

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. Heresy at Colossae
 - 1. It was tied to Judaism and Gnosticism.
 - 2. They emphasized special freedom, super protection, strict behavior, super knowledge and a superior attitude.
 - 3. Like all heresies, Jesus is not enough.
- B. An outline of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - 2. Doctrinal Instruction (1:15-29)
 - 3. Warnings against false teaching (2:1-23)
 - a. Encouragement to persevere in the faith (1-7)
 - b. True doctrine is found in Christ (8-15)
 - c. False doctrines of men (16-23)
- C. Review of last week
 - 1. False teachers declare that there is more but Paul proclaimed that Jesus is enough.
 - 2. All wisdom and knowledge are stored in Christ.
 - 3. Christians are called to live what they believe.
- D. Concerning this section, G. Osborne, *Paul has been preparing for this moment with nearly every point he has made thus far. Now he opens his arguments countering the dangerous ideas being promulgated by certain teachers at Colossae.*

COLOSSIANS 2:8-15, TRUE DOCTRINE IS FOUND IN CHRIST

- A. Paul warned the Colossians against being captivated by false teaching (8)
 - 1. He admonished them not to follow the path of human wisdom (8a), ***See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world,***
 - a. *see to it*
 - 1) It means to *beware, watch out for.*
 - 2) Paul strongly warned them to take seriously the matter of false teaching.
 - b. *that no one takes you captive*
 - 1) It means *to take off as spoil.*
 - 2) Here, Paul is speaking of false teachers carrying the Colossians away from the truth into the slavery of error.
 - c. Paul listed ways false teachers would try to ensnare the Colossian believers.
 - 1) *philosophy*
 - a) It is the *love or pursuit of wisdom.*
 - b) In this verse, it means *human understanding* in contrast to divinely revealed knowledge.
 - c) T. Constable, *It refers to the speculations and ideas of false teachers not rooted in divine revelation. These ideas had come down by merely human tradition.*
 - 2) *empty deceit*
 - a) It is *that which gives a false impression.*
 - b) Philosophy that is not based in divinely revealed truth is unprofitable.
 - c) Ephesians 5:6, *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*
 - 3) *human tradition*
 - a) It is that which is handed down from one generation to the next which would include the teaching of rabbis.
 - b) W. Barclay, *It was a product of the human mind; and not a message of the Word of God.*
 - c) Illustrations of human tradition
 - 1] It forbade eating with unwashed hands but permitted worship with an unclean heart.
 - 2] It was precise in the means of washing cups but unable to teach how to purify one's conscience.
 - 3] It had a fancy ceremony for drawing water from a well but refused to receive living water.

- 4) *elemental spirits of the world*
 - a) *elemental spirits* may also be translated *elementary principles*.
 - b) There are several ways to understand these words.
 - 1] *elemental* could refer to the elemental forces of the word, as earth, fire, water and air. Paul would be encouraging the Colossians not to become overly focused on material things.
 - 2] It could refer to elementary teachings for beginning learners.
 - a] Galatians 4:3, *In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*
 - b] Hebrews 5:12, *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,*
 - 3] It could refer to the demonic powers mentioned in Colossians.
 - a] Colossians 1:13, *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,*
 - b] Colossians 2:15, *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*
 - c) E. Peterson gives an interesting translation of this verse, *They spread their lies through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings.*

2. He encouraged them to be captivated by Christ (8b), ***and not according to Christ.***

- a. *not according* looks back to *takes you captive*.
- b. Christians are to be taken captive, captivated by Christ.
 - 1) Colossians 2:3, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*
 - 2) True religion is relational, knowing Christ, not just knowing about Christ.
- c. H. Spence, *The views combated were “not according to Christ,” for they made him something less and lower than that which he is.*

B. Paul gave them reasons why Jesus is supreme (9-15)

1. It is because of Who He is (9), ***For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,***

- a. *For* introduces another reason why Jesus is sufficient, He is fully God in human form, Colossians 1:19, *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*
- b. *fullness of deity dwells*
 - 1) The essence or nature of God fully resides in Jesus because that is His nature.
 - 2) Nida, *...for just what God is, that is exactly what Christ is.*
- c. *bodily*
 - 1) John 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - 2) 1 John 4:2-3, *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*
- d. Jesus is supremely unique.
 - 1) He is one Person with two natures, human and divine, equal with the Father in deity and equal with man in humanity, except for sin.
 - 2) John Eadie, *Jesus has not only the fulness of Divinity, but has it in a human shape-has a heart of a brother to love you, and the arm of God to protect and bless you.*

2. It is because of what Jesus has done, (10-14)

- a. He made them complete because He is over all (10), ***and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.***
 - 1) Christians partake of the fullness of Christ.
 - a) John 1:16, *For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*
 - b) Ephesians 3:19, *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*
 - c) M. Anders, *Jesus Christ is completely God, and we are complete in him. We just need to grow. The Christian always grows by nutrition (feeding on his Word) and not by addition.*

