

The Danger of Not Following a Christ Centered Doctrine

Colossians 2:8

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, ©1989 (Rev. 92,09)

Colossians 2:8 “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.”

Introduction: There are three warnings in Colossians 2, (1.) do not allow yourself to be carried off (2:8); (2.) do not allow others to act as your judge in regard to various things (2:16); and (3.) do not allow yourself to be continually defrauded, (2:18).

We want to focus on the first one. Paul was warning Christians of a real great danger before them.

In a time past a story is told of a con artist. A farmer whose horse kept slobbering over everything saw an advertisement in a farm magazine offering a cure for slobbering horses for a 20 dollar fee. The farmer put 20 dollars in an envelop with a stamped self-addressed envelop asking for the secret. In return mail he received a very thin envelop containing a single sheet of paper, on which was written the words, “Teach your horses to spit.” It was a simple-minded deception. The not so funny thing is this happens every day from places you won’t suspect. (Illustration taken from Ray Stedman on Colossians)

1. The Dangerous Threat (2:8 “beware”)

When Paul says “beware” (Gr. “blepete”) a present command that translates “see to it” meaning “be on your guard” or “beware.” Paul is commanding all Christians to keep vigilance. It is a call to vigilance.

2. The Dangerous Scope (2:8 “anyone”)

Paul states “beware lest anyone...” The word “anyone” (Gr. “tis humas”) is singular.

There are individuals that have a mission. It is a one on one mission. Today, it is the “leader” or “radio personality” or “writer” who is doing the most damage in leading people astray.

(Word Pictures in the NT, A. T. Robertson, Nashville: Broadman, 1931, Vol IV, p. 487)

Not every church person has correct doctrine

Not every Christian has correct doctrine

Not every Radio preacher has correct doctrine

Not every Christian book has correct doctrine

Not every Christian magazine has correct doctrine

Doctrine that is not Christ centered is discovered, retrofitted, and shared through many means.

3. The Dangerous Goal (2:8 “cheat you”) (

Paul uses the word “cheat” (Gr. “ho sulagogen”)

This word is made up of two words “ago” which means “to lead or carry” and “sule” which means “booty” (the loot or plunder taken in a robbery or war). The present tense shows it is a continual on going occurrence, not just a one time act.

(Word Pictures in the NT, A. T. Robertson, Nashville: Broadman, 1931, Vol IV, p. 487)

The word is used in the Greek for “kidnapping” “taking someone captive” and “the plundering of a house.” Paul sees the danger of people with false doctrine taking true believers hostage. Don’t let anyone carry you away, make you his prey, make you a captive, lead you off like a prisoner of war. (“Colossians,” John MacArthur, The MacArthur NT Commentary, Chicago: Moody, 1992, p. 99)

These false teachers are “men stealers.”

(“Colossians,” Curtis Vaughan, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, Vol. 11, p. 197)

Doctrine that is not Christ centered gets a hold of you and by its very nature takes you away from the truth and when it does this, false doctrine owns you and controls you.

4. The Dangerous Weapon (2:8 “philosophy”)(the manner of capture)

Philosophy (Gr. “tes philosophias”) comes from two words, “philos” meaning “love/friendship” and “Sophia” meaning “wisdom.” We get our English word “sophisticate” from the word “sophos.” From one of these words that make up the word “philosophy,” “sophos,” We get our English word “sophistication.” “sophisticated” person has acquired worldly knowledge and views things from an elite position.

Philosophy sounds harmless. If a pastor says he doesn’t like philosophy, someone says “Oh preacher there is nothing wrong with philosophy. You are just one of those anti-intellectuals.” But it all depends on what we mean by philosophy?

What do we mean by “philosophy?”

1. By philosophy do we mean establishing a criteria for underlying support.
 2. By philosophy “do we mean the search for clarity and understanding regarding a certain subject using all the means afforded to man?” (Making pagan ignorance equal with God’s truth)
 3. By philosophy, “do we mean human speculation regarding man’s basic questions apart from the revelation of God?” (totally pagan unregenerate frame work)
- (“Philosophy,” S. Lewis Johnson, Bibliotheca Sacra, Dallas Seminary, 1962, p. 309)

Paul is using the word “philosophy” here in a derogatory connotation. These pagan philosophers of Paul’s day pretend they were going to enrich you, but in fact with their teaching, they were going to plunder you and spoil you. It was a philosophy based on totally pagan unregenerate knowledge apart from God’s truth.

In Paul’s day, the Gnostics, the Epicureans, and the Stoics, were these philosophers. This philosophy Paul is talking about came from the teachings of the unregenerate heathen Gentile theorists of his day.

Gnosticism (Gr. “gnosis” Knowledge) separated physical from thought, (matter was evil) and a special possession of knowledge was needed for salvation.

Epicureans, followers of Epicurus (341-270BC) condemned excess and commanded a simple life. Happiness and avoidance of pain the chief goal of life.

The Stoics (Gr. “stoa” colonnade porch) where these philosophers taught. It was founded by Zeno 308BC, first to establish a world-view. Right-reason helps us adjust into the universe.

Mark it down, these philosophies never went away. We face them today along with refinements and many more “sophisticated” trappings.

5. The Dangerous Method (2:8 “empty” and “deceit”) (means of capture)

Two words describe the characteristics of the philosophy.

A. The word “empty” (Gr. “kenes” used 18xs in the NT) means “hallow, fruitless, or without success.” This philosophy does not contain the things to help one succeed in life. It is high sounding nonsense.

B. The word “deceptive” (Gr. “apates” used 7xs in the NT) means “cheat, deluded, deceptive.” This philosophy is false impression by appearance, statement, or influence.

6. The Dangerous Content (2:8 “traditions of men” and “elementary principles of this world”)

Two words describe the content:

A. “traditions of men” (Gr. “ten paradysin ton anthropon”)

What are the traditions of men?

“It is the inadequate, depraved, perpetuated human thinking patterns. Tradition doesn’t mean anything just because it is handed down doesn’t mean its true. If it starts out as error and is handed down, it is still error.”

(Complete in Christ, John MacArthur, tape GC2141)

B. “Principles of this world” (Gr. “ta stoicheia tou kosmou” used 7xs in NT)

What does Paul mean by “elementary principles?”

- elementary instruction, such as the A,B,C,s
- elementary elements, such as earth, wind, fire, water
- elementary forces, spirits, demons, etc.
- elementary teachings, dictionary, encyclopedia knowledge
- elementary techniques, ascetic regulations, rules

“Some have said that these “elementary principles” are the things which controlled the heavenly realm which affected everyday life, such as sickness, curses, crop failures, plagues, earthquakes, natural disasters. Magical practices were needed to avert their influences.”

(Colossian Syncretism, Clinton Arnold, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996, Pp. 158-192)

It is the “world’s” system apart from Christ.

7. The Dangerous Result (2:8 “not after Christ”)

A. This philosophy and those who put it together, didn’t follow after Christ.

B. Those who follow it won’t be following after Christ.

Conclusion: We have got to “hang on to Christ” (2:1-7)