

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

“Hold Fast to Christ” (pt 2)

Feb 24, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 2

Scripture Reading: Matthew 15:1-20

Introduction-

“I’ve watched my wife counsel a lot of young ladies who are considering marriage, and she always asks them the question, ‘Are you willing to call

your husband “Lord”?’ There will be dead silence in the room.” At the podium, a handsome and charismatic man in his early forties mimics in mincing tones the single women’s response to his wife’s evocation of 1 Peter 3: 6, which describes Sarah showing submission to her husband Abraham by naming him “lord”: “‘Are you kidding me? I only have one Lord: Jesus Christ!’”

He continues, mincing no more: “We’re not talking about Lord as in the Creator, but your earthly head. And one that you have to follow, even when he makes bad judgments. Are you ready to do the most vulnerable thing that a woman ever can do and submit yourself to a man, who you are going to have to follow in his faith, who is incredibly imperfect and is going to make mistakes? Can you do that? Can you call your husband ‘Lord’? If the answer is no, you shouldn’t get married.”

Doug Phillips, the founder of Vision Forum, a prolific publisher of

homeschool curricula and one of the most influential proponents of the conservative Christian patriarchy movement now flourishing among homeschoolers, is addressing between three and four hundred people gathered at the massive Digital Federal Credit Union convention center in Worcester, Massachusetts, for the feature address of the Eighteenth Annual MassHOPE Christian Homeschool Convention.

His keynote speeches are PowerPoint presentations— The Wise Woman’s Guide to Blessing Her Husband’s Vision and The Homeschool Vision for Victory. Vision and victory are key words here, referencing Proverbs 29: 18, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” It’s a verse interpreted by would-be patriarchs as a warning to cast a bold vision for the future of their families and “the church militant,” so that their children and the church at large keep a lofty goal in sight: victory for the Body of Christ in reclaiming the earth as their own.

Preparing for this work is the common thread through all of Phillips’s media, products, and even toys, which are showcased several times a year in a stunningly produced high-gloss catalogue featuring numerous pictures of his family— he uses his children as models— and the extensive and wholesome-looking Vision Forum clan at home in San Antonio, Texas. In

Massachusetts Phillips’s lecture draws the largest crowd of the speeches that day. The main reason most families come to the event, priced at sixty-five dollars per adult, is to shop for homeschooling materials, and here there’s an arena floor full of vendors hawking books, CDs, and DVDs for the instruction of both mind and soul. **The materials provide counsel for raising pure children who resist worldly temptations**, and not just those of drugs and sex; dating and attending college away from home are equally verboten. But, as evidenced by the booths rented by political action groups such as the antifeminist flagship Concerned Women for America, Phillips and other leaders know that this is fertile ground for spreading their ideas, their theology of the family.

But Vision Forum’s passion— its heart— is in books, tapes, and CDs that stress the necessity of building large family dynasties, generations of families with six, eight, ten or more children to raise a godly seed **for Christ and the salvation of America**, and that lay out the guidelines for how men and women should behave. Following the philosophy that all education and play is inherently religious— and that ideological neutrality is therefore impossible— Vision Forum offers well-stocked, sex-segregated children’s product lines, the

Beautiful Girlhood and Adventurous Boyhood collections. These lines forge gender fidelity through an assortment of Victorian-inspired (yet multiracial) dolls, aprons, and cookware to start training your daughter for successful wifedom now; or conversely, expensive swords and musketeer outfits, camping gear, and Second World War canteens to instill in your boy his sense of nobility and obligation to protect and lead the women in his life. For adults, the gender-training materials are even more explicit. The Biblical Patriarchy collection for husbands includes titles such as Manliness, Manly Men Write Manly Letters, and Poems for Patriarchs; the Virtuous Womanhood collection for wives includes Verses of Virtue, The Role of Women, and What's a Girl to Do?

Joyce, Kathryn (2009-03-01). Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement (Kindle Locations 119-160). Random House Inc Clients. Kindle Edition.

Now, with that real-life, contemporary example fresh in our minds, follow along as I read the second chapter of Colossians.

