

Christ Reformation Church

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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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Guard Your Treasure and Stay Free”

Feb 10, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 2:1-15

Scripture Reading: Romans 14

Introduction-

Listen to these comments a fellow shared with me this past week:

We no longer live in a generation of people that are willing to carefully study issues for themselves. Instead, we live in an age where decisions must be made fast without any introspection or contemplation. Schools teach our kids to model others – not learn on their own. *Modeling* becomes the easiest and fastest way to learn, so forget studying the issue on my own... go get an expert and do what they do. That's why we have these big name evangelical “experts.” It's not because they are a new evil. No, there's always been men willing to lead through selfish and manipulative means. Instead, the problem is this generation that follows men without questioning them.

How do we end up with these mega church, mega-author phenomena? It is certainly not because these guys earned their stripes through years of study of God's word. Some of them simply rose to fame because of money and

endorsements of others just like them.

Studying God's word for answers is old fashioned today. When you contradict whoever someone is modeling, you literally challenge their own internal programming. Their first reaction is always kind of a "Does Not Compute" look. They seldom get past that because that would mean they would have to think autonomously. They are, sadly, unfamiliar with how to do that.

The seminaries have figured out that the world will not challenge them, so they take license. They send down their traditions, and we buy them. Often literally.

Colossians is warning us repeatedly to guard our treasure – *Christ!* We must not be turned away from Him by the traditions and philosophies of man. Paul warns us in fact –

Colossians 1:23 ESV

(23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

It is possible for a person who has professed Christ to make shipwreck of

their faith. To fall away and be lost. This biblical doctrine does not contradict the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. God's elect WILL be saved and He holds them and preserves them so that nothing can ever cause them to perish in hell. Just Jesus' words in John 17 prove that. BUT people who have professed Christ, who have been baptized, who have started off even very well, *can end in hell*. And even a genuine, true Christian can come into great trouble if drawn away by these traditions of men that Paul is warning us against here:

Colossians 2:8 ESV

(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.

Colossians 2:18-23 ESV

(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.

The more I interact with Christians and hear their stories of how they became entrapped to man-made traditions, the more confident I am in this statement –

The tradition of man enslaves; the truth of Christ sets us free.

It is always this way. Here is the same principle stated another way by the Apostle Paul –

Romans 14:17 ESV

(17) For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The modeling that the fellow I was speaking with mentioned is not Christian discipleship. It is a blind modeling. It is an acceptance of the person's own words. They are couched in "Bible" language, but they

are not the Word of God. And they concern things that Paul calls "eating and drinking." That is, the "do not handle that food, do not taste that drink, do not touch that over there" kind of teachings. They are a rule book. They don't bring peace and they don't bring joy. And they are not the righteousness of Christ.

And they always draw you away from Christ. In 1:23, Paul warns that we must stand upon the righteousness of Christ alone. We must hope in Him, the object of our hope in the gospel. We must not allow ourselves to be shifted off, but we must keep the "feet" of our faith stable and steadfast upon His Word. Many have not done so. They have not continued in the faith. They will not be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before the Lord on that Day.

And we have given numbers of examples of these kinds of false systems that come along, pretending to be of Christ yet pressuring us to turn away from Him and embrace their philosophies and delusions. Adventism was one such example. Rome is another. Mormonism too. All of these systems name Christ, yet insist that you must have more.

But some of the most dangerous of such deluding philosophies in our

experience come from within our own midst –

Acts 20:26-31 ESV

(26) Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you,

(27) for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

(28) Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

(29) I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

(30) and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

(31) Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

As reformed Christians, we do not believe that any man speaks God's inerrant Word. That the pope, for instance, speaks forth new revelation from God and *that because it is so spoken it is the Word of God*. No. We deny this. Just because something is spoken from this pulpit, or is written in a book does not make it the Word of

God. And yet we act in many cases today that such is the case! We have a weakness for slick-sounding, crafty, smooth preachers and teachers and charismatic individuals –

2 Corinthians 11:20 ESV

(20) For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

Today there are myriads of man-made traditions, commonly embraced in our churches, that are examples of the very same enslaving traditions that Paul warns us of. As we have seen in weeks past, many of these traditions are in connection with the Christian family. The family has been made an idol by many of these kinds of teachers who lay long lists of specifics upon us about how we are to do things in our homes and marriages and in our child-rearing.

