

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

Part Seven

Introduction

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. 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, 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. 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, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 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, 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. 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 - Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using - according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed 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. If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 2:6-3:4).

Introduction

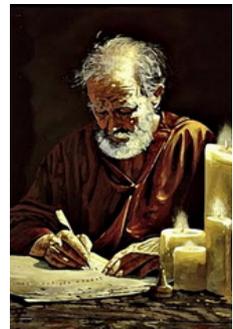
1. In the last section Paul spoke of his sufferings and labor in the gospel, and he ended by stating that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. He says this “lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words” (Colossians 2:4). Paul will begin discussing this further in just a short while.
2. In the last verse of the section (Colossians 2:5), Paul speaks of the steadfastness of their faith in Christ, and he will say a few words of encouragement on this first.

Paul’s Defense Of The Faith – 2:6-3:4

X. EXHORTATIONS TO CONTINUE IN CHRIST

“As you therefore have received [the] Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7).

1. Among the majority of religious organizations we hear leaders urging people to “receive the Lord Jesus into your heart”, and many believers will tell you how they became a Christian by “accepting Jesus into my heart”. To what is Paul referring when he says, “As you therefore have *received* Christ...”?
 - a. Receiving Christ:
 - 1) The Colossians had *received* Christ by being taught about Him by Epaphras. Paul wrote, “... since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras” (Colossians 1:6-7). Hendrickson says, “The word *accepted* [received] is here used in its technical sense: *received as transmitted*” (cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:1; Philippians 4:9).



- 2) To *receive* Christ is to receive Him by instruction, or to *receive the apostolic tradition* (cp. **Galatians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6**). The contrast to receiving Christ or the apostolic tradition is the “tradition of men” (in verse 9). One can only *receive* Christ by being taught the truth about Him (**John 6:44-45; Hebrews 8:11; Matthew 28:18-20**).
- 3) Having received Christ by instruction, Paul says, “so walk in Him”. This simply means they were to continue patterning their lives in accordance with what they had been taught. They had been taught about Christ and they had learned from others (1:7) how the knowledge of Christ was to govern every aspect of their walk, in Him.

b. There are two things we need to make clear:

- 1) The reason that Christ, rather than the gospel, is specified as the object of the instruction is because, as Lightfoot says, “The central point in the Colossian heresy was the subversion of the true idea of the Christ”.
- 2) But why does Paul identify the One whom they had received as “the Christ Jesus the Lord”? There are similar terms used elsewhere in the New Testament (**Ephesians 3:11; Philippians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 4:5**), but these exact terms appear together only here. It is likely that Paul means to say, “The Christ, even the Lord Jesus”.
 - a) In using these terms, Paul is countering the false view of those who misunderstood the true nature of the Christ. Paul wants the brethren to understand that Jesus is the Christ, and as the Christ He is also Lord of the universe. This being true, Jesus is not subject to any powers in the universe. Indeed, all powers are subject to Him.
 - b) Paul, in bringing all these designations together, is reminding the brethren of the absoluteness and sufficiency of what they had received in Him.

2. Paul now explains what is to characterize our “walk” or life in Christ:

b. Having been rooted and are being built up:

- 1) Paul says they *had been* “rooted” in Him. They had been planted in Christ, the soil into which the roots sink. This is an action that had taken place in the past and has continuing results.
- 2) Paul says they *are being* “built up” in Him. The figure of being built upon Christ is used often in the New Testament (**1 Corinthians 3:10, 12, 14; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:5; Jude 1:20**), but not here, though. The text does not say they are being built “on Him” but “in Him”. The point seems to be that “Christ is the one who binds Christians together; he is the principle of cohesion, or binding element, as they are built up in Him” (Walton Weaver).

