

Contending For The Faith
Lesson #18 May 20, 2020 Heretics In Colossae

The heretical teachings in Colossae contained and flaunted an exclusivity of mystery, secrecy, and superiority, the element of knowledge for a few elect through some form of initiation by religious experience or religious rites into the mysteries of the cult.

- This foreshadowed full-blown Gnosticism that would later develop.

The Gnostics' beliefs were rooted in "special knowledge." They were "in the know" when it came to the deeper things of God. They were the "spiritual aristocracy" in the church.

- Teachings Are Based On Gnosis: Secret Knowledge = Knowledge of spiritual truth
- Salvation is not obtained through faith but through knowledge.
- Knowing God, the transcendent one, is not achieved by external revelation.
- The knowledge of transcendence arrived at by way of interior, intuitive means
- Therefore, the means is internal and requires an "awakening."

The knowledge, of which the Gnostics spoke, was knowledge acquired through mystical experience and not by intellectual apprehension.

- It was an occult knowledge pervaded by the superstitions of astrology and magic.
- It was an esoteric knowledge, open only to those who had been initiated into the mysteries of the Gnostic system.

This heresy promised a close union with God whereby one would achieve a "spiritual perfection."

- Spiritual fullness could be theirs only if they entered into the teachings and ceremonies prescribed.
- Full knowledge, a spiritual depth, could only be achieved by the initiated.
- This "wisdom" would release them from earthly things and put them in touch with heavenly things. [Satanic deception]

Like many of the cults and the eclecticism of today, it wore the mask of Christianity, but it was totally false. It used Christian words and Christian phrases, but with different meanings.

It claimed to have something for everybody, but in essence provided only a delusion.

Heretical Teachings of Gnostics [Donald Burdick]

1. The human body composed of matter was evil, but God who is Spirit is good.
2. Salvation meant escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge.
3. The humanity of Christ was firmly denied, because his deity, could not be associated with the physical world.
4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly and extreme asceticism was adopted.
5. Paradoxically, this belief also led people to live very worldly and promiscuous lives because since physical matter rather than breaking God's Law was considered evil or wrong, breaking His law was of no moral consequence.

What is the "Colossian heresy"? An attempt to mix:

- Greek philosophy Knowledge or gnosis
- Pagan practices Deceptive
- Jewish legalism Externals
- "Christian" Appearance, deceptive

As we read between the lines in 2:8-25 we can begin to discern its shape. The heresy seems to have had these elements:

- Col. 2:8 A belief system, Paul called a "hollow and deceptive philosophy"
- 2:8, 22 Tradition-based, "depends on human tradition"
- 2:8 Elemental spiritual forces underlie the system
- 2:8 Not Christ-centered, the teaching doesn't "depend on Christ"
- 2:18, 23 Food restrictions and Jewish "holy days" are involved
- 2:18 Angel worship is central
- 2:18 Visionary experiences are touted
- 2:18 Pride characterizes the proponents
- 2:19 Losing connection with Jesus Christ is the result
- 2:20-23 Rule-keeping is urged
- 1:19; 2:9-10 "Fullness" language suggests that a "fullness" of spiritual experience couldn't be found in Christ alone. The vocabulary is found in both Gnosticism & Stoicism
- 2:11, 13; 3:11 Circumcision is advocated

There were five errors that endangered the Colossian church:

- 2:4-7 Enticing words
- 2:8-13 Philosophy
- 2:14-17 Legality
- 3:18-19 Mysticism
- 2:20-23 Asceticism

The Colossian Heretical Reasoning:

1. Christ is not fully God.
2. Christ is not fully human.
3. So Christians are not fully saved.
4. They need to add works including various rituals for spiritual maturity.
5. Since we are spirit and the body is evil, inner spirituality is divorced from outward actions.

The Gnostics Teachings:

1. They Attacked The Person And Work Of Jesus Christ
 - Denied Jesus was God; Denied Jesus was the Savior = Dethrone Jesus Christ
 - Taught He was not the very Son of God come in the flesh.

