

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Hold Fast to Christ!

(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Look No Further Than Christ”

December 9, 2012

Sermon Text: Colossians 1:1-2

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1

Introduction-

It is very easy for a ship to get off course, and it is very easy for us to do the very same thing. Many, many voices and subjects call for our

attention. This past week I saw a very good example.

There are a group of so-called “churches” that have focused themselves upon a Swedish mystic named Emmanuel Swedenborg. One of their pastors showed up on our blog this last week. We soon blocked him so he could not use the blog as a format for exposing others to his heresies. The Swedenborgian Churches of North America are enamoured with Swedenborg. Here is a bit about this guy:

Emanuel Swedenborg: born Emanuel Swedberg; 29 January 1688 – 29 March 1772) was a Swedish scientist, philosopher, theologian, revelator, and, in the eyes of some, Christian mystic. He termed himself a "Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ" in True Christian Religion, a work he published himself. He is best known for his book on the afterlife, Heaven and Hell (1758). Swedenborg had a prolific career as an inventor and scientist. In 1741, at the age of 53, he entered into a spiritual

phase in which he began to experience dreams and visions, beginning on Easter weekend of April 6, 1744. This culminated in a 'spiritual awakening', in which he received revelation that he was appointed by the Lord to write a heavenly New Church Doctrine to reform Christianity.

According to the New Church Doctrine the Lord had opened Swedenborg's spiritual eyes, so that from then on he could freely visit heaven and hell, and talk with angels, demons and other spirits; and that the Last Judgment had already occurred, in 1757, although this was only visible in the spiritual world, where he had witnessed it.

New Church Doctrine states that The Last Judgement was followed by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which occurred, not by Christ in person, but by a revelation from Him through the inner, spiritual sense of the Word through Swedenborg. Swedenborg then argued that it is the presence of that spiritual sense which makes the Word Divine.

For the remaining 28 years of his life, Swedenborg wrote 18 published theological works, and several more which were unpublished. Some followers of the New Church Doctrine believe that, of his theological works, only those which Swedenborg

published himself are fully divinely inspired.

New Church Doctrine rejected the concept of salvation through faith alone, since he considered both faith and charity necessary for salvation, not one without the other, whereas the Reformers taught that faith alone procured justification, although it must be a faith which resulted in obedience. The purpose of faith, according to New Church Doctrine, is to lead a person to a life according to the truths of faith, which is charity, as is taught in 1 Corinthians 13:13 and James 2:20. However, he made no attempt to found a church.

A few years after his death – 15 by one estimate – for the most part in England, small reading groups formed to study the truth they saw in his teachings. As one scholar has noted, New Church teachings particularly appealed to the various dissenting groups that sprang up in the first half of the 18th century who were "surfeited with revivalism and narrow-mindedness" and found his optimism and comprehensive explanations appealing.

In Earths in the Universe, it is stated that he conversed with spirits from Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Saturn, Venus, the Moon, as well as spirits from planets beyond our solar system. From these 'encounters' he concluded that the

planets of our solar system are inhabited, and that such an enormous undertaking as the universe could not have been created for just one race of people; nor one 'heaven' derived from it. He argued: "What would this be to God, Who is infinite, and to whom a thousand or tens of thousands of planets, and all of them full of inhabitants, would be scarcely anything!". Swedenborg and the life on other planets question has been extensively reviewed elsewhere.

Where does such a thing lead? Well, here is the upcoming schedule of events and studies from the website of one of these Swedenborgian churches:

Welcome to the 2012-2013 Church Year at the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church

UPCOMING EVENTS INCLUDE
Wednesday Night Book Discussion Group: 90 Minutes in Heaven by Don Piper on Dec. 5, 12 & 19

And mark your calendars for the next 2013 'EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY' LECTURE - MYSTICAL STRANDS IN WORLD RELIGIONS Sunday afternoons at 12:30pm Come to hear more about some of the mystical strands within the world's major religious traditions as we host speakers from a variety of spiritual communities.

The Swedenborgian theology of the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church honors the good and truth in all traditions and encourages inquiry as a spiritual path to deepening faith.

