

Holding Fast: Colossians – Week 7

INTRO

Paul has never personally visited the church in Colossae, but because of Epaphras' faithfulness, the church overall is in a healthy place. However, there are some who are pushing unbiblical ideas (heresies) in the church. The way Paul deals with them is by beginning with the foundation of Christianity. Who is Jesus? With this cornerstone in place, he moves forward.

We don't know much about the heresy so far, but we do know that it's promising great wisdom and knowledge through the influence of elemental (i.e. demonic) spirits. Paul points out that in Jesus we have ALL the treasures of knowledge & wisdom, and every other philosophy is empty lies.

HOOK

The Infamous Dred Scott Case: Dred and Harriet Scott were slaves in 1846 who filed for freedom in circuit court in St. Louis, Missouri (a slave state). Having been sold to a new owner, they were taken to Wisconsin, a free state, then moved back to Missouri. Despite being illiterate, the Scotts capitalized on a law within the courts that stated they should have been freed when their owner moved to Wisconsin and should be free despite moving back to a slave state. "Once free, always free."

After an odyssey of wins, defeats, and appeals they worked their way up through higher and higher levels of court. In 1857, their final case was in the US Supreme Court. The court ruled that **1.** Blacks don't have rights as US citizens. **2.** Slave states no longer had to honor the 'once free, always free' principle. **3.** Congress shouldn't have prohibited slavery in Wisconsin in the first place. Dred and Harriet Scott lost their case after an 11-year battle. They were still slaves.

- The highest authority in the land, the Supreme Court, failed them. Corruption and sin infiltrate every human philosophy, culture, and authority.

BOOK – Thesis:

Colossians 2:15 - *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

- There is a new Sheriff in dodge, a new Hero, a new King, a new order. All the old authorities have been suffered a crushing defeat. He has his foot on their throats, and they no longer have power.

Illustration: The same word is echoed in **2 Corinthians 2:12-14** ("*thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*"), would have been familiar to the

people living in the 1st Century. Victory parades of a Roman General after battle were city-wide, day-stopping events when the general and his army returned to Rome or his home city.

“Over the duration of the Roman Empire there were 320 triumphal processions and they all followed a set custom. As soon as the battle was won, a herald would run from the battle ground to the city to proclaim the victory. Our Bible word for “preaching” is the same word used to describe the announcement of this herald. When the residents heard the good news they immediately began to make preparations for a magnificent victory celebration.

On the morning of the parade, the Roman priests would burn large amounts of a special incense, so that when the citizens woke up and sniffed the air they would say, “We’re going to have a party today! We’re going to have a victory parade!” They would start lining the streets waiting for the parade to begin.

Leading the parade would be the priests swinging the censures burning that special incense, followed by musicians! They would be followed by the victorious soldiers carrying the treasures and spoils of the war. Then, the central figure would be the victorious general riding in a beautiful chariot. His chariot would often be pulled by white horses, but other animals were used too. For instance, when Pompey conquered Africa, his chariot was pulled by two elephants. And for Mark Anthony’s victorious parade, he had two lions pulling his chariot. Dionysus’ chariot was pulled by four tigers.

And then, walking behind, chained to the chariot of the victorious general, would be the leading officers of the defeated army. These enemy officers would be led into the city to demonstrate that they had been defeated. It was a humiliating experience for them. For instance, in 30 B.C., Cleopatra committed suicide to keep from having to endure the humiliation of being chained to Octavian Caesar’s chariot. These defeated officers were facing execution, but sometimes due to the mercy of the conquering general, their lives were spared, and they became slaves.

When the Roman citizens saw their victorious general, and the defeated officers chained to his chariot, they would shout praises and throw flowers at the victorious general. They would sing and celebrate the great victory of their general.” - By **Dr. David O. Dykes**

- **Note:** We are not in the Victor’s chariot. Jesus alone is the Conqueror. His chariot, as O. Dykes says, is a “one-seater.”
- Paul is about to unpack details about the two (or perhaps same) heresies pushing their way into the Colossian church. Those promoting these heresies are tools of demonic forces, and it’s Jesus, the Victor, who has triumphed over every one of them. **So, why believe their teachings? Why follow what they are pressuring you to do?**

Note: We are going to go out of order to **first**, look at what the heresies promoted; **second**, what are the outcomes of following them; and **third**, Paul’s instruction to the Christians there.

