

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (12):
Walking and Watching (Col. 2:6-15)**

Let us turn to Colossians 2 where we will continue to consider the Apostle Paul's instruction to this church that he had never personally visited.

We have just completed our look at Colossians 2:1-5, in which the apostle had exhorted these Christians to be knit together in love, reaching all the riches of full understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Jesus Christ. Paul wanted them grounded and secure in their knowledge and commitment to Jesus Christ, so that they would be characterized by stability and strength in their faith. In establishing them in their knowledge and commitment to Jesus Christ, Paul would be assured that they would withstand those who would attempt to corrupt their faith through what seemed to be plausible arguments.

We now arrive to verse 6 and following, in which the apostle instructs these Christians further in how they should live as Christians. They are to be devoted wholly to Jesus Christ. They were not to allow anyone or any teaching to divert them from their commitment to Jesus Christ. He then set forth the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to enable them to live before Him. He is able to do so because He has all authority, having caused them to be born again and saved them from any and all that threatened them. Let us read Colossians 2:6 through 15.

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.

As we approach this section of the epistle, it would be helpful to identify the paragraph divisions before us. A paragraph by definition contains a series of sentences that are related to a single topic, a major idea. Paragraph divisions are determined by the translator. Different translators will often identify different paragraph divisions of the same portion of text. Generally, a more readable translation will have shorter paragraphs. This is what we have in the various translations of Colossians 2:6 and following. The New International version (NIV) has verses 6 through 15 divided into four separate paragraphs.¹ The New King James Version (NKJV) has verses 6 through 15 in three separate paragraphs.² The English Standard Version (ESV) and also the Revised Standard Version (RSV) organize verses 6 through 15 into two paragraphs.³ Interestingly, the two most circulated editions of The Greek New Testament both have Colossians 2:6

¹ (1) vs. 6, 7, (2) v. 8, (3) vs. 9-12, and (4) vs. 13-15

² (1) vs. 6, 7, (2) vs. 8-10, (3) vs. 11-15.

³ (1) vs. 6, 7, (2) vs. 8-15.

through 15 as one paragraph.⁴ In other words, these Greek scholars understood all of verses 6 through 15 as setting forth a common, single idea. We will assume this last division of our passage.

Not only is it helpful to identify the paragraph divisions, we should also attempt to distinguish the length and nature of sentences in each paragraph. And just as paragraph divisions vary between English translations, so sentence divisions also vary. As we have shown earlier in our study, the more readable translations like the New International Version (NIV), tend to set forth their translation into shorter sentences for easier reading and comprehension. The NIV translates verses 6 through 15 in nine sentences. The New King James Versions set forth these verses in seven sentences. The older King James Version has 5 sentences. But when one examines the Greek New Testament, just as there are fewer paragraphs, verses 6 through 15 comprising one single paragraph, so there are only two sentences in the one paragraph. Verses 6 and 7 comprise one sentence in the Greek text. And then all of verses 8 through 15 are one sentence in Paul's original epistle written in the Greek language. This is the most accurate way to represent this passage, for although in verses 6 through 15 there are 27 different verb forms (of which 14 are participles), there are actually only two finite verbs, one for each sentence. And so, the first sentence of verses 6 and 7 have the main verb, "walk." Again, the beginning of verse 6 reads, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so *walk* in him..." The second sentence (in the original Greek text), which is all of verses 6 through 15, has its single finite word at the beginning of the sentence: "*See*", or to be more intelligible, "See to it." Perhaps the translation of the KJV translates it best, "beware." And so, there is but one main verb in vs. 5 and 6, the word translated, "walk", and one main verb in verses 6 through 15, the word "see" (to it), or "beware." This is how we have arrived at our title, "Walking and Watching." In verses 6 and 7 we have instruction of how we are to be *walking* in Jesus Christ. In verses 6 through 15 we have instruction of how we are to be *watchful* while walking with Jesus Christ.

