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“Warnings to the Church in a Crazy World”

Colossians 2:1–23

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Our world is influenced by what Paul calls “the traditions of men” and “the basic principles of this world,” which are often contrary to Scripture. These worldly influences threaten a person’s walk with Christ, and more broadly, the church itself. What were the things of Paul’s day that he was warning the church at Colosse about, and how do these influences continue to threaten the church today? In this study, we apply Paul’s warnings and look at how the culture, especially its underpinning worldly philosophies and aberrant doctrines, has slipped into the church.

1. **Colossians 2:1–10, 20–23** – “[1] For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, [2] that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. [5] For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. [6] As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, [7] rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. [8] Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. [9] For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; [10] and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. . . .

[20] Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as [though] living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— [21] ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ [22] which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? [23] These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

- a. In verse 1, the word “conflict” comes from a Greek athletic term meaning “competing.”
2. Outline of Colossians
 - a. A word of encouragement (verse 5)
 - i. Paul had never met the Colossians.

1. Paul wrote to the Believers at Colosse while in prison, between 60–62 A.D.
 - ii. Paul had heard about Colossian Believers' good order and steadfastness of faith.
 1. God is a God of order.
 2. Satan is a god of chaos and confusion.
 3. We should be consistent rather than hot-and-cold Christians.
 - iii. Paul encouraged the Colossians to continue in virtue by being (verses 6 and 7):
 1. Rooted and built up in Christ
 2. Established in the faith.
 3. Abounding in faith with thanksgiving.
- b. A word of warning (verse 8)
- i. Paul's concern was not the worldly influences affecting the culture, but their influence on the church.
 - ii. Paul warned of the way the world can "*cheat*" Believers.
 1. "*Cheat*" comes from the Greek **sylagōgeō**, which literally means "to carry one away as a captive like a slave."
 2. Figuratively, it means "to carry one away from truth."
 - iii. Paul warned us to beware of worldly influences:
 1. The tradition of men (verse 8)
 2. The basic principles of the world (verses 8 and 20)
 3. The doctrines of men (verse 22)

3. Worldly philosophies

- a. The two dominant philosophical ideologies of Paul's day were anti-Christian.
 - i. They both put man at the center to the exclusion of God.
 1. **DISCUSS**: Consider the philosophies you've accepted into your life. Are they Christ-centered or man-centered? Is your attention focused on self or God?
- b. Epicureanism
 - i. Epicureanism was begun by Epicurus, who died in 270 B.C.
 - ii. This philosophy considered simple pleasure the sole intrinsic value of life.
 1. Knowledge, friendship, and tranquility were classified as simple pleasures.
 2. **DISCUSS**: According to the Bible, what is the purpose of life? Where should "simple pleasures" rank?
 - iii. Extreme pleasure was not considered good because it was thought to put life out of balance.
 1. Rich food was seen as excessive.

2. Sex was seen as a necessity, not a pleasure.
 3. Epicurus said, “Sex is never beneficial, and you are very lucky if it does not do harm as well.”
- c. Stoicism
- i. Stoicism elevated logic and reason as supreme.
 1. **DISCUSS:** As Christians, what should be our supreme guide?
 - ii. Stoicism advocates for people to focus on what they can control—their thoughts, actions, and reactions—while accepting what they cannot control.
 1. Stoicism was a self-help tool that provided some wisdom but omitted God’s sovereign control and aid.
 2. **DISCUSS:** How do you handle problems beyond you?
4. Paul entered the debate.
- a. Paul debated the proponents of these worldly philosophies (**Acts 17**) at the Areopagus in Athens.
 - i. The Areopagus was a place where philosophers discussed their ideas and contemplated life.
 1. Areopagus means “hill of Ares.” It is also called Mars Hill.
 2. Ares is the Greek god of war, and Mars is his Latin name.
 3. **DISCUSS:** What is our modern-day Areopagus? In what ways do you go where the people are so you may witness to them?
 - ii. Athens was the intellectual center of the first-century world.
 1. In 387 B.C., Plato founded the Academy of Athens.
 2. The philosophers Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle lived in Athens.
 - b. Paul presented Christ using his listeners’ philosophical vantage point.
 - i. Paul observed that the Athenians were religious to the point of paranoia.
 1. In addition to the Athenians’ thousands of idols, they had an altar to an unknown god.
 - ii. Paul used the unknown god idol as a tool to introduce Jesus.
 1. **Acts 17:23** – *“As I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.”*
 2. **DISCUSS:** Paul observed his audience and based his entry point for witnessing on his observations. What are some ways your observations help shape what your entry point is when witnessing to others?
 - c. People responded to Paul’s preaching in one of three ways:
 - i. Some mocked.

- ii. Some were curious.
- iii. Some believed.
- iv. People respond to the Gospel in the same three ways today.
 - 1. Our duty is to share Jesus.
 - 2. God's duty is the results.
 - 3. **DISCUSS**: People can have different reactions to the same message. How do you focus on doing your part and leaving the rest to God?

