

An Open Letter to Pastors / Continued VII ~

Colossians 2:8 - 23

~ The great thinkers of mankind have produced and developed myriad philosophies and religious systems over the centuries in an attempt to control, manipulate, and even improve human nature. Some of these theories of self-help may actually work – for a while – but they can only provide temporary relief from the acts and consequences of our human nature. Even the laws and ordinances that God gave to the nation Israel in the Old Testament only condemned the guilty sinner; they never made any improvement in any way, shape or form. No, friends, what we need is a new nature; and, once the Spirit of God has given us that new nature, we still need power to appropriate it. Only the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the transforming power of His Spirit through the Word of God can produce that power. There is no human scheme, plan or design – known, yet to be known, or unknowable – that can substitute for a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our previous report, we examined five errors that were creeping into and endangering the church at Colosse. Those are the same dangers in our contemporary church; and they rank in the order I presented them. Enticing words are one of them. It's easy to become carried away by a man who is an outstanding orator, but does not know, preach or teach the Word of God. Frankly, enticing words is the number one factor contributing to the destruction of the modern day church – and it is what literally destroyed the witness and testimony of the church at Colosse in the time in which we are studying. The Gospel had been preached mightily by Paul and others; but the ramifications of committing these five errors by the church at Colosse and Laodicea are the main reason Christ is utterly rejected in that part of the world today — right now — as I type and as you read this report. If you have not read our last report, I suggest you go back and do so now....

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

~ The *"tradition of men"* is exactly what Jesus warned of and condemned the religious rulers for in His day. They taught customized, tailored, and personal religious philosophies rather than the Word of God. Honestly, because I always am honest with you dear readers, that is the main reason I have been led to teach the *ENTIRE* Word of God. It's too easy to lift out a peculiar passage here, and a disconnected verse there, and string them together to ride a misguided interpretation like a hobby horse. Prophecy, for example, is very important; and I certainly believe in it. After just four more reports from Colossians we're going to begin the *L-O-N-G* prophetic section of the Bible in Isaiah; but there's a whole lot more to Scripture than prophecy. Others like to dwell on the message of living a Christian life – and that's in the Bible, too – but, again, that's not *all* of it.

See, if we do not understand the *TOTAL* Word of God — not just pieces and parts — then we can never know anything about prophecy or the Christian life. Paul mentions the *"rudiments"* of the world here; and what he meant is that they were beginning to build their theology on a worldly system. So many churches today have fallen into this trap because it usually seems so overly-simple. Well, our Christian life and existence is based on the Lord Jesus Christ and the entirety of Holy Writ – or all you have is a vain and empty, dead religious philosophy that doesn't mean anything to anybody – not even yourself....

9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

~ This is a clear cut and undeniable declaration of the deity of Christ Jesus. I don't see how it could be put into any stronger terms or simpler language than this. In the Greek *"complete in Him"* is a nautical term that translates vividly into saying that, in Christ, we have everything we need for the journey of life. God gave us all we will ever need in this life in His Son. However, let's not oversimplify that by saying *"Christ is the answer."* We need the question first. If you say Christ is the answer to all of our problems and to this world's theoretical lies then, yes, I agree – Christ is the answer. However, if you want to know which restaurant to eat at, or where to go to have your hair cut – then I don't think He is the answer to those questions. You'll need to seek His leading. The Lord isn't going to print directions. Some people seem to think that God Personally told them to get up at a precise moment in the morning and go down the road eight point six miles, turn right, go another two point three miles and turn left, and then talk to the person with a red hat on. Well, that type of thinking is for completely superstitious idiots, my friends. God just doesn't work that way. He never has – and He never will.

The church today needs to get rid of the systems, methods, and exterior ceremonies and rituals and get born-again. When you and I come to Christ, and trust and obey Him as our Savior, then we become a new creation. Then – and only then – can we truly rest in Him. That's true identification in Christ as we are buried with Him in baptism and risen with Him through the operation of faith in God. God raised Christ from the dead, my friends.

Lord Lyndhurst was a chancellor of Great Britain - and likely the sharpest legal mind this world has ever known. He said, *".... I know what evidence is, and such evidence as for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has never broken down."* Our salvation is contingent upon a historical fact. When Christ died, He took your place and my place; and when He was raised from the dead, we were also raised from the dead; joined to the True and Living God. This is so critical and so urgently important to understand that I just don't feel like I have properly conveyed the message to you correctly; even with the emphasis that I have placed on it, I suppose I'll always feel inadequate handling these truths. So, we should move along now....