(Colossians 2:1-23 ESV) ¶ 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.

I suggest to you that the things taught by Phillips and his organization are

exactly the kind of thing that the Apostle Paul is warning us all against. Is there some truth here and there in the things Phillips says? Yes. But so was there some truth no doubt in the Colossian heresy that was threatening that church and which prompted Paul to write this epistle.

Did you notice the points I bold-faced?

The materials provide counsel for raising pure children who resist worldly temptations, and not just those of drugs and sex; dating and attending college away from home are equally verboten.

....stress the necessity of building large family dynasties, generations of families with six, eight, ten or more children to raise a godly seed for Christ and the salvation of America, and that lay out the guidelines for how men and women should behave.

Is there anything wrong with having lots of children? Is there anything sinful about dressing differently than the world? Of course not. *Unless the motive is sinful.* What could be wrong with such things though? This. Listen again -

(Colossians 2:18-23 ESV) 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.**

You see, it isn't just Adventism or Roman Catholicism or the Federal Vision systems that threaten us. It is these very kinds of things that threaten us and are very subtle in creeping in. What is the fundamental danger? *They all cause us to stray from Christ who is our life and power and joy. They tell us that we need something more.*

(Colossians 1:22-23 ESV) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 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.

Listen to this quote from a pastor who wrote to his congregation, cautioning them against a widespread movement known as Family Integrated Churches. Those kinds of churches and leaders preach that homeschooling **MUST** be every Christian's model, that youth ministry is evil, and that a church is sinning if it has Sunday School classes for children. Here are some of the things this pastor warns his people about –

"Faithfulness to Scripture means more than just holding a biblical view about a given issue. It includes holding that view in due proportion to the weight it receives in Scripture and the place assigned to it by Scripture.

Issue-oriented movements are often reactions against some legitimate problem in society or the church at large. Reactionary movements sometimes overact and become biblically imbalanced. When I read Family Integrated Church leaders describe age-segregated Sunday School programs as a serious threat to biblical family order and the authority of fathers, I wonder if they are taking their legitimate concerns too far and finding enemies where they should be finding friends. Be careful to evaluate

the legitimacy of such assertions according to the Scriptures.

Issue-oriented movements tend to so emphasize and so closely identify themselves with their one primary issue of concern that they unwittingly displace the one great issue for the Christian and the church – the gospel itself. There is a tendency to displace the gospel [Christ] from its place of first importance. Every local expression of the church of Jesus Christ should desire to be known and identified supremely for its commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not by its distinctives. Whenever the church raises such issues to the level of first importance, we risk distorting our true identity and undermining our true calling and usefulness. When I read leaders of this movement speaking as if America's greatest need is the restoration of biblical fatherhood, I wonder if such a displacement of the gospel is occurring.

And issue-oriented movements like this tend to hold their particular convictions in such a way that almost inevitably promotes disunity within the body of Christ. We get into trouble when our efforts to define 'truly biblical' take us beyond the Bible itself. The basis of unity becomes agreement with the specific way those convictions are worked out, rather

than like-mindedness on the broader principles behind those convictions. Seeking to order one's family by the Word of God suddenly becomes not enough. Now it must look a certain way, or it is not 'truly biblical.' And that is where the problem lies."

[Letter taken from The Wartburg Watch website]

Well, you see the point? These are the things we must constantly watch for. We must cling to Christ in whom is all that we need. We must remember that He has put His Spirit in every genuine Christian, and that by His Spirit and Word He leads us. He is the One we must look to for wisdom, strength, and power and joy. We are complete in Him, the Creator of all things.

Alright then, let's look at a few more specifics here in chapter 2.

(Colossians 2:1-8 ESV) ¶ 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.

Paul calls the Colossians, and us, back to the message of the gospel of Christ by which we were saved in the first place. This is where the Christian's *roots* must be planted. If we are going to grow in Him, be built up in Him, become stronger in Him and wiser in Him, then we must be sure we cling to Him and His Word. We need to come to a point where our faith is *established*. That is, the truth of Christ which we have here in His Word, must become a strong, unshakeable foundation. Liken it to a tree. We begin as seedlings, but as we remain rooted in Christ's truth, we grow and our roots grow down deeper and we eventually become a tall, mighty tree that cannot be shaken by every wind of false doctrine that happens to come blowing our way. And we become

thankful! Thankful to Christ. We are characterized by what we **HAVE** in other words, not in seeking something that people tell us that we need in addition.

