

Message #9

Colossians 2:8-10

Many years ago, I was in a college course in which the teacher tried to convince us that the chairs we were sitting in were not real. Now I admit, I am a simple-minded guy, but the one thing I certainly did know is that the chair I was sitting in was real.

As I listened to this guy lecture, I thought I have paid money to listen to a nut job who doesn't even know that chairs we sit in are real. He claimed he got his brilliant idea from Plato and as I listened to him talk my conclusion is this guy is out of his mind. He may think he is some philosophical intellectual scholar, but he is a moronic bean head.

Now when there are these idiotic philosophical speculations about chairs, it is just laughable, but when there are philosophical speculations about God, apart from Scripture, it is dangerous. Worldly philosophers, who promote things contrary to God's word, have been deceiving people for centuries.

There have been those who have postulated theories and lectured on their theories as if they were provable facts. They present their views as scientific, which are idiotic. For example, one theory is that the world began not as a result of the creative genius of God, but by some random explosion. Now we can scientifically test explosions and explosions never create beautiful things. Explosions destroy things.

We can see this with a firecracker, dynamite, nitroglycerin, atomic bombs, tomahawk missiles and nuclear explosions. Explosions never create beauty, they destroy things. So some philosophers say we want you to believe us rather than facts. We speculate that there was one explosion that created the beautiful world.

The Apostle Paul believed in the importance of learning truth. The Apostle Paul believed in systematic teaching. He believed it was important that people came to a deep knowledge of the deep things of God. **The Apostle believed and taught that deep knowledge came from an accurate understanding of God's word.**

The Colossians were surrounded by a bunch of smooth-talking, intellectual philosophers and religious salesmen, who were trying to pull them away from the word of God to what they called their "higher level of learning." Paul had seen plenty of these kinds of guys in his lifetime. They propagated their secular theories and philosophies and swayed many people. Paul did not want that happening to the Colossians, so what he says here is this:

NEVER ALLOW ANY PERSON, NO MATTER HOW INTELLECTUAL OR SCHOLARLY OR PHILOSOPHICAL THEY APPEAR TO BE, TO PULL YOU AWAY FROM THE WRITTEN TRUTH OF GOD AND FROM A FOCUS ON JESUS CHRIST.

The word of God will always prove to be true and the vain philosophies of men will eventually be shown to be foolishness.

The assumption of these verses is that there will be those who will surface who will try to pull you away from the written word of God. They will use their vain philosophies and theories to try to do that. They will appear to be smooth and logical and scholarly and rational, but they will not be Biblical. Paul says no way, don't listen to them. You stick with the Scriptures.

In fact, when Paul opens this section up in verse 8 he says, “you see to it.” This is a very strong warning given to believers to see to this themselves. In fact, the pronoun “you” is used in the verb “you see” and then it is used again as the object of the verb “you.” So we may understand this as **“you see to this concerning yourself.”** Each believer must make certain that he protects himself.

Make sure no one is taking you captive, by their vain views and philosophies and pulling you away from God's written inspired truth that downplays or lessens or demeans Jesus Christ.

There will be people, who appear to be very learned people, who will try to pull you away from an accurate, systematic study and belief in God's word and in Jesus Christ.

What is needed today by everyone is careful systematic study of God's written word that teaches accurate truth about Jesus Christ. If one has this as a foundation, one will go far in any academic pursuit or career.

The actual Greek word “philosophy” (φιλοσοφία) is a word that literally means to have a love of wisdom and knowledge to the point where one wants to carefully investigate to discover truth (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 472).

There is nothing wrong with loving wisdom and knowledge to the point where careful investigation is made to discover truth. But that was not happening here. The philosophy was pulling people away from truth.

The specific kind of philosophy that Paul has in mind here is the love of a wisdom that adds things or subtracts things which are contrary to the written Revelation and truth of God.

There were various religious teachers and philosophers who were saying they had uncovered deeper ways and methods to having wisdom and knowledge that really made the Bible almost unnecessary.

I want to read you something that was written by H. A. Ironside:

“It is a sad commentary on conditions of Christendom that in the average theological seminary far more time is given to the study of philosophy than to searching the Scriptures. Christianity owes no debt to Greek, Roman, Medieval or Modern philosophy. A man can be a well-furnished minister of Jesus Christ who has never heard the names of the great philosophers, whether pagan or Christian, and who is utterly ignorant of their system and hypotheses, providing he will ‘study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.’ The truest culture, intellectual or spiritual, is that which is drawn from the constant study of the Bible” (*Colossians*, pp. 75-76).

Now understand this point. We are living in a very deceptive world, filled with deceptive people and churches. They are out to deceive you and captivate you by their vain, worldly religious views and philosophies. There are religions and denominations who invent things that sound reasonable and possible. You see to it yourself that no one pulls you away from a careful study and analysis of God's written word. You stick to the Scriptures for the Scriptures are the truth.