I. Walking in Him (2:6, 7)

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Now in verse 6 we are told *what to do*, and then in verse 7 we are told *why we should do it*.

A. What to do (v. 6)

Paul wrote, "*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.*" We are told to "walk" in Jesus Christ. Walking speaks of on-going activity. True Christianity is not a *one-time decision*, rather, it is a *life-long walk*. Christianity is not a mere prescription to escape God's wrath, it is a *relationship with God* that grows richer and deeper with the passing of time.

Now, how are we to "walk in Christ?" Verse 6 tells us: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." And so, how did we receive Him?

1. We received Him in *humility and submission*. When one receives the Lord he ceases to be his own Lord. His **self-sufficiency** is abandoned. His **self-dependency** ceases. No one can be a true Christian as long as self is king and Christ is not enthroned in the heart. Notice again what he wrote, "As you received Christ Jesus THE LORD."

The Christian has denounced his former independence and has made a "declaration of dependence" on Jesus Christ as Lord. And so, as you received Christ as Lord, in humility and submission, so go about "walking" in Him. This should characterize our Christian walk. We are to be humble and submitted to our Lord Jesus.

⁴ Aland, Kurt, Matthew black, Carlo Martini, Bruce Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (United Bible Societies, 1975), pp. 697f, and Kurt & Barbara Aland, et. al. *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 526f.

How else did we receive Him?

2. We received Him in love. No one can be a true Christian who does not love His Lord and seek to serve Him and bring honor to Him. Peter would write of the Christian's heart: "Whom (Christ) having not seen, you love" (1 Pet. 1:8). And so it is, when a person perceives the love of God in Christ, He receives Christ as Lord and Savior, his heart is filled with love for his Savior. So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord *in love*, so walk in Him daily in love, guarding your heart lest you depart from your first love.

How else did we receive Him?

3. We received Him in joy. No one can be a true Christian who has not experienced the **joy** of knowing Christ as Lord and Savior. Peter wrote further, "Whom (Christ) having not seen, you love, in whom though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with *joy unspeakable and full of glory.*" So, as we received Him with joy, we are to walk daily in Him, in joy.

How else did we receive Him?

4. We received Him in faith

No one can be a true Christian who has not come to Christ the Lord in faith. We believe who He is; He is the only begotten Son of God. We believe what He did; He died so as to save sinners from the penalty of death and judgment. We believe where He is and what He is; He is risen and seated at the right hand of God, high and exalted. The Father gave to Him all authority to grant repentance and forgiveness for those that come to God through Him. We believe what He will yet do: He will return to judge this world and usher in the eternal state. We received Him in faith, believing these things of Him. And so, we are to *walk believing* these things day by day. And so, *walk* as you received Jesus Christ as the Lord.

Now **verse 6** tells us *what* we are to do, as well look to **verse 7a**, we learn *why* we should walk in Him as we received Him.

B. Why we are to do it (v. 7a)

Again we read,

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught...

The apostle described these Christians' relationship with Jesus Christ in three ways. They were "rooted" in Him, they were "built up" in Him, and they were "established" in the faith. Now it is important to understand that each of these three "blessings" that every true Christian experiences is due to the grace of God operating upon him and in him.⁵ These are blessings that God had bestowed upon each of them as Christians. Let us consider each of these.

1. You have been "rooted" in Him.

The imagery is that of a tree having been planted. This word, rooted (which is a participle) is in the perfect tense. What this means is that when God had caused us to be converted to Jesus Christ, it was God who then caused us to be "rooted" us in Jesus Christ. And ever since that time we have been inextricably and vitally connected to our Savior. As a tree is rooted in the ground, God caused us to be planted, to be

⁵ These are three passive voice participles, revealing that God had acted upon them; they were passive in the reception of these blessings.

rooted in our Savior. That happened when we were converted, but the tense of the word also emphasizes that reality continues even now. He caused us to be rooted in Him and we are still rooted in Him, therefore, it only follows that we should “walk” in Him.

