

WARNINGS AGAINST ERROR

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 2:8-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. This epistle was written to warn the Christians of Colosse about the error of Gnosticism (cf. 2:4, 8).
2. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Much that appeared wise and welcome was really human and worldly, having no relation to Christ" (*Studies in Colossians*).
3. The Greek word translated "spoil" in verse 8 is used only here in the New Testament, and literally means, "to carry one off as a captive and slave."
4. The idea is that Satan enslaves people through false doctrine. People enslaved by Satan's errors think they have found the truth, but are actually brainwashed by "vain (empty) deceit" (2:8).
5. The word "deceit" (2:8) reminds us that Satan is a deceiver and is behind all false teachings. Revelation 12:9 says Satan "deceiveth the whole world."
6. Paul said in II Thessalonians 2 that the antichrist will come "after the working of Satan...with all deceivableness" (II Thess. 2:8, 9).
7. Our Lord said in Matthew 24:4, "Take heed that no man deceive you."
8. The Christians in Colosse had been delivered "from the power of darkness" (1:13), but the devil is constantly attacking the churches and trying to put them into darkness.

I. BEWARE OF WORLDLY PHILOSOPHY (2:8-10)

1. This is the only time we see the word "philosophy" in the Bible. The word literally means "love of wisdom."
2. Philosophy "not after Christ" (2:8), i.e., without Christ, is not wisdom, but is foolishness. In fact, Christ is called "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" in I Corinthians 1:24.
3. Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10 say, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."
4. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "No system of thought can be regarded as worthy of the name of 'wisdom' which does not reckon with human depravity and find a place for divine redemption from it" (*Studies in Colossians*).

5. Some popular worldly philosophies include humanism, selfism, relativism, pragmatism, evolution, and materialism. Any philosophy that contradicts Scripture is wrong.
6. Colossians 2:9 teaches the deity of Christ, a doctrine denied by the Gnostics, and all Gnostic "new age" cults today.
7. Not only do we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and follow Him, and obey Him, and serve Him -- we are "complete in Him" (2:10).
8. Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:19 that they might be "filled with all the fulness of God."
9. W.H. Griffith Thomas says, "Shall we not from Christ's fulness receive a deeper holiness, a nobler character, a truer righteousness, a wider charity?" (*Studies in Colossians*).
10. The term, "rudiments of the world" is found twice in this chapter (2:8, 20). It refers to the basic, elementary principles (the "ABC's") of worldly religion. Verses 20-24 indicate it refers to ritualism.

II. BEWARE OF RITUALISM (2:11-13).

1. Ritualism appeals to the flesh -- the smell of incense, the flickering candles, the colorful religious costumes, the dead, lifeless formal music, the bowing and scraping and kneeling, etc.
2. Our Lord said in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."
3. There is a big difference between ritualism and regeneration. Most people who attend ritualistic churches are not born again.
4. Many religious people put a big emphasis on baptism and circumcision, but the Bible teaches that we need a "circumcision of the heart" (Col. 2:11; cf. Romans 2:28, 29; Phil. 3:2, 3).
5. This can only be done supernaturally by God (2:11). Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart."
6. The LORD says in Ezekiel 11:19, "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh."
7. In Paul's day, it was a popular error that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were first circumcised. Acts 15:1 says, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."
8. This error is dealt with in Paul's epistles, particularly Romans and Galatians.
9. And today many people think they are saved by being baptized, but the Bible teaches baptism is symbolic (Col. 2:12; cf. Rom. 6:3, 4).

10. "Buried with him" and "risen with him through the faith of the operation of God" (2:12) refers to our identification with Christ, and our spiritual union with Him.
11. "Operation of God" (2:12) refers to the supernatural power of God ("working" in Col. 1:29). In Ephesians 3:7, the word is translated, "the effectual working of his power."
12. In Ephesians 1:19, the word is translated, "the working of his mighty power."
13. Ritualistic churches have replaced regeneration ("quickenened" -- 2:13) with forms and ceremonies and liturgies and sacraments, etc.
14. With genuine salvation comes quickening and forgiveness (2:13).

III. BEWARE OF LEGALISM (2:14-17).

1. The word "legalism" is often misused. Worldly churches with low standards of Christian conduct, and loose standards of dress and music, etc. often condemn stricter conservative churches, and call them "legalistic."
2. Many untaught Christians are confused over this.
3. The word "legalism" means, "dependence on the law rather than depending on Christ." In Scripture it refers to churches that mixed law with grace.
4. The book of Galatians deals extensively with legalism. Galatians 2:21 says, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (cf. Gal. 1:6-9).
5. Legalism refers to churches that teach salvation by works (SDA, RCC, etc.).
6. "The handwriting of ordinances that was against us" (2:14) refers to the Mosaic Law. Paul says the law "was against us" because we are all guilty sinners, and this was a debt no man could pay -- except the Lord Jesus Christ. *He paid the debt in full when He died on the cross (2:14b).*
7. *Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.* -- Elvina M. Hall
8. Our Lord "blotted out" (2:14) our debt. When Christ died for our sins, the demands of the law were satisfied completely -- "having forgiven you all trespasses" (2:13).
9. The word "spoiled" in verse 15 is different than the word used in verse 8. Here it means "disarmed." The same Greek word is

- translated "put off" in Colossians 3:9. Satan and his demons were defeated at the cross.
10. The Mosaic Law was "a shadow of things to come" (2:17). In this dispensation of grace, no Christian is to be "judged" (2:16) for not following Old Testament rules and customs.
 11. Romans 6:14 says, "For ye are not under the law, but under grace."
 12. This does not mean Christians under grace are lawless. The next verse, Romans 6:15 says, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid."
 13. All of the Old Testament types and shadows and sacrifices and ordinances pointed to Christ. When Christ came their purpose was fully served and we are now living in a new dispensation (2:17).

CONCLUSION:

1. When the Romans crucified a man, it was the custom to write a card stating his crime, and to nail it to the cross. And they did this when our Lord was crucified.
 2. Mark 15:16 says, "And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (cf. Col. 2:14).
 3. The key to our victory over sin and false doctrine is our union with Christ. Through our union with Him in His death and resurrection, we have forgiveness of sin, and victory over sin.
 4. We are "in Him" (2:9-11), and "with Him" (2:12, 13). This spiritual union is our "guarantee of faithful adherence to what is true and of fearless abhorrence of what is false" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Studies in Colossians*).