

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians

Chapter Eight

BIBLICAL WARNINGS

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Ancient Gnosticism was a constantly fluid and evolving perversion of truth. It absorbed religious beliefs from most pagan religions as well as Judaism and Christianity. Both Judaism and Christianity were paganized by the corrupting philosophies of Gnosticism. This process of religious evolution is known as Syncretism: the combination of different forms of belief or practices; the absorption and incorporation of various religious beliefs and practices. This ancient Gnosticism evolved into modern Gnosticism and is what we know today as Ecumenicism. It is this process of syncretism that Paul is warning about in the epistle to the Colossians (as well as all local churches down through the ages).

The Colossian church was a local church surrounded by a society that mocked God, rejected authorities, played with Spiritism (mysticism) and flirted with pagan cults. The historic period was also very materialistic enjoying all the material comforts of their time. It was this society’s drawing power that was tempting the Colossian believers to abandon their distinctive Christian and Biblical beliefs to become part of a larger and more socially acceptable community of people. To counteract this tendency, Paul confronts this local church at Colosse with one simple question, *Is Jesus Lord?*

Up to this point in the epistle, the Lordship of Jesus has been emphatically established. This brings the believer to a new question, *Is Jesus YOUR Lord?* The attack against these Colossian believers (*and all separated, Bible believing Christians*) is a philosophical attack. When believers accept human philosophies that are contradictory to the Word of God, they become the “spoil” of spiritual warfare taken captive by the enemy of Christ. These philosophies are an assault on the very foundation of Christianity (*the Lordship of Jesus Christ*).

Colossians 2:8 is a warning.

For the church at Colosse there were **four elements of false teaching** that posed a constant threat to these new believers and their local church.

1. The philosophies of men (v 8-15)
2. Jewish legalism (v 16-17)
3. Spiritism (Mysticism) (v 18-19); these were spiritual mysteries revealed through spiritual mediums such as dead spirits or angels\demons.
4. Asceticism (v 20-23); this involved a monastic lifestyle of self denial, starvation, deprivation of sleep, and self flagellation.

These four elements continue to be a threat to individual Christians in various forms today. The continuing warning of the epistle is against both these individual heresies and their combined influence. Combined they created a very complex problem requiring solid theological foundations for spiritual discernment in order to avoid doctrinal contamination. The person contaminated with any one of these philosophies would become pre-occupied with its ridiculous teachings, which in turn would result in their becoming useless for Christian service.

God’s solution to the problem has been given in our last study from Colossians 2:1-7. God wants believers to concentrate on laying solid theological foundations based upon knowledge of Him and His Word; doing this which will unify believers in Biblical truth.

Satan's common tactic is dividing and conquering. If you can split an army into small, fragmented groups, it is always easier to find a weakness. Satan then attacks at the weakest point. Within a local church, this is usually with new Christians who are not yet grounded in the Word of God or in the lives of those who are yet not fully committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, making themselves continually vulnerable because they continue to live in the "flesh."

"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17).

Analyzing the warning: "Beware"

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

The warning in Matthew 7:15 and I Peter 5:8 is about accepting false teachers. The danger is being devoured by them. A fish that takes the bait is doomed to be devoured.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6).

The warning in Matthew 16:6 is against false doctrine ("leaven"). The danger is the prison that false doctrine creates in the practice of life. When God says "beware," He offers a warning that requires a constant vigilance on the believer's part in order to avoid corruption. The constant danger is that of being captured by false doctrines. When that happens, you become a traitor to the Lordship of Christ by joining the ranks of those propagating false doctrines.

The manner of capture ("spoil") is the philosophies of men (false doctrines)

A philosophy is any system of thought or theory about the universe, its origins, man's purpose in it and the meaning of life. A Biblical philosophy answers all these questions by understanding the revelation about them from the Word of God. A humanistic philosophy answers these questions from man's own logic and reasoning outside of the Word of God (*ex parte*). A philosophy can also be humanistic if it incorporates human logic or reasoning with revealed truth (*Example: Theistic evolution*). God's Word exposes humanistic reasoning and logic about knowing Him or the origins of existence as completely unreliable.

⁹ But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰ But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

"Eye hath not seen, nor hear heard;" spiritual truth cannot be understood or discovered through empiricism. Empiricism is the idea that truth can only be discovered by experience (*scientific experiment*).

"Neither have entered into the heart of man;" spiritual things are totally incomprehensible to man's mind and it is impossible for lost men to fathom the reality of spiritual things. Science is empiricism. Philosophy is rationalism. Anything which is scientifically true or philosophically true will also be in agreement with Scriptural truth. Anything contradicting Biblical truth in whole or in part is not true.

