

Colossians 2:8-23 • Christ the Head

Introduction

It wasn't the Tabernacle itself that was holy or to be worshiped, but the God who dwelt therein. Neither was the Temple and all of the items and treasure in it of any spiritual value but the God served by them. Over and over man seems to have to be reminded that even the "things" of God are not to take the place of God Himself. We're not to grow into the "things" of God, but into Christ, the head.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. ⁹For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ¹¹and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ¹²having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

[Read v.8-15]

Q: In verse 8, Paul uses the word "captive" to describe what can happen to those who teach false doctrine. Look at 2 Tim 2:24-26 and compare. What does this imply about the source of the false teaching?

"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

—2 Timothy 2:24-26

A: The fact that it says "no one" implies that Paul had in mind a particular person. The term captive was used of taking captives in war and leading them away as booty. It implies that accepting the philosophy causes one to be in spiritual bondage, and the source for that is Satan himself.

Q: What is the manner in which the Christians at Colossae can be taken "captive"? Are we to assume that Paul condemns philosophy?

A: By following "philosophy and empty deception." This is the only occurrence of the word "philosophy" in the NT. The definition of the word "philosophy" is a noble one, literally meaning "love of wisdom."

Application: What are the consequences of Christians believing things that are not true, and failing to know and believe things that are true?

Q: In verse 8, what are the 3 descriptive phrases that Paul uses to characterize this hollow and deceptive system?

- First, it is after the "**tradition of men**"; that is, man-made, and probably handed down by word of mouth. Note that Jesus got after the Pharisees for making "traditions of men" equal to God's Law.
- Second, it was a philosophy that depends upon "**the elementary principles of the world**". This phrase has multiple meanings in the Greek, originally denoting the letters of the alphabet, its root meaning being "things in a row." The term then came to mean the "ABCs" of learning. This term is also used in Gal. 4:3 and Heb. 5:12 in reference to the Law, and implies that the Law was simply elementary or basic instruction, that of a pre-schooler. It may also refer to "elemental spirits"; that is, demonic.
- Third, it was a system "**not according to Christ.**" This is its most telling criticism.

Application: What are some current teachings or philosophies floating about in our culture today that fit these descriptions?

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Q: What does verse 9 tell us about the nature of Christ?

A: The phrase “*fullness of Deity*” means that Christ did not just have divine qualities and attributes (as Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons would say), but that He has the very essence of God. (Compare this statement with John 1:1.) The word “*dwells*” suggests permanent residence. The point is this: Jesus Christ is fully God, something that the deceptive philosophy being taught denied.

Q: Because of Christ’s divine nature, in verses 10-14 name all the things that you the believer have as a result of being “in Him.”

1. We are made complete (10a; cf. Eph 1:3)
2. We have a leader who is over all rule and authority, personally as well as universally (10b; cf. Eph 1:21)
3. We are part of a new covenant people (circumcision of the heart), with all its blessings, including eternal life and the promise of heaven (11a)
4. Our flesh has been crucified with Christ (11b)
5. We have died to our old nature (12a; cf. Rom 6:6)
6. We have been given a position with Christ in the heavenlies (12b; cf. Eph 2:6)
7. We have been made alive with Him (spiritual life; promise of resurrection; 13a)
8. Our sins have been forgiven (13b)
9. We have protection from the Accuser (14a)
10. The curse against us has been nailed to the cross (14b; cf. Gal. 3:13)

Application: Go around the room and ask each individual which one stands out to them personally at the moment, and why.

Q: Go through verses 9-15 and count the number of times you find the words “Christ,” “He” and “Him.” What is the point, therefore, of these verses?

A: Depends on the translation used; in NASB, 15x. The point is this: Jesus Christ is **everything!** To listen and heed to any teaching or philosophy that is otherwise “*not according to Christ*” is not settling for the best or for the truth.

¹⁶Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—¹⁷things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

²⁰If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”²²(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?²³These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

[Read v.16-23]

Q: What were some of the things that this “philosophy” was teaching?

A: What you eat; what you drink; what festivals to celebrate; seasonal observances, such as vernal equinox; what day to worship on, and what you do on that day; asceticism; angeolatry; and experiencing visions and manifestations. Many of these things were of Jewish origin, but there was obviously some Paganism mixed in.

Q: Things in the OT like keeping the Sabbath, dietary restrictions, feasts and festivals played what role before Christ came?

A: They simply pointed to Christ. They were “shadows” of what was to come. Because Christ fulfilled the Law, the Law is no longer binding on those who are in Christ. Believers are now to be ruled by the Holy Spirit, not the Law.

Q: What was the root problem, as expressed at the beginning of verse 19?

A: Some Christians in Colossae were moving away from Christ as the center of all. The subtle indication here is that there was a strong personality in the church, a Christian, who was the proponent of all this, and his root problem was that he didn't “hold fast to the head” (v. 19).

Application: *There's one main point of application here. What is it? (Keep Christ the head of your life.) What are some specific ways by which we can keep Christ as the head of our lives?*