

WARNINGS AGAINST ERROR, PART 2

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

INTRODUCTION:

1. This epistle was written to warn the Christians of Colosse about the error of Gnosticism (cf. 2:4, 8).
2. The Bible teaches us that Satan enslaves people through false doctrine.
3. First Timothy 4:1 says, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."
4. Hebrews 13:9 says, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines."
5. People enslaved by Satan's errors think they have found the truth, but are actually brainwashed by "vain (empty) deceit" (2:8).
6. The word "deceit" (2:8) reminds us that Satan is a deceiver and is behind all false teachings.
7. Revelation 12:9 says Satan "deceiveth the whole world."
8. Our Lord said in Matthew 24:4, "Take heed that no man deceive you."
9. Last week we looked at the problem of worldly philosophy and ritualism. We also touched upon the problem of legalism. Tonight we will consider again the error of legalism, as well as the errors of mysticism, and asceticism.

I. BEWARE OF LEGALISM (2:16).

1. As I mentioned last week, the word "legalism" is often misused. Worldly churches with low standards of Christian conduct, and loose standards of dress and music, etc. often condemn stricter conservative churches, and call them "legalistic."
2. Many untaught Christians are confused over this.
3. The word "legalism" means, "dependence on the law rather than depending on Christ." In Scripture it refers to churches that mix law with grace.
4. The book of Galatians deals extensively with the error of legalism. Galatians 2:21 says, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."
5. Legalism refers to churches that teach salvation by works (SDA, RCC, etc.). It would also include Pentecostal churches or other churches which teach one has to be baptized in order to be saved.

6. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Period.
7. "Holy days" (2:16) is where we get our English word "holiday." It literally means "feast day" or "festival." It refers here to the annual festival of the Jews, such as the Passover.
8. "The new moon" (2:16) refers to the sacrifice on the first day of every month. Numbers 28:11 says, "And in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD." The Jewish sabbath (2:16) and the other Old Testament laws and customs are not binding on Christians (cf. Gal. 4:9-11).
9. The sabbath principle -- one day set apart for rest and worship -- is now maintained by not working on Sunday, the Lord's Day. Sunday is the New Testament day for rest, worship, and Christian service.
10. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "The observance of the Lord's Day is one of the most essential features of all true spiritual life" (*Studies in Colossians*).
11. The Mosaic Law was "a shadow of things to come" (2:17; cf. Heb. 10:1). "Body" here means, "that which casts a shadow as distinguished from the shadow itself," i.e. "substance."
12. In this dispensation of grace, no Christian is to be "judged" (2:16) for not following Old Testament rules and customs.
13. All of the Old Testament types and shadows and sacrifices and ordinances pointed to Christ. When Christ came their purpose was fully served and we are now living in a new dispensation (2:17).

II. BEWARE OF MYSTICISM (2:18, 19).

1. Mysticism is dangerous because it is based on feelings rather than objective fact. Any religious experience that is contrary to Scripture is wrong.
2. Mystics look for truth inwardly, going by their feelings and intuition, and internal sensations rather than by the Word of God.
3. I remember many years witnessing to a Sikh. His daughter-in-law had visited our church a few times. This Sikh told me he wanted to know Jesus, and experience Jesus in a very intimate way -- apart from the Bible.
4. He was not interested in a serious Bible study. This is the danger of mysticism, and this has crept into many churches, especially Pentecostal churches.
5. Mysticism was a big part of Gnosticism. Regarding this, Paul said, "Let no man beguile you..." (2:18; cf. 2:4).