Here is an example taken from an upcoming article on our blog about Caleigh's experience growing up in a home where the father was very abusive and who used the Bible to justify his actions:

When I was 7 ½ years old, I got baptized, and that is the only time I ever remember my dad specifically talking to me about what it means to

be saved. I do remember not being able to give the definition on my own, but when my dad started talking, I was able to fill in the words. I don't think I really understood what it meant to be a Christian at that age, but I definitely can remember my heart really changed after that.

I mainly was excited to be able to take communion with all of the rest of the adults and to give my dad the thumb's up that meant that I didn't have anything to confess. I have never been able to take communion without remembering that I had to give my dad a thumbs up or else I couldn't take communion. The thumbs up was supposed to signify that I didn't have anything to confess, and also that I didn't have anything against my dad, or anyone else.

My dad controlled my siblings and I when it came to communion, and many other areas. Having to give him a thumbs up was like showing to the world that he was in control of our faith. I hated having to do it especially because rarely was I not angry or frustrated with him. I just didn't want to have to be approached by my dad and given a talk about how I'm holding things against him, or not forgiving him, and forget that I was hurt by him, or angry with him for abusing my siblings.

Patriarchy is a sneaky beast, and it definitely has some good aspects, but more so it gives abusive men the perfect cover up for continuing to abuse their families. Patriarchy is very much of an outward picture belief system where a lot of pressure is put on everyone doing the same thing, "looking" the same way, or believing the same thing. Home schooling, women being baby making machines, and practically being chained to the stove, daughters never going to college, quiverfull mindset of having as many children as possible, sons carrying on their father's business, or never going to college as well, and fathers being in supreme authority over their families are very common things among patriarchal/quiverfull families. The fathers having absolute authority over their families with no one they are accountable to is what enables the abusers.

This sort of mindset creates an environment where scriptures that talk about submission, authority, women, and children are all taken out of context and made to mean that the men are in absolute authority over the women and children. These verses are then twisted to mean that men are the only ones who can hear from God, and fathers rule their families with this mentality meaning that the children and their wife can never hear from God. This closes the box pretty tightly

around any child who might have questions, or who begins to think on their own, and begins to realize that maybe daddy isn't always right.

This is not the biblical teaching on marriage and family as Paul sets out in Ephesians 5 and, as we will see, in Colossians 3. This is a terrible distortion and it is the creation of human beings. You see the bondage that it brought Caleigh and the rest of her family under.

Think of the "movements" we have had in the evangelical church in the last 50 years. With each of them you will realize that there is a name, or a very few names, associated with them. These names wrote all kinds of books on all kinds of topics giving us entire systems of how the Christian is to live. And in many cases, as we are learning now, the end was not good. The traditions of men supplanted the Word of God and drew people away from Christ over and over again. And it is still happening today. Tread carefully, for example, in using a study Bible in which the notes were all written by one person. We need to have this attitude

Galatians 2:6 ESV

(6) And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)--those, I say,

who seemed influential added nothing to me.

Alright then, in the rest of our time let's come back to Col 2:1-5 and make a few observations:

Colossians 2:1-5 ESV

- (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,
- (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.

