

## Don't be fooled      Colossians 2:1-15

As I was writing this sermon, I felt it was important to look at the previous sermon on this passage. So let's do this through PP throughout this sermon. (Read *Slides 1, 2, 3*)

### **Christ is Sufficient – a review**

Colossians 2:1-15

Paul tells his readers to not have **buyer's remorse**.

His comment about the false teachers is:

**Their product is hazardous for your health!**

**We tend to default to trust – but we also need to be skeptical.**

What church or religious rules do you and I not follow today? Please name a few. Another way to ask is this, what church traditions did you argue with your parents about?

Rules – we love them and hate them. If I like a rule – I love it. If I dislike a rule – I hate it. And so it has always been. Even way back in the early church. We tend to have an inner tendency to kick back, to resist rules. And the problem with rules gets more complicated when two or more competing values collide.

Jack Eckerd founded the chain of drug stores that bear his name. He gave his employees shares from his personal stock. By taking advantage of the stock option program offered by Eckerd, his employees benefitted financially in the success of the new company. Mr. Eckerd sent a letter to his employees expressing the hope that they would feel a moral obligation to give 10 percent of what they gained through their stock options to their church, charity, or to help someone else. Eckerd himself gave huge sums of money to missions and charitable causes.

Not long after becoming a Christian, Eckerd walked through one of his stores and noticed pornographic magazines in the magazine racks. Although retired, Eckerd called the company president and urged him to get rid of the magazines. Management demurred, citing the substantial profits they stood to lose. Eckerd used his power as the largest stockholder, and his wishes prevailed. Pornographic materials were removed from all 1,700 stores.

When he was questioned as to why he took such a stand, Eckerd replied, "God wouldn't let me off the hook." He made a decision to walk with God over the competing value of profits. We would probably agree with Mr. Eckerd's choice, but how we gain wealth is always a question of whose rules, whose philosophy we are following – the stockholders, Wall Street, the customers, profit, our own greed, or the Almighty's?

Weeks ago we looked at Paul's encouragement to stick to the rules of growing in spiritual fullness in Christ. We were reminded that Christ is sufficient! We studied **Colossians 2, verses 5 to 7** which tell us, (Read *Slides 4, 5, 6*)

**Colossians 2:5-7 suggests what the Christian life is like:**

**For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how **disciplined** (soldier) you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.**

**So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to **live your lives in him**, (athlete) **rooted** (tree) and **built** (builder) up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were **taught**, (student)**

**and overflowing with thankfulness** (river).

We looked at the allusions in these verses, from the original language of the Bible, to soldiering, walking, being rooted like trees, being built up, learning and overflowing with thankfulness like a river.

The banks of certain rivers are lined with a substance called 'near quicksand.' It is almost quicksand, but not quite. If we keep walking on this near-quicksand, we don't have a problem. But if we stop, we will start sinking, and we will eventually get sucked in completely. So, too, if we don't keep walking, growing, developing, in our Christian experience, we will start sinking. The way to keep moving is to walk in faith in the Christ we have received. These allusions, indicate our relationship with Christ is not to be stagnate, but to be a growing active relationship.

These familiar terms or metaphors we looked at several weeks ago refer to daily conduct. They emphasize continuing to believe the truth about

Christ, not allowing our faith in Christ's deity and authority to waver. It was Christ who saved us so do not forsake His divine authority for any human sophistry or chicanery. Paul urges us to mature in Christ by increasing our union with Him. We are to maintain a lifestyle patterned after His. John writes "The one who says they abide in Him, ought themselves to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6). When faced with the dilemmas that confront followers of Jesus in our daily lives, the guideline is, 'What would Jesus do in this situation?'

Furthermore – going back to the previous sermon  
(Read *Slides 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13*)

We have a precious gift – a key antidote to false teaching

Five reasons that all we need is Christ  
Colossians 2:9-15

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,  
and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

He is the head over every power and authority.

In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ,

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities,  
he made a public spectacle of them,  
triumphing over them by the cross.

And rules become complicated when they are tied with what we would call heresy. They even involve changing religious traditions and challenging cultural habits as well as attitudes. It

is so easy, as human beings, to think that Christianity is all about looking a certain way or believing in the correct doctrine or following a specific set of rules. There is some validity in this. For example, how we talk is a good rule.

So let's look at this passage from a new angle.

*Slide 14*

Another look at Colossians 2:1-15

**Don't be Fooled!**

But just because we do something on the outside, doesn't mean it's who we are on the inside. We want to help ourselves and others walk rightly with the Almighty Creator, by applying the "rules" of North Star's Statement of Purpose and Vision. We know external action is a huge part of the Christian faith, but the inward reality is the substance. The external reality is a natural outflow of the inner reality that Christ lives in us.

