

COL. 2:6 – 3:4

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V. Exhortation, Warning, and Commands Regarding the False Teaching (2:6-23)

A. Exhortation to continue to live in Christ (2:6-7)

1. **⁶So then, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him,**

a. They had received Christ Jesus as Lord - Epaphras had delivered the Christian teaching or tradition to them (see, 1:15-20, 23), and they did not just hear it, they received or accepted it.

b. So they should continue to live in him

(1) For Paul, to believe includes an obligation to behave a certain way. In 1:10-12 he reported that the goal of his intercessory prayer was that they live (or walk) worthily of the Lord. He now exhorts them to that end.

(2) They were to continue living under the lordship of Christ, just as they had begun their Christian lives by submitting to that lordship. They are to understand more and more the consequence of his supremacy. This would include a rejection of rival loyalties.

2. **⁷having been rooted and being built up in him, being established in the faith just as you were taught, [and] abounding in thanksgiving.**

a. Paul elaborates on his exhortation to continue to live in Christ. Having been firmly rooted in Christ, they should continue building on that foundation; that is, they should continue to be strengthened in the faith Epaphras had passed on to them (see Gal. 1:6-9), not to abandon it as they are being pressured to do.

b. Joyful thanksgiving is to characterize their lives. This refers to an act (giving thanks), not simply to a state of mind (being grateful). Given the corporate nature of thanksgiving in view in 3:15-17, that is probably what is in view here. It would include singing songs of praise and thanksgiving.

B. Warning about and debunking of the false teaching (2:8-15)

1. **⁸Watch out lest there will be anyone who takes you captive through the philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.**

a. Strong warning against being taken captive

(1) Paul's strong warning against being carried away into the slavery of error shows how seriously he regarded the false teaching.

(2) The method of abduction was literally "philosophy and empty deceit." The heretics probably pushed their teaching as "philosophy," so Paul employs that term, but he adds "empty deceit" to make clear it is a hollow sham.

(a) "deceit" stands opposed to the gospel, "the word of *truth*" (1:5) and to "wisdom and knowledge" (2:3).

(b) "empty" is in contrast to the mystery and its "glorious *riches*" (1:27) and to Christ in whom are found all the hidden *treasures* of wisdom and knowledge (2:3).

b. Nature of the false teaching

(1) Paul describes its *source* as "the tradition of *men*." It is likely that the heretics had put forth their teaching as "tradition," thereby pointing to its antiquity, dignity, and revelational character. (In 2 Thess. 2:15 Paul tells the Thessalonians to "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us.") Paul rejects any divine origin for the heretics' teaching, making clear that it was a human fabrication, one which stood against the apostolic tradition which centered on Christ Jesus as Lord.

(2) Paul describes its *content* as centered on the elemental spirits or powers of the universe (NIV "basic principles") rather than on Christ. In the teaching at Colossae these spiritual beings were seen as controlling the heavenly realm and humanity's access to God's presence. One needed to placate or appease these powers, at least in part through subduing the flesh, to gain "fullness" with God.

2. ⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been made full in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

a. This explains why they should not embrace this teaching that centers on such spirit beings rather than on Christ.

b. Christ is the one in whom the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells (taking up language from 1:15-20). Only in him is fullness to be found. It is not to be obtained by groveling before the elemental spirits of the universe or by observing their regulations.

c. They have *already* been "filled" in Christ, the same person in whom the fullness of Deity dwells and the One who is ruler and master over every principality and power (which means their final defeat is inevitable).

3. ¹¹**In him you also were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands in the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ,**

a. In addition to being filled, "in him" they also were circumcised with a circumcision not done by hands – a non-physical circumcision done by God.

b. This non-physical circumcision involved a "putting off of the body of the flesh," the removal or putting to death (crucifixion - Rom. 6:6) of the condemned sinner, the person under judgment.

c. This occurred "in the circumcision of Christ," meaning in "Christian circumcision" or initiation which, as is clear from the N.T. and the next verse, is baptism.

d. Since baptism is nowhere else referred to by the figure of circumcision, it is likely that Paul used this language in response to some contention of the heretics. They were somehow making an issue of circumcision but probably not in the same way as the Judaizers in Galatia (otherwise Paul would probably have dealt with it more like he did in Galatians).