“Progress does not consist in dropping the early truths of Jesus Christ the Lord for newer wisdom and more speculative religion, but in discovering ever deeper lessons and larger powers in these rudiments which are likewise the last and highest lessons which men can learn” (Maclaren).

b. Being established in the faith:

- 1) There can be no progress unless one is continually being established in the faith. It is as one is being established in the faith that one becomes more firmly rooted and increasingly built up. On the other hand, it is as one is being rooted and built up that his faith is established. It works both ways.
- 2) Paul says “established in the *faith*”. The word “faith” can refer to subjective or objective faith. The context will determine what is meant. The words “as you have been taught” indicate that objective faith is here in mind.

c. It is because of one’s life in Christ that he ought to abound or overflow with thanksgiving. “Thankfulness is after all a truly inescapable accompaniment of a secure and abounding Christian life” (Walton Weaver).

XI. REASONS FOR REMAINING STEADFAST IN THE FAITH

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. 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, 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. 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, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:8-15).

Five Reasons To Remain Steadfast In The Faith:

1. Remain steadfast in the faith because the philosophy¹ of men is not according to Christ.
 - a. Paul had earlier warned about being deceived with persuasive words (2:4), and now he underscores it with a severe warning against those false teachers and their insidious influence. They must beware “lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit...”. The word “cheat” (NKJV) is not the best translation. The word “spoil” (KJV) is a little better, but it still doesn’t convey the idea of the Greek word *sulagōgēō*. The word *sulagōgēō* means “to carry off as booty or as captive” (AG). These brethren had been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s Son, and “Paul is fearful that they might lose their new found freedom and be brought back into bondage again by being abducted, as slave raiders would attack and drag away men as booty” (Walton Weaver). The warning was to prevent them from being led away captive (cp. 2 Timothy 3:6; Galatians 5:1).
 - b. The means employed by those false teachers is stated: “through [the] philosophy and empty deceit”. The term “empty deceit” is simply a description of the philosophy – the philosophy of the false teachers is deceptive and empty because it is made to sound plausible by those who beguile “with persuasive words” (2:4).
 - c. The philosophy under discussion is...
 - 1) “According to the tradition of men”. A tradition is that which is handed down in teaching. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to “stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15; cp. 1 Corinthians 11:2). In determining the true character of any teaching, we must ask, “Is it from heaven, or is it from men?” (see Matthew 21:23-17).
 - 2) “According to the basic principles of the world”. This statement is a qualification of “tradition of men” and it identifies the *subject matter* of the teaching. The Greek word, *stoicheion*, means, “The basic parts, rudiments, elements, or components of something” (CWSD). It is difficult to determine what Paul has in mind, though, and even commentators have widely differing views. The two likely views are: (i) They are animated spirits or persons, and (ii) They refer to the regulations and ordinances (foods, certain feasts, etc).
 - 3) “Not according to Christ”. To whatever the “basic principles” (NKJV) or “rudiments” (KJV) refer, they were “not according to Christ”. The philosophical system of thought presented to the Colossians was not founded upon Christ; it did not have Christ as its subject matter. True, Christ may have been worked into their system, but He was not given a position that rightly belonged to Him.

¹ Philosophy is an activity of thought, which may become a way of life. It is primarily a pursuit after wisdom. It is a critical and comprehensive inquiry into the ways in which what we know can be used to obtain what we value. Philosophy is one of the most, if not THE most, distinctive of all human activities, as such Philosophy has been and may continue to be of importance in the live of humans, around the world

2. Remain steadfast in the faith because Christ is all they need; they are complete in Him.

- a. The word “for” at the beginning of the sentence gives the reason for what has just been said in the previous verse. The philosophy of the false teachers is not according to Christ; it is a philosophy that makes being in Christ incomplete. Christ is not incomplete because “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” and Christians are in no way incomplete because “you are complete in Him”.
- b. Paul again reaffirms what he said earlier: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). Whatever beings there may be in the physical realm and the spiritual realm, Jesus is the creator of them all (something which the Gnostics denied), and, therefore, He is the head over all principality and power.