Section 1: What are the Heresies? - Christo-Judaism and a Pagan Mystery Cult

Colossians 2:16 - *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

- “Therefore...” – since Jesus has set us free from sin, nailing our record of debt to the cross, AND He has conquered every adversary...
- **Heresy #1:** A “Christian”-Judaism similar to those Paul has had problems with before. They taught that to be Christians, you had to first become Jewish and follow the Old Testament laws. You could only eat certain things (dietary laws), were compelled to participate in religious festivals (many took place at the first of the month – new moon), and be circumcised.

Colossians 2:17 - *These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

- Paul calls these things shadows. They signify that something substantial is nearby but are totally substance-less themselves. They all pointed to a future reality that has already come.
 - **Illustration:** Like a cashier asking if you want to keep your used-up gift card. It signified something of substance, but no longer has value.
 - **Ex.** The sign of circumcision was fulfilled in Jesus. (see last week)
- The value and symbolism of these are in Christ. He is the culmination of what these signs, symbols, and shadows reveal.

Colossians 2:18a - *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,*

- **Heresy #2:** Some sort of pagan mystery cult which worshiped angels, emphasized spiritual visions, and demanded asceticism.
- **“asceticism”** – “rigorous self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence and pleasure, typically as a way to express spiritual devotion”
 - Arduous fasting, abstinence from sex, self-abuse for the sake of spiritual enlightenment.
- **“worship of angels”** – This practice would be particularly offensive to God. God is a jealous God. He’s jealous of our trust and of our love, and His anger is against those who worship the creation instead of the Creator.
 - **Rom. 1:18,25** - *...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [...] ...they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...*
 - Who are these alleged angels? **V.8,20** – They’re demonic spirits.
 - In **1 Cor. 10:20**, Paul says behind every idol is a demon.

- **“going on in detail” about visions** – The Greek word here is rare in literature which made it difficult for scholars to translate until they found it in a series of inscriptions near Ephesus. The word describes an initiation ceremony into a mystery cult where the initiate would enter into the innermost part of the temple and experience spiritual visions.
 - It would seem former/current members of these cults are basing some of their teachings off of these pagan spiritual experiences.
- **These were supposed to lead to (2:3,4,8) wisdom and secret knowledge.**

Application: The use of the phrases “*pass judgement on you (v.16)*” and “*disqualify you*” suggests the followers of this heresy were trying to criticize and discredit sincere Christians because of their lack of following these rituals and teachings.

The tactic of trying to judge and criticize Christians for our beliefs is just as common today. But where their some religions of their Hellenistic culture promoted asceticism, our hedonistic culture promotes the pursuit of pleasure. The reigning moral philosophy of our day is, “As long as it’s not hurting someone, do what makes you feel good.” So Christians are judged according to that standard.

- “Really? You’re a virgin?” or “You don’t have sex anymore?”
- “Why don’t you watch _____ series on Prime/Netflix?”
- “All Christians are bigots because they’re homophobic and misogynistic.”
 - “What kind of Christian doesn’t accept everyone as they are?”
- It’s social suicide in school to be vocal and active about your faith (even in Christian schools). You are judged and disqualified.
- A friend of mine who was at the top of the music industry and gave his life to Jesus once said, “In music and Hollywood, you can be anything you want, and they’ll cheer you on... accept a Christian. To be a Christian is suicide to your career.” – Paraphrase from Dave

Going out of order... coming back.

Colossians 2:20-22 - *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?*

- Paul bundles both halves of the false teachings into a conclusion.

- Their Roman/Greek hierarchy of deities and their mythologies... modern day: JW's, LDS, the traditions of Catholicism are all made up from a human's mind (v.23 – "self-made religion"). **These rituals and teachings don't find their source in God's self-revelation but in man's imagination.** They didn't find their basis in scriptural authority, but in fact, behind them all are elemental spirits, demonic forces.
- But, believers have died to these. They aren't bound to religious or cultural regulations. In fact, Jesus defeated and took victory over these forces. **They have no claim of ownership over God's people whom He's set free!**

2. What are the Outcomes of Following These Philosophies and Rituals?

Colossians 2:18b - ...*puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,*

- Speaking directly to works-based religion which produces **PRIDE**.

