

Col 2:8-15

The False Philosophy and the Sufficiency of Christ

Paul has been expressing his great desire for them to remain firm in their faith and grow in it not being confused by any philosophy that would try to lead them away from being confident in the complete supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as their Savior.

- He has been doing this by emphasizing truth with positive encouragement.
- He now directly exposes the errors of the philosophy they were confronted with along with giving some warnings.
- He starts off telling them just how bad this false philosophy was, calling it empty deception based solely on worldly man-made ideas. He warns them not to be taken captive by it.

The False Philosophy Exposed (2:8)

Philosophy

- Any elaborate system of thought and/or moral discipline.
- The three sects of Judaism were called philosophies: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Each had their own way of looking at things – their own philosophy.
- Remember from our introduction - the philosophies of the Essenes appeared to have many similarities with the particular teaching the Colossians were faced with.

Empty deceptive philosophy

“Paul is warning against the kind of philosophy that amounts to nothing more than empty deceit. It is deceptive, for, while it promises big things (*justification, knowledge, sanctification*) to those who obey its ordinances, it cannot redeem its promises”. Hendrickson

Why was this philosophy empty deception?

- Because it was according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of this world, rather than according to Christ.
- Paul uses the same terms in verses 20-22.
- “Elementary principles of the world” – key phrase to understand
 - “Elements” – Greek word “stoicheia” – several different uses
 - Elements or units in a row – 1,2,3 etc or A,B,C, etc
 - Elements of the physical world – earth, air, fire, water
 - Elementary principles – rudiments or basics elements of teaching – elementary teaching, rudiments of grammar, elementary school
 - Use in scripture
 - 2 Pet 3:10 – The physical elements of the world will be consumed by fire at the second coming of the Lord. *Not the context of Colossians.*
 - Heb 5:12 – The very basic doctrines of the Bible – emphasis is on going past these and learning deeper truths. *Not exactly the context of*

Colossians, even though in Colossians the teachings of the ceremonial law are the issue.

- Gal 4:3-5 – The Law – being held in bondage by it
- Gal 4:9 -11 – Very similar wording as found in Colossians
 - Why did Paul call the Law “elemental things” that were weak and worthless which would enslave them? What is the whole context of Galatians?
 - The wrong use of the Law: looking to it as a way to be justified.
 - The Colossian Heresy – same idea - added to faith in Christ strict observance of the law as a way to be complete
- Use in Colossians
 - Elementary principles of the world
 - Worldly teaching that made the wrong use of Mosaic Ceremonial Law which taught basic principles of salvation at a “child’s level” (OT vs. NT) using physical and material things to point toward eternal spiritual truths that would be fulfilled in the Messiah.
 - Plus it added other worldly ideas (extra-biblical) of mysticism and asceticism as ways to gain closer access to God and overcome sin.
 - According to the traditions of men
 - The worldly minded person always looks at strict observance of rules, regulation, ceremonies, and rituals as means to be justified before God
 - They also have tendency to look beyond the Scriptures to find other ways to God.
 - Not according to Christ
 - The Mosaic Law was meant to point to Christ
 - In Christ is the true source of justification
 - In Christ is found all wisdom and knowledge
 - This deceptive philosophy was leading them away from Christ as their sufficient Savior and Lord.

The Sufficiency of Christ Expounded (2:8-14)

His Supreme Person (2:9-10)

- The God-man
 - Fullness of Deity
 - Completely God – completely the Second Person of the Trinity
 - Equal with the Father and the Spirit – a member of the Godhead
 - Nothing of the Second Person’s deity is missing in Jesus
 - Christ is not Godlike – He is God
 - Fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form

- God dwells in the man Jesus
 - A real human being with a real human soul
- The God-man in whom we are complete
 - By faith we are placed in Christ – mystical union with Him
 - Through this union with Christ we are made complete – lit. “full”
 - Our “fullness” - know God fully, fully reconciled to God, and fully enabled by his power to live for God.
 - We do not need to look for these things anywhere else, through any other means, or from any other being.
- The God-man who is Lord over all
 - Head over all rule and authority
 - 1:16 – powers and authorities in the spiritual realm.
 - Because Christ is Lord over all spiritual beings, it doesn’t make sense to worship them (angels) or seek knowledge of God from them through visions or mystical experiences.