2. You are being “built up” in Him.

Here we have the imagery of a building being constructed. There is a change of tense in this second word (participle). The first (“rooted”) was in the perfect tense, emphasizing that God had done this in the *past* (at our conversion) and *the results continue* to the present time. This second word, translated “built up”, is in the present tense. What the Lord is telling us is that He is causing every Christian to be *presently* built up in Him. He is causing each and every Christian to grow up in Him. Because our God is causing us to be built up in Jesus Christ, it is only reasonable that we should “walk” in Him.

3. You are being “established” in the faith.

The apostle commanded these Christians to walk in the Lord. They were to do so because of what God had done for them in Jesus Christ and because He was presently establishing “in the faith.” Here “faith” is not speaking of the Christian’s subjective faith--the fact that he believes; rather, “faith” is a reference to the Christian’s objective faith--what he believes--even the truth that is in Jesus Christ, of what is believed. There is “the faith”, the Christian faith, which is the doctrines of Scripture that touch on the identity and nature of the true God, of His Son Jesus Christ, and what He did to secure the salvation of His people. “The faith” involves those doctrines that are essential to our salvation, even the truth regarding sin and its punishment, the grace of God in bringing us salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. All of these doctrines (and more) is what constitutes “the faith.” And what the Lord is teaching us in this passage is that because of our connection and relationship to the faith that we have come to know, believe, and embrace, He tells us, “therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

This word, “established” is also a present tense word in the Greek text, which indicates that God is in the process of establishing us further in the faith, which we have heard, learned, embraced, and in which we are being established. Because of this, we are to “walk in Him.”

Each of these three words depict what God has done or is doing for the Christian. We are to “walk in Him”, Jesus Christ, because God has *rooted* us--or planted us in Him, He is *building* us up in Him, and He is *establishing* us in the faith. Because you have been an object of God’s gracious dealings, therefore, walk in Him.

And so, verse 6 tells us **what** to do and verse 7a tells us **why** we should do it. Now when we read verse 7b we see...

C. How to do it (v. 7b)

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, *abounding in thanksgiving*.

How are we to walk in Jesus Christ? We are to do so overflowing with expressions of gratefulness to our God for all that He has given us, is giving to us, and has promised to give us in Jesus Christ. When considering what He has done for us, and what He is doing in us, how can we do anything less? And so, let us be walking in Him, rejoicing and thanking Him for the great mercy and great grace He has shown to us.

But a word of caution is in order: For not only are we to be “walking in Him” (2:6, 7), we are to be “watching” while we walk.

II. Watching in Him (2:8-15)

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

The English Standard Version (ESV) opens with the words, “See to it.” Perhaps the sense of warning and urgency is better conveyed by the King James Version rendering: “Beware!”

Why was this warning necessary? What is the danger? The answer is that there are some who would “take you captive”, who may be successful, if you are not alert and you do not take steps not to be deceived by them. The idea is that of a battle being waged, the defensive walls have been breached, the enemy comes in and takes the spoils of the city, and you are the spoils taken. “See to it”, wrote the apostle, “that this doesn’t happen to you.”

Paul is referencing the error that had been promoted among the members of the church at Colossae. Now as we have previously said, we do not really know the true and full nature of the heresy that the Apostle was addressing that existed at Colossae in those early days. However, we can make some assertions about the error by considering what the apostle sought to correct and what he sought to affirm to this church. The false teachers were trying to lead away the Christians from viewing themselves as *complete in Jesus Christ*.

We can also determine what kinds of methods that the false teachers were using in order to corrupt the church.

A. The two kinds of error that threatened the church (v. 8) -- (1) philosophy, (2) empty deception

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive *by philosophy and empty deceit*, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

1. Philosophy

When we say, philosophy, within this context, we are not talking about the far-out thinking and philosophies of non-Christian people. One aptly described a study of that kind: “The history philosophy is a record of the insanities of mankind; a catalogue of lunacies” (Spurgeon). No, rather Paul was addressing some who claimed to be Christian, yet they were seeking to make a spoil of “Christians” by leading them to embrace a brand of Christianity that is not after Christ.