4. ¹²**having been buried with him in the baptism in which you also were raised together through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.**

a. "having been buried with him in baptism" specifies the nature of "Christian circumcision." Baptism is a sharing in Christ's death which is epitomized by his burial. We are "buried with him through baptism into death" (Rom. 6:4).

b. "in which also you were raised together"

(1) The old man, the condemned sinner, died with Christ in baptism but the new man, redeemed and free from condemnation, also was raised with Christ in baptism.

(2) This raising to spiritual life had already taken place for them. See Eph. 2:1-6. This does *not* mean, of course, there is no future resurrection (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:18).

c. The spiritual resurrection or rebirth experienced *in* baptism is *through* faith.

(1) Without faith the spiritual event of baptism, the working of God as outlined by Paul, does not occur. The person only gets wet.

(2) Faith is spoken of as "faith in the working (or power) of God who raised him [Jesus] from the dead." Those who submitted to baptism did so with faith in the redemptive power of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

5. ¹³**When you were dead in the trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.**

a. Paul elaborates on their spiritual resurrection.

b. "When you were dead in the trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh"

(1) This sets up another before and after contrast (see 1:21-22). "Death" is their spiritual condition of alienation and condemnation; they were lost or under the dominion of death.

(2) Death was "in the trespasses" because their acts of disobedience brought them under judgment.

(3) Death was "in the uncircumcision of their flesh" because it was apart from the realm of grace. The "uncircumcised" in this section are those outside of grace, the person under judgment (the old man - see 2:11). In speaking of the former life of Gentiles, it obviously includes physical uncircumcision which symbolized their alienation from grace (see Eph. 2:11-13).

c. "[God] made you alive with him,"

(1) As his power raised Christ from physical death, so his power raised them from spiritual death (see Eph. 1:18 - 2:6), which is a prelude to their ultimate physical resurrection.

(2) Their uncircumcision had been removed; they were circumcised with a circumcision not done by hands.

d. "having forgiven us all our trespasses" – This is the means by which this spiritual resurrection was effected.

6. ¹⁴**He erased the record of debt based on legal demands that was against us, which was opposed to us; he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.**

a. The word *cheirographon* does not mean "written code" as the NIV translates it; it refers generally to a handwritten document (*cheir* meaning "hand" and *graphe* meaning "writing"). But more specifically, it means a written record of debts. Sin, of course, is spoken of as a "debt" (e.g., Mat. 6:12); it is our failure to pay God his due.

b. *Cheirographon* ("record of debt") is followed immediately in the Greek text by "the *dogma*" (*cheirographon tois dogmasin*). Paul uses this word *dogma* in Eph. 2:15 in reference to the Mosaic Law, but the word simply means "legal requirements," rules or commandments that are to be obeyed. It is broad enough to encompass the law written on Gentiles' hearts to which Paul refers in Rom. 2:14-15 (though the word is not used there).

c. The noun *dogma* is here in the dative case, which can have a causal meaning. So the phrase can mean "record of debt *because of* legal requirements." That is why I have translated it "record of debt based on legal requirements." It is our sin record – the record of our failure to live up to God's moral requirements.

d. That record of debt has been nailed to the cross. In Christ's crucifixion, our debt has been erased, has been completely forgiven.

7. ¹⁵**Having disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public spectacle [of them], leading them in a triumphal procession through him.**

a. By wiping out our sin debt, God eliminated the only weapon the spiritual powers had for gaining mastery over us. If we are already reconciled, if our debt has been removed, there is no need to heed the dictates of spirits to try to gain God.

b. The fact the sin problem was resolved totally apart from the spiritual powers of the universe, exclusively through Jesus Christ, revealed openly that these beings had no real power. They were all "smoke and mirrors" or "paper tigers." The utter completeness of Christ's work exposed their irrelevance.

c. This public exposing of the salvific irrelevance of these powers is pictured as leading them as captives in a victory parade. As conquered enemies were paraded by the returning victor, so God through Christ has utterly vanquished the powers the heretics were promoting.