Walk in Christ. Walk with Christ. Listen to His Word. Be taught by Him. Not by some cheap substitute who wants your ear. Don't look at some system of thought, of some "do this and don't do that, dress like this, not like that..." system.

When I am at some coffee place studying, sometimes I have to put my earphones in and crank up some music. Why? Because some guy sits down with another person at a nearby table and *never shuts up!* Or there is the classic cell-phone guy. He talks so loudly that everyone is in on the conversation. So you have to tune these people out.

In a way, Paul is telling us here to tune a lot of voices out, and listen to the One Voice that matters – Christ. He says –

(Colossians 2:8 ESV) ¶ 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.

Let's consider some of these terms in more detail:

1. Taken Captive:

See the danger. We who were captives of the devil have been set free in Christ. His emissaries try to bring us back into captivity, and these means we have been discussing are the schemes he uses to do it. The enemy wants to convince us that we really aren't fully free yet. Thus he takes control of us and carries us off captive.

Many Christians are "captivated" by "captivating" speakers and writers and teachers, such as the example we quoted earlier. But inevitably they will be led away from the true Captor who gives us life, Christ.

Just yesterday Verla was listening to a video clip on our blog of a pretty widely known evangelist who, in my opinion, has strayed from the gospel and become immersed in man-made traditions. We listened to his statements he was cranking off with all authority and confidence and then asked, "where did he get that? Not in the Bible. He is just talking off the top of his head and the people are lapping it all up."

Christ's truth ALWAYS sets us free. Man's tradition ALWAYS puts us in bondage.

2. According to:

These philosophies and empty deceptions that will come our way (and they WILL), are said to be "according to." Now, get a firm hold on this. These captive-taking, captivating philosophies and deceptions are:

- According to human tradition,
- According to the elemental spirits (or principles) of the world,
- AND THEREFORE *not according to Christ.*

In fact, if you look ahead in 2:18 you will see there that Paul attributes the source of these deceptions as *the arrogance and sensuality of those who teach them.*

Human tradition is the invented devices and philosophies of man which, most often, are presented to us as the Word of God. A pulpit is a dangerous place. A man can stand in it, Bible open before him, and then authoritatively pronounce things as the Word of God which are no more than the inventions of himself or some other human being. To some degree or another, we have all been guilty of this ourselves. It is really quite easy to fall into.

(Matthew 15:8-9 ESV) "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

These traditions are NOT ACCORDING TO CHRIST. They are the products of man's sinful flesh and thus are damaging lies. This is one of the reasons that so often we see famous Christian leaders who have written books on how to have a successful marriage, who have taught huge seminars on various topics, and then they come crashing down when their real self is revealed. Because you can teach all of these noble-sounding things and yet be motivated by sin, self, and the flesh – having nothing to do at all with Christ.

We need to spend far more time in our Bibles, prayerfully studying them, than in listening to notable Christian leaders. God has given pastors and teachers and so on for the building up of His people, but this can NOT be a substitute for the personal, regular, prayerful study of God's Word for ourselves.

Many Christians read more books ABOUT the Bible than they read the bible itself!

Now, what is this business of "according to the elemental spirits of

the world"? You have the same thing it appears in these texts:

(Colossians 2:20-21 ESV) ¶ 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"

And again –

(Galatians 4:3-9 ESV) In the same way we also, when we were children, **were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world**. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. 8 ¶ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, **how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world**, whose slaves you want to be once more?

So these systems are built upon the fundamental assumptions that

regulations must be enforced, that we must have commandments of do not taste, handle, or touch, and that we must DO and NOT DO these commandments if we are going to be approved of by God. The Greek word use for elemental spirits/principles is interesting:

(Col 2:8 BGT).....τ□ στοιχε□α
το□ κ□σμου.....

