

ESTABLISHED IN CHRIST JESUS

Colossians 2.6-15

Two primary arguments of false teachers seem to have been:

1. Jesus is not God but simply a god, with no exclusive claims
2. What Jesus promises/claims to have done is somehow deficient, lacking in fullness. Other things are needed.

Paul's message in response:

As you have received (i.e. as a gift, through the teaching received; rabbinic tradition of transmitting and safeguarding a tradition

=> continue to live your lives in him. LIFESTYLE according to 1.10: "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work".

How does one safeguard one's walk? -

- By being rooted in him - Ps.1; *Horticultural image*. Deep, and in the good soil, i.e. 'in Christ' - Jesus *is* LORD – no other (Ps 1). Source of life and food
- By being built up in him - *Architectural image*. Growing – a life reshaped according to the Gospel, and in knowledge and love of him. Reflecting his image and glory.
- By being established in the faith, just as you were taught - 1.7. Refers to the basic of faith, such as read of in Phil 2; 1 Cor 15; 1 Cor 11.
Established = a legal term, speaking of a contract that is ratified and made binding (Martin) *Legal image*. COMMITMENT, LOYALTY – single-minded.
- Overflowing in thanksgiving (for all Christ has done for you).
Thanksgiving is a central theme in Colossians: 1.12; 2.6; 3.15, 17; 4.2. Image is of a vessel overflowing, and of public/corporate thanksgiving, not simply private/internal gratitude. See Luke 7.36-50; Mark 14.3-9. Queen's funeral service is reminder of the power and importance of public worship and thanksgiving.
Cultic/worship image.

The best antidote to false teaching etc., = maturity in Christ. See Eph 4.13-14:

Christ gave the various ministries "for building up the body of Christ... to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

See to it that no one takes you captive, i.e. a slave-raider carrying off his victim, or a prisoner carried off as spoil.

Ironic given “Christ has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1.13-14).

- Through philosophy, to be understood as a deep knowledge of divine (pagan)mysteries, or Judaisers (so NT Wright) - which is a sham
- And empty deceit (something which promises much but delivers nothing (e.g.wealth/riches) v’s the riches/treasures have in Christ – 1.27; 2.3)

It seems that these false teachers promised a new spiritual ‘freedom’ through the gift of a new spiritual fullness.

- According to human tradition (esp. religious regulations as in Mk 7.8 re what defiles, v’s revelation from God, faithfully passed on – 1.7, 23, 25-27)
- According to the elemental spirits of the universe. Probably territorial gods/spirits or angels or gods inhabiting the stars. They rule destiny, control human life, and hold the entrance into the divine realm in their keeping. Christ is one of them, but only one among many.

These things = created things and set up a rival allegiance to Christ, through whom they were made, either by

- a. demoting him to an inferior place in the *pleroma* (the fullness) or
- b. by insisting that he was not the sole mediatorship between God and the world (see v.18)
- c. by suggesting that the redeeming and reconciling work accomplished by Jesus’ death on the cross was somehow imperfect or insufficient – as see in following verses about food, drink, festivals, angels
- d. by suggesting that the spiritual liberty enjoyed by all who by faith are united to Christ is somehow lacking in fullness

Why would you be drawn away from being Christ’s captives?

- “And not according to Christ” – “the way, the truth and the life”.
 - In him the fullness of the deity dwells bodily, i.e. he is God (v’s the teaching of elemental spirits and angels). He is not one of many but the only God
 - You have come to fullness in him (forgiveness and fresh standing before God); i.e. you can want nothing from anyone else, there is nothing more to desire/receive.

- Who is the head of every ruler and authority, i.e. he cannot be upstaged by any of the elemental spirits or rulers or authorities; **he is supreme**, totally God. He brooks no rivals.
- In him also **you were circumcised** with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ.

The implication is that some false teachers were telling the gentile Colossians that they still needed to be circumcised (and obey the law of Moses), an outward circumcision performed by man, but which didn't necessarily reflect an inward circumcision (i.e. change of heart, e.g. Deut 10.16; Jer 4.4; Lev 26.41; Ezek 44.7,9; Deut 30.6; Rom 2.28-29; Phil 3.3). The true circumcision is the circumcision which Christ himself underwent, the crucifying/stripping off of the flesh (not just a small part, the foreskin!), which he performs on everyone who is baptized into him. It is nothing other than the death of the old self and the resurrection to new life in the Spirit.

The desires of the flesh no longer rule over us. They're still present, but don't rule – Christ does.

- when you were **buried** with him in baptism, you were also **raised** with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead
Not just 'faith in Jesus Christ' but "**faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead**". To believe that God raised Jesus from the dead is to believe in the god **who raises from the dead**. Such faith not merely assents to facts about Jesus, it recognises a truth about God. Cf. Rom 4.13-25, esp. vv.18-21 "In hope he believed against hope, that he should be the father of many nations... No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (NT Wright)
- And when you were dead in trespasses (cf. Prodigal Son Luke 15.24,32) and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God **made you alive together with him**, when he forgave us all our trespasses, **erasing the record** that stood against us with its legal demands.

Sin -> death. Resurrection/new life presupposes that sin has been dealt with/forgiven. Gen 3 and Rom 6.23 “The wages of sin is death”.

The image is of an IOU, a list of debts owed, or charges made against us. Debts had to be atoned for. In ANE, writing was on papyrus or velum/skin, with ink that had no acid on it and so did not stain. Meant that writing could easily be wiped out. He set this aside (by erasing what is written), or – changing the metaphor - nailing it to the cross. Cf. the nailing of the charge against Jesus to the cross – Mark 15.26 “and the inscription of the charge against him read “The King of the Jews”.

It is all God’s work “God made you alive...”

“Made alive together with him...” = brought into the family of God, the true Israel, through baptism and spiritual circumcision... (cf. Eph 2.12)

- He disarmed (lit. ‘stripped’) the authorities and rulers and made a public example of them, **triumphing** over them in it. Image of victorious general/king parading captives and executing enemy leader.

Great irony here: greatest power (Rome) and greatest religion (Judaism) had conspired to strip, humiliate and destroy Christ, King and Lord of glory. Threatened by his claims to sovereignty, they crucified him, believing they had destroyed his power and triumphed over him.

Paul’s argument:

Continue to live in Christ, don’t be drawn away.

- a. Remember who Christ is – God supreme (cf. 1.15-20)
- b. Remember who you were under v’s whom you are under now: elemental spirits/the rulers and authorities v’s Christ
- c. Remember your former state, before Christ: Dead in sin v’s (cf. 1.21)
- d. Remember what Christ has done for you: raised to life, in fullness (cf. 1.12-14)
- e. Remember what Christ has done to your former masters/rulers Disarmed and humiliated them, triumphing over them

Summary:

- A. Christ is supreme, perfect, triumphant over all other powers;

- B. He has redeemed you from evil powers and given you life and everything you need for full life/perfect freedom;
- C. Why would you return to the powers of darkness/death? NO! Continue in Christ.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow in your faith/as a Christian?
2. Can you think of anyone (living or dead) who inspires you as a person who was/is overflowing with thanksgiving? If so, what was/is it about them that made/makes such an impression upon you?
3. Do you think of yourself as a person who is overflowing with thanksgiving? What does that look like (or what might it look like)?
4. What are some of the deceitful 'philosophies' being peddled today which demean Christ and his redeeming work?
5. What human traditions can cause harm in the church (v's those which can be helpful)?
6. What would you identify as 'elemental spirits' today?
7. What does it mean to you to have faith in the power of God to raise from the dead?