3. Remain steadfast in the faith because they have been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.

- a. The Gnostics would argue that the Colossians were not real Christians, they were not complete, and that it was necessary for them to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.
- b. But Paul has already argued that they are complete in Christ, and he now explains that these Gentiles had indeed been circumcised with a far superior circumcision: they were circumcised in Him; it was a circumcision made without hands “by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”. “The circumcision advocated and practiced by the false teachers was a minor operation. The circumcision experienced by these Christians was the removal and cutting away of their former evil habits and attitudes, i.e. getting rid of the old man (Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:24)” (Dunagan).
- c. When did this spiritual circumcision take place? This is answered in the next two verses: “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. 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” (Colossians 2:12-13).

4. Remain steadfast in the faith because the Mosaic Law has been done away.

- a. The Gnostics sought to persuade the Colossians that it was necessary to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses; this because they supposed being baptized into Christ was insufficient. Paul has already shown the all sufficiency of being in Christ, and now he shows how absurd the concept of being under the Law really is.
- b. Under the Law, the blood of goats and bulls could not wash away sins, and the Law was against us and contrary to us. Thus it was wiped out and taken out of the way; it was nailed to the cross. The law, then, was a major barrier that stood in the way of man’s salvation, but this has now been removed.

5. Remain steadfast in the faith because all hostile forces have been disarmed.

- a. There is a divergence of views as to the identity of the “principalities and powers”, but since we are viewing this section as “Reason To Remain Steadfast In The Faith”, we agree with Walton Weaver who says, “The point being made about the disarming of the hostile powers is only another reason why the Christian should stand fast in the faith by opposing the false teachers in Colosse”.
- b. The cosmic forces that have been working against Christians have been disarmed through the work of Christ on the cross, and their final overthrow is certain (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Paul has given the brethren several reasons for remaining steadfast in their faith...

- Because the philosophy of men is not according to Christ.
- Because Christ is all they need; they are complete in Him.
- Because they have been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.
- Because the Mosaic Law has been done away.
- Because all hostile forces have been disarmed.

... and each reason has in one way or another been based upon the all-sufficiency and preeminence of Christ.

XII. REASONS FOR NOT SUBMITTING TO VAIN PHILOSOPHY

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 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, 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. 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 - Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using - according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed 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. If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 2:16-3:4).

Three Reasons For Not Submitting To Vain Philosophy

1. Do not submit to vain philosophy because it exalts the shadow above the substance.
 - a. The false teachers viewed anyone who did not walk according to their teachings as being outside the people of God – this was their judgment, and Paul says they must not allow these false teachers to judge them in this way.
 - b. The false teachers were making such a judgment in respect to rules regarding foods, drinks, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths. We might think these rules were based on the restrictions in the Mosaic Law and, indeed, this may have been the foundation or starting point. In other words, the false teachers had their own rules regarding these things that had their beginning in the Law. As we saw earlier, Christians have been freed from the obligations of the Law, and must not allow themselves to be brought back into bondage by its requirements.
 - c. All those things (regarding food, drink, festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths) were a shadow of good things to come. In order for there to be a shadow, there must be a reality that casts the shadow. The reality in this case is Christ. To submit to the rigid ascetic requirements of these false teachers means one would be relying on the shadow instead of the reality which cast it. Paul is saying that such forms and ceremonies were the shadow, but what cast the reality or substance is found in Christ and the New Covenant. And those in the body of Christ immediately share in those things typified in the Old Testament. This, then, is the reason why the strict demands of the false teachers must be rejected.
2. Do not submit to vain philosophy because it replaces Christ with mystical religion.
 - a. Two characteristics that identify the false claims of the false teachers. Paul begins with a warning: “Let no one cheat [the KJV has ‘beguile’] you of your reward”. The word “cheat” (NKJV) and “beguile” (KJV) really don’t convey the meaning to the English reader... the AMP version conveys the meaning much better: “Let no one defraud you by acting as an umpire and declaring you unworthy and disqualifying you for the prize”. These Christians were already members of the body of Christ, and they ought not to let anyone judge them otherwise.
 - 1) The first characteristic of these false teachers concerns...
 - a) “voluntary humility”. This likely refers to restrictions regarding food and drink and the observance of festivals and holy days. They submitted to such voluntarily but, as the NKJV indicates, insincerely (or false). They engaged in such ascetic practices because they were believed to be effectual for receiving visions of the heavenly mysteries. These teachers found delight in such practices as a prelude to the reception of heavenly visions (O’Brien).

