

## “Beware of Man’s Words”

June 18, 2017

Colossians 2:6-15

### I. Introduction

The Christians in the church in Colossae were facing danger from false teachers who offered persuasive religious arguments that threatened to undermine their confidence in the truth they had received and believed about Jesus Christ. Paul doesn’t name the particular heresies or teachings but looking at the Letter to the Colossians we see that elements of humanism, legalism, mysticism, and austerity & self-denial--stoicism were part of these false teachers’ arguments. It seems like every generation of Christians faces similar threats from false teachers. The best defense Christians have against such attacks is to be thoroughly grounded in the basics of their faith in Christ and to understand completely the significance of His death and resurrection and the Christian’s life in Christ.

To counter these false teaches’ claims to a secret, superior knowledge, Paul had already written that there was no hidden knowledge apart from Jesus Christ—in **Colossians 2:3** he wrote that in **Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** Jesus Christ is sufficient. Against the teachings that Jesus was one of many lesser creations or emanations of God, **Colossians 1:16** says, **“For by him all things were created.”** Jesus isn’t one of many gods, He is the one true God or, as **Colossians 1:19** says, **“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”** Now Paul taught the Colossians about being a Christian and how to live in Christ.

### II. How to Live in Christ

**“Living”** or **“walking”** in Christ refers to ongoing growth as a Christian continues believing and growing in the truth about Christ and Christianity. In the Christian life, we never stand still—either we go forward or gradually slip backward. **Hebrews 6:1** says, **“Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.”** The Christian who is not making spiritual progress is an open target for the enemy to attack and destroy. So just before he launched into his attack against the false teachers, Paul used several pictures to

remind his readers of the need of spiritual progress—or what living or walking in Christ means. Paul listed 4 characteristics of how believers should live and grow—how to live in Christ.

**A. They are to be rooted in Him.** Like a tree with deep roots in rich soil, believers have been rooted—firmly planted—in Christ Jesus. That planting took place at salvation. Christians aren't to be tumbleweeds that have no roots and, as [Ephesians 4:14](#) says, “**Blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.**” Christians are rooted in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 3:11](#), “**For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.**” Jesus Christ is the foundation, the Rock, for every Christian's life.

**B. Paul then wrote that they are “built up in Him.”** Actually the Greek translation should be “*being built.*” This implies that believers who are rooted in Christ are still under construction and not yet a finished product—[Acts 20:32](#) says, “**Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.**” As well as giving strength and stability, roots draw up nourishment so that the tree can grow. Christ is the source of spiritual nourishment so that Christians can grow and bear fruit while they are rooted in Him.

**C. They are “strengthened in the faith.”** It is the Word of God that builds and strengthens the Christian. Epaphras had taught the truth of the Word, but false teachers were trying to undermine it. Christians who study the Bible become established—strengthened in the faith. Satan has a difficult time deceiving the Bible-taught believer.

**D. They are “overflowing with thankfulness.”** Christians don't root themselves or build themselves up or strengthen themselves; God does. God's actions in the lives of believers lead to the 4<sup>th</sup> characteristic: they are “**overflowing with thankfulness.**” At the same time a grateful heart for all God has given us in Christ will further strengthen our grip on the truth and help us resist false teachings.

### **III. Watch out for man's words**

Paul then went on to warn them to watch out for man's words as he turned to one of the reasons for writing this letter: *false philosophy*. The word *philosophy* comes from two Greek words, *phileo*, “to love,”

and *sophia*, “wisdom.” Philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom. In a sense everyone is a philosopher. But here Paul warned of: “**hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.**”

Paul’s concern was that those who had been transferred from Satan’s domain to Christ’s domain not be enslaved again—that they not be re-“**captured.**” Not knowing the truths of the Word of God, immature children of God can become fascinated and captured by the philosophies and empty delusions of false teachers. They can be tricked into thinking that they have found some truth, which in reality is a lie that makes them a captive to false teaching. When a person doesn’t know the doctrines of the Christian faith, he can easily be captured by hollow and deceptive philosophies.

The philosophy of the false teachers is “**hollow and deceptive**” for several reasons. **First**, it is in the tradition of men and not the truth of God’s Word. The word *tradition* means “*that which is handed down.*” There is nothing inherently wrong with human tradition. There are true Christian traditions, e.g. **turn to 1 Corinthians 15:3-8**. The important thing about any teaching is its origin: Did it come from God or man?

The religious leaders in Jesus’ day had their man-made traditions and were very zealous to obey them and protect them. Sadly, even today, our man-made traditions are usually more important to us than the God-given doctrines of the Scriptures. There is nothing wrong in having church traditions that remind us of our godly heritage, but we must be careful not to make those traditions equal to the Word of God.

**Second**, the false teachers’ traditions were “**hollow and deceptive**” because they involved the “**basic principles of this world.**” This can refer to a false belief system based on worldly wisdom not biblical teachings. To accept this teaching would be to regress from mature teaching of Scripture to infantile teachings of a false religion—people talk about “My god.”

This was also one of the phrases in the vocabulary of the religious astrology of that day. The Gnostics of Paul’s day believed that the angels and heavenly bodies influenced people’s lives. They had their daily horoscopes. Such teachings about demons and angels were and are not part of true Christian doctrine. They are world-based teachings—man-centered teachings; if anything, such teachings are satanic. The fact that

such teachings are not about Christ is sufficient to warn us against horoscopes, astral charts, Ouija boards, and other spiritist practices. Any Christian who dabbles in mysticism and the occult is only asking for trouble.

