

STUDY THE BIBLE 23 (STB 23)

"THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS"

The Gnostic Heresy (secret knowledge)

The Colossian saints had a **complete misunderstanding of spiritual circumcision**, were resorting to various sorts of secret and hidden knowledge, and were putting Jesus Christ aside.

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:" (Col 2:9-10)

BACKGROUND

The epistle to the **Colossians** and the book of **John's gospel** address the same problem – **heresies of the 1st century** flooding into the church.

Now **John**, in the Gospel of John, counteracts the more obvious problem of 'Christ is not God', and indeed, all the variations on that eg 'half man/half God', 'Christ a mere phantom', 'Christ just a god' and so on.

But **Colossians** deals with the infiltrating Trojan horse of the worldly wise gnostics with all their deeper and hidden knowledge, being an ungodly, evil and poisonous brew of Greek philosophy, Judaism, Oriental religions and higher intellectual thought.

Paul never went to Colossae, the church being established by Epaphras, working himself into the ground, labouring fervently for them (4:12), and who also ended up in prison with Paul (Philemon 1:23).

THEME

1. Get God's **wisdom** and **his** spiritual understanding (1:9) revealed in Christ
2. You are **complete and sufficient in Christ** in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (2:9)
3. Heaven and earth were **created by Christ not** the angels (**not the NIV 'through'**) (1:16,17). The Colossian Heresy that Paul writes to counteract, was based on their understanding that Christ could not, and would not, create a sinful world. Therefore it must have been made by a successive series of angels that had become more sinful, eventuating in a fallen world far removed from a perfect and sinless Christ.
4. In essence Paul says "Dear Colossian people, please ignore all the books and gurus telling you how to overcome the flesh by a deeper and more satisfying spiritual life with **voluntary humility** (2:18), **philosophy** and **vain deceit** (2:8), fleshy mind inventions of **starving yourself** (2:21,23), **will worship** (2:23) and **rudiments of the world** (2:8). Why? The flesh is not honoured by, and can never be satisfied, by these things (2:23). Why? They come from the fleshy mind (2:18) and flesh can never satisfy flesh. Jesus Christ is 100% sufficient to overcome the flesh – not the man made programs of legalism, rituals, mysticism and philosophy.

Instead of letting **Dr Christ** attend to them, they were receiving house calls from **four physicians of no value** (Job 13:4) – **Dr Law, Dr Philosophy, Dr Religion** and **Dr Ascetic**.

Dr Law, well described in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, prescribes solid efforts of the flesh to keep God's commandments and thereby heal the sin-sick soul. He directs us to Mt Sinai to live in a town called Morality.

Dr Philosophy, whose medicine is 'vain deceit' after the tradition of men, which turn men's thoughts to their own crude notions (rudiments of the world) and cunning follies, that only land them in deeper sin because of their pride and unbelief. This false Doctor, using the worldly wisdom of situation ethics ("the end result is always justified by any means to obtain it"), minimises and makes excuses for sin.

Dr Religion, whose remedies for sin consist of heavy doses of voluntary humility, worshipping of angels, keeping feasts and observing days. These are rounds of piety that the flesh enjoys but which never change the heart nor arrests the plague of sin.

As the reader would know, this spiritual Doctor, while condemning legalism in all its manipulating, dominating and oppressive forms, turns out to be the worst legalist of all. Why? He has put aside God's rules so that he may enforce his rules on others.

Dr Ascetic, prescribes starvations, fasts and the neglecting of the body along with strict man-made ordinances and will worship, but which the apostle says are "...not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." (Col 2:23). They are of **no avail** against the indulgences of the flesh. The flesh scoffs with scorn and derision at these empty and worthless attempts to appease its raging and unlimited appetites.

THE END RESULT?

The Colossian church were to send Paul's letter to the church at Laodicea about 10 miles away (2:1; 4:15-16). This church at Colossae had become an odious mixture of East and West - of the Greek, the Jew, the Orient. Now if they could have read the message of the Revelation of St John to the church at Laodicea (**not that they could** as it would be written 20 years after Paul writes to the Colossians) they would see how their church would end up.

