

SOME ENEMIES OF GRACE

Colossians 2:16-23

Intro: Dr. Griffith Thomas who lives in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, said in his commentary on Colossians and Philemon,

It is significant that the majority of Christians have always been slow to apply principles to conduct, or to see the precise bearing of great truths on the details of daily life (p.93).

He could say this from a wide experience in the ministry in England, Canada, and the United States. This is an important fact for all of us to remember

And we can say that he was giving expression to what the Apostle Paul learned not only from the Spirit of God, but which was confirmed over and over again in his own ministry throughout the Roman Empire. Anyone who reads his epistles knows that the Apostle Paul always laid a doctrinal foundation for his practical exhortations. And it is easy to see that he maintained the same order for himself as he did for the individuals and the churches whom he sought to help.

I have heard this expressed, as probably you have also, in our day, when professing Christians have said, “Don’t give me doctrine; I am only interested practical teaching, in how to live the Christian life.” You usually find that people who have this attitude are deficient in their living as they are in their understanding of the Word. No one in his right mind wants to minimize the Christian life, that is, the practical evidence that we have been saved, but the knowledge of the teaching of Scripture is where we get the strength to live lives that are pleasing to God and satisfying to us.

Now the first two chapters of Colossians are strong in doctrine, in teaching – very strong! Remember all of the teaching that Paul gave to the Colossians in chapter 1 about Christ as our Savior, about Christ as the full revelation of God, about Christ as our Creator, and of Christ as the Head of the Church, the body of Christ. All of that is doctrine.

Without picking up again all of the details we have gone over, in chapter 2 we come to the first exhortation in verse 6. (Read verses 6 and 7, and show how Paul was referring to their having been “rooted and built up in Him [Christ], and stablished in THE faith” – which is doctrine.) Then Paul sounded a warning: “Beware,” or take heed, of what? “Philosophy”!

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What is philosophy? Well, it is doctrine, and in the context here it is doctrine which is not a part of “THE faith.” False teachers are going to teach, but they are going to teach what is false. It is the tradition of men, not the tradition of Scripture. It is “the rudiments of the world,” not the basics of Scripture.

And then from verse 9 on down to verse 15 we see Paul’s emphasis on the Person of Christ, our completeness before God in Christ, and His emphasis on the work of Christ, so that nothing can be added, and nothing needs to be added, to Who Christ is and to what He has done in revealing God to us, and in the sufficiency of His work of salvation.

Illus: I remember some time ago that a group of people were discussing what to give a certain wealthy man for Christmas. And one of the people said, “What do you give to a man who has everything?” That is the kind of a question the Apostle Paul was answering for the Colossians. Here is a man who has been saved by Christ, and actually united to Christ. What more can be done for him? And the answer is, “Nothing!” If we have Christ we need not one other thing to make us fully acceptable to God, and we have all that we will ever need to live lives on earth that are pleasing to God. Salvation is not Christ plus, but Christ PERIOD!

I hope this truth is really written on all of our hearts so that we can never be moved away from it.

Now this wonderful fact does not keep false teachers from trying to make us believe that Christ is not enough. False teachers don’t like the word *grace*. You would think that everyone in the world would take it as the best news they have ever heard that “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph.2:8-9). Grace means salvation is a gift. It is not a reward for anything that we do. In fact, grace also means that God does not give me what I deserve (which would be banishment), but He gives me what I never could deserve, and that is eternal salvation. In fact, in writing to the Colossians Paul used the word grace as a synonym for salvation. See Colossians 1:3-6, esp. v. 6.

False teachers always have something to add to Christ and what He has done. And there are three kinds of false teaching that the Apostle Paul mentioned here in the last eight verses of Colossians 2. Let me mention what they are, and then we will look at them briefly.

The first is in verses 16 and 17, and it has to do with the Law, the OT Law given to Moses by God.

The second is mysticism. And you see this in verses 18 and 19.

The third false teaching had to do with what the Apostle called, “the commandments and doctrines of men.” And this finishes out the chapter in verses 20 through 23.

Now let us consider first:

I. THE LAW (Col. 2:16-17).

This was a major problem in the early Church. The first converts were Jewish people. And many of them did not initially go for preaching salvation to Gentiles. But there were some of them who felt that if Gentiles were to be accepted on an equal basis with the Jews, then they had to submit to circumcision, and Sabbath keeping, and the observance of the various feast days which were important to the Jews. That is what Paul was talking about in verse 16, following the dietary laws of the Jews, observing their feast days, and doing what the Jews were required to do in the time of the new moons, and on and on down the list.

Now one thing that many Jews did not understand was the purpose of the Law. The Jewish people were required to keep the Law, but it was never given as a way of salvation. The Law was to have a restraining effect upon the Jews until the promised Redeemer would come. Paul said, “For by the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). In fact, please turn in your Bible to Romans 3:19-27 where Paul discussed God’s purpose in giving the Law, and its relationship to salvation. Please turn in your Bibles and follow as I read Romans 3:19-27:

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

So Paul and all of the other writers of Scripture made it perfectly clear that salvation is not, and never was, the way of salvation. It was given to the Jews for their obedience, but not to save them. Salvation in the OT was by faith, just as it is now. The Law was a shadow; the body casting the shadow was Christ. As Paul told the churches of Galatia in Galatians 3:24-26,

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Beware of anyone who comes to you teaching that you need to add obedience to the Mosaic Law before you can be sure you are saved. Remember it is “by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

But let us move on.

