

Preeminent. Christ's Place in The World

WEEK 7
**HUMAN
PHILOSOPHIES**



“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

Despite the fact that the Christians in Colossae were standing in the truth when Paul wrote his letter to them (Col. 2:5), there was still a need to be vigilant about the error that was being proclaimed in their city under the auspices of Christianity. So, having exhorted them to keep on walking in Christ, believing in Him as the express image of God and submitting to His lordship as the way to resist error and grow in the faith, the apostle warns the Colossians to beware of “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition” in today’s passage (Col 2:8).

The apostle is not disparaging philosophy as such, and the tools this discipline gives us can be immensely helpful in formulating summaries of biblical doctrine. What he is condemning is philosophy that is based on human reason alone, apart from divine revelation. Moreover, the term philosophy in the first century had a broader connotation than it does in our day—it could be used to describe

COLOSSIANS 2:8-10

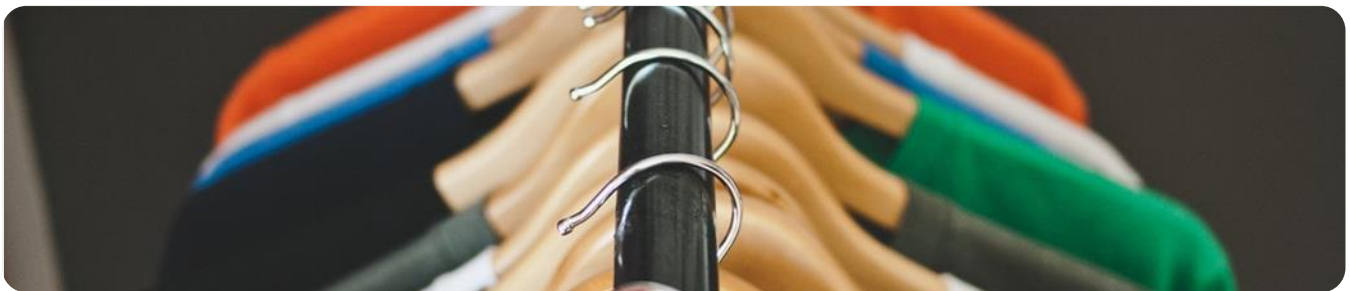
CORAM DEO

God prescribed food laws and other ritualistic observances for old covenant Israel, so we know that these practices are not inherently evil. They only become wrong when they become ends in themselves (1 Sam. 15:22–23). We might not be tempted to follow certain food laws today, but we are tempted to think that real spirituality is tied to specific forms of personal devotions, avoiding certain movies, never gambling, and so on.¹

nearly any kind of belief and not just the systemized thinking of the Greek philosophers. In Colossians 2:8, Paul is referring to false religious instruction, specifically the erroneous teaching being proclaimed in Colossae. Because this “instruction” did not exalt Christ (as God did), it was empty and worthless. Like the emperor in the old story, those promoting such lies had no clothes—the superior Christian life that they claimed to be wearing was nonexistent, made of that which is unreal, making promises it could not keep.

Today’s passage describes the errors taught in Colossae as according to “elemental spirits of the world,” a translation of the Greek word *stoicheia*, which had several meanings in the ancient world. Paul seems to use it here for the “gods” of the nations, the patron protectors of particular geographical locales. As believers, we know that such “gods” are nothing more than demons who enslave those whom they are supposed to liberate (1 Cor. 10:1–22). Colossians 2:16–23 indicates that the false teachers in Colossae advocated, among other things, keeping food laws and following a specific calendar as the key to holiness. These teachings were according to the “elemental spirits”—demons—because evil powers used such things to excite sin in people, not because ritual calendars and dietary regulations are inherently evil. Traditions like these are sinful only if we think salvation is in them or if we impose them on others.

OPEN IT



Describe a time when you were duped into “buying or doing something” because someone else talked you into it.