C. Command not to submit to spiritual powers (2:16-23)

1. ¹⁶**Therefore, do not let anyone pass judgment on you with regard to food and drink or concerning a festival or a new moon celebration or sabbaths,**

a. This is a reference to Jewish kosher laws, extended to include wine (as they had been by Paul's day), and to Jewish holy days (see, Ezek. 45:17; Hosea 2:11). Given the Jewish flavor of this heresy, there was a tendency to bind O.T. rituals. Paul is urging his readers not to accept these as binding.

b. How is this related to ("Therefore") the disarming of "rulers and authorities" in v. 15? The false teachers were urging obedience to these O.T. rituals as a way to satisfy the spiritual powers, probably those angels involved in the giving of the

Law (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2; see also Gal. 4:1-11), and thereby to advance toward fullness with God. Since *all* spiritual powers have been disarmed in that a full relationship with God has been provided in Christ, there is simply no reason to obey their alleged dictates, no reason "to dance to their tune."

2. ¹⁷ **which things are a shadow of the coming things, but the substance is Christ's.**

a. The O.T. regulations belong to the old age which has passed away with the coming of Christ (see Heb. 10:1). Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism (see Gal. 3:23-25). Thus, God *has not* bound these rules on the Colossians and the spiritual powers *cannot* bind them.

b. It is interesting that with regard to these more orthodox tenets of Judaism, Paul, in essence, speaks of them as having "had their day." They have been displaced. The less "orthodox" elements of the heresy are condemned as teachings of men (e.g., 2:8, 22).

3. ¹⁸ **Let no one condemn you who delights in humility [techniques] and worship of the angels, which things he had seen on entering [heaven].**

a. This verse is descriptive of the heretics. They emphasized ascetic practices such as fasting and apparently also emphasized visionary experiences in which they allegedly participated with angels in heavenly worship of God.

(1) The phrase "worship *of angels*" can mean either worship directed toward angels (objective genitive) or worship offered by angels to God (subjective genitive). It's the same ambiguity in a phrase like "appreciation of the workers." It could mean either appreciation someone has for the workers or the appreciation the workers have for someone else.

(2) Drawing on the work of a scholar named F. O. Francis and some others who elaborated on his thesis, both Peter O'Brien and James Dunn in their commentaries on Colossians favor the sense of angels worshipping God. They do so because the heresy has a strong Jewish flavor, and in the words of Dunn (p. 179-180), "worship of angels is something one would not expect in any of the forms of Judaism known to us for this period." In fact, there was broad opposition within Judaism to angel worship. Dunn writes (p. 180):

[W]e would have to envisage a very syncretistic form of Judaism, unlike anything else we know of. This, however, hardly squares well with the evidence of a Jewish character for the "philosophy" which relished not simply odd bits and pieces abstracted from Judaism but the identity markers which marked out ethnic Jews anxious to maintain their ancestral traditions (circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath in particular; see on 2:11 and 2:160.

(3) If the reference is to angels worshipping God, then part of the appeal of the false teachers was their offer of a kind of mystical worship experience, a visionary participation with angels in heavenly worship. Presumably this came only to those who satisfied the purity demands of these angels.

(4) The fact the Colossians did not have this grandiose experience was probably presented as an indication of their spiritual lack. If they would buy what the heretics were selling, if they would dance to the tune of the spiritual powers, their insufficiency would be overcome, the proof of which would be their visionary participation in heavenly angelic worship.

b. If, on the other hand, the Colossian heresy was an unprecedented syncretistic form of Judaism in which angels were worshiped, then that worship was part of how one appeased them to gain fullness with God.

c. Paul proceeds to undercut the validity of the heretics' claim.

(1) **He is puffed up without reason by his mind of the flesh** – His visions are of no value or are delusions.

(2) ¹⁹**and not holding fast to the head from whom all the body, nourished and held together through the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth of God.**

(a) This is a serious charge that these heretics had separated themselves from Christ, the source of growth.

(b) Christians only serve the growth of the body as conduits of Christ's will. When they pass on merely *human* philosophy, they are of no value.

4. ²⁰**Since you died with Christ [out] from [under] the elemental spirits of the universe, why as though still living in [the] world do you let yourselves be ordered about –**

a. Since their forgiveness/reconciliation deprived all the spiritual powers (including angels as mediators of O.T. law) of any leverage, it was inconsistent to subject themselves to their control.

b. The Christian has no need to appease or placate *any* spiritual powers. They have been freed.

