**Colossians 2: Christ vs. the World’s Philosophies**

Theme of Colossians: The supremacy of Christ. The all-sufficiency of Christ.

Background: In Colossians, Paul is exposing and debunking a strain of teaching which had found its way into Colossae sometimes called the Colossian heresy:

They have been captured by a philosophy which involves the stoichaea – ABCs—the fundamental ways of the world in 2:20-23. In Coll 2 he talks about not being held captive (better: kidnapped) by human-based philosophy or rules that “lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

Christ vs the powers, the rulers, the philosophies, the ideas, the rules of the world.

In our day, this might include a political philosophy or a cause other than that of the kingdom.

Christ in Colossians:

Col 1:2 We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Col 1:3 We thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 1:4 Our faith is in Christ Jesus.

Col 1:7 Epaphras a faithful servant and minister of Christ.

Col 1:13 God has brought us into the Kingdom of His Son.

Col 1:14 We have redemption in Christ.

Col 1:14 We have forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Col 1:15 The Son is the image of the invisible God.

Col 1:15 The Son is the first born over all creation.

Col 1:16 In Him, through him and for him, all things were created

Col 1:17 Christ is before all things.

Col 1:18 Christ has supremacy in everything.

Col 1:19 All the fullness of God dwells in Christ.

Col 1:20 Christ is reconciling all things to Himself.

Col 1:22 We are presented holy in God’s sight by Christ.

Col 1:24 Christ is the head of the body.

Col 1:27 God’s glorious mystery is Christ in you.

Col 1:28 Christ is the one who we proclaim.

Col 1:29 Christ’s power works in us.

Coll 2:2 The mystery of God is Christ.

Coll 2:5 Our faith is in Christ.

Coll 2:6 We live our lives in Christ.

Coll 2:9 In Christ all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form.

Coll 2:10 In Christ we are brought to fullness.

Coll 2:11 In him you were circumcised.

Coll 2:13 We are made alive in Christ.

Coll 2:17 The law is a shadow. The reality is found in Christ.

Coll 2:20 We died with Christ.

Coll 3:1 We have been raised with Christ.

Coll 3:3 Our life is hidden with Christ.

Coll 3:4 Christ is our life.

Coll 3:11 Christ is all and is in all.

Coll 3:17 Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Interestingly, the Holy Spirit mentioned once in Colossians (Coll 1:8) (look at Paul’s other letters).

 ● Romans 25 times

 ● 1 Corinthians 20 times

 ● 2 Corinthians 10 times

 ● Galatians 15 times

 ● Ephesians 10 times

 ● Philippians 3 times

 ● 1 Thessalonians 4 times

In Colossians, Paul is talking about the value of being in Christ.

Col 1:14 We have redemption and forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Col 2:7-8 We live our lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him

Col 2:10 In Christ you have been brought to fullness.

Col 2:11 In him you were also circumcised… having been buried with him in baptism

Col 2:17 The Law is a shadow, the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Col 2:19 If we are not dwelling in Christ, we have lost connection with the head.

Col 2:6-15

v. 8 Let no one take you captive to hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental forces (stoicheia) of this world rather than on Christ.

Elemental forces - στοιχεῖα - stoicheia –

stoixeíon– properly, fundamentals, like with the basic components of a philosophy, structure, etc.; (figuratively) "first principles," like the basic fundamentals of Christianity. ABCs

What would make this philosophy that Paul was concerned about so deceptive? It combined elements of different ideas that were prevalent and accepted in the ancient culture: asceticism, mysticism, mystery religion, Jewish tradition, Gnosticism.

The *stoicheia* are the basic assumptions of the world.

What would be our *stoicheia* today?

1. Prosperity gospel That the purpose of the Christian life is for us to be happy.

2. American dream That personal fulfillment is the ultimate good.

3. Comfort/materialism That the possession of sufficient “stuff” is the root to happiness.

4. Personal security That financial or physical security is essential to happiness.

5. Being a good person/ a nice guy That being a good person is enough.

6. Universal salvation

7. Moral relativism There is no absolute moral truth.

8. Entertainment/leisure The goal of life is fun.

9. Post modernism All truth is relative.

10. Scientism Only physical things are real.

11. Republicanism/social conservative politics is the means to be right with God.

12. Democratism/progressive politics is the means to be right with God.

What might be some others philosophies that are deceptive and can

kidnap our faith and “drag us away”?

The Colossians were being warned against the smooth talking spiritual tricksters. They used many fine sounding arguments, combining moral teaching, philosophy, self-discipline and religious practices. These theories about God were being discussed and taught constantly at the pagan and Jewish school in the Greek cities of the time.

They are being taught in lecture halls and in churches in the US today.

This is why we have to be students of God’s Word and be watchful or we too will fall prey to the deceitful philosophies that pervade our culture. Our faith must be focused on Christ. He is the fullness of God in bodily form.

All these alternate teaching are hollow and useless. Would you go back to learning and reciting your ABCs after you are already a fluent reader?

