

The Colossian Heresy Exposed Part 1

Text: Colossians 2:16-23

Introduction

1. These verses are a natural outflow of the truths expounded in the previous verses. The word 'therefore' in verse 16 points to what has been covered in the previous verses.
2. The Apostle now confronts the 3 central elements of the Colossian heresy and dismantles each one masterfully having already dealt with it as a philosophy in verse 8.
3. This lesson: Legalism – the first major element of the Colossian heresy.

I. Legalism - Don't be Judged (Vs. 16-27)

Definition: Law works become the ground/basis of our acceptance with God. "Legalism is best understood as a spirit that fails to recognize that God's grace has made us acceptable to Him, and that human works have no part in it." (Homer A. Kent, Jr.)

A. It's spirit – harsh and condemning

Gal. 4:17 *"They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them."*

B. It's emphasis – external ritual

1. Diet

a. Meat

b. Drink

I. Timothy 4:3-5 *"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."*

Romans 14:17 *"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."*

2. Days

Lessons in the Epistle to the Colossians

- a. Holyday (Feast days – e.g. Passover, First fruits)
 - b. New Moon
 - c. Sabbath Days (the Sabbath is never spoken of in Scripture as being binding for the Gentiles. New Testament believers assembled on the Lord's Day)
- C. It's error – going back to the shadow & forsaking the substance.
1. The Shadow – the Old Covenant
 - a. 'Shadow' = a shadow which in itself has no substance but indicates the existence of a body which casts the shadow, or a dim outline, a sketch of an object in contrast with the object itself.
 - b. Heb. 10:1 *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."*
 - c. Gal. 4:9 *"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years."*
 2. The Substance – Christ

Rom. 10:4 *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."*

1 Cor. 1:30 *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"*

Gal. 3:24-25 *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."*

H.A. Ironside – "In the Old Testament dispensation the light of God was shining upon Christ, and all the forms and ceremonies, including even the weely Sabbaths, were but shadows cast by Him....The very fact that He links the Sabbath with the other ceremonies shows clearly that the rule of life for the believer is not the ten words given at Sinai. While confessing this law to be holy, just and good, the new creation man is not under it. He is, as Paul expressed it elsewhere, "under law to Christ" (I. Cor. 9:21). That is, his responsibility now is to walk in fellowship with the risen Christ, the Head of the Body of which he is but a feeble member, in whom dwells the Holy Spirit to be the power of the new life – manifested in subjection to the exalted Lord. None need fear that this will make for a lower standard of piety than if one were under the law as a rule of life. It is a far higher standard. He whose one thought and desire is to manifest the risen life of Christ in all his ways will lead a holier life than he who is seeking to subject the flesh to rules and regulations, even though given from heaven in a dispensation now past."

II. Mysticism – Don't be Deceived (Vs. 18-19)

Definition: The elevation of subjective experience over the intellect. In the context of these verses, extra-biblical ideas.

Lessons in the Epistle to the Colossians

A. Deceptive – *'beguile'*

* These false teachers would rob the Colossian believers of their future rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

B. Superficial – *"voluntary humility"*

1. 'voluntary' – 'desiring'
2. 'humility' - lowliness

C. Idolatrous – *"worshipping of angels"*

Illustration: The Apostle John on Patmos

Rev. 19:10 *"And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

* False cults and religions often place special emphasis on angelic beings.

D. Presumptuous – *"intruding into those things which he has not seen"*

E. Elitist – *"puffed up in his fleshly mind"* (Heresy is a work of the flesh – Gal. 5:20)

F. Autonomous (Vs. 19)

1. Denies Christ's Headship (See 1:18)

Eph. 4:16 *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."*

Therefore it is characterized by:

2. A lack of unity & cohesion.
3. An absence of genuine spiritual life and vitality.

* True life and growth can only be produced by our union with Christ (See John 15). It cannot be manufactured through self effort.

III. Asceticism – Don't be Enslaved (Vs. 20-23)

Definition: The practice of extreme, harsh denial of natural appetites in the quest for a higher spiritual state of holiness and acceptance with God. E.g. the monastic ideals.

Lessons in the Epistle to the Colossians

Note: The Western world is turning to many of these ancient, pagan practices.

- A. It bypasses the believer's position in Christ (Vs. 20)
 - 1. 'rudiments' – see verse 8
- B. It brings bondage to a worldly system (Vs. 20-21)
- C. It originates from man-made ideas (Vs. 22)

Mark 7:7 *“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”*

- D. It appears in a false form of godliness (Vs. 23)
- E. It fails to achieve what it promises (Vs. 23)
 - 1. 'honour' = value (translated elsewhere as 'price' & 'sum')
 - 2. 'neglecting' = unsparing severity
 - 3. No amount of harsh treatment will ever subdue the sinful nature in man. Only the Supernatural power of God's Holy Spirit working in the life can produce genuine godliness and spiritual life. There is no victory over the sinful impulses of the flesh nature apart from Christ.

Gal. 6:14 *“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”*

Alexander McClaren: “Any asceticism is a great deal more to men's taste than abandoning self. They will rather stick hooks in their backs and do the 'swinging poojah' than give up their sins and yield their wills. There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us and that is the power of the indwelling Christ.”

Conclusion: What are you trusting in for your acceptance with God? (Salvation or Sanctification)