b) “and worship of angels”. As well as delighting in false humility, they also found delight in the worshipping of angels. The following is a quote from Dunagan: I think writers are on the right track when they suggest that the previously mentioned false humility is connected with and is a motivating factor behind the angel worship mentioned in this passage. Barclay writes, “the Gnostics and Jews would have justified it (angel worship) by saying that God is so great and high and holy that we can never have direct access to Him and must be content to pray to the angels”. Erdman says, “It was expressed in ‘worshipping angels’ as the representatives of God, and was thus alleged to be less presumptuous than the direct worship of God, as though He were too high to be worshipped by men. Yet to refuse God's appointed way of approach through Christ was really presumptuous pride”. The false teachers may have said something like, “We are too humble to dare presume that lowly men like ourselves could ever worship God. Rather, we acknowledge our weaknesses, our short-comings, and are content to merely worship God's representatives instead”.

2) The second characteristic of these false teachers concerns...

a) “intruding into those things which he has not seen”. The AMP gives a better rendering: “taking his stand on visions [he claims] he has seen”. This likely refers to the things they had discovered through their claimed visions. Speaking of such visions and the spectacular things they have seen and heard would, no doubt, impress and bewitch many.

b) “We may not know the exact nature of the spiritual experiences the proponents claimed to have passed through, but as Bruce points out, their ‘exploitation of it forms a remarkable contrast to Paul’s apologetic account of the strange thing that happened to him once when he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4).”

b. Two descriptions of the false teachers. In the first two descriptions, it seems Paul was using the catchwords of the false teachers. Now, though, he offers his own personal criticisms to such private religious experiences.

1) “vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind”. These false teachers claimed to have superior knowledge and have mystical experiences. Thus they became inflated with conceit (**cp. 1 Corinthians 8:1**).

2) “and not holding to the head”. These false teachers had not held to Christ. They had turned aside to a philosophical system of their own devising that made Him less than absolutely supreme. Indeed, it is Christ that is the source of all spiritual life and growth of the body.

3. Do not submit to vain philosophy because it ignores the Christian’s death with Christ.

a. The Colossians understood that they had died with Christ (referring to their baptism) from the “principles of the world”, i.e., all the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Since this is the case, then it would not make sense to live once more according to those principles – they had died with Christ from those principles of the world.

b. They had died with Christ, but they had also been “raised with Christ”. Walton Weaver says, “Spiritual resurrection with Christ brings the Christian into a new and heavenly order. His connections with the old order were severed when he died with Christ”. Since we have been raised with Christ, we ought to set our minds on things above.

Applications

1. Just as we have received Christ, it is essential to **keep on walking in Him**; continuing to be rooted and built up in Him. A Christian that is not growing is withering away at best, and dead at worst.
2. We must always ensure to **remain alert** and never allow ourselves to become complacent because the world is full of false teachers seeking to lead the ignorant and unwary astray.

3. There are many religious organizations that deny the deity of Christ (even some churches of Christ), and we would do well to memorize what Paul says here: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”. **Believing in Jesus’ deity is essential to our salvation!** Jesus said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” (**John 8:24**).
4. You will have noticed that there are many religious organizations that still cling to the Law of Moses to some degree. Indeed, people have a hard time believing that the Mosaic Covenant has been abolished. Some will say, “Yes, the ceremonial law has been abolished, but the moral law has not”. All such arguments are designed to cheat you and rob you. **The Law has been abolished and we must not allow ourselves to be brought under its power** because the Law kills. As Paul says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (**Romans 8:2**).
5. **One thing of which we especially need to beware is creating our own religion!** This happens when we refuse to study the scriptures and we simply walk in our own opinions.

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