** (par-al-og-id’-zom-ahee) *–* **cheated**, **deceived**, **circumvented**, **wronged**.

With a Plausible argument – speech that is **persuasive**, speech that seems **reasonable**, speech none the less that leads you away from truth and turns you to error!

Here is what Paul is saying, you and I need to have a settled understanding and indeed even conviction of who Christ is and what He has done for us. So that when the Mormon, JW, Seventh Day Adventist (or some other false way) shows up at our door, we are not deceived by their plausible arguments or their persuasive speech.

**Vs 5** – Paul warns the Colossians to stand fast, stand firm in their understanding of the mystery of God.

Paul then writes, I am rejoicing to see your **“good order”** and your **“firmness”** in your faith in the Messiah.

***Good order*** *-* **τάξις** (tax’-is) – **good discipline**, **proper arrangement**, **proper posting by rank**.

***Firmness -*** **στερέωμα** (ster-eh’-o-mah) – foundation, something solid, something that supports. It is the solid portion of a military line that can withstand an attack.

**Desire #4 – Vs 6 -** That ***as they received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.***

***Therefore,*** builds to a conclusion of all that Paul has said up to this point, he is bringing this all into a focused point.

As you originally received Jesus (by faith), continue to walk in Him (by faith).

**Live in union with him and maintain a unity in sprit with other believers.**

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Ga 5:16 ESV)*

**In Ephesians, Paul used the imagery of “walk” six times**! Both in the negative sense of how they previously “walked” and in the positive sense of how they should “walk” now.

**Vs 7** ***Built up*** – To finish a structure by **attaching it to the foundation**.

***Established*** – **made firm.** Being firmly rooted in Christ, growing in Jesus, results in us being established in our faith.

I thought of the Psalm 1 (notice the imagery that Paul has been using):

*“****1*** *¶ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;* ***2*** *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night.* ***3*** *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.* ***4*** *¶ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.* ***5*** *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;* ***6*** *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” (Ps 1:1-6 ESV)*

***In Him!*** Thoroughly grounded on the foundation, in Christ!

**Desire #5 – Vs 7b** That we would be ***abounding in thanksgiving.***

***Abounding*** – The idea of the Greek word is something that is exceeding its boundaries, it is something that is overflowing, the Greek word is also used to describe how a flower goes from bud to blossom.

Believers are firmly rooted in Christ, they are being build-up in Him, this results in them being established in their faith, which results in an **overflow of thanksgiving**.

That is a picture of our response to what God has done for us!

*“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1Th 5:18 NKJV)*

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**Philosophy or Christ?**

***8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.***

**Vs 8** – ***See to it*** – The Greek word is **βλέπω** (blep’-o) – It means to **see**, to **perceive**, to **look**.

Paul is warning them to look, to listen, to watch out so that they are not …

**Vs 8** – ***Taken captive*** –It literally means to **kidnap**, to **take captive**, to **carry off as booty** or **spoils of war**. Do not let anyone enslave you with ***Philosophy*** –

The word philosophy comes from two Greek words:

**φιλέω** (fil-eh’-o) – love

**σοφία** (sof-ee’-ah) - wisdom

***Philosophy****,* in this context is the **love of wisdom.**

**Vs 8 –** Notice that Paul calls this love of wisdom as ***empty deceit.***

The ***philosophy*** of the Colossians false teachers was not what it appeared to be. It **sounded good**, it **seemed reasonable**, but it was **vain lies, and** it was **empty deception**.

It was according to ***human tradition –*** but it was not divine revelation. This had become commonplace for the Jews of Jesus’ day:

*“****5*** *And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"* ***6*** *And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "’This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;* ***7*** *in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’* ***8*** *You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."” (Mr 7:5-8 ESV)*

Vs 8 - It was according to **elemental spirits of the world.**

The Greek word is used to describe a **simplistic**, **rudimental**, **elementary** understanding. That seems to be Paul’s point here. Some believe it may be a reference to demonic spirits.

What they have done was abandoned the lofty principles of biblical truth and returned to basic worldly explanations and understandings.

The same Greek phrase is also found in:

*“1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the* ***elementary principles*** *of the world.” (Ga 4:1-3 ESV)*

**Vs 8 -** Notice it is not of Christ! The Greek word is **κατά** (kat-ah’). It is not according to Christ; it does not come down from Christ!

Then Paul makes 3 points, about the truth, which we should assume these who held to a love of philosophy rejected.

**Point #1** **Vs 9** – ***For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,***

Now I want you to call your attention to the word ***fulness***, it is the Greek word **πλήρωμα** (play’-ro-mah) – All the fulness of deity, dwells in Jesus. But keep your eye out for this word, it will come around again.

The **present tense** of ***dwells*** indicates that the essence of Deity continues, at that very moment, to abide at home in the person of Jesus Christ!

Now maybe you are thinking, didn’t Paul already make that point on his nine points about the person of Jesus Christ in chapter 1…

*“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,” (Col 1:19 ESV)*

Any argument, that denies the divinity of Christ, regardless of its reasonableness is empty deception.

**Point #2** **Vs 10** - ***and you have been filled in him.***

Here the same Greek word, the fullness of Deity dwelt in Jesus and we have been filled (made complete) **πληρόω** (play-ro’-o) in Him!

**You and I possess everything we need in him.** We have been filled (in Him)

**Point #3** **Vs 10b** – ***who is the head of all rule and authority.***

**This is important for you and me.** Although Satan goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (IPet 5:8), he can do nothing without God’s permission, we see that clearly in the book of Job.