6. "Voluntary humility" (2:18) means a false humility. If it is genuine humility it is not "voluntary" (determined). Like the dangerous and deceitful Richard III, who declared, "I thank my God for my humility" (Shakespeare, *Richard III*).
7. Charles Ellicott said "voluntary humility" was a false humility, and to believe that God is so inaccessible that He could only be approached through the intercession of angels was "a false and perverted lowliness" (cited by W.H. Griffith Thomas).
8. H.A. Ironside said this about those who pray to saints or angels because they believe they are too unworthy to go directly to God: "This sounds like lowliness of mind and humility of spirit. It is really the most subtle kind of pride, for it involves proposing to be wiser than the revealed Word of God."
9. The Bible teaches we have direct access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, our one and only mediator (I Tim. 2:5).
10. Hebrews 10:19 says, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus."
11. "Let no man beguile you of your reward..." (2:18). Getting entangled in error would involve the loss of Christian liberty.
12. "Worshipping of angels" (2:18) has long been a popular practice. Even the apostle John, after seeing and hearing the marvelous prophecies and visions recorded in the book of Revelation, "fell down to worship before the feet of the angel" who showed him these things (Rev. 22:8).
13. But the angel corrected John and said to him, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren, the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book. Worship God" (Rev. 22:9).
14. Today there are scores of strange books, television shows, and movies about angels. They are produced by Roman Catholics, Mormons, Pentecostals, New-age people, Muslims and other unbelievers. They should be rejected and ignored.
15. Colossians 2:18 says these false teachers intrude into those things which they have not seen, vainly puffed up by their "fleshly (carnal) mind."
16. W.H. Griffith Thomas says, "We must never allow ourselves to be defrauded of any blessing that is rightfully ours in union and communion with our divine Lord and Head" (2:18, 19).
17. "And not holding the Head" (2:19) means they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. A true member of

the body of Christ is in vital union with Christ, and is connected to the other members of the body.

III. BEWARE OF ASCETICISM (2:20-23).

1. Asceticism can be good up to a point -- denying self (fasting, etc.). It is wise for a Christian to avoid certain worldly pleasures (e.g., alcohol, tobacco).
2. However, asceticism goes beyond what the Bible teaches and has led to monks and hermits living in isolation.
3. Asceticism involves avoiding certain foods (2:21), but this is often contrary to Scripture (cf. I Tim. 4:1-5).
4. Christians are allowed to eat any kind of food, even food offered up to idols.
5. Our Lord said, "Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:18-23).
6. Romans 14:1-3 says, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him."
7. Both Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 teach it is okay for Christians to eat meat that was offered in sacrifice to idols. However, if it offends others we should abstain.
8. Those of us who are saved have died with Christ (Col. 2:20; 3:3). Therefore, our eyes should be on eternal things (3:1), not on things which will soon perish (2:22).
9. Colossians 2:23 says there is "indeed a shew (appearance) of wisdom in will worship (self-imposed ascetic restrictions), and humility (cf. vs. 18), and neglecting of the body..."

10. "Neglecting the body" (2:23) may appear spiritual, but is actually very carnal (cf. *Scofield Bible* margin note).
11. "Not in any honour (value) to the satisfying of the flesh" (2:23b). "Satisfying" here means, "to satiate the desires of the flesh" (Lexicon).
12. Paul is saying asceticism is of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. Ascetic practices are of no help in fighting the lusts of the flesh.
13. The Gnostics taught that all matter -- including the human body -- was evil. This is contrary to Scripture. Genesis 1:31 says, "And God saw every thing (includes man and woman) that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."
14. The Psalmist said, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psalm 139:14).
15. But the Gnostics taught that all matter -- including the human body -- was evil. This type of thinking led to self-whippings and other deviant practices still practiced by some Roman Catholics today.

CONCLUSION:

1. Paul reminded the believers in Colosse that they died with Christ (2:20; cf. 3:3). Paul said in II Timothy 2:11, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him."
2. This is taught very clearly in Romans 6. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Romans 6:6, 7).
3. Therefore, we are dead "from the rudiments of the world," i.e., the basic, elementary principles -- the "ABC's"-- of worldly religion (2:20; cf. 2:8).
4. Paul is not referring to the two Christian "ordinances" (2:20), baptism and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances were given to us by the Lord Himself.
5. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are simple, whereas the ordinances condemned by Paul

apparently were complex and ritualistic -- "Touch not; taste not; handle not" (2:21), and were devised by men (2:22b).

6. The key to victory over sin, and victory over religious deception is found in verse 10. Our union with Christ gives us wisdom and discernment.
7. Our union with Christ conveys grace and power.
8. Our union with Christ controls our lives and enables us to do God's will (cf. 1:9-14).