These people will try to pull you away through "empty deception." So the means to get you away from focus is by deception. It is an empty deceit that will take one nowhere.

Now the empty deception is modified by three prepositional phrases that all begin with the preposition "according to." I am not the one inventing this data. This is straight from the Biblical text:

Prepositional Phrase #1 - Empty deception is according to the traditions of men. **2:8a**

The original text reads "the traditions of the men" (Thn plhrwma thç anqrwpon). The word "traditions" refers to things men have invented or produced which they claim is something that completes or fulfills things beyond that of Scripture (*Ibid.*, p. 866).

These are deceitful men who go beyond what the word of God actually teaches. They add things and invent things that they claim is really necessary to be right with God.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee said this is why it is so important to teach the word of God systematically. This is why he refused to teach topically. He was convinced that God was the One who wanted His word taught systematically and any other way of teaching was some system or method invented by men.

He also observed that he personally saw many people who ran to all kinds of conferences and seminars and had notebooks filled with all kinds of things who never went anywhere in their spiritual lives because they were not properly taught (*Colossians*, p. 159, 152).

The only way to see to it that we are being taught the truth is by going straight through the truth. Leap frogging from one passage to another is a philosophy that has been invented by men and may lead to the potential of one being deceived.

Raising hands and going forward in altar calls are traditions invented by men and sometimes those things, called motional regeneration, are viewed as really important.

Prepositional Phrase #2 - Empty deception is according to the elementary principles of the world. **2:8b**

The words "elementary principles" literally refer to elementary sounds and elements. The term refers to very basic and elementary things such as learning an alphabet or learning to pronounce vowels. The writer of Hebrews lists elementary things in Hebrews 6:1-3.

Paul says empty deception keeps people shallow. It stays at surface level and keeps the people at surface level. I believe many churches and many missionaries are guilty of this very thing. They are not taking their flocks deep in God's word.

Propositional Phrase #3 - Empty deception is not according to Christ. **2:8c**

Any true teaching will be Christ-centered and not man-centered and not tradition-centered and not surface level-centered.

Deceptive philosophy is persuasive and popular, but it is not Christologically powerful. It adds man-made traditions and shallow religious challenges to people and basically say Jesus Christ and the word of God is not all you really need.

Understand this, there is an exclusiveness to our relationship with God and that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is not "a way" to have a relationship with God; He is "the only way" to have a relationship with God.

Deceptive teaching is not teaching that will tell you everything you need for a relationship with God is Jesus Christ and the word of God.

Now in **verses 9-10**, Paul gives two reasons why we must never permit any one to pull us away from this focus:

REASON #1 – Because the fullness of God is in Christ. **2:9**

The Colossians were being told that Jesus Christ was not enough. They were being told they needed circumcision, legalism, asceticism, baptism and religion.

Paul says Jesus Christ is all you need because in Him "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

The word "deity" (θεοτης) is a very rare Greek word, only used here. This word is even stronger than the one Paul uses in Romans 1:20 that is translated "Divine Nature." This word contextually says that "all the fullness of Deity" inhabited or lives in bodily form in the Person of Jesus Christ.

What this means is that the totality of all that God is, including His attributes, qualities, power, personality and essence, fully existed in bodily form in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now the fullness of Deity has always existed in God the Son, Jesus Christ. But it did not always exist in bodily form. That blessed moment in Bethlehem when Jesus Christ came into the world in bodily form continues to exist to this very moment.

Understand what Paul is saying here, Jesus Christ was not a mere man, He was not an exalted spirit being or angel, He was not a step down from God; He was and is fully God in bodily form.

Paul's point is don't you allow any one or any religion pull you away from this truth and captivate you through some empty, deceptive philosophy.

Deep knowledge of Jesus Christ and the word of God is the greatest use of your mind and it will lead to the greatest development of your spiritual life.

REASON #2 – Because the fullness of Christ is in us. **2:10**

Understand this very important point—you are complete in Christ by faith in Him. A full and complete relationship with God is not found in worldly philosophy or academics or personal achievement or circumcision, baptism or catechism or religion; it is found in Jesus Christ.

When you have Jesus Christ in your life, you are complete in your relationship with God and when you go after an accurate understanding of God's word, you will soar like an eagle to depth levels of spirituality you would have never imagined.

Jesus Christ is over everything. He is the designer (1:16a); He is the creator (1:16b); He is the sustainer (1:17); He is the ruler (**2:10**); He is the conqueror (2:15). When you have Jesus Christ in your life, you don't need anything else.

The greatest knowledge you will ever gain is knowledge of God's written word through a faith in Jesus Christ.