II. MYSTICISM (Col. 1:18-19).

What is mysticism? And what do I mean by mysticism as I seek to explain what Paul meant in these two verses. We know this was another group because Paul renewed his warning here.

We all know, or should know, that the Bible was given to us by divine inspiration. Or, as the Apostle Peter explained the Bible, he said that “men of God spake as they were moved,” or carried along, “by the Holy Spirit.” From Moses who wrote the first five books of our Bible, on down to the Apostle John, who wrote the last books of the Bible, all of them wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible although there were many writers. And we believe that the books of the Bible are verbally infallible and unchanging. God the Holy Spirit led the writers to the very words that they used. There is

no other book that as ever been written under such conditions. The Bible is complete as it is. There have been no additions since the Apostle John wrote his Gospel, his epistles, and the book of the Revelation. The Bible may not tell us all that we would like to know, but it tells us all that God wants us to know, and there never has been an individual who knows all that is contained in the Bible. But the true Christian position about the Bible is that God has revealed all that He is going to reveal.

Now the best way to understand mysticism, in my opinion, is that there always seems to be people who believe that God is continuing to make revelations, adding to what we have in the Bible.

The dictionary defines mysticism “the doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God is attainable through immediate intuition or insight and in a way differing from ordinary sense perception.” In other words, the mystic is one who claims to have special knowledge of God which is in addition to the Bible. Although not all mystics accept the Bible.

Now look at the way Paul defined these people in verse 18. Now there is absolutely no agreement among mystics, but notice that Paul said that they will cheat you out of any reward you may have coming you from the Lord by a “voluntary humility,” and then he adds at the end of the verse, “vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.” And what seemed to be one of their main points? The worship of angels. We see a lot in the Bible about angels who worshiped God, but never are we taught to worship angels. And then Paul added that they were “intruding into those things which they had not seen,” but he implied that they claim to have had visions which that had not had.

You see mysticism is the Devil’s imitation of divine inspiration. One major difference as to the effect of the teaching of a false prophet, which a mystic is, and a true prophet, as the writers of Scripture were, is that the writers of Scripture were humbled to be the servants of God through whom God gave His Word to people, but the mystic may pretend humility, but he is actually eaten up with pride. See what his reaction is if you reject him and his teaching.

What is the main fallacy of the mystic. He does not hold the Head, Who is Christ, by Whom the body of Christ is increased, edified, and multiplied. God does not bless the mystic. They mystic divides the body of Christ; the teaching of Scripture unites the body of Christ. So beware of

the person who claims to have information about God, or information from God, which is not included in the Bible.

And now we come to the third form of error which we are to avoid. And the Holy Spirit has actually given us a name for this. It is called in verse 22:

III. “THE COMMANDMENTS AND DOCTRINES OF MEN” (Col. 2:20-23).

This also takes on many forms. I can think of two that actually are related to each other. One is what we are plagued with in our educational system from kindergarten to college, and that is Godless, humanistic psychology. And closely related to it are the political philosophies that are circulating throughout the world. Isn't it amazing to you that practically nothing is being said in these days about the rule of God in the lives of men and women throughout the world. Will democracy save the world? As we are being told today is socialism the answer? Can any political philosophy change the hearts of people? Is politics the answer to all, or even to any, of the problems that we face in our country? As you listen to TV and read the newspapers and news magazines, isn't it amazing that we don't hear anybody raising the question, What about the Gospel?

Several months ago I read a statement to you which was made by a French statesman by the name of Alexander de Tocqueville, who made a study of our country to try to determine the secret of our greatness. I am going to read his statement to you again this morning. Remember these words go back to the early nineteenth century, the early 1800's, about 200 years ago. Listen to his words: (Read “The Greatness of America.)

Concl: Two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul warned the church at Colosse about the danger of making the Law of God a way of salvation. He warned about those mystics who claimed to have a message which was in addition to the Word of God. And then he warned them about people who would come with the wisdom of men, and who would possibly sponsor some political agenda as the hope of the world. We can see how all of these heresies are still with us today.

Let us look at Paul's summarization of what he has written in verses 16 through 22. His summary is in verse 23. The KJ translation is correct, but it not as clear as it could be. I am going to read it as it appears in the

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margin of my Bible. The first is the same; the last statement is different. Speaking of all that he had mentioned from verse 16 on, he said, Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, *but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh* (Col. 2:23).

Why doesn't someone of prominence speak to the whole nation and say, "What about the Gospel?" Let me say it again, "Our greatest national problem is sin." And there is only One Who can solve that problem, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Our Lord Jesus Christ died that our sins might be forgiven, and that we might live in victory over the power of sin to the glory of God.

I have by no means exhausted that which could be included in these three groups which Paul mentioned, but I hope that I have given you enough to see that we are still trying to make things work that never have worked, trusting that we will all see that the only hope that we have for a change in our own hearts, is in the Lord Jesus Christ. All other solutions have failed, and can never succeed.