



COLOSSIANS

Centered on Christ

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LESSON 3: THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL ADD-ONS

The church at Colossae was being infiltrated with false teachings who were telling these Christians that Christ alone is insufficient, that righteousness can only be achieved through Christ plus something else.

A. The Central Question

How can we respond to someone who says salvation comes through Jesus Christ but righteousness comes only by following certain rules and regulations?

B. The Text: Colossians 2:8-23

⁸Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. ⁹ For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. ¹⁰ So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

It's not Christ + physical circumcision

¹¹ When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision-- the cutting away of your sinful nature. ¹² For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. ¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

It's not Christ + rules

¹⁵In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. ¹⁶ So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. ¹⁷ For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.

It's not Christ + asceticism, or Christ + angel worship

¹⁸ Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, ¹⁹ and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. ²⁰ You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, ²¹ "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? ²² Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. ²³ These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires. (Col. 2:8-23 NLT)

C. Discussion Questions

1. What are the sources of the "empty philosophies" Paul describes in this passage? (Hint: see Col. 2:8).
2. Some false teachers were saying that Jesus was not God, or that he could not have had a physical body because anything physical is evil. What does Paul say about this? (Hint: see Col. 2:9).
3. Why is there a human tendency to think we must follow certain rules such as "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!" in order to become more righteous? How effective is "rule keeping"? (Hint: see Col. 2:23).
4. In what ways is the believer in Christ complete? (Col. 2:10, see also Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:52, Col. 1:22 and 2 Cor. 5:21)? Does it mean reaching a state of sinlessness in this life? (see 1 John 1:8).

D. Comments

In Colossians 2:8-23 Paul warns against false teachings and encourages believers to remain steadfast in their faith in Christ. Here are the main points Paul makes in these verses:

1. **Warning Against Deceptive Philosophy:** Paul begins by warning the Colossian believers to beware of deceptive philosophy and empty deceit that is based on human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world. He emphasizes the importance of being rooted and built up in Christ, rather than being taken captive by worldly philosophies.
2. **Fullness in Christ:** Paul emphasizes the fullness and sufficiency of Christ. He teaches that in Christ, believers have been circumcised with a circumcision made

without hands, referring to a spiritual circumcision of the heart. In Christ, they have also been buried with him in baptism and raised to new life. This underscores the central importance of Christ in the believer's life and salvation.

3. **Freedom from Legalism:** Paul addresses the issue of legalism, warning against the imposition of human regulations and religious rituals as a means of attaining righteousness. He emphasizes that such practices are of no value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh. Instead, he encourages believers to focus on Christ, who is the true source of spiritual growth and transformation.
4. **Christ's Triumph over Powers and Authorities:** Paul asserts Christ's triumph over the spiritual powers and authorities, including those of the demonic realm. Through his death and resurrection, Christ disarmed these powers, making a public spectacle of them and triumphing over them. This highlights the victory believers have in Christ and their freedom from the bondage of spiritual forces.
5. **Warning Against Asceticism:** Paul cautions against adopting ascetic practices and rigid adherence to human regulations, as they are ultimately futile in dealing with the sinful nature. He emphasizes that true victory over sin and spiritual growth come through a living relationship with Christ, not through external observances or self-imposed rules.
6. **Focus on the Substance, Not the Shadow:** Paul contrasts the shadowy rituals and regulations of the Old Testament law with the substance found in Christ. He encourages believers to not be judged by others in matters of food, drink, festivals, or Sabbaths, as these things are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. This underscores the centrality of Christ and his redemptive work in the believer's life and spiritual journey.

Overall, Colossians 2:8-23 highlights the supremacy of Christ, the danger of false teachings, and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation and spiritual growth. It urges believers to remain steadfast in their faith in Christ and to avoid being misled by deceptive philosophies or legalistic practices.

E. Application

1. **Guard yourself against _____.**

Just as Paul warned the Colossian Christians to beware of deceptive philosophy and human traditions, modern believers are also called to discern truth from falsehood. In a world filled with various ideologies, philosophies, and spiritual teachings.

2. **Remain** _____.

In the midst of shifting cultural norms and moral relativism, Christians can find stability and strength by deepening their relationship with Christ through prayer, study of Scripture, fellowship with other believers, and participation in the sacraments.

3. **Stay free from** _____.

Just as Paul cautioned against the dangers of legalism and human regulations, modern Christians must guard against the temptation to rely on external rituals or religious observances for salvation or spiritual growth. True freedom is found in Christ alone, not in adherence to a list of rules or traditions.

4. **Stay centered on Christ, not** _____.

Christians are encouraged to set their minds on things above, not on earthly things. In a culture that often prioritizes materialism, success, and pleasure, believers are called to keep their eyes fixed on Christ and to seek first the kingdom of God.

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