Zen in the Buddhist Tradition

January 27, 2013 – Craig Richards

Sufism in the Islamic Tradition:
Explanations of 20th Century Sufi
Shaykh M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen
February 24, 2013 - Ruqaiyyah
Elizabeth Lee-Hood

Vedanta in the Hindu Tradition

April 28, 2013 – Swami Yogatmananda

Somewhere, sometime, someplace, some Christian failed to keep rooted and established in Christ, in Whom is are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, who is the fullness of God, and decided that Emmanuel Swedenborg's visions had something "more" to offer. They did not heed Paul's warning to the Colossians and now – no mention of Christ at all. No gospel. No salvation. Here is more on the Swedenborgian disciples from their own web page –

Welcome to the website of the Swedenborgian Church. We're glad you stopped by! The Swedenborgian Church is an open-minded, forward looking Christian church drawing its

faith from the Bible as illuminated by the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772).

If you have serious questions about traditional Christian theology, yet wish to explore the deeper aspects of the Bible and the Christian faith, we may be what you are looking for. We worship a God of unconditional love, whose warmth and light can deepen your inner life and give direction to your spiritual journey.

We invite you to explore our growing website to learn more about our church and its ministries. And may God bless you on your spiritual journey!

Curious Seeker | Active Seeker | Deep Seeker

Curious Seeker-

God is infinitely loving and at the center of every life.

Truth is love in action. Actions performed out of love are genuine expressions in a physical form of what love means.

There is one God whose essence is Divine Love and Wisdom. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all aspects of God just as body, mind, and soul are all aspects of one person.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God that provides inspiration and help to lead better and more fulfilling lives.

The literal sense of Scripture tells the story of the people of God, and contains a deeper meaning that illumines the journey of the human soul.

People are essentially spirits clothed with material bodies. At death, the material body is laid aside and the person continues to live on in the world of spirit choosing a heavenly life or a hellish one, based on the quality of life choices made here.

God gives everyone the freedom to choose their beliefs and live their lives accordingly. Salvation is available for people of all religions.

The Second Coming has taken place—and in fact still is taking place. It is not an actual physical appearance of the Lord, but rather his return in spirit and truth that is being effected as a present reality.

God is infinitely loving and at the center of every life.

It is exactly what Paul has warned us of here in Colossians. Listen as I read Colossians 2 and you will see the direct application.

¶ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in

love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 6 ¶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 ¶ **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, and not according to Christ.** 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 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, 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.

13 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, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

16 ¶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. **18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.** 20 ¶ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)-- according to human precepts and teachings? **23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.** (Colossians 2:1-23 ESV)

Christ Reformation Church could one day become something just like this New Jerusalem Church if we do not guard ourselves against being drawn off from Christ by some philosophy, some tradition, or some supposed vision. The thing has happened over and over and over again in the history of the church. Just think of the major cults like Mormonism, JW's, and we would even have to include Seventh Day Adventism here as well. Christian Science. All had some leading figure who came along, spoke and wrote voluminously, had visions, and led people away from Christ, supposedly into some greater and "deeper treasure." These are roads that lead to spiritual poverty and eternal death.

Well then, let's see if we can introduce this letter to the Colossians, giving its background, occasion, setting and theme.

The Colossians

The city of Colossae was located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) on the Lycus River. It was very close to Laodicea and Hierapolis:

A city of Phrygia on the Lycus River, one of the branches of the Meander, and 3 miles from Mt. Cadmus, 8,013 ft. high. It stood at the head of a gorge where the two streams unite, and on the great highway traversing the country

from Ephesus to the Euphrates valley, 13 miles from Hierapolis and 10 from Laodicea. (ISBE)

Ephesus was to the west some distance, on the coastline.

In religion the people were specially lax, worshipping angels. Of them, Michael was the chief, and the protecting saint of the city. It is said that once he appeared to the people, saving the city in time of a flood. (ISBE)

In other words, Colossae was right in the vicinity of the 7 churches of Asia that are addressed in Revelation 2-3:

- Ephesus
- Smyrna
- Pergamum
- Thyatira
- Sardis
- Philadelphia
- Laodicea

This is why you have Laodicea mentioned here in Colossians:

(Col 2:1 ESV) ESV Colossians 2:1 ¶
For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,

(Col 4:12-16 ESV) 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus,

greet you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

The People Named in Colossians

Here are the people Paul names in this letter:

Paul (himself) - He is in prison, probably in Rome. PEPC (Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians) are known as the “Prison Epistles.”

(Col 4:18 ESV) 18 ¶ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Also 1:7, 12-13,24; 4:3; Eph 3:1; 4:1

Timothy is with Paul, 1:1

Epaphras 1:7 He took the gospel to the Colossians (see also 4:12-13).