5. ²¹**"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"**

a. These are illustrative of the type of ascetic requirements sought to be imposed by the "spiritual" heretics to satisfy the spiritual powers.

b. Criticism of these ascetic rules:

(1) ²²**(which things [referred to] are all [destined] to perish with use) – according to human commands and teachings?**

(a) Paul is probably thinking especially of food. Since food is transient and perishable, proponents of the "philosophy" lack a true sense of proportion by making them issues central to their teaching.

(b) Matters of food and drink are of no consequence as far as godliness is concerned (Rom. 14:17), especially when a test case is made of abstaining (see Mk. 7:17-23).

(c) The requirements being pushed by the heretics are merely taboos of human origin (see 2:8). As noted above, Paul does not criticize the more orthodox elements of Judaism in this way (2:16-17). Those requirements were not manmade; rather, they served their purpose. (The food requirements of the heretics were ascetic requirements.)

(2) ²³**These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in terms of self-imposed piety and humility [techniques] and harsh treatment of the body but are not of any value against indulgence of the flesh.**

(a) They look to be a wise approach to gaining God; asceticism seems very spiritual.

(b) But these external rites do not touch the heart of the matter, the desires and impulses of the inner person (the "old man"). See 3:5-10. Also, they may fuel the proud spirit of self sufficiency.

D. The right perspective for Christian living (3:1-4)

1. Since then you were raised with Christ, seek the things above,

a. Paul picks up the resurrection concept of 2:12 and phrases it to parallel 2:20 ("Since you died . . .")

b. He again describes their resurrection as a past act. There is a future bodily resurrection, but their past spiritual resurrection when they were baptized into Christ profoundly linked them with a new and heavenly order.

c. Because they have been raised with Christ, their lives are to be different. Their interests must be his interests. They are no longer their own but have been bought at a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

d. "Things above" stands for the heavenly world, the new age or new order God is bringing to earth. This is the kingdom which God inaugurated in Christ and will consummate at his second coming.

e. "The Colossian Christians have already participated in the world to come, the powers of the new age have broken in upon them, they already participate in the resurrection life of Christ. Thus, their aims, ambitions, indeed their whole orientation is to be directed to this sphere" (O'Brien, 161).

2. where Christ is, seated at God's right hand.

a. Sitting at the right hand symbolized honor. Based on a messianic interpretation of Ps. 110:1, the apostles preached that Jesus was enthroned after his resurrection and ascension. Christ ruled from the right hand of God and would continue to do so until all his enemies had submitted (1 Cor. 15:25).

b. The heavenly realm centers around the one with whom they have been raised. Since he is in a position of supreme authority, no principality or power can prevent their access to this realm and to God's presence.

3. ²Set your minds on the things above, not the things on the earth.

a. Paul repeats the charge (in essence), adding a sharp contrast between "things above" and "things on earth."

b. They are to be kingdom minded, Christ-centered, rather than worldly or fleshly minded. It's like Rom. 8:5-6 where Paul rejects orientation to the flesh.

4. ³For you died and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

a. Paul elaborates on the basis of his admonition. *They died* to that old order when they were baptized into Christ (2:11-13, 20). Death with Christ involves a dying to the elemental spirits (2:20) and, by implication, to "the things on earth" which would include the matters in 2:16-23.

b. They were raised and participate in Christ's resurrection life. In some way, the life of the age to come, which will be received on the final day, has, by Jesus' resurrection, become a present reality for believers.

c. That new life, that resurrected life, is secure with Christ in God and is hidden in the sense it is not presently visible. Since Christ has his being "in God," those who belong to Christ have their being there also.

5. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

a. The resurrection life in which they now participate in a concealed fashion will be fully manifested at Christ's return, at Christ's future revelation.

b. Christ's role is so supreme that he is described as their life; he is the giver of resurrected lives, those which will be revealed on that day.

c. At that time, the new lives will be revealed "in glory." They will share Christ's likeness (1 Jn. 3:2) and will receive the glorious resurrection body (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:42-43).