



COLOSSIANS

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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.
Colossians 2:8

In verse 3, Paul noted that it is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. After that, he gave general urgings which were based on that. Now he gives a specific exhortation intended to keep them on the right track by explaining what is to be avoided. This will be followed up with a positive statement concerning Christ in order to contrast what he now says.

He begins with "Beware." The Greek word gives the idea of being observant, and so it would appropriately read "Watch out!" He is giving them a strong admonition that dangers are out there, and the enemy has them ready to ensnare any who are not attentive. His next words show that there will be loss if one is not carefully attentive, by saying, "...lest anyone cheat you." He uses a word *sulagógeó*, which is only found here in Scripture. It gives the idea of being taken captive, as if plunder in war, or to be made a victim through fraud. If one isn't watching, the result will come surprisingly, and there will be great loss.

From there, what is to be watched for is stated, and also what its characteristics are like. One must watch for possibly being ensnared "through philosophy and empty deceit." In the Greek, there is an article before "philosophy," and thus it says, "the philosophy." Not all philosophy is bad; Paul cites some reasonable philosophy in Acts 17. However, there is specific philosophy which is then described by Paul as "empty deceit." These words explain "the philosophy." Therefore, it should read, "the philosophy which is empty deceit." With this, Paul will next go on to describe the characteristics of such philosophy so it can, in fact, be watched out for.

First, such philosophy is "according to the tradition of men." Jesus continually warned Israel of the traditions of men, such as in Matthew 15:2-6 and Mark 7:3-9. Such traditions derived their authority, not from Scripture or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as passed on through the Apostles, but rather it came from the authority of men. And these traditions were two-fold.

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

The first consisted of those which were derived from the Jewish traditions, such as referred to by Jesus, and then there were those of the Greek philosophers. They often sought after wisdom, but not the wisdom of God. Instead, it was of superstition.

Secondly, he notes philosophy which is “according to the basic principles of the world.” The word translated as “principles” is *stoicheion*. It means “properly, *fundamentals*, like with the *basic components* of a philosophy, structure, etc.; (figuratively) ‘first principles,’ like the basic fundamentals of Christianity” (HELPS Word Studies).

It further refers to “the *rudiments* with which mankind . . . were *indoctrinated* (before the time of Christ), i.e. the elements of religious training or the ceremonial precepts common alike to the worship of Jews and of Gentiles” (J. Thayer).

Both Jew and Gentile had worldly systems in that they did not transcend this world. Each participated in ritual sacrifices. Each had certain feast days. Each had systems which only pointed to spiritual and heavenly things.

Paul uses the term *stoicheion* to speak of these systems in a negative light. They refer to any such worldly system – whether law or Gentile religion. The only difference is that the law actually pointed to Christ. Other than that, it was still only a type and a shadow.

He finishes up with the thought that these things are “not according to Christ.” Christ is the fulfillment of the law. Therefore, to mandate observing anything from the law which is fulfilled, instead of honoring Christ who did the fulfilling, is empty deceit. Further, there are other Jewish philosophies, such a Kabbalism, which are mere traditions, and which are not even in accord with the law. And beyond that are countless other worldly philosophical systems which are merely idle ramblings of man, and which are intended to draw the believer in Christ away from what is sound. Only when a philosophy is according to Christ, can it be reasonable and worthwhile.

Life application: As noted above, not all philosophy is bad, but one must be extremely careful to pay heed to what is being taught. If any doctrine, philosophy, or teaching draws one’s attention away from Christ, it is empty deceit, and it is to be rejected. Always be sure to prepare yourself mentally for such things by being grounded in Scripture.

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; Colossians 2:9

There is an intentional emphasis of the words in Greek which are intended to destroy the claims of heretics concerning who Jesus Christ is, in both role and nature. These emphatic words include, “all the fullness of the Godhead,” then the word “dwells,” and also the word “bodily.” All are emphatic. Each is targeted against some heretical idea concerning Christ.

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The words, “For in Him” are speaking of Christ who was noted in the preceding verse. Paul then uses the word, “dwells.” It is a word which indicates to “reside,” or “to settle down as a permanent resident.” In Christ is this type of permanent dwelling where there is “all the fullness.” This term recalls his earlier words in verse 1:19. There can be only one sound and reasonable explanation for the statement. He is the dwelling place of what will next be named, which is “the Godhead.” The word for “Godhead,” *theotés*, is found nowhere else in Scripture, but it signifies “God’s essential (personal) deity, as belonging to Christ” (HELPS Word Studies).

From this, Paul adds on his final emphatic word, “bodily.” The word is *sómatikós*, and it is also found nowhere else in Scripture. It is an adverb referring to the complete embodiment of the fullness of God. This then is contrasted to any supposed distribution of the Godhead through any other intermediaries. In other words, it is an argument against any heresy that Jesus Christ is anything other than fully God, and the dwelling place of the Godhead.

The word for “dwells” is in the present tense, and therefore, it is denoting “an eternal and essential characteristic of Christ’s being” (Vincent’s Word Studies). From all ages, and unto all ages, Christ is the place where God dwells. As Christ took on human form, this means that the fullness of God chose to take up residence in this human form from that time on. The Person of Christ is the place from which all the fullness of the Godhead issues forth from. This is now eternally so.

What Paul is doing is refuting heretics on the left and on the right. Those who deny His deity are proven false. Those who deny His humanity are also proven false. He is the God/Man; He is the place where all the fullness of the Godhead dwells; and His body is a real, material body. To believe anything else is to believe the lies of the devil. It is something warned against by John with the words –

“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” 1 John 2:22, 23

Life application: To err in believing the truth of what the Bible teaches about Jesus is an error which has eternal consequences. The words of Scripture concerning both the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ are clear and precise. To twist them away from either precept is to mock God who has given us this word for us to accept. Don’t be a denier, put away your biases and presuppositions, and bow your knee to Jesus Christ now, while you have the chance.

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