Yes, you've got it! One giant baked pudding of sewerage, consisting of an unholy mixture of **higher university intellectual thought** combined with **Roman Catholic starvations, meditations, candles, whippings and flagellations**, stirred in with very large spoonfuls of **Greek philosophical thought** and flavoured with

'christian' rock and roll, Copeland, Prince, Myer, Hinn and Hills TV, and cooked in an Essene oven, having first been sprinkled with large dustings of modern 'pop' psychology, 'tongues', church voting, water baptisms, church membership and set to a temperature suitable for an ascetic Buddha having a meeting with some Hindus, Greenies, sodomites and feminists.

Correct! Welcome to the modern day Laodicean church – found today anywhere, and on any corner.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

C1 = Christ is God and creator

C2 = Fullness of the Godhead bodily

C3 = Seek those things above

C4 = Various fellow labourers

Ch 1 = Christ is God and creator

In his prayer for the Colossian church (v9-14) Paul introduces the words '**wisdom** (v9,28) **fruit** (v6,10) **spiritual understanding** (v9) **truth** (v5,6) that are of God. The problem was this church were lapping up and displaying the world's wisdom, truth and fruit without God's spiritual understanding.

They were trying to be complete and fulfilled without Christ.

Paul outlines that Christ is creator (v16) head of the church (v18) and has the fullness of the Father (v19). They are urged not to move away from the hope of the gospel (v23).

He establishes his authority with his credentials of afflictions (v24, 25) and assures them that he labours and strives to bring them to perfection in Christ (v29).

Ch 2 = Fullness of the Godhead bodily

Paul exposes their **lack of understanding of spiritual circumcision** with the classic verse in all scripture (v11). And here's the mystery they had failed to comprehend and Paul was needing to reinforce and emphasize – that of spiritual circumcision. He tells them that a believer, a saved man or woman, a Christian, is not a murderer or a liar or an adulterer but his flesh is.

Now the new birth, getting saved, being put into the death of Christ is a **spiritual circumcision which cuts off your soul from the flesh**. The '**real you**', which is the **inner man** (Eph 3:16) is not responsible for your fleshy sins (Rom 7:15-18). And of course some may wish to hide behind this truth. But because the '**fleshy you**' commits your sins as works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21), **you will reap the consequences of these flesh sins in your flesh!** And here's the thing – these fleshy sins cannot affect the salvation of your soul.

Under the Old Testament, because the saints didn't possess eternal security like the Christian today, they could lose their salvation. Why, they could never be put into the death of Christ and therefore have their soul separated from their flesh.

Now Like Luther before he realized he was a schizophrenic consisting 'two' people, a saved man trapped in a body of flesh, he underwent all sorts of physical deprivation and tortures. And here's the key, he never understood the following verse:

"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:" (Col 2:11).

See that? When you get saved your soul is separated from the sins of the flesh – they are cut off from your soul! You are saved but your body is still a raging, stinking mess of vile and putrid sin.

They were trying all sorts of things to get rid of their sins. These included philosophy, traditions of men, rudiments of the world (v8), voluntary humility (this 'skill' Luther as a Catholic excelled in), worshipping of angels because they supposedly created the universe not Christ (v18), diet restrictions (v21, neglecting of the body and will worship (v23).

Ch 3 = Seek those things above

So with that in mind, he assures them, those that are saved (v1) to **set their affection on things above** (v2). Good advice. He warns that there are certain sins (v5) they need to be rid of (v5,8,9) to escape God's wrath. He emphasizes good behaviours to practice (v12-13) above which **charity** is the chief which he calls the **bond of perfectness** (V14).

Paul endorses Bible study and soaking up the word (v16) and this will give you wisdom and teaching (v16) such that you'll be able to admonish one another (v16).

He then has specific **instructions** for **wives, husbands, children, fathers** and **servants** (v18-22)

Ch 4 = Various fellow labourers

A special word for masters (v1) is given and he mentions various people, including himself, with an itemization of what everyone is up to (v3-18). Again, he stresses they get wisdom (v5).

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Harley Hitchcock