Consider now carefully the *results* of the genuine working of the truth of Christ in us:

- Encouragement
- Being knit together in love

- Growing in a fuller understanding and knowledge of Christ

Man's philosophies and delusions, even those wrapped up in a "biblical" covering, effect just the opposite:

- Discouragement
- Factions
- Being distanced from Christ

Our treasure is in Christ. The traditions of men are cheap counterfeits. They are empty. They are powerless. Consider for example what they will do in your family if they are embraced. Here is a system. I remember years ago a man coming to me all excited. He had found it! This was the real deal, he said, and it was going to have huge ramifications for his family and the families of everyone else who embraced it. Turns out it was a man-made system with all the typical books and materials cranked out by one person. What are the results of these things in our families –

- Discouragement
- Factions
- Being distanced from Christ

I wonder if Paul didn't have the very same kind of thing in mind when he warned the Galatians –

Galatians 5:11-15 ESV

(11) But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. (12) I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

(13) For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (14) For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (15) But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

The gospel of Christ on the other hand knits us together in love. This is vitally important then for us to understand. How do we know if something is Christ or if it is man's own making? Well, of course we objectively look at Scripture and compare it, but we can also look at its fruits. Does it encourage or discourage? Does it bring genuine believers into more love and unity with one another and into a deeper knowledge of and love for Christ? Or does Christ just kind of get put into the background while we are all talking about what to handle, taste, or touch?

Listen to this account from a lady who, along with her husband, was drawn into one of these very kinds of

deluding philosophies Paul is warning us against here in Colossians –

I had never heard of a home church before, but for some reason, that term kept coming to my mind. I started asking around everywhere I went if anyone knew of a home church in our area. I asked people at the grocery store, on the street, friends, everyone. We were *desperate*. Finally, a friend of a friend of a friend told me about a “home” church an hour away. I called, but was told simply, “No.” Crestfallen, we continued visiting various churches in the area, but – nothing.

Several weeks later, I called this lady back, practically begging to be allowed to visit. She was immediately apologetic, explaining that she had met several friends of mine in the meantime, who all vouched for me. (I later learned that another lady, whom I did not know, in a homeschool group I belonged to had attended one of these two home churches — the Wednesday church — for a while and caused lots of problems, so she was hesitant to invite others from that homeschool group.)

As she was describing the church to me, she let me know of their conservative values. “If they insist that I can’t wear colorful clothes,” I thought, “I’ll be content to wear tan and gray. If I can’t wear make-up or

jewelry anymore, I’m willing to give them up, if only I could find the *right* church.. This church was such a well-kept secret, it must be quite remarkable!” Desperate enough to give up just about anything, we wore our most conservative clothes that Sunday, arriving at this country home way out in the Hill Country of Texas. With goats and chickens in the front yard, as well as swings, a large wooden deck, and lots of grassy areas for the children to play, it seemed an ideal location for a family friendly church.

A bit anxious, we arrived early while the leader’s wife was still painting her nails red. She greeted us warmly and asked, “Do you home educate? Do you belong to HSLDA? Have you heard my husband speak?” It was a bit unusual, I thought, but we settled down in our seats for the service.

After some worshipful hymns, her husband began to preach. And preach and preach. We took an intermission after two hours and came back for more. Even though it was long, we loved every minute of it and the hour-long discussion of the men that followed.

As we had a “pot-providence” meal and fellowshiped for hours afterward, we knew this was home. The perfect church at last! Beginning this church plant with a series on “one anothering,” the fellowship was indeed

sweet our first year there. I do not recall any bickering or gossip amongst the fast growing group of believers, all like-minded in so many ways.

Shortly before we found these people, Mark and I had been praying together that God would show us all sin in our lives, as we desired to be pure before Him. God was so faithful in answering that prayer, bringing several preachers into our lives through audio tapes and radio. After every sermon we listened to, God refined another area in our lives. On a long trip, sometimes we would listen to several a day. Feeling purged, we returned to this home assembly only to have God use the two leading men there to reveal more areas in our lives that were not pleasing to the Lord.

By the time we started attending this fellowship in 2000, our marriage was the best it had ever been. But that was soon to change

On their second visit, things tightened up further –

On our second Sunday at the fellowship, the leaders introduced us to a special woman guest – Jane. After the meeting of the church (the worship service), the leaders invited Jane to formally meet with all the women and talk to them about college. Jane began relating why it was so evil for women and girls to go to college, especially

outside the home. She related some of her own experiences at College, where she received a BA in English, but in a way that was intended to warn others not to let their daughters attend institutes of higher learning.