His Sufficient Work (2:11-14)

Paul shows just how completely Christ saves us using the symbolism of Circumcision and Baptism

Circumcision (11)

- OT sign and seal of:
 - Being a member of God’s people
 - The promises and responsibilities of that relationship
 - God would be their God and bless them
 - They were to obey God and wholly serve & worship Him alone
- The “body of the flesh”
 - The flesh – Paul always used to mean the sinful nature we are born with
 - The body of the flesh – the whole sin nature – the sinful nature we have while living in our current mortal bodies
 - Paul in Romans, said “Who will save me from this body of death?”
- The removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, a circumcision made without hands
 - Circumcision was a sign that they were God’s people
 - He expected them to act like his people, i.e. to obey
 - Just like they cut off and threw away their circumcised flesh, they were supposed to throw off their old sinful habits and instead make a habit of serving God.

- However the Old Covenant only commanded this but did not promise the ability to do it – the ability to resist the sinful flesh/nature – OT history shows most failed in this
- New Covenant promised something the Old did not – Jer 31:33, Joel 2:28-29
 - The pouring out of the Holy Spirit to change their hearts
 - Creating a new nature within them that would empower them to say no to their sinful nature and yes to God
 - It was an inward circumcision of the heart that was made without hands – by the Holy Spirit – by the Spirit of Christ.
- This had already happened to them – in Him “you” were...
 - They had completely received the thing that was pictured in the OT outward ordinance of circumcision.
 - They were therefore complete in Christ – in Him they have had their hearts changed by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism (12)

- Replaces circumcision as a better sign and seal
 - Paul moves quickly from the symbolism of circumcision to that of baptism without blinking an eye.
 - Not trying to make the point that baptism takes the place of circumcision
 - In his mind that is already clear so he easily interchanges one for the other
 - He makes the transition to baptism because it more fully shows all that happens to us in salvation
- More clearly points to the work of the Holy Spirit (compared to circumcision)
 - Salvation from the power of sin
 - OT - various forms of baptisms and washings with water – water was always being poured or sprinkled on something to signify ceremonial cleansing or consecration
 - Poured water on hands, cups, pots, bowls...
 - Sprinkled water or blood on people with hyssop branches
 - Holy Spirit always figured as coming down upon, poured out upon, or filling
 - Water is poured or sprinkled in the sacrament of baptism to signify this
 - Baptism is a sign and seal of the Holy Spirit being poured into our hearts
 - Cleansing with water pictures our hearts being cleansed of sin
 - Ongoing sanctifying work → [salvation from the power of sin](#)
 - *Heidelberg Catechism Q 70b* – focuses on washing away of sin in our hearts by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit
- Represents our union with Christ
 - WCF 2:3 - The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son
 - Christ indwells the believer by the Holy Spirit
 - Faith is the means God uses to unite us to Him
 - Christ is in us and we are in Christ – mystical union

- United to Christ in his death, burial and resurrection
 - We participate(d) with Him in these events
 - “Buried with Him”, “Raised up with Him”
 - Therefore we receive the benefits of these events.
 - Baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ.
- WSC Q94 – focuses on our union with Christ – ingrafting into Christ – and our commitment to follow him

Benefits of being united to Christ, of receiving the circumcision of Christ (13-14)

- Forgiveness of sin
 - “We were dead in transgressions” – guilty
 - The Law condemned us as guilty
 - A certificate of guilt was written against us
 - His death on the cross for sin became effective for us
 - The debt of sin is paid for
 - The certificate of guilt was nailed to the cross
 - Washed clean of its guilt by Christ’s blood – its guilt has been taken away from us
 - [Salvation from the guilt of sin](#)
 - *Heidelberg Catechism Q70a* – focuses on the washing away of the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ resulting in forgiveness
- Raised to newness of life
 - “We were dead in the uncircumcision of our flesh” – spiritual dead
 - His resurrection from the dead became effective for us spiritually
 - Spiritually born again – regeneration – raised to newness of life
 - The process of sanctification began – Holy Spirit working in our hearts to change us to live for God (circumcision made without hands)
 - [The removal of the power of sin](#)
 - *Heidelberg Catechism Q 70b* – focuses on the sanctifying work of the Spirit

The Supreme Authority of Christ Vindicated (2:15)

- Through his death, burial and resurrection, Jesus disarmed and triumphed over all his and our enemies: The Devil, sin, and death.
- WSC Q 26 – our victorious King
- Psalm 2

Conclusion

“Colossians, see how completely Jesus Christ saves you! Hallelujah what a Savior!! You have been made complete in Him – so don’t look anywhere else.”