4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his

prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

The church at Colossae apparently got its start during Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus (A.D. 52–55). During this time, the Colossian, Epaphras probably traveled to Ephesus and responded to Paul’s proclamation of the gospel (see Acts 19:10). This new believer returned to his hometown and began sharing the good news of Christ, which resulted in the birth of the Colossian church (Col. 1:7). At the time of this writing, Epaphras is with Paul in Rome and has likely shared the bad news that there was a dangerous teaching threatening the church at Colossae (4:12). Paul writes this letter to respond to this situation and to encourage these believers in their growth toward Christian maturity. [Crossway Bibles (2009-04-09). ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 298342-298348). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition].

(Col 4:7 ESV) **Tychicus**. He probably carried this epistle to Colossae. A faithful servant of Christ.

(Col 4:9 ESV) **Onesimus**, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. He traveled with Tychicus. (See Philemon)

(Col 4:10-11 ESV) ¶ **Aristarchus** my fellow prisoner greets you, and **Mark** the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions--if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called **Justus**. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

(Col 4:14 ESV) (Col 4:14 ESV) 14 **Luke** the beloved physician greets you, as does **Demas**. (With Paul in Rome). Demas would later love the world and abandon Paul (2 Timothy 4:10).

(Col 4:17 ESV) 17 And say to **Archippus**, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." (so he is at Colossae)

Notice this parallel of names, showing that Philemon was written in the same setting:

Phm 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, Phm 1:24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

Theme and Purpose

Why did Paul write Colossians? What was his purpose? What is this letter

about? *Theme and purpose, and setting.*

- The *theme* is what a letter or book is about.
- The *purpose* is the reason why the author wrote about that theme.
- The *setting* has to do with the circumstances in which the letter was written, both for the author and for the recipients. Paul was in prison – that was his circumstance. Epaphras and perhaps others from Colossae had come to him in Rome. What news did they bring that might have prompted Paul to write this letter about the superiority and supremacy of Christ?

Epaphras is with Paul in Rome and has likely shared the bad news that there was a dangerous teaching threatening the church at Colossae

The letter was probably written c. A.D. 62. Paul wrote it at roughly the same time that he wrote Philemon and Ephesians. All three letters were sent with Tychicus (see Eph. 6:21) and Onesimus. This date assumes that the imprisonment Paul speaks of is his Roman imprisonment that followed his harrowing voyage to Rome (Acts 27–28). [ESV Study Bible Notes]

Listen to J. Ligon Duncan describe the occasion, purpose, and theme as he introduces his series on Colossians:

The book of Colossians is about the incomparable Christ. It is about the soul-sufficient Christ, the sovereign Christ in whom is everything that we need, in whom is everything that we have as Christians.

The gospel of Jesus Christ was not brought to the Colossians directly by Paul. Paul tells us in the passage we just read that Epaphras had come to the Colossians with the word of truth. It is very likely that Epaphras had been in Ephesus some hundred miles to the west of the Lycos Valley and he had heard the preaching of the Apostle Paul there and that faithful man and the Apostle Paul compliments him with that great accolade, that faithful man took back the gospel to the Colossians and they came to Christ and a church was formed in that city where Paul had never been. In this letter, Paul is responding both positively and negatively to the Colossians that Epaphras has now told him.

Epaphras has visited Paul and one of the things that he has told Paul is that there are apparently new teachers, false teachers in the congregation which are confusing young converts. They are teaching an add-mixture of Christian truths with Jewish ritual practices and

even pagan beliefs and practices. They are not outrightly denying Christ, but they are mixing the gospel of Christ with truth and error. It's a hodge-podge of things that they are teaching. Paul will outline for us in chapter 2 some of the distinctives of this teaching.

For instance in chapter 2:11, 16, and 17, the Apostle Paul tells us that these people were apparently requiring that Gentile Christians obey Jewish Old Testament ritual law.

In that same chapter, just a little bit further on, you will notice in verse 18 that apparently these people were teaching that we ought to worship angelic mediaries, the worship of angels apparently was part of their bag of tricks. And you may say now how in the world could a young Christian fall for that. But you could imagine a presentation like this. God is great and awesome and spiritual. We are small and weak and material. How can the material world have fellowship with the spiritual world? We need a mediary between us and God and even between us and Christ if we're really going to have a fullness of fellowship and so we should worship these mediaries. You can hear the logic going something like that and young Christian converts scratching their head and saying, 'well I guess that makes sense.' And certainly in the culture of their day that

would have been a very compelling sort of argument.