There were errors that were common in first century Asia Minor, in which Colossae was located. But similarly there are many errors today that are making spoil or taking captive of many professing Christians. Any teaching that would take your eyes off of Jesus Christ as the center of all things, the basis of all your hopes, the meaning of all that exists, is false teaching that would lead you astray from Him.

2. Empty deception

The second form of error that false teachers were using to corrupt the Christians at Colossae involved “empty deception.” There are those who promise much, but deliver nothing. They captivate professing Christians who fail to heed the instruction of our passage: “*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit.*”

And so, there were two kinds of errors Paul identified. There were also...

B. The two kinds of ‘packaging’ through which error was promoted to them (v. 8) -- (1) according to human tradition, (2) the elemental spirits of the world

1. According to human tradition

There are many who embrace errant teaching because it comes to them in this form. Because the teaching and observance has long been in existence and has been observed by many, it is assumed to be true, legitimate, God honoring and pleasing to God. Our Lord rebuked his own people for the error they embraced because it came in this form of tradition.

⁵Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?”

⁶He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

‘This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.

⁷And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

⁸For laying aside the commandment of God, *you hold the tradition of men*-- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.”

⁹He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. ¹⁰For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ ¹¹But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban (that is, a gift to God)”’, ¹²then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³*making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down*. And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:5-13)

Human tradition must always be assessed and either accepted or rejected by the standard of the Holy Scriptures, for human tradition has a powerful appeal to people to embrace error that comes in this form.

2. According to “the elemental spirits of the world”

The understanding of this phrase is debated by commentators. Some argue that it reflects the ancient Greek world view of “elements” that are the basic components of the physical universe. These would have included the elements of earth, air, fire, and water. But more likely Paul was addressing error that was based on elemental teachings or doctrines, perhaps of a Jewish or pre-Christian nature and origin. Perhaps the explanation of **William Hendriksen** is best:

This was not *apostolic* tradition, nor was it tradition that belonged to the main stream of *Judaism*, though it did have something in common with Judaism and embraced later tenets. It was rather a mixture of Christianity, Judaistic ceremonialism, Angelolatry, and Asceticism, as verses 11-23 indicate. It was a philosophy according to the rudiments of this world. Rudiments are *elements*, either in the physical or in the non-physical realm.⁶

F. F. Bruce wrote of these errors:

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 109.

But, for all its attractiveness, this particular philosophy was but an empty illusion. If the Colossians embraced it, they would be losers and not gainers thereby. For those who had “received Christ Jesus the Lord” I must be unacceptable; it was a human tradition which ran counter to the essential truths of their Christian faith and life. It sounded well, it appealed to their natural religious instincts, but there was nothing in it for Christians. It was not a teaching “according to Christ”—in accordance with the tradition handed down by Him—but one which accorded with the elemental spirits of the *kosmos*.⁷

Matthew Henry sought to identify the error to which Paul was referring to be characteristic of both the Jews and the Gentiles in their corrupting influences upon the Christians. Here are his words:

After the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world: this plainly reflects upon the Jewish pedagogy or economy, as well as the Pagan learning. The Jews governed themselves by the traditions of their elders and the rudiments or elements of the world, the rites and observances which were only preparatory and introductory to the gospel state; the Gentiles mixed their maxims of philosophy with their Christian principles; and both alienated their minds from Christ. Those who pin their faith on other men's sleeves, and walk in the way of the world, have turned away from following after Christ. The deceivers were especially the Jewish teachers, who endeavoured to keep up the Law of Moses in conjunction with the gospel of Christ, but really in competition with it and contradiction to it.⁸

False teachers are denounced and Christians are warned respecting them in a number of places in the Scriptures. **Peter** described in similar ways the false teachers that were corrupting the faith of his readers. In 2 Peter 2 we read of ones “in the church.” Of false teacher he wrote that they