- Stripped Jesus of His true identity and divinity; therefore, His authority can be overridden.
- They make Jesus' death on the cross fiction or insufficient for salvation.
- They gave Him prominence but not preeminence.
They taught that Jesus was one of many ways man could reach God.
- It taught that Christ was insufficient and one must go beyond Christ into the fullness of what they had to offer.
- This Christian facade made the Colossian error extremely dangerous.

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. ² Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

³ And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

To refute [prove wrong by argument or evidence] their false teachings, Paul stresses the divine person and finished nature of the redemptive work of Christ.

Col. 1:12-14 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet [fit] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

A. Jesus Christ is The Savior

Man's greatest problem is SIN which can never be solved by a philosopher or religious teacher. Sinful man needs a Savior.

Col. 1:12-14: 5 benefits God secured to us when Jesus Christ died on the cross.

1. He made us fit [meet; qualified us] to be part of his Kingdom

Meet = to make sufficient; render fit; reaching the place of sufficiency and making someone qualified; to equip one with adequate power to perform the duties of one,

2. He rescued us from Satan's domination and made us His children

Col. 1:13a delivered [rescued from danger] us from the power of darkness

- We were in danger of spending eternity apart from God.
- The sword of God's judgment was hanging over our heads.
- We were delivered from the authority of Satan and the powers of darkness.

Note: The gnostic false teachers believed in an organization of evil spirits that controlled the world [Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15]; angels, archangels, principalities, powers, dominions and thrones.

3. He brought us into His eternal Kingdom [translated us]

Col. 1:13b translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son

- Jesus Christ released us from bondage into His Kingdom of light.
- He made us victors over Satan's kingdom of darkness.

Deut. 6:23 And He brought us out from there [Egypt=type of bondage], that He might bring us in to give us the land [inheritance; Promised Land] which He swore to give our fathers.

4. He bought our freedom from sin and judgment

Col. 1:14a In whom we have redemption through his blood,

Salvation is free but it is not cheap. Three words express the price God paid for our salvation.

Propitiation: satisfy God's Holy Law; the meeting of its just demands so God can freely forgive those who come to Christ.

Blood: What the price was: Jesus had to die on the cross to satisfy the Law and justify lost sinners.

Redemption: to release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom

5. He forgave all our sins.

Col. 1:14b even the forgiveness of sins:

- Redemption and forgiveness go together. [Eph. 1:7]
- Forgiveness = to send away or cancel a debt
- God's forgiveness is an act of His grace.
- Forgiveness is not an excuse for sin. It is an encouragement for obedience.

Truth: Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation. No other person could redeem us, forgive us, transfer us out of darkness into light and do it wholly by grace.

Wiersbe: "Any religious teaching that dethrones Jesus Christ or that makes salvation other than an experience of God's grace through faith is anti-Christian and a doctrine of demons."

2. The Gnostics Taught: Matter Is Evil; Only Spirit Is Good

It claimed to be *human philosophy* based on the *traditions* of men.

Question: Why is there evil in this world if creation was made by a holy God?

Belief: The philosophers came to the false conclusion that Matter Was Evil.

Georg Cantor: "A false conclusion once arrived at and widely accepted is not easily dislodged and the less it is understood the more tenaciously it is held."

- They concluded that a holy God could not come into contact with evil matter so there had to be a series of "emanations" from God to His creation.

Matter is Evil: They had to find a way to control their human natures in the pursuit of perfection. Two different practices resulted:

- The only way to conquer evil matter was by means of rigid discipline and asceticism.
 - Lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals.
- It is permissible to engage in all kinds of sin since matter is evil.

Thus, Paul warns us to be on alert to philosophical or religious arguments based on the argument of human tradition that appeals to its antiquity and dignity of the past as a reason for acceptance. In other words, this philosophy was based on the empty speculations of man instead of the sure revelation of God.

Col. 2:2-4 May they be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the "Mystery of God," namely Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴ And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

I Cor. 2:4-5 And my [Paul] speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Kidnapped Convert > Col. 2:8-10 BEWARE lest any man cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, after the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not after the teachings Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

You are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.

