

The Colossian Heresy Exposed Part 2

Text: Colossians 2:18-23

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: Brief review of Legalism, the first pillar of the heresy and examination of the final two, mysticism and asceticism.

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
- B. It's emphasis – external ritual
 1. Diet
 2. Days
- C. It's error – going back to the shadow & forsaking the substance.

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.

- A. Deceptive (18a)
 1. 'beguile' = deceive, mislead
 2. 'reward' = These false teachers would rob the Colossian believers of their future rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Lessons in the Epistle to the Colossians

B. Superficial (18b)

1. 'voluntary' – 'desiring/willing'
2. 'humility' – false humility
3. Note: For every Christian grace, the flesh has its counterfeit.

C. Idolatrous (18c)

1. 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."*
2. False cults and religions often place special emphasis on angelic beings.

D. Presumptuous (18d) *"intruding into those things which he has not seen"*

1. 'intruding' = to enter into, penetrate
2. "things which he has not seen" = the unseen world of spirits and angels

E. Prideful (18e) – *"puffed up in his fleshly mind"* (Heresy is a work of the flesh – Gal. 5:20)

1. "puffed up" = inflated, full of pride. Word picture: A pair of bellows which are used to blow up or inflate!
2. "fleshly mind" = his ideas originate from the sinful flesh, not the Spirit. The flesh is "the unregenerate state, in which the sinful principle dominates."
(Moule) Heresy is a work of the flesh (Gal 5:20)

F. Autonomous (Vs. 19)

1. When Christ is kept in his rightful place as Head of the church, the following 3 blessings ensue:
 - a. Life – 'nourishment'
 - b. Unity – "knit together"
 - c. Growth
 - i. 'increaseth...increase' = same word, means "grows with the growth of God"
 - ii. "of God" = Divinely produced growth. True life and growth can only be produced by our union with Christ (John 15)
2. When Christ's Headship is denied, the opposite is true
 - a. There is barrenness
 - b. There is division
 - c. There is decay

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.

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. "dead with Christ" = see Vs. 11-13
 - 2. 'rudiments' – see verse 8
- B. It brings bondage to a worldly system (Vs. 20b-21)
 - 1. 'ordinances' = dogmas, decrees
 - 2. 'perish' = temporal things
- 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)