READ IT | Colossians 2:8-10

EXPLORE IT



1. What two things were taking the Colossians captive?
2. From where does such false teaching come?
3. How much of God's deity does the Son possess?
4. According to verse 10, how much authority does Jesus have?

GET IT

See To It

Paul gives a serious warning for continual vigilance, for you to keep your "spiritual radar" continually on high alert. Paul is saying we need to keep our "spiritual antennae" in the "receiving mode" with the filter of discernment turned "on" so that we can filter out the wisdom of man. An unguarded mind, even of a believer, is subject to deceit, misunderstanding, and confusion, which inevitably results in false doctrine and false (sinful) living.¹

5. In verse 8 we get the first real glimpse of the heresy being taught to the Colossians. What do we learn about it?

¹ http://preceptaustin.org/colossians_28-15.htm

6. What connection can be made between the perils in verse 8 and his emphasis in the preceding verses (6-7) on making spiritual progress?

7. Paul is deeply concerned with false teaching taking the Colossians captive. Why are we so casual when it comes to defending our self against false teaching?

Greek Philosophy was "the love of wisdom" which primarily focused on the pursuit of truth. Here, it is pursuing what is hollow, as in not rational or beneficial or true. Human reasoning and intellectualism are finite and flawed whereas God's is infinite and True. Paul uses the arguments and language of Greek Philosophy to refute irrationality and occult practices. We are to love Christ and His wisdom and not the world's or what is error. There were many different movements then, just as today, lobbying for our attention and influence. Paul's point is that our influence and source for knowledge is very important, and we must make sure it comes from God and not trends, feelings, or humanistic ideas. This does not apply to academic discipline; rather, this is the "garbage-in-equals-garbage-out" thinking. What we put in our minds will drastically affect our virtue, values, character, and spiritual growth in how we are and behave in the world, either glorifying our Lord or tearing down His Church.²

8. What philosophies today diminish Christ's supremacy and sufficiency in our lives?

What specific principles or truths do these philosophies claim are true?

9. Have you ever bought into empty philosophy or false teachings?

How does having appreciation for our Lord Jesus Christ keep you from being led astray?

10. What can you do to be on guard against false teachings and harmful ideas?

How can your church help you to see that such teachings are nonsense and even dangerous to one's faith and community?

² R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. *Into Thy Wor* http://www.preceptaustin.org/colossians_28-15.htm#2:8d Ministries www.intothyword.org/

*“The false teaching is described, first, in terms of its source—**human tradition**, and, second, in terms of its content—**elemental spirits and not according to Christ**” Tradition usually serves merely to perpetuate error. In our own day, a common argument for evolution is the false assertion that it is “what scientists have always believed.” If a new Christian from a distant mission field were to visit many of our churches, he would probably be astounded at the ideas and practices we have that cannot be supported by God’s Word. And tragically, man-made **traditions** are often given more importance than the God-breathed doctrine of Scripture! ³*

11. When can human traditions be profitable for us? What causes these traditions to be detrimental to our faith?

12. What is it about these traditions that make them so attractive to follow?

13. What are some man-made traditions within Christianity today?

“You have been filled in Him”

This means to be completely filled, with one of the implications being that one is to be totally controlled by that which fills them. Paul's main thrust here, however, is that believers have come to completion, a state of having no deficiency. To be sure, we are all "works in progress," but Paul's point is that in contrast to empty philosophy, believers are filled with the One in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!⁴

14. What does it take for most Christians to realize that all we need to live an abundant life is Christ's fullness, and that we already have all we need because we are complete in Him?

Of all the things in the universe that we could focus on, one rises to the top: Christ is preeminent. He alone is worthy of being our singular focus. When Christ comes into focus, he brings everything else into focus because all things were made by him and for him.

15. What is currently taking your focus away from Christ?

What are the gauges you use to determine fullness of life?

How can you fix your eyes on Christ as the right gauge this week?

³ http://www.preceptaustin.org/colossians_28-15.htm#2:8

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