*Slide 15*      **Warning # 1**

The Colossians struggled with this in multiple different ways. We found Paul got real direct in **Colossians 2, verse 4**. "I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments."

The Message version says it this way. "I'm telling you this because I don't want anyone leading you off on some wild-goose chase, after other so-called mysteries, or 'the Secret'."

*Slide 16, 17*      **Warning # 2**

Then in **Colossians 2:8** Paul tells us, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world, rather than Christ." Paul is warning about adding ideas to Christianity.

It is significant that when the Bible mentions philosophy, we are warned to beware of it! This is the only use of the word philosophy in the New Testament. Paul's concern is that no false teacher take believers captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy. The thought here is not against all philosophy but against false philosophy. The philosophy at Colossae was labeled hollow, empty, deceptive, based on human tradition, rather than on Christ.

### *Slide 18*

True Christian philosophy takes captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. Paul in **2 Corinthians 10:5** says “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”.

### *Slide 19*

False philosophy is based on the world’s basic principles. **Colossians 2:20** informs us, “If you have died with the Anointed One, Christ Jesus, to the elemental spirits of the cosmos, then why are you submitting yourselves to its rules as if you still belonged to this world?”

### *Slide 20, 21*

Paul in **Galatians 4:3 and 9** says it like this. “So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces, elementary principles of the world.” “But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces or principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?”

We are told the world’s elementary principles, elementary philosophies are demonic and worldly, not godly or Christlike. Unless we believers are careful, such philosophy may ensnare us, taking us ‘captive’.

Basically, the Bible warns, “Beware of the philosophy and psychology the world values.” They are vain. They are empty. They don’t work to enhance life and especially life in Christ Jesus. Their ideas creep into the minds and attitudes of believers, to our detriment. They damage society and they injure our witness. This is why it’s important to know our Bible and to figure out how it ties in and influences our daily living, decisions and attitudes.

Paul exhorts his readers to not have spiritual buyer’s remorse. Our focus today gives us more information on how the Colossians, and we, can add external additions to the gospel that undermine a truly Christ-centered identity because of false teachers. This is in contrast to establishing our identity in Christ where we are free, alive, complete, forgiven, and victorious.

We need to be concerned about the huge numbers of self-help books. And the over dependence on psychiatrists and counselors when problems are specifically dealt with in the Bible. If your car breaks down, I wouldn’t tell you to read your Bible. I would tell you to read an automotive manual and go to a mechanic. If your arm breaks, I would not tell you to read your Bible. I would tell you to go to a doctor and read a medical manual. But for matters of the heart and soul and relationships, read your Bible, for it alone contains the best answers we need. I’m not against counseling, or self-help books, but we need to be sure we are receiving the right counseling – even from Christians.

I remember years ago reading a basic money management, investment book. I remember one of the stories by the author. He met an old friend and they got caught up with each other. The friend seemed to still be messed up and was regularly going to an expensive psychiatrist. He expressed that he wasn’t getting any better. The line the author wrote that I remember is, “I wonder if my friend has told his counselor about how rich he is and how he has adapted his parent’s attitude toward money and wealth, and how all that is messing him up?” The point of sharing this story is the friend’s wealth and worship of money was one of his key problems.

### *Slide 22*

So let’s try to figure out in more detail what the words of verse 8 mean for us. The false teachers in the Colossians church evidently used clever and seductive tactics and misguided logic so the believers had to ‘see to it’ that they didn’t let down their guard and be captured by philosophy that was contrary to Christ. The language here in verse 8 indicates that these false teachers ‘**carry people off as their spoil.**’ The sense of the words used is like being carried off as a person’s slave. This ties in with the warnings to not become a captive of false ideas and false leaders.

But what could be wrong with pure philosophy since it simply means ‘the love of wisdom’? Remember all the focus Paul has been giving to learn God’s knowledge and wisdom?

### *Slide 23*

Second, we need to remember that philosophical wisdom often is ‘**hollow.**’ Many of the ideas and philosophies we hear of today when compared with the reality of human existence are far off the mark because they are empty. When we examine them, they are hollow, empty.

The third characteristic is that this philosophy is ‘**deceptive.**’ It may sound good, but it is designed to lead people astray. I hope we have become sensitized to the information we receive. Mass media information generally isn’t neutral. Most media is owned by large corporations – each with their own interests and the interest of the owners. At its best, their language can be cleverly slanted. Same with politicians.