Stoicheia of the cosmos. Here is the lexicon definition—

Strictly, a small upright post; hence first beginning, element or principle; only plural in the NT;

(1) generally, the rudimentary elements of anything, what belongs to a basic series in any field of knowledge; in grammar, the ABCs; in speech, basic sounds; in physics, the four basic elements (earth, air, fire, water); in geometry, the axioms; **in philosophy, the givens;**

(2) as used in the NT;

(a) as a religious technical term elementary doctrines, fundamental teachings, basic principles (HE 5.12; perhaps CO 2.8, 20 and GA 4.3, 9);

(b) in a negative sense, humanistic teachings common to Jewish and pagan religions, involving binding

traditions, taboos, prohibitions, ordinances, ceremonies, etc., teachings involving either supernatural elemental or animating spirits (probably CO 2.8, 20), or basic material elements (probably GA 4.3, 9) elements, elemental things;

(c) in relation to the natural world (basic) elements, natural substances (2P 3.10, 12)

Alright, computers are not my specialty and particularly computer languages and coding systems. As I understand it, some (all?) computer languages are a system called *binary*. Let me call in Wikipedia for some help here –

A Binary code is a way of representing text or computer processor instructions by the use of the binary number system's two-binary digits 0 and 1. This is accomplished by assigning a bit string to each particular symbol or instruction. For example, a binary string of eight binary digits (bits) can represent any of 256 possible values and can therefore correspond to a variety of different symbols, letters or instructions.

In computing and telecommunication, binary codes are used for any of a variety of methods of encoding data, such as character strings, into bit strings. Those methods may be fixed-

width or variable-width. In a fixed-width binary code, each letter, digit, or other character, is represented by a bit string of the same length; that bit string, interpreted as a binary number, is usually displayed in code tables in octal, decimal or hexadecimal notation. There are many character sets and many character encodings for them.

A bit string, interpreted as a binary number, can be translated into a decimal number. For example, the lowercase "a" as represented by the bit string 01100001, can also be represented as the decimal number 97.

In such a system we would say then that the 0 and 1 are the stoicheia, the ABC's building blocks of that computer language. In that language, and thus in that system of "thought," you never get away from the 0 and the 1. The entire thing, every instruction and program, is based on these fundamentals stoicheia.

What the Apostle Paul means when he says "the elemental spirits/principles" of the world here is this:

That the world's building blocks, the world's ABC's of religion, from which ALL the world's religions are constructed, are entirely and radically foreign in their most basic elements to the gospel of Christ and the wisdom

of God. God's "language" is not only different, the very ABC's of our redemption in Christ are totally different. The one (from the world) is works righteousness: do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. The other (Christ) is grace.

Any tradition created by man, even if it is couched in "biblical" language, will inevitably be written in the stoicheia of the world. It cannot escape that. It is the very language of the thought process of everyone who is outside of Christ. It proceeds, as Paul says, from the arrogant, fleshly mind of the one who invents it. And this is why-

(Colossians 2:20-23 ESV) ¶ 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.

In fact, these philosophies, deceptions, and traditions are *perfectly consistent with the flesh because they are the product of it. THE FLESH ALWAYS*

SPEAKS THE SAME LANGUAGE OF THE STOICHEIA OF THE WORLD.

Do you begin to see now, more clearly, why it is vital that we not be taken captive by these things and that we cling close to Christ, walking in Him, listening to Him, being rooted and built up and established in Him?

If you are a Christian, then you have everything you need. Christ is in you. You have His Word and by His Spirit you recognize His voice. Scripture gives us everything we need to know for life and godliness.

(2 Timothy 4:1-4 ESV) ¶ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves **teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.**

These myths abound today, and they do not just come to us in the form of easily-recognizable denials of the fundamentals of the gospel. No. The enemy is crafty.

In light of all this, perhaps here are some of the most important words from Scripture for us right now:

(Matthew 11:28-30 ESV) Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

If something is being laid upon you is hard and heavy, if it does not give you rest, then it is not of Christ no matter how "Christian" it claims to be. Always be on guard, asking yourself "just what "stoicheia" is this message written with?