Thirdly, in this same passage, chapter 2:20-23, you see that these teachers are also teaching sort of an asceticism, a bodily form of excessive self-denial which was apparently very significant in their teaching. All these teachings were being add-mixed with Christian truth and according to the Apostle Paul, not only changing the gospel but endangering the spiritual lives of the believers at Colossae because truth is unto godliness and untruth leads to destruction.

And so the Apostle Paul writes this letter to combat this error, to combat this error which offered a fullness of spiritual experience which had never been previously known by the Christians in Colossae, to combat this error which offered a new spiritual freedom for those who would follow it. To combat this error which claimed a particular insight into the powers of evil and the ability to protect the Colossians from those powers. To combat this error which offered a deeper knowledge of God and a greater experience of his power. To combat this error which inclines some to think of themselves as superior to other believers. To combat this error for its impressive self-denial and to combat this error which was divisive in the church in Colossians, the Apostle Paul presses home one truth

applied in a multiple variety of ways over and over again in the book and that one truth is the sole sufficiency of Christ to this error.

Paul's antidote is the unfolding of the cosmic implications of Christ's absolute pre-eminence and directing us to the sole sufficiency of his saving work. Paul's one answer to this erroneous teaching is the person and work of Christ. For the message of the book of Colossians is that believers are complete in Christ and that faith in him necessarily rules out reliance on anything outside of him, anything subsidiary or under him. For nothing in the universe is outside the scope of his sovereignty and so the Apostle Paul sets forth before them the sufficient Christ, the solely sufficient Christ, the sovereign Christ and the incomparable Christ.

Here is a bit more of an elaboration on the specific heresy being spread at Colossae (from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) –

The Colossian heresy is due to Judaistic influences on the one hand and to native beliefs and superstitions on the other. The Judaistic elements in this teaching are patent, circumcision (2:11), the Law (2:14,15), and special seasons (2:16). But there is more than Judaism in this false teaching. Its teachers look to

intermediary spirits, angels whom they worship; and insist on a very strict asceticism. To seek the origin of angel worship in Judaism, as is commonly done, is, as A. L. Williams has shown, to miss the real significance of the attitude of the Jews to angels and to magnify the bitter jeers of Celsus. Apart from phrases used in exorcism and magic he shows us that there is no evidence that the Jew ever worshipped angels (JTS, X, 413 f). This element in the Colossian heresy was local, finding its antecedent in the worship of the river spirits, and in later years the same tendency gave the impulse to the worship of Michael as the patron saint of Colosse (so too Ramsay, Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible (five volumes), under the word "Colossae"). The danger of and the falsehood in this teaching were twofold. In the first place it brought the gospel under the bands of the Law once more, not now with the formality of the Galatian opponents, but none the less surely. But as the apostle's readers are Gentiles (1:27) Paul is not interested in showing the preparatory aspect of the Law. He simply insists to them that they are quite free from all obligations of the Law because Christ, in whom they have been baptized (2:12), has blotted out all the Law (2:14). The second danger is that their belief in and worship of the heavenly powers, false ideas about Christ and the material world, would develop even further than it had. They, because of

their union with Him, need fear no angelic being. Christ has triumphed over them all, leading them as it were captives in His train (2:15), as He conquered on the cross. The spiritual powers cease to have any authority over the Christians. It is to set Christ forward, in this way, as Head over all creation as very God, and out of His relation to the church and to the universe to develop the Christian life, that the apostle writes.

It is interesting that the writer of Hebrews addresses a similar error regarding angels:

¶ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. 5 ¶ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? 6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." 7 Of the

angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." 8 ¶ But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." 10 And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, 12 like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end." 13 And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:1-14 ESV)

Conclusion

So there it is. Colossians is a letter written to all of us to warn us against the error of thinking we need "more. It accomplishes its purpose by showing us the excellencies and supremacy of Christ, by reminding us what He has done for us, and by exhorting us to live lives that demonstrate that we know Him. We are pointed toward a deeper knowledge, but this knowledge is

always a more intimate relationship with God.

Here then is God's will for us, and we pray that as we study this letter from His Word in weeks ahead, His will would be accomplished more and more perfectly in us:

(Col 1:9-14 ESV) 9 ¶ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.