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

~ Paul was contending with two systems of Greek philosophy in his day. The two are diametrically opposed to each other; yet they both came out of the same end of one goat. One is Stoicism, and the other is Epicureanism. The stoic taught that man was to live nobly and that death did not matter. They taught that man should hold his appetite in check and become indifferent to changing conditions. Stoicism says to be neither uplifted by good fortune nor cast down in adversity. They hold that man is more than his circumstances and that his soul is greater than the entire universe. I'll admit, Stoicism is a brave philosophy, and sounds great – but it's impossible to achieve. Epicureanism, on the other hand, is a philosophy which states that everything is uncertain. That is, we don't know where we came from, and we don't know where we're going. All we really know is that, after a brief existence, we disappear; seemingly never to be heard from again. In light of that, they theorize it is useless to deny ourselves any present joy in light of potential future ills. All said, it boils down to “... eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

Interestingly, both man-made theories of existential conduct are the same thing many so-called Christians claim when they say they live by the Sermon on the Mount. Those who say they live by the Sermon on the Mount never seem to even know where the mount is; and they don't know more than ten words from the sermon. It's really a joke – except it isn't funny! I know some people who have notebooks filled with page after page of notes on how to live the Christian life. Unfortunately, they never do very well in their Christian life. See, there is one very important thing that is required: that we are joined to the Living Christ. If you understand that, then you are going to live for Him – every day. How close are you to the Lord? Do you walk with Him? Do you turn to Him when the going gets difficult beyond what you are able to bear? Do you trust Him when the emergencies of life appear suddenly from nowhere? Who and what is the center of your life today, friends? ~

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

~ Paul now addresses legality; and, again, the answers to all of the problems that the church in Colosse was facing are found in Scripture. This flesh has been condemned; and Christ took our condemnation upon Himself on the cross. When they crucified Him they wrote “.... *King of the Jews*” on a sign above His head. Of course, Jesus was being publicly executed on a charge of leading a rebellion against Caesar. Those in the crowd understood the crucifixion as being a punishment for disloyalty to Roman authority. Well, when God looked upon the cross, He saw an altar on which the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world was being offered. God didn’t even see the sign that the Romans had made because He “.... *blotted out the handwriting of ordinances.*” God wrote His Own sign with Ten Commandments on them – all of which you and I are guilty of breaking – and which we cannot possibly keep.

Christ didn’t break any commandments of God, though – because He was sinless – but He was made sin for us because you and I are sinners who come short of the glory of God. So, if God has saved you, raised you from the dead, and joined you to Himself in a living body, then why would you go back to a law that you know you cannot and do not keep? The law was given as discipline for the old nature. People challenge me all the time as they contend, “.... *show me where the law was changed.*” Friends, the law was never changed – but *Y-O-U* have been changed. Now we have a new nature, and we try to obey and please Him because we love Him! We don’t obey the law for salvation; we do so because we are saved; and we love Christ Jesus as our Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ is either a reality in your life – or He isn’t. Not only is this important to understand – it is the *ALL*-important thing to understand....

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

~ Mysticism is another popular angle from which people attempt to approach God. Here, Paul is addressing the Gnostics who make such a bespectacled pretense of wisdom. So many people today — many Christians included — assume the most proud, pious and pygmy superiority over others; but it renders them hypocrites and spiritual snobs. Generally speaking, they are as ignorant of the Bible as they can possibly be — although they usually claim to be Biblical scholars. They know certain Scriptures, but have no earthly idea how it fits into dispensation through sound doctrine. Their pretense is as thick as the smog in Los Angeles. Frankly, their heads just are not screwed on tight. Thankfully, they come and go as fast as a rain shower in Florida; and it generally doesn't take them long before they decide they really don't want to be my friend; but I digress....

20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

22 Which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

~ So, our Spiritual Safari ends this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God on the theme of asceticism. These are the people who always follow the latest fad, gimmick, or technology in the church. There was a

time when women weren't allowed to wear make-up, for example. I had a friend recently ask me if wearing make-up was acceptable in the church. I told her, and I quote, "*.... I would wear make-up if I thought it would help me look better.*" Running around saying, "*.... I do this and don't do that*" is a pride that apes humility. It's just so much more pretending – and it's no good. What we need in our Christian life is reality, my beloved – real reality – not what the world mislabels reality; because their existence is as fake as Hollywood itself. God wants us to rejoice in Christ and draw near to Him today – in reality ~

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