To counter the” **hollow and deceptive philosophy**” of the false teachers, Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-10**, “**in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ.**” Paul’s main point is that since Christ is the fullness of God and believers are in Him, they have all the fullness humans can ever possess. They have all the completeness they need in Christ, they is no need to look anywhere else for any special knowledge or philosophy.

#### **IV. Complete in Jesus Christ**

Part of the false teachings that were causing issues was legalism. Gnostic legalism said that the Jewish Law would help the believers become more spiritual. If they were circumcised and if they watched their diets and observed the holy days, then they would become part of the “*spiritual elite*” in the church. Paul made it clear that the Christian is not subject in any way to the Old Testament legal system. They are complete in Christ. Paul explained 4 things in our relationship with Jesus that makes it not only unnecessary, but sinful for us to get involved in any kind of legalism.

**A. Christians are circumcised in Him.** In **Genesis 17:9-14** we see that circumcision was a sign of God’s covenant with the Jewish people. Although it was a physical operation, it had a spiritual significance—these were people set apart to God. Unfortunately, the Jewish people began to depend on the physical and not the spiritual. People make the same mistake today when they depend on some religious ritual such as baptism or the Lord’s Supper to save them rather than the Lordship and Savior-ship of Jesus Christ.

It wasn’t necessary for a believer to submit to physical circumcision because he had already experienced a spiritual circumcision through his identification with Jesus Christ—the sinful nature has been circumcised, i.e. it has been removed; **Romans 6:6** says, “**For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.**”

**B. Christians are alive in Him** Like all of mankind, the Colossians were dead in their sins before their salvation. As is pictured in believer's baptism, because God raised His Son from the dead, Christians have eternal life, i.e. we are alive in Him. Really what more do we need? God **"forgave all our sins,"** so that we have a perfect standing before Him—we are alive in Him.

**C. Christians are free from the Law in Him** Jesus not only took our sins to the cross—[1 Peter 2:24](#) says, **"He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.'"**—He also took the Law to the cross and nailed it there, forever out of the way. The Law was certainly against us, it was impossible for anyone to meet its demands.

When He shed His blood for sinners, Jesus Christ canceled the huge debt that was against sinners because of their disobedience to God's holy Law—[turn to Romans 8:1-4](#). Jesus paid the full debt when He died on the cross. If a judge sets a man free who is guilty of a crime, the judge cheapens the law and leaves the injured party without restitution. But God paid sin's debt when He gave His Son on the cross and thereby He upheld the holiness of His own Law.

Jesus did more than just pay the debt, He took the Law that condemned us and set it aside so that we are no longer under its dominion. This doesn't mean that we are lawless, because the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us as we walk in the power of the Spirit. Our relationship with Jesus Christ enables us to obey God, i.e. to follow His commands, not out of fear of punishment but out of love.

**D. Christians are victorious in Him.** Paul closed the section by writing, **"having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."** Christians are victorious in Jesus Christ. The imagery is that of a triumphant Roman general parading captives through the streets of Rome. God has triumphed through Christ's death on the cross over every power and authority. Satan and his army have lost whatever weapons they held. In His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ vindicated God and vanquished the devil. Satan was disgraced and defeated.

As children of God, Christians are victorious in Jesus Christ. Though we may wrestle against the forces of evil, as [Romans 8:37-39](#) says, they cannot be victorious. Christ, the crucified, risen Lord of all, reigns supreme in the universe. To be unified with Him is to be free from Satan's dominion—we are victorious in Him.

## V. Conclusion

There are still “[hollow and deceptive philosophies](#)” that attack Christians today. They ridicule His name and harass His followers. It can be identified by lines like: “Faith in Christ is fine as far as it goes, but you are not really right with God, accepted by God, or protected by God unless you also...” Or there's the famous, “My god is a god of love and . . .” It makes no difference how these sentence are completed; they are false and not according to Christ.

As a result of the Fall, man is in a sad state of incompleteness. He is spiritually incomplete because he is totally out of fellowship with God. He is morally incomplete because he lives outside of God's will. He is mentally incomplete because he does not know ultimate truth. [Turn to 2 Peter 1:3-4](#). At salvation, believers “[participate in the divine nature](#)” and are made complete. Believers are spiritually complete because they have fellowship with God. They are morally complete in that they recognize the authority of God's will. They are mentally complete because they know the truth about ultimate reality. All true believers are complete in Christ and do not need the teachings of any cult or false teacher.

Christians have been given everything that God can possibly give us. Our task is to continue to live exclusively in Christ and to abound in thanksgiving for what God had done for us through Christ. Everyone has a choice, whether to follow human wisdom or to come to Christ. To follow human wisdom is to be kidnapped by the emissaries of Satan and his false system, which leaves a person spiritually incomplete. To come to Christ is to come to the One who alone offers completeness—spiritual, moral, and mental completeness.

So what is your choice? The wise choice is to choose Jesus Christ. But it doesn't stop there—as we saw in today's Scripture, you need to grow—as [2 Timothy 2:15](#) (NET) says, “[Make every effort to present](#)

yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately.” Are you growing? Whose teachings or philosophies do you follow?