Warning: Do NOT let your hunger for a more fulfilling Christian experience cause you to trust in a teacher, a group or a system of thought more than in Jesus Christ.

He is your hope and your true source of wisdom.

Truth: Only by being connected with Christ through faith can anyone have eternal life.

Only through a CONTINUING connection with Him can anyone have power for living.

Andrew Murray: The believer can each day be pleasing to God only in that which he does through the power of Christ dwelling in him.

3. The heretical teachings added Jewish legalism, mysticism and asceticism = syncretism
 - ❖ The rite of circumcision was helpful in spiritual development. [2:11]
 - ❖ OT law, especially dietary laws, was useful in attaining spiritual perfection. [2:14-17]
 - ❖ Definite rules and regulations told them what was evil and what was good. [2:21]
 - ❖ Observance of sabbatical and festival holy days [2:16]
 - ❖ All the above emphasized rule-keeping as the way to be holy.

The heresy promised people a close union with God that would bring spiritual perfection.

But you must enter into the prescribed teachings and ceremonies. There was a "full knowledge," a spiritual depth that only the initiated could enjoy. The wisdom gained would release you from earthly things and put you in touch with heavenly things.

Paul's Warning: Do you want to live in the fullness of Jesus Christ? Don't complicate and distort the Gospel message by adding man's additions and traditions to our worship.

A. Danger of Legalism

- Human nature thrives in "religious duties."
- The flesh is weak when it comes to doing spiritual things [Matt. 26:41], but it is very strong when it comes to practicing religious rules and regulations.
- False teachers were promoting a heresy that stressed self-made rules.
- Sought spiritual growth by discipline of the body (asceticism) and visions (mysticism).
- This search created pride in their self-centered efforts.

Col. 2:16a Let no man therefore judge you...

➤ Therefore > verses before > basis for our freedom is the person and work of Jesus Christ

Consider: If you judge because someone is not living under the Law, you are saying that Christ did not finish the work of salvation on the cross and that we must add something to it.

- They said that Jesus Christ is not sufficient for ALL the spiritual needs.
- They claimed a "deeper spiritual life" for all who would practice the law.

Col. 2:16-17 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

¹⁷ Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Truth: The law was a schoolmaster that helped to train and discipline Israel in the childhood of the nation, preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah. Now that Jesus had come, the schoolmaster was no longer needed to perform the same functions. [Gal. 3:24-4:11] However, the Law still reveals the holiness of God. The Law reveals sin, but it has no power to prevent sin or redeem the sinner. Only grace can do that.

- The Law is a shadow. In Christ we have the reality, the substance.
- Why go back in the shadows when we have the reality?
That is like trying to hug a shadow when the reality is at hand.

Paul's Warning: Do you want to live in the fullness of Jesus Christ?

B. Let No Man Beguile You Of Your Reward Col. 2:18-19

4Jewish Mysticism: Heretical teachings included the *worship of angels* and interest in astrology
Col. 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Consider: This points to a pagan and mystical element.

Question: Why would false teachers promote angel worship?

One of the leading pagan influences was the religious philosophy known as Gnosticism.

- Gnostics had a very confused and un-Biblical view of God and His created order.
- The ultimate form of God cannot not be known or accessed directly because he is remote.
- God has many components and God takes the form of many lower beings.

False Teachers to the Christians:

❖ Worship angels! based on visions they claimed to have seen.

➤ "You cannot worship God directly or access God directly in the person of Jesus Christ.

That is a proud thought. No, you must be humble. You must approach God by worshipping these other lower beings, these many components and celestial servants of the great and unknowable God. You must worship angels."

This worship of angels involved an outward show of humility, an outward show of what was supposed to be a superior reverence for God. "I, a mere man, must worship God through these intermediate beings. Perhaps I can reach the distant and unknowable God in this way."

Note: Some scholars believe angels weren't actually worshiped but were simply thought of as guiding spirits and intermediators by which men thought they could worship or contact God.

Note: These angels turn out to be fallen angels or demonic spirits.