I was bold enough to ask the obvious: “What do unwed young ladies do all day?” Jane’s answer, and the answer of every young lady in that congregation was, “Serve her father.” Some had family businesses and that was a great answer. They were working hard all day, learning skills, and helping the family to earn a living. But I know many that don’t fall into that category. Don’t get me wrong, nearly all the young ladies at that fellowship are wonderful young ladies, and would make great stay-at-home wives. But are they prepared to homeschool sons someday? How are their sons going to learn to do great things for the Lord if the moms aren’t educated enough to be able to teach them?

Several months later, we had another guest, come to speak to us about his new book about immodesty in America. Since I was very new to the study of modesty, I asked the leaders if the women of the church could meet together after the service to discuss the practicalities of the sermon and how it related directly to us. His terse answer was, “That would not be biblical. Women are to be silent in the church.”

As some of you may have guessed by now, I wasn't satisfied with that answer, so I reminded him that it was going to be after the service, like Jane had done earlier. But, no dice.

You see it? We are in every bit as much danger today as the Colossians were. What this lady experienced was not encouragement, it did not draw her and her husband and other believers together, and it gave a very warped view of Christ and His truth.

Christ is Our Treasure

I do not fully comprehend what verse 3 says about Christ –

“...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

I do know that entire sermons have been preached on this single phrase! Let's just state a few observations about this:

- These treasures are there, but we do not see them fully or easily. They are hidden. Hidden also speaks of security and safety. These treasures cannot be stolen by thieves, nor can they be seen by the world.
- As we see in verse 2- the Christian is reaching for the full assurance of understanding and knowledge of Christ. We need to

know that we have not yet seen the full treasure!

1 John 3:2 ESV

(2) Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV

(12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

- And we will never fully know Christ in this life. In fact, it is possible we will never cease to come to know more of Him even in eternity.

Take careful note again then of verse 4 –

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

Any system or tradition that comes our way that offers itself in addition to Scripture, we must reject. It is a delusion. Notice Paul says here that such arguments will be plausible. This word is pithanologia. Listen to it in the KJV –

(Col 2:4 KJV) And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

The Greek dictionary (lexicon) defines this pithanologia this way –

plausible, but false, speech resulting from the use of well-constructed, probable arguments - 'convincing speech, plausible language

Think this through. Maybe you went to a conference, like I have, or you got hold of some teaching cd's, and there was this teacher who could just crank it off with ease, talking on all kinds of subjects, and the whole thing sounds "biblical" and reasonable and you were convinced that here is a guy who has all this vast knowledge. He is brilliant. Just ask him for the answers. DANGER!! We can never sit back and drink it in with the assumption that such a person is speaking God's truth.

Here are some of the repeated warning in Scripture about these dangers:

Rom 16:18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Mat 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you.

Mat 24:24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

Mar 13:22 for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray.

Act 20:30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

2Co 11:3 But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Eph 4:14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Eph 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.

Col 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to

the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Col 2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

1Ti 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

2Ti 2:16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,

2Ti 3:13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Tit 1:10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

Tit 1:11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.

1Jo 2:18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.

1Jo 2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

1Jo 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2Jo 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Smooth, flattering speech that is driven by the speaker's own sinful appetites.

Here is this great OT warning for us –

Isaiah 8:19-20 ESV

(19) And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? (20) To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

These false systems then are not mere plain outward, open rejections of the deity of Christ or of things quite obvious. No, they come in deceptive packaging that is so good we often get caught up in them and pretty far down their road before we realize that the fruit of the thing is evil.

Christ sets us free. Christ encourages us – even when He must rebuke us. Christ knits us together in love. Christ becomes increasingly beautiful to us so that we want more of Him. Like Zacchaeus on that great day when Jesus spotted him up in the tree, we are eager to have Christ come to our home.

Stand then on the firmness of your faith in Christ, and just as you received Him, so walk in Him.