Colossians 2:8; human philosophies are hopeless (“vain deceit”) in their effort to help man with spiritual realities. They cannot give what they promise. For instance, a person who preaches salvation through human accomplishments (“works”) cannot deliver on his promise because God is the only One capable of saving anyone and He will ONLY do so by His own criteria.

“⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

To choose anyone of the thousands of human philosophies of life (and the practice of it) that are in contradiction with the Word of God is to be captured and carried away by Satan as a spoil of war. Is this warning being taken seriously by believers today? How many Christian parents (believing in an eternal hell) would even think of risking the soul of their child by putting him in a Buddhist monastery, school of Islam or a Roman Catholic school? Christians read the writings of all kinds of heretics because they are famous with little concern if they are true to God’s Word. Radio preachers and Television preachers bombard Christians with a smorgasbord of heresy and few Christians have enough Bible knowledge to even know they have been taken as “spoil” by *wolves in sheep clothing*.

Many parents think nothing of putting their children into the hands of secular humanists, atheists, evolutionists, homosexuals and hundreds of other philosophical perversions of truth each day in government run schools. These perversions of truth are complicated enough that a mature Christian would have difficulty dealing with the deception. How can we expect children to be able to survive in this environment? If Christians really took this warning seriously, there would be fewer evangelicals in bed with the harlot of Ecumenicism?

The method of capture (“spoil”) is INFILTRATION.

The danger of corruption is increased because these philosophies often do not directly confront the believer. They sneak in under the guise of sincerity, devotion and truth while they carry away the already weak and wounded to their den of deception. There are two main methods of deception resulting in capture:

1. “Traditions of men”

Simply because something is old and handed down through generations does not make it truth. As far as mankind is concerned, Satan’s lies are almost as old as the revelation of God’s Truth to mankind. Tradition should not add one ounce of weight to anything. Old lies are no better than new lies. Almost all new philosophies are simply one man building on another man’s outdated idea by adding new error to the old error in order to modernize it and make it socially acceptable. There is nothing honorable or sacred about human traditions. They are little more than perpetuated ignorance.

“The thing that hath been, *it is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is that* which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

“⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? ⁶ He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. ⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. ⁹ And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:5-9).

2. “The rudiments of the world;” the word “rudiments” means elementary or infantile. The reasoning of man about the reality of God and existence compared to the revelation of God’s Word are little more than a baby’s *Gah-Gahs*.

No matter how intellectual some of these philosophies appear, they are like the jungle native who offers sacrifice to the fire because it keeps him warm and cooks his food. “Rudiments” means to govern your life by infantile beliefs of mythology and human reasoning like getting a child to be good by lying to him about Santa Claus. Ceremonialism, sacramentalism, pagan symbolic mysteries and initiatory rights are all rudimentary, infantile and immature concepts based upon integrating humanistic philosophies and traditions with Christian beliefs. Legalism in any form is an elementary religion and it is false religion.

“⁸ Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. ⁹ But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. ¹¹ I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:8-11).

“⁹ For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. ¹⁰ And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:9-10).

Everything we need and want for understanding God, life and the practice of it are found in Jesus Christ. We need look no where else than to the revelation of the Word of God. Once you know the Jesus of the Word of God and His free gift of salvation, don’t look elsewhere to know Him better. Search the Word more deeply to know Him more deeply.

“So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Many people searching for truth end up playing with rattles (human philosophies, intellectualism, traditions of men) instead of laboring with the adult tools of God’s Word to live a life of practical Christian service. Many of those rattles have a snake on the end of them.

“Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents” (I Corinthians 10:9).

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1. What are the similarities between the culture of Colosse and ours that pose similar threats to believers of today? _____

2. According to Colossians 2:8, what is it that makes believers “spoils” of spiritual warfare? _____

3. What is the central statement for the foundation of the Christian faith to which these philosophies are an assault? _____
4. List the four elements of false teaching that pose a constant threat to believers and their local church.
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
 - C. _____
 - D. _____
5. From Colossians 2:1-7 and chapter seven, what is God’s solution to this constant threat? _____

6. What is the “beware” warning of Colossians 2:8 specifically about? _____
What is the danger in failing to heed the warning? _____

7. What is a PHILOSOPHY? _____

8. What does I Corinthians 2:9-10 reveal to us about man’s abilities to know God, comprehend the source or our origins, or understand the forces behind our existence? _____

9. According to Colossians 2:8, what are the two methods that Satan will use to capture (“spoil”) genuine believers?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
10. What is a tradition? _____

11. What does the word “rudiment” mean as used in this context? _____

12. What is the only way of knowing if your belief system has been defiled and you taken as spoil by these two things? _____