We know that our news feeds and what we watch is often news sources that do not offer competing perspectives. And when they do, their real purpose is to criticize some perspectives and find fault with them and make fun of them. So, we have to deliberately work hard at finding a variety of perspectives – including about faith.

Recently I saw a short clip of a couple being interviewed. They were asked why they believed the US election was a fraud. The response? “That’s what the TV said.” Obviously we have a sense of where they are getting their information. They need to also listen to other sources and then figure out for themselves what is true.

### *Slide 24*

The fourth reason we are to be on guard is that these empty and deceptive philosophies ‘**depend on human tradition.**’ They arise out of the thinking of humans, find a foothold in society, and then are passed along from generation to generation so as to appear popular and widely supported. Hardly anyone dares question them because it seems like everybody believes them. I think it is increasingly dangerous to truly think for ourselves. For example, we know this in our families when it comes to political issues and when it comes to different views about COVID.

And it is astounding how few people change political parties when their party changes its basic beliefs, actions and things they work for. Why? Well my dad and his dad were liberals or

conservatives or you name it. So people find themselves defending ideas that are hard to defend. Each generation needs to think for themselves – do some research and get a broad range of information, so they don’t have just hollow wisdom and human knowledge. Fifth, philosophy depends on ‘**the basic principles of this world.**’ The Greek here is ‘elementary spiritual forces.’ This refers to ‘things in a row’, and became associated with the alphabet, meaning going step by step with good logic. In this case it is often false logic. These basic principles refer to the elementary stages of religious idolatry, or even the worship of fallen angels, so we know so many values and ideas of the world are wrong. Yet it is so easy for us to be infiltrated by them.

### *Slides 25, 26, 27, 28*

Maybe using the words of William Barclay will help us. “**Paul may be saying ‘these false teachers claim that they are giving you knowledge which is very advanced and very profound. In point of fact it is knowledge which is uninstructed & rudimentary because at the best it is knowledge of the human mind. The real knowledge, the fullness of God is in Jesus Christ. If you listen to these false teachers, so far from receiving deep spiritual knowledge, you are slipping back into rudimentary instruction which you should have left behind long ago.’**” (p 137) This is in contrast to Paul’s interceding and urging us that his readers long for and receive – more of Jesus.

The term elementary means what it is – basic, uncomplicated, or as Scripture says elsewhere – still drinking milk and not solid food. The second meaning back then, is linked to the stars and planets, and their spirits. It is impossible for us to understand how much the ancient world was dominated by the idea of the influence of the stars, astrology and their spirits. We know quite a few political leaders in the past and even quite recently used the stars and so on as guides to their decision making. We have some of the same problems today. How many people today put faith in their horoscope? And, if you have the right passwords and the right formula, you can escape the fatalistic influence of the star. Really? But that was what was being taught.

The Gnostic teachers were saying in essence  
“Jesus Christ is all very well, he can do much for  
you. But he cannot enable you to escape from  
your subjection to the stars and the spirits. We  
alone have the secret knowledge which can  
enable you to do that.”

***Slide 29, 30***

Paul’s response: “You need nothing but Christ to  
overcome any power in the universe. For in him  
is nothing less than the fullness of God and he is  
the head of every power and authority, for he  
created them. So don’t be fooled!”

In Brazil we got to know some middle-class  
people on one street, who we often visited out on  
the street in the evenings. Across the dirt street  
was a big tree. One evening a man decided to  
tell me he put his faith in that tree. I asked him  
why he would believe in a tree – an inanimate  
object? I asked him why not put your faith in  
the Creator of that tree? The conversation went  
nowhere except in circles. I kept praying  
desperately for a way to get him to focus on  
Jesus. But I could not find a way to cut through,  
using Paul’s term, his belief on ‘elementary  
spiritual forces.’ So we need to be alert and  
aware how many gods are around us, and how  
many philosophies and ideas are ready to  
diminish our faith and witness in Christ.

No human-made religion can lead to truth, for  
truth can be found only in Christ. As something  
hollow, philosophy, human ways of thinking,  
cannot fill anyone except with more emptiness.  
By contrast, Colossians 1:25 says that we have  
received the Word of God in ‘its fullness’ and  
Colossians 2:2 reminds us that because we know  
Christ, we have the ‘full riches of complete  
understanding.’

If we put these two verses together, we can  
conclude by saying that a grounded, growing and  
grateful believer will not be led astray. We don’t  
have to worry about being spiritually kidnapped  
and fooled, if we are a follower of Jesus like an  
active soldier, a power walker, a rooted tree, a  
builder, a student, and an overflowing river urge  
us to be. And we are taking Paul’s warnings  
seriously. More warnings to come.