V10 You do not need anything else but Christ. Since you are in Christ, you have the fullness of God in you! (John 1:16, Gal 3:27)

Note: fullness = pleroma = filled full. We are filled full in Christ. We need no other philosophy or perspective.

If Christ fills you up, what else do you need?

Environmentalism is a great cause. Christians ought to be supportive of environmentalism, as God made us stewards, but environmentalism will not make us filled full. Neither will social justice or moral causes do this.

What does the world offer that Christ does not offer?

v. 10 He is the head over all power and authority, and this includes political parties, social movements, media outlets, social media outlets,…

V11-12 Paul reminds us here. How do you come to be in Christ? In baptism.

Baptism = circumcision of the heart by God

Circumcision = cutting away of the physical flesh

Baptism = cutting away of the sinful nature (Rom 6:6)

The power the world has over us was removed in baptism.

v. 11 We are circumcised in Christ, not in physical circumcision.

We are moral beings in Christ, not through moral actions.

Not that moral action is not necessary, but we need to remember that our moral righteousness is found in Christ.

That is why pushing moral political positions will have limited value. It will not create true righteousness.

We become moral by cutting off the flesh in and through baptism, not by acting morally. This is why Christians enforcing our moral ideals on the world through political action is a questionable use of our time and energy.

The kingdom of God is not about coercion, but conviction.

We are socially just people in Christ, not through social justice causes. Of course, those who are in Christ will act justly, but that is not what makes them just.

We help God to bring social justice to the world primarily (but not only) by bring people to Christ. It is in Christ that real social justice is found.

Q: Paul, how does this work?

V13-15 “having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness”

canceled - ἐξαλείψας - exaleipsas

“charge of legal indebtedness” – NIV

“the record of the charges” – NLT

“the certificate of debt, with its obligations” Holman Christian

“the handwriting in the decrees against us” - Berean Literal

Jesus covered, blotted out our sin, and then cancelled the debt by nailing it to the cross.

V15 Jesus publicly nailed that blotted out debt certificate to the cross to show all the hostile powers (whether human or spiritual beings) that they were vanquished and no longer had power over God’s ransomed people.

Jesus made a spectacle of the worldly powers—showing them to be powerless against him, and, therefore, powerless against us as well. They are “powerless tyrants.”

The stoichaea are disarmed and powerless in light of the kingdom of God.

So we, as disciples, do not turn to or rely on any such worldly powers. Our methods are not political, nor do we use coercion. No! We show the world Christ and his kingdom as an alternative reality to that of the world.

Col 2:16-23

v. 16-17 Paul deals here with a particular philosophy, which is the legalism of grace-free Judaism, but this can be applied to any human idea or philosophy.

The legal prescriptions of the law are all but shadows of what is now reality, that is, us in Christ.

Because we are in Christ, we are not to be judged by what a particular group says is right or wrong.

If this was true of the actual Bible—the Old Covenant, it is surely true of any human-created idea, organization, philosophy, power or partisan group.

Believe it or not, even the Mosaic Law is consigned to the *stoicheia* by Paul.

 Why? Because it did not create true righteousness!

There is not, nor can there be a “Christian” political party or partisan effort of any kind. We can ally with certain causes, but we cannot give our loyalty to any group, and that includes our country.

Jesus is our Lord and the Kingdom of God is our country.

As disciples, we obviously value all human life, but our means toward that is through bringing people into the kingdom and bringing the kingdom to the lost, not through political action or through the courts. The same for homosexuality or other immoral behaviors. We do not defeat the demons of darkness through changing laws, but through allowing God to change hearts one at a time.

Our weapons are not the weapons of the world.

We do not use the politics of power.

Michael Burns Escaping the Beast: “When we yoke ourselves with one of the philosophies of the present age, we lose the ability to distinguish ourselves from the world, and the prophetic voice is silenced (as we are shouted down by those within our own ranks who accuse us of being what they actually are, which is partisan and beholden to the world.”

V18-19 Paul says for the Colossians not to let anyone disqualify them from the prize.

v. 19 Those who rely on the stoichaea and not Christ have lost connection with Christ, who is all-sufficient for the growth of the church.

Our righteousness is in Christ, not any earthly political or other cause.

v. 18 Neither is it in any private religious experience/vision/prophecy/miracle/revelation.

V20-23 Paul is saying all of these things are useless. They are but a shadow. Christ is the real thing.

V20. The Colossians died to these things when they became united with Christ.

Asceticism is not a means to righteousness. Neither is alliance with any earthly cause.

V. 20 The stoicheia are the ABCs of the world. Human philosophies or parties or schools of thought, be they progressive or conservative, freeing or constraining are but ABCs compared to knowledge of Christ.

v. 23 We do not base our righteousness on added rules about clothing, movies, card-playing, tattoos, dating practices.

Imposing these things on the world do not work, but guess what,

These things do not work to create righteousness for us either!

So, what does? Col 2:10 We are brought to fullness in Christ.

Let us seek Christ.

Let us seek our righteousness through and in Christ.

Let us seek to please God by becoming more like Christ.