Jesus is the sovereign King over the entire creation:

*“who (referring to Jesus) has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” (1Pe 3:22 ESV)*

*“****31*** *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,* ***32*** *but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."” (Lu 22:31-32 ESV)*

Having brought up the point that we are complete in Christ, he now expands on that point in verses 11-15 and makes five additional points.

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***11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”***

**Point #4** **Vs 11** – ***In Him, we have been circumcised, by the circumcision made without hands.***

Obviously, there was a Jewish influence who were demanding that the men in Colossae be circumcised if they were really saved.

Here Paul says, NO! Metaphorically, or if you like spiritually, you have been circumcised, by the circumcision that was made without hands.

Here is Paul’s point, we are not brought into union with Christ by circumcision, but rather, by faith. We are complete in Jesus and metaphorically circumcised by Him (**in our heart**), which destroyed the power of death that had a hold on us.

Being in a relationship with God was always about having your heart circumcised, not only your flesh.

Stephen had been seized and brought before the Sanhedrin, the leading council of Israel, the seventy leaders: Here is what he said:

*“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” (Ac 7:51 ESV)*

We have been circumcised by Christ, in our hearts. This is the only circumcision that really matters.

Paul writing to the church in Rome wrote:

*“28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” (Ro 2:28-29 ESV)*

**Point #5** **Vs 12** – We have buried with Jesus (baptism into his death) and we have been raised with Jesus (baptism into His resurrection), all through faith!

It seems there were some who were either teaching you had to be baptized to be saved or that a person is not actually born again until you were saved.

But you see Paul’s point. Before we ever stirred the baptismal waters, we were united in Christ’s death, (by faith), we were raised to new life (by faith), through the powerful working **ἐνέργεια** (en-erg’-i-ah) (English word energy) of God.

Baptism serves only as a picture of the reality that we possess by faith, in Christ.

This is precisely what our Pastor says every time he baptizes someone, quoting Romans 6:4:

*“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Ro 6:4 ESV)*

Christ’s death and resurrection clearly shows his power over death. Our baptism is meant to show our union and identification with Jesus.

**Point #6** **Vs 13** – ***having forgiven us all our trespasses***. We were dead in our sins and uncircumcised in our body. But by faith, we are now alive in Jesus and forgiven of all sins.

Being completely forgiven is one of the most amazing things in the Scriptures:

*Ps 103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

But never forget, our forgiveness came at great expense to our Savior!

**Point #7 Vs 14** – ***canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.***

In the Greco-Roman world the “***record of debt***” was a written notice of indebtedness, Paul uses that word picture to characterize our indebtedness to God, because of our sin.

This image comes from the notice fastened to the cross by Roman authorities, declaring the crime for which the criminal was being executed.

The crime that led to Jesus’s death: (our record of indebtedness to God, our sins)!

**Point #8** **Vs 15** – ***He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.***

At Calvary, Jesus stripped away the power for Satan to slander and you and I and put all demonic powers to an open shame.

The cross and the death of Jesus stands as the emblem of the defeat of Satan, the failure of demonic powers to thwart God’s plan. But more than that He triumphed over them.

**Satan has been defeated; Calvary is a public display of his defeat.**

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**Legalism or Jesus?**

***16 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. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”***

**Vs 16-** Let no one judge you on your obedience to Jewish rituals. Clearly one of the things these false teachers were advocating was the observance of various Jewish observances:

***Food and drink*** – dietary laws

***Festivals***– Jewish Holy days like Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles, etc.

***New moon*** – Celebration at the first day of the month (Num 28:11-14)

***Sabbaths*** – all forms including the weekly Sabbath (Lev 23)

The reasons in **Vs 17 -** ***These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.***

**Asceticism and mysticism or Jesus**

***“18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 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. 20 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 — 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used) — according to human precepts and teachings? 23 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.”***

**VS 18** – Let no one **disqualify you**. The Greek word means to **defraud** you, **beguile** you, or **deprive** you of something that is rightfully yours!

**Error #1 Vs 18a** - ***Insisting on Asceticism*** (the practice of strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline).

The NKJV calls it false humility. The Holman calls them: ascetic practices.

The false claim is these extreme measures of self-denial bring a deeper spiritual connection a deeper religious experience. You will see the real issue here in one second!

**Error #2 Vs 18b – Practicing Mysticism -** There were those who were insisting that they worship created beings, and not the creator alone! This included those who went on and on about visions they had received.

But then Paul tells us what is really behind the false humility and the mysticism.

**Vs 18c** - ***puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,***

This was really pride, this was really a sensual mind. This was in all honesty not religious, but demonic.

**Vs 19 -** The people doing these things were destroying Christian unity as they exalted themselves.

They were not holding to the head Jesus Christ. They were not nourishing the body. What they were doing was quite the opposite!

**Paul closes with final thoughts about asceticism and legalism**

***20 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 — 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used) — according to human precepts and teachings? 23 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.***

There is the phrase again, elemental (spirits) principles.

If you have died with Christ and been made alive with Christ, why in the world would you believe that you are saved by following man made rules.

Rules that were made by fallen humans that are basic and simplistic.

**VS 23** – Paul acknowledges that they can have the ***appearance of wisdom***.

**V 24** Ascetism and legalism have one point in common. They can do nothing to help us overcome the power of our fallen nature.

These things rather than help us overcome the flesh, indulge the flesh!

The only answer to help us wrestle against the fallen nature is to be born again.

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