In the Bible, we find that there are good (angelic) and bad (demonic) spirits.

Groothius: "Angels are the 'messengers' of God sent to do his will, usually behind the scenes.

The Bible never tells Christians to cultivate conscious relationships with angels, although they do visibly appear throughout both the Old and New Testaments."

In fact, though God used angels to communicate His word, we are warned against their worship.

- Believers who consult horoscopes substitute superstition for revelation and deny the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- They held to a form of astrology, believing that angelic beings ruled heavenly bodies and influenced affairs on earth. [Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15]

They were advocating occult experiences with these angelic beings or guiding spirits or ascended masters as they are sometimes called in the New Age movement.

The goal is to experience some kind of religious fullness and gain contact with God, something that fits with what we see today in advocates of the New Age movement.

Belief: Astrology & Influence of Angels

- Jesus Christ won a complete victory over all satanic powers. [Col. 2:15]
- Christians do not need to turn to the rudiments of the world. [Col. 2:8, 20]
 - Rudiments = elemental beings or elementary principles
 - Refers to beings that controlled the heavenly bodies who in turn controlled events on earth.

Note: They believed in a powerful spirit world that used material things to attack mankind.

Bible: Angel Worship Forbidden - "Worship God!"

- ❖ Satan, who himself is an angel, tried to cause our Lord Jesus Christ to sin during the temptation in the wilderness by causing Jesus Himself to engage in angel worship.

Matt. 4:8-10 Again, the Devil took Him [Jesus] up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me" [a fallen angel] Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan!

For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

Rev. 19:10 And I [John] fell at his feet [the feet of this mighty angel] to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Rev. 21:9 An angel reveals to John a vision of the New Jerusalem.

Rev. 22:8 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

Hebrews 1 declares the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ to the angels. He declares that the angels are not components of God, but the creations of God. They are His ministering servants. He declares that Christ came into this world, for a time made a little lower than the angels as He took on a human body, in order to suffer for sin and open the way to the very throne room of God once and for all.

Heb. 1:6 "Let all the angels of God worship Him."

Consider: These teachings undermined the foundations of the Christian faith. Heretics:

- Attacked the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was merely one of God's many "emanations" and not the very Son of God come in the flesh.
- The Incarnation means God with us. [Matt. 1:23]
- False teachers claimed God was keeping His distance from us!

Heb. 4:16a Let us come boldly, directly, before the throne of grace - not through a host of angels, not through lower beings, but through the intercession and the worship of God the Son Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Truth: When we trust the Son of God, there is no need for intermediary beings between us and heaven.

- In His work on the cross, Jesus Christ settled the sin question [Col. 1:20] and completely defeated all satanic forces. [Col. 2:15]
- Jesus put an end to the legal demands of the law. [Col. 2:14-17]
- Jesus Christ is the Preeminent One. [Col. 1:18; 3:11] All I need is JESUS!

Paul's Warning: Do you want to live in the fullness of Jesus Christ?

C. Let No One Enslave You Col. 2:20-23

Col 2:20-23 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. [rules with NO power]

Paul has condemned legalism, mysticism and now asceticism.

- Asceticism is the belief that holiness comes by denying yourself certain basic needs and comforts; designed to control the flesh.
- An ascetic practices rigorous self-denial and even self-mortification in order to become more spiritual.
- Asceticism has much to do with the world and not the riches of the kingdom.
- The "commandments and doctrines" of false teachers replaced God's inspired Word.

The answer to Legalism is the spiritual reality we have in Christ Jesus.

The answer to mysticism is the spiritual union with Christ, the head of the Church

The answer to asceticism is our position in Christ, in death, burial, and resurrection

Truth: Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit who leads us into all Truth. By walking IN THE SPIRIT, and daily crucifying the flesh under the control of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome the indulgences of the flesh.

Paul countered this with the futility of such practices against the flesh and by the fullness of the person and work of Christ and the believer's completeness in Him

Col. 1:19-20 For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

²⁰ And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Col. 2:9-10 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

¹⁰ And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.