

“DON’T BE TAKEN CAPTIVE!”

COLOSSIANS 2:8

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INTRODUCTION

Paul tells us not to be taken captive by “philosophy.” So, Philosophy is bad, right?

Paul carefully explains in this context what kind of wrong “philosophy” he speaks of—not all philosophy is wrong. At any rate, there is a real danger and we must “beware”!

We have “died” with Christ to the “rudiments/elemental spirits” of the world (v. 20); He has delivered us from the “power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His beloved Son” (1:13). Why go back?

DON’T BE TAKEN CAPTIVE BY ANY HUMAN TEACHER OR SYSTEM—ONLY BY CHRIST!

I. BE ON YOUR GUARD

A. Refuse to become a captive of any false teacher—the warning goes back to **2:4** & even **1:23**.

1. See to it, beware, look out! [present tense—the continual need to be vigilant] [“you” is emphatic]
2. “Someone”—whoever it may be
3. “Spoil” is “to take one as a captive—here body and soul. [word found only here until a later time]
 - To carry off as booty, as a captive, kidnap; used later of prisoners of war.
 - **False teaching and false teachers are not out to help you—for even if they believe they are, the enemy behind such teaching/teachers has sinister motives and always looks to harm and damage!** The false teachers were actually **spiritual kidnappers!**
 - The present tense indicates the persistent efforts of false teachers/teaching.

B. Refuse any false system of teaching

1. Philosophy [same in Greek as in English; only NT use; the word means “*love of wisdom*”]
 - Jewish writers used this noun in the sense of “teaching”.
 - Robertson correctly notes that Paul does not condemn proper knowledge and wisdom; in fact, he often praises such and encourages the pursuit of it in Christ (see vv. 2-3 above). Paul, as he expresses this fact elsewhere, wants believers to avoid “falsely called knowledge” (I Tim. 6:20).
 - As Paul uses it, the term evidences the insufficiency of the human intellect and the need of revelation.
 - **It appears that the believer can at least appreciate the higher qualities of such uninspired human effort without failing to recognize its inherent weaknesses and inadequacies.**
2. Empty Deception—connected with philosophy without another article; we may render: gives: “through hollow and deceptive philosophy.”
 - a. “Vain/empty”—void of any real spiritual value
 - b. “Deceit”—all false teaching is deceptive.

II. LET CHRIST BE YOUR SAVIOR AND TEACHER

A. Reject human tradition

1. Word mostly used in NT by Christ of the scribes and Pharisees (Mk. 7; Mt. 15).
2. However, in II Th. 2:15 and 3:6, and in I Cor. 11:2 Paul uses this noun in reference to “traditions” he had taught believers—that is the correct ideas, teachings, and practices of Scripture and believers must cling to.
3. Here the tradition is of men—they are the source! It is the product of mere human speculation”; **false teachers do not lead their followers to divine truth.**

B. Reject the rudiments/elemental substances of the world. [The content of the philosophy]

The word is controversial in its meaning here; commentators widely differ:

1. **Elements**” (of learning), **fundamental principles**—cf. “ABC’s”; notes of the musical scale; “rudiments of grammar,” “elements of Arithmetic.” This is its use in Heb. 5:12

2. **“Elemental substances**, elements from which everything is made,” including the stars and other heavenly bodies (II Pet. 3:10, 12).
3. **“Elemental spirits”**—those that according to the beliefs of many ancients “preside over and direct the heavenly bodies.
 - There is no known usage prior to the NT with this meaning.
 - Bruce even suggests that Paul may have been the first to use the word with this meaning—especially since he calls them “the elements of the world.”
4. Two points must be noted about Paul’s use of the term in Gal. 4:3,9 and Col. 2:8, 20:
 - a. Since the word is so rare in the NT, it is likely that it has the same definition each time Paul uses it in Gal. 4 and Col. 2.
 - b. For the same reason, the word is surely Paul’s choice and not the one chosen by the teachers.
5. The second definition is most likely:
 - The lexical evidence is very solid since this was the dominant meaning in Paul’s day.
 - Every instance of “elements of the world” found in the general period during which Paul ministered has this meaning (—20 occurrences have been found).
 - The phrase is very rare, and Paul gives no explanation of it; therefore, the commonly held definition should be expected.
 - The view fits well into both contexts. The “world” is taken not in its ethical sense of “worldly” etc., but with the common idea of “universe, all creation.”
 - This view avoids the problem of “why this phrase” that arises with the other two views.
 - This view incorporates the strengths of the other two views:
 - View 1—It holds to the sense of “‘basic’ reality that is central to the ‘principal’ view.”
 - View 3—Like the “elemental spirits” view it “alludes to the notion of cosmic power.”
 - As noted elsewhere, the ancients of Paul’s day did venerate the cosmic world and the spirits they felt controlled it. Even the four “elements” of earth, water, air, and fire were given divine names. Some even deified these 4 elements.
 - The rules with which Paul deals in both books focus on material realities.
 - Since the Colossian false teacher/s were focused so much on material realities, they were acting more like the pagans. They were, in effect, putting them in the place of Christ (and failing to recognize that believers had ‘died’ to them with Christ” (v. 20).
- C. Christ is all we need—His person and His teaching.
 1. Here Paul ties together his primary theological teaching of Colossians with his central purpose: Christ and Christ alone is sufficient.
 2. Christ is the true measure of all teaching and human knowledge. The false teachers were measuring Christ by their teachings, rather than measuring their teachings by Christ, which is the correct procedure; for Christ is “the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe.”
 - We must not allow any detraction from Christ’s central role. The teachers likely did not deny Christ outright, but probably required something to be added for complete spiritual fulfillment; in such a case, **“addition means subtraction.**

CONCLUSION: This “according to Christ” is the real “test of movements, of institutions, of books: are they ‘after Christ’? **It is a great mistake to think that every form of philosophy is capable of being harmonized with Christianity.** Men, instead, want a “Christ” according to their thoughts. However, we must still love God with our **minds** (Mt. 22:37).

The Lord puts no premium on ignorance or stupidity!

Philosophy and practices such as condemned here by Paul are still prevalent today, disguised under such a designation as ‘the spirit of the age’ and characterized by love of show, of pleasure, of fashion, and of purely physical beauty. Be on guard! Reject human tradition; reject the elementary powers of this world. Christ is all you need!

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