Colossians 2:23 - *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

- "Do these things and you can enjoy thinking well of yourself. You're spiritual now. Everyone can see how good you are. You're awesome."
 - **Proverbs 8:13** – "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech."
 - **Proverbs 16:18** – "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."
 - **Luke 14:11** – "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
- "We want our kids to have pride, to think they are awesome. We want to avoid damaging their egos." **This is directly opposed to the teaching of scripture.** "*We are dead in sin*" and "*No one seeks God*" and "*no one is good, no not one.*"
- The demands of society seem wise but all the religions and philosophies which demand behavior modification and works-based spirituality only culminate in the sin of pride and add up to zero value.

LOOK

3. Paul's Instruction to Believers: HOLD FAST

Illustration: Holding on to my dad's beltloop in the crowd at Promise Keepers

Colossians 2:19 - *...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

- When they follow man-made, culture inspired beliefs they are letting go of their anchor, their tether, their solid rock.
- All these things (what they eat, what holidays they celebrate, the worship of anything by GOD) don't nourish them spiritually. Like eating junk food which has no benefit and only becomes poop.

Paul, in His correction is giving two instructions. They are to hold tightly to Christ and to His body, His church.

***To Christ the Head:**

Their firm foundation is Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the body. Through Him they are nourished with the Word of God giving health, energy, nutrients, and strength to them. God, and not their unbiblical teachings from pagan visions and expired food laws, gives growth to them spiritually. He supplies all our needs.

- Know Him. – Study about Him in the Bible.
- Know Him. - Walk in awareness and relationship with Him.

***To the Body of Christ:**

Illustration: Drew feeling alone in his class. Encouragement to remember the church as the place of rest from the world's tensions and criticisms.

1 Corinthians 12:12 - *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

The body of Christ serves many purposes: (here are a few)

1. Teaching of God's word.
2. United worship and glory to our God.
3. Support of one another physically.
4. Support of one another spiritually.
5. A team effort in the growth of the kingdom of God.
 - a. Historically, in times of sever oppression, Christians haven't looked for ways to not gather, but risked their lives to gather more.
 - b. We need each other.

TOOK

Dred and Harriet Scott failed to win their freedom through appealing to the highest court in the United States. They were still slaves.

But, two things happened because of their valiant struggle against oppression.

1. The children of their original owner, who had become abolitionists, purchased them and their two daughters and gave them their freedom. **2.** The case, *Dred Scott vs. Sanford*, which was highly publicized, stirred contentions between slave owners and abolitionists, was a major factor that led to the civil war.

- Jesus has not left us slaves. He has triumphed over every authority which binds us. He has triumphed over demonic forces and over the human heart which devises ways to “earn salvation and spiritual goodness.”
- What He has left us with is (Eph.2:8-9) “*by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*”

Hebrews 10:23-25 - *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

RECAP

- Man-made religions and traditions are empty and spiritually useless and only create pride.
- The way to arm ourselves, the way to reorient when we get off course, is to return to Christ and stay anchored in His church.

Challenge 1: What are some “works” you’ve been convinced help you earn God’s favor? Begin to pray about them.

Challenge 2: Pursue knowing Him. **1:9-10**

~ *Soli DEO Gloria*

eGroup Questions /// Holding Fast

Pray:

Key Verse: Colossians 2:20-22 - If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations [...] according to human precepts and teachings?

Questions:

1. What are some rituals people claim make us more spiritual, closer to God, remove our sin, or earn a ticket to heaven?
2. What is behavior modification? Does Jesus require behavior modification to be saved?
3. What is required for salvation? What is required to please God? (lean on scripture here)
4. What does scripture say about living a holy life?
5. Why is culture SO anti-Christians? "Christian-phobic."
6. Is it important for us to fit into culture, to be likable, for evangelistic purposes?
7. Why do you think Pastor Dominick SOOO insistent on studying the Bible?
8. Why did Pastor Dominick say we have to know Jesus and we have to know Jesus. What did he mean?
9. Why do you think the early church gathered together when they could lose their lives if they were caught? Why not just be Christians at home?
10. What questions did the message tonight make you think of?

Ask for prayer requests: Pray