- 2) Christians need not look elsewhere for the spiritual needs because Jesus is supreme.
 - a) Jesus is over *all rule and authority*.
 - 1] Colossians 1:16, *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*
 - 2] Colossians 2:15, *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*
 - b) There are no spiritual forces or concepts that are not found in Christ.
 - 1] M. Anders, *Fullness is not found in the host of spirit beings supposedly emanating from God. They are not the fullness of God; Christ is...It is futile to look for spiritual fulfillment or maturity in any other place than Jesus Christ, who is the treasure house of all wisdom and knowledge and the fullness of deity.*
 - 2] J. McGee, *What is your question? What is it you need today? Are you carried away by human philosophy? Then turn to Christ. Are you carried away by enticing words? Are you carried away by the systems and traditions of men? Turn to Christ.*
- b. He cut off the domination of their sinful natures through His sacrificial payment (11-14)
 - 1) They were regenerated by spiritual circumcision (11), ***In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,***
 - a) Paul reminded the Colossians that they were spiritually circumcised by Christ
 - 1] Judaizers said that one must be physically circumcised to be saved but completeness in Christ is based on spiritual circumcision.
 - 2] Deuteronomy 30:6, *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*
 - 3] Romans 2:28-29, *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*
 - b) A Christian is regenerated by *putting off* his sinful nature which is accomplished by Christ.
 - 1] Romans 7:24-25, *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*
 - 2] Hebrews 10:16, *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,*
 - 3] Galatians 5:24, *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*
 - 4] M. Vincent, *In spiritual circumcision, through Christ, the whole corrupt, carnal nature is put away like a garment which is taken off and laid aside.*
 - 2) They were spiritually baptized into Christ's body by his death and resurrection (12), ***having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.***
 - a) Paul reminded the Colossians that they were spiritually baptized into Christ.
 - 1] 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*
 - 2] Romans 6:4, *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*
 - b) Spiritual baptism places a person into the Body of Christ with two results.
 - 1] The old self was buried at the crucifixion of Christ.
 - 2] The new self was raised as Christ was resurrected from the dead.
 - 3] 2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*
 - 4] J. McGee, *When Christ died you and I died with Him; He took our place. And when He was raised, we were raised in Him, and we are now joined to a living Christ.*

- c) Spiritual baptism is the work of God accomplished by faith.
 - 1] Neither religious ritual, circumcision nor baptism, can make us alive in Christ.
 - 2] M. Anders, *Paul is speaking of the spiritual reality behind the physical rite...The Jews began mistakenly to think that the physical ritual was sufficient all by itself.*

- d) Spiritual baptism is an incentive to live out what has been experienced in the new birth
 - 1] R. Wilson, *Paul's constant challenge to his readers is that they should live a life in conformity with the new order into which they have entered.*
 - 2] G. Osborne, *The resurrection power is not simply experienced one time, at conversion, but is an ever-available strength meant to be experienced on a daily basis. The resurrection life is a present reality and not just a past act.*

- 3) God forgave their sins based on Jesus' payment at the cross (13-14), ***And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.***
 - a) They were reminded of their depraved condition before trusting Christ.
 - 1] Paul reminded the Colossians that their salvation took place while they were spiritually dead.
 - 2] They were sinners by practice (*trespasses*) and by nature (*uncircumcision*).
 - 3] We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

 - b) They were declared innocent because legal payment was made for them at the cross.
 - 1] Christians are not just forgiven for their sins they are given new lives in Him.
 - a] Titus 3:7, *so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*
 - b] G. Osborne, *Those who deserve eternal condemnation now share the new life of Christ and will be joint-heirs with him in the heavenly reward.*

 - 2] The new life is made possible because payment was made to cancel our debt.
 - a] Romans 8:2, *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*
 - b] F. Bruce, *Just as His own indictment was fastened there, says Paul, so he takes the indictment drawn up against his people and nails it to His cross.*
 - c] N. Geisler, *Since people cannot keep the Law, it is like a bill of indebtedness. So people, unable to pay the debt, are criminals. But Jesus took ... away this criminal charge, this certificate of indebtedness, by His death. It is as if He were nailing it to the cross with Him, showing He paid the debt.*

 - 3] God accepted Jesus' payment for sin.
 - a] *This he set aside* which means *to take upon oneself.*
 - b] John 1:29, *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*
 - c] Jesus, the sinless One, became sin in order to cancel our sin debt.

- c. He defeated demonic powers at the cross (15), ***He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.***
 - 1) *rulers and authorities*
 - a) These are evil angelic powers.
 - b) They had struggled mightily against Jesus in an attempt to keep Him from going to the cross.
 - c) Matthew 16:22-23, *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

 - 2) *put them to open shams...triumphing over them*
 - a) The rulers and authorities were disgraced at the cross by Jesus.
 - b) The claim Satan and his forces held over humanity was sin and death which Jesus defeated at Calvary.
 - c) Matthew 27:51-53, *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*

- d) Vaughan, *To the casual observer the cross appears to be only an instrument of death, the symbol of Christ's defeat; Paul represents it as Christ's chariot of victory.*
- e) M. Anders, *On the cross, Jesus won a decisive victory, making clear to the universe that Satan is a vanquished foe. This does not mean that we will not have conflict. The devil has been defeated, but he has not yet conceded defeat. He has been overthrown, but he has not yet been fully eliminated. Satan continues to harass us. When we understand our identity in Christ, we can live above Satan's control.*

<i>CONCLUSION</i>

- A. Christians should be captivated by Christ and not by the world.
- B. Everything a person could hope for may be found in Christ.
- C. Our spiritual victory was secured at the cross.