5. Gnosticism

- a. Gnosticism in history
 - i. The worldly philosophy of Gnosticism was in its infancy in the first century, and it grew in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.
- b. Gnosticism as a philosophy
 - i. The word "Gnosticism" comes from the Greek **gnosis**, meaning "knowledge."
 - ii. Gnostics believed that they had secret knowledge, and they thought knowledge—not faith—was the pathway to salvation.
 - iii. They taught that the body was inherently sinful, which led to two evils:
 - 1. The erroneous belief that Jesus has not come in the flesh.
 - 2. Great immorality in the church
 - a. If only the immaterial matters, then what we do with our material bodies is not important.
 - b. **DISCUSS**: What are some ways our culture tries to disregard the importance of the material body? How does that contrast with Biblical truth?
 - c. **DISCUSS**: How can one error lead to another? How can we discern what is true in this present age?
- iv. Our modern culture merges these worldly philosophies.
 - 1. In our culture, man defines God, morality, and truth.
 - a. For example, the New York Senate and Assembly passed a bill to change the language of family law.
 - b. This would change the words "mother and father" to "gestating parent and non-gestating parent"
 - 2. But in Christianity, we see God and the world through the lens of the Bible and not the other way around.
 - a. Christians must not be enslaved by worldly wisdom but abide in God's truth.
 - b. To avoid being taken captive by worldly ideologies, we must know what we believe and why.

- c. **DISCUSS:** When have your beliefs been confronted? How have you researched the topic to find answers?

6. Errors creeping into the church

a. The rainbow flag

- i. The churches who fly the rainbow flag affirm rather than help people struggling with immoral sexual attractions find love and identity in Christ.
- ii. **DISCUSS:** The world defines love as agreement, but what is the Biblical definition of love? When has someone shown love to you by confronting you?

b. Social justice

- i. Churches that promote social justice do so at the cost of Biblical justice.
- ii. **DISCUSS:** What does social justice focus on? What does Biblical justice focus on instead?

c. The Palestinian keffiyeh (scarf) as a statement of opposition to Israel

- i. People wearing keffiyehs to protest Israel reveal they are uninformed about who Palestinians' true oppressors are— Hamas.
- ii. **DISCUSS:** What does the Bible have to say about forming a quick opinion on a matter (**Proverbs 18:13, 17**)? How do you try to avoid the trap of being uninformed or misinformed?

d. The Third Way

- i. The Third Way is a movement toward middle-ground Christianity.
 - 1. **DISCUSS:** What is the inherent flaw to the idea that Christians should avoid expressing an opinion on whatever the culture has decided is a political matter?
- ii. Third Wayism claims to be politically neutral, but their placation of the left inevitably leads them to drift toward Progressive ideology.

e. The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)

- i. NAR believes in prophets who have extrabiblical revelation for the body of Christ.
 - 1. NAR is Gnosticism repackaged.
 - 2. **DISCUSS:** How does the push toward relying on extrabiblical “revelation” make people vulnerable to deception?

f. Attacks on the validity of the Bible

- i. There has been a rise in people interested in the Ethiopian Bible.
 - 1. The Ethiopian Bible contains 81–88 books, depending on how you count them.
 - 2. Some incorrectly claim that the Ethiopian Bible is the older, original, and more historically accurate manuscript.

- 3. The Ethiopian Bible may be rich in tradition, but it is not divinely inspired.
 - ii. We hold to the 66 books of the Biblical canon, which were recognized in the 1647 Westminster Confession.
 - iii. This questioning of the canon of Scripture is only one more way to cast doubt on the trustworthiness of Scripture.
 - g. Belief in universalism
 - i. Universalism is the heretical belief that God will not send anyone to hell because all roads lead to God.
 - ii. **DISCUSS:** How does universalism negate the Great Commission? What are some other ways this false doctrine leads to further errors?
 - h. Belief in annihilationism
 - i. Annihilationism is the erroneous belief that unbelievers will not face eternal, conscious torment, but rather be destroyed.
 - i. Belief in a flat earth
 - i. The flat earth view is a growing belief among believers, but it is not Biblical.
 - 1. **Isaiah 40:22a** – *“It is He [God] who sits above the circle of the earth.”*
 - ii. Christian astronaut Barry “Butch” Wilmore said every time he has gone around the earth, it is round.

7. Paul’s charge to the church

- a. Christians must be vigilant to defend truth inside and outside the church.
 - i. If you start to embrace what is contrary to Scripture, no matter how “small,” you are stepping away from God’s path by relying on your understanding rather than God’s.
- b. **Colossians 2:6-10** – *“[6] As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, [7] rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. [8] Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. [9] For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; [10] and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”*
 - i. **DISCUSS:** How can you answer the call to defend Biblical truth?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)