

Colossians 2:6-15

⁶Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, ⁷by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith just as you were taught, while you overflow in faith with thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ. ⁹For all the fullness of God's being dwells bodily in Christ. ¹⁰And you have been brought to fullness in him. Christ is the head over every ruler and authority. ¹¹You were also circumcised in him, with a circumcision not done by human hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, ¹²when you were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead.

¹³Even when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses. ¹⁴God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ.

Strengthened in the Faith

I.

His congregation was in trouble. The problem wasn't trying to decide how many salaries the church could afford to pay. It wasn't a squabble about what piece of property to buy to build a new facility, or even a question of how lavish the facility for their worship should be.

In fact, the problem was far more profound—far deeper. Faith itself was under fire. New teachers were coming in and undermining the truths of the gospel as they had been taught. What was he to do? How would the young pastor handle it?

Even pastors need to ask for advice from time to time. Twitter is no help. Just because there is a high volume of tweets on a given subject doesn't mean the quality of information is going to suffice. Hashtags don't give satisfactory answers.

The young pastor couldn't take out his phone and dash off a quick email to his mentor, either. Email hadn't been invented yet. Rather than using snail mail—letters might get lost in the first century, after all—Epaphras hit the road himself to go and talk with Paul. 1300 miles he traveled, mostly on foot, to talk to Paul and get some advice.

Faith was under fire. Paul addressed the problem as Epaphras had identified it. "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ" (Colossians 2:8, EHV).

Ah, philosophy! Have you ever noticed how intellectuals try to make you feel so inferior? "You know...there are important questions: 'What is the meaning of life?'" Read the philosophy of these intellectuals. Whole volumes they spend in defining and explaining all they think you need to know about life. It requires technical terminology, of course. If the vocabulary isn't deep enough, no one will take them seriously. The explanations of the meaning of life are complicated.

Of course, if you read the complicated explanations about the secrets of life from two or three different philosophers, you will find that they completely contradict one another. Perhaps the answers really *are* complicated.

The new teachers brought philosophy and empty deceit to the Colossians. They tried to convince them "you don't know enough...but *we* can explain! We can help you!" They bombarded Christians with appeals to their intellect. But these things were "not in accord with Christ."

There were other challenges, too. “You were also circumcised in him, with a circumcision not done by human hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, ¹²when you were buried with Christ in baptism” (Colossians 2:11-12, EHV). The Colossians were being told they must do certain things. Baptism is the New Testament sacrament that replaced circumcision as a sign of faith, yet they were being told that circumcision must be required again. In the verse after our text Paul writes: “Do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day” (Colossians 2:16, EHV). Attacks were made against the days the Colossians chose for their worship days. They were attacked for failing to follow Old Testament dietary restrictions. They were attacked about which days they chose to celebrate—dates to celebrate the birth of Christ, or the resurrection of Christ, or whatever other holidays they might choose.

In every case, these new teachers were coming in and introducing errors that led the Colossians to think something was missing in their faith. These wise, philosophical teachers would be more than happy to supply what was lacking.

II.

There are no “new teachers” bringing anything in to the church. At least, not *this* church. At least, not *yet*. But faith is under fire, isn’t it?

In 2019 you can identify gender as you choose. It used to be accepted science that there were two genders, and your birth certificate would identify which of the two you are. An online search reveals 112 genders today. You can even be gender-fluid, and switch on a whim—whatever feels good in the moment is your own brand of “science.”

For thousands of years the definition of marriage was pretty well set in stone. Today, a Christian’s definition of marriage according to what God says in his Word is hurtful and uncaring.

Back in Old Testament times people debated whose gods were superior. Today, tolerance is preached. But it’s more than just to not persecute a person on the basis of religion, we are told all gods are the same, and we are bigoted and hateful if we do not believe that all paths lead to the same blissful existence at the end of this life.

The Colossians were bombarded with appeals to the intellect. 21st Century Christians are bombarded with appeals to the emotions. It just feels wrong to insist that there is only one way. Would a loving God really insist on one moral code? One definition of marriage? One rigid set of genders? Come on, Christians!

Surely God would want you to bend and sway a little bit to keep up with the times. Surely God would give a little bit to an enlightened emotional reality!

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ” (Colossians 2:8, EHV).

Faith is still under fire. Science and reason and philosophy still seek to explain away and disprove the absolute truth of the Bible. Increasingly the attacks come from emotional appeals. Sticking to the morality proclaimed in Scripture is unloving and uncaring.

Whether attacks on faith are directed at the head or the heart, they are just as deadly. They threaten to take you captive and undermine what God’s Word says.

III.

“What is the meaning of life?” Philosophers spend volumes trying to explain it intellectually. Others insist the answer might change from minute to minute based on your emotions. Little children can learn the answer readily.

“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, ⁷by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith just as you were taught, while you overflow in faith with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7, EHV).

You learn the truth from the ultimate source of truth—from God himself. The Bible is the History of God’s Saving Activity. The Bible has the answer to the questions of what God expects of all people of all time in his moral law. The absolute truth of the Bible reveals to us the stark reality that, no matter how you *feel* about it, some things are defined by God absolutely as sin.

“Even when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses. ¹⁴God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14, EHV).

Paul points to the absolute truth of the Bible that some things are sin. Sin has consequences. Sin separates us from God. Sin makes it as though you were already dead, and separated from God forever.

But Paul’s words reveal something remarkable. The Bible also shows the absolute and ultimate love God had and has for human beings. God loved you, even when you were dead in your trespasses—that is, your sins. God loved you so much that he made you alive with Christ. He forgave your sins in Jesus. He took the record of your sins—the sins of going along with the emotions of the times or the intellectual explanations that defy Scripture, and rejecting God’s truth—he took all of it and nailed it to the cross with Jesus. He took out the giant pink eraser of Jesus’ life and death and erased all record of your evil deeds and desires from the Book of Life. He took it away.

“You were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead” (Colossians 2:12, EHV). Christ Jesus died *for* you. He paid for every sin. Because he paid, his death is counted in your favor. Just as God raised your Lord Jesus from the dead on the third day, so also you can count on your own resurrection from the dead to spend life eternal with the Lord Jesus in heaven.

IV.

Epaphras headed off to see Paul to get help. He needed this kind of clear-cut explanation that would refute all the attacks on faith.

Attacks on the gospel will continue to come. Satan wants you to abandon God just as surely as he wanted the Christians in Colossae to have their doubts and turn away.

Perhaps they will attack your intellect. Maybe the trick will be that of extra or superior knowledge. Secret societies or lodges or cults that only reveal their knowledge when you are safely on the inside of the group.

Perhaps it will be a route of ritual. You will only experience *real* satisfaction in your Christian spiritual journey when you observe certain rituals—go back to the formula of the Old Testament and worship on the Sabbath—Saturday—eat the right foods, live the sanctified life with certain distinctive habits, avoid certain behaviors and certain substances.

Maybe it will be an appeal to extra-biblical spirituality. Certain gifts or abilities should or must be yours in order to truly show that you are a Christian. An encouragement to look to those professing to have seen heaven and proclaimed its reality beyond what God has revealed in Scripture.

“After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ” (Colossians 2:15, EHV).

Jesus won. Conquering Roman generals would parade their vanquished foes down main street to make a public display of their defeat. In the same way, God made a public spectacle of the enemies of Christianity in Christ’s victory.

Because Epaphras went to Paul we have this letter to the Colossians to remind us to continually be strengthened in the faith by what we have learned. Jesus won. We have life eternal in Jesus.

God bless you as you continue to walk in Christ Jesus, strengthened and built up in your faith in him. Amen.