¹⁷are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. ¹⁸For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. (2 Pet. 2:17-19)

Christians are easily deceived, therefore Paul gave them warning: “Beware! Be on guard!” To illustrate this is so, we might consider the Christian book industry of many “best sellers” on the market. They are superficial, often errant and deficient in their presentation of the truth of Scripture. And heretics grind out these books and they quickly become “best sellers.” We might say that it is in some ways an easy matter to become a prominent Christian author. Here is the prescription for a big seller:

- 1) Find a problem common with the human condition; it does not need to be original with you; take some condition that is commonly known in the psychological field.
- 2) “Christianize” the terminology.
- 3) Depict it as it is experienced in the Christian community.
- 4) Find some Biblical material to cite as illustrations.
- 5) Propose some treatment. It need not necessarily provide a cure; the book will sell regardless.

The Scriptures have continual warnings to us regarding the need to be on guard for false teachers. Let us look at another passage in which the Apostle Paul warned of false teachers and their teaching. We read of Paul’s instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:1ff.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 230f.

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell), p. 757.

seared with a hot iron,³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

We might read this and assume that the Holy Spirit was speaking about people who depart from the faith at the end of the age, just prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But this would be wrong, for the expression “latter times” should not be limited to the last days before Jesus returns; rather, it is an expression that applies to the entire age from the resurrection of Christ until the Second Coming. All down through 2000 years of church history “some” have departed from the faith who had once professed understanding and confidence in the truth of God. The Holy Spirit has declared that there will be in this age those who abandon historic revealed truth as it is in Jesus Christ and embrace and teach heresy.

Paul said that these heretics would “depart from the faith.” They once had embraced the faith. They had believed on Jesus as Lord and Savior, but they later turned away. They came to reject and deny what they formerly espoused. They fell away, or “apostatized” from the faith. These heretics have no hope of salvation.

Note that these apostates would still have a faith that they believe and proclaim. They have not stopped believing. They could still claim to have “their faith.” But they no longer believed “the faith,” that is, the body of teaching that is true Christianity. Some argue as long as people believe in God they should be encouraged and accepted as fellow “believers.” No, it is not important that you merely believe, but that you believe the truth as it is taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Paul identified five specific false doctrines that would be promoted among the people of God. These errant beliefs probably reflect the situation at Ephesus, where Timothy would be serving in the church. It would have been similar, if not the same kind of error that was troubling the church at Colossae. The heresy came to be known as *Gnosticism*. But even in the mid 60’s A.D., when this epistle was written, some of the teachings were circulating. This list seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit had informed Paul specifically about this impending threat to the churches. And so, here specific errant teachings threatening the church at Ephesus are identified, but it was probably the same as what was occurring at Colossae.

1. The false teachers would be “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” All false teaching is deceptive and demonic. People are deceived into accepting false doctrine. There are evil spirits and demons (probably one and the same) whose purpose is to deceive Christians and move them to embrace error.

2. The false teachers would be “speaking lies in hypocrisy.” The devil is a liar and the father of all error respecting spiritual things. The Lord Jesus Himself declared this is so:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (John 8:44)

These apostate heretics teach in hypocrisy. They do not live as they teach. We read something similar of false teachers in **2 Peter 2:19**. There we read, *“While they (the false teachers) promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”* They were telling others that they had the answers to their problems. They were teaching that they knew the way in which people could gain victory over sin and corruption. But their teaching was false. They were hypocrites, for the very things from which they were promising deliverance also enslaved them.

3. The false teachers would be “having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.” Every human being has a conscience. The conscience is an innate ability to distinguish between right and wrong and to know and feel good when we have done right and to feel bad when we do wrong. God has placed a conscience in every human being. But one of the devastating effects of sin in us is our desire and ability to

reshape or redefine God's standard so that we may sin and not feel condemned. When people sin and but then refuse to repent as their conscience is directing them to do, the standard by which their conscience has operated begins to change. At first, they excuse themselves for having violated their conscience. Later they justify their behavior. In time they celebrate what formerly tormented their conscience. This is what it is to "sear" one's conscience. People must inform their conscience by God's Word. If they refuse to do so, but rather choose to have false doctrine shape the nature of their conscience, they will espouse their heresy and perceive themselves serving God while doing so.

4. The false teachers would be "forbidding to marry." The Gnostics believed that everything physical was evil. Only that which is spirit is good. They taught, therefore, that people should live an ascetic lifestyle, denying themselves of sex and food and other physical pleasure and sensation. In doing so, the Gnostics taught that people could become right with God or in closer communion with God. These false teachers taught that *celibacy* was the way in which a truly devout godly person should live. The Holy Spirit described this teaching as a departure from the faith.

We read in Scripture that singleness, or the unmarried state, is a "gift." A Christian may in some ways be more *useful* in the Lord's service by remaining unmarried (cf. Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:22ff). But usefulness is not the same as holiness. It is false teaching to teach that people may be more holy before God because they are unmarried. In fact, just the opposite is generally the case. One reason that marriage is encouraged in the Bible is so that people might live more holy lives, for they may thereby escape temptation to sin that would otherwise ensnare them (cf. 1 Cor. 7:9). But these false teachers were advocating that you could be more right with God if you remained single. According to the Holy Spirit this is a departure from the faith.

5. The false teachers would be "commanding to abstain from foods." They would be teaching that you could be closer to God if you only ate certain kinds of food and avoided others. This too, is heresy. Paul then gives an explanation as to why this kind of thinking is wrong.

a. First, we read that such instruction is contrary to what God has revealed. Foods are described in verse 3, ***"which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth."*** Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. This is why Christians pray before their meals. In doing so they humbly acknowledge God's provision and express thanksgiving to Him for His kindness.

b. Second, ***"For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving."*** Gnostics taught that created things were inherently evil. No, God created all things good. The Old Testament taught Israelites to distinguish between animals according to *clean* and *unclean*. But this is not the same as saying some animals were good and some evil. Cleanness and uncleanness speak of animals' suitability toward God with respect to service toward Him or sacrifice rendered onto Him. Animals declared as "clean" were fit for God's presence and offering to Him. Animals that were declared "unclean" were unfit for God's presence because they were associated with death, which is incongruent with life before God. The categories had to do with association with life and death, not good and evil. Animals were rendered "clean" if they were unassociated with death. Animals that were by their very nature associated with death were identified as unclean. Animals like owls, eagles, hawks, and vultures were "unclean" because they were associated with death. Grazing animals were generally "clean" because they were not associated with death.

Gnostics taught that some foods were by their very nature "evil." (Note, not merely unhealthy, but inherently evil.) "To be right with God" they taught, "these needed to be avoided. But if you ate these other kinds of foods you may become right with God." No, the Scriptures teach that the Kingdom of God does not have to do with "meat or drink"; rather, it is spiritual in nature. It has to do with matters of truth and living righteously. For God declares that ***"the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"*** (Rom. 14:17).

By the way, what we have been saying about all food being inherently "good" is not a discussion about *the health value of certain foods*. Clearly there are foods that are healthier than others. Healthy and

unhealthy foods are not the discussion here. The point is that there is no food that you can eat or abstain from that is going to affect your spiritual wellbeing. All that is inherently good; food is not inherently evil.

c. **“For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”** The food we eat is “sanctified” by the Word and prayer. What this means is the food that we eat is rendered suitable to us and acceptable by God for us when we acknowledge what *the Word* says about the food we eat, that it is indeed “good” and given to us by God, and that in *prayer* we express gratefulness to God for His provision.

Just before we conclude our consideration of this passage, let me give a word of warning about the days in which we live, for the principles that we have been addressing are very practical. As our society increasingly departs from its Christian heritage, we will see our society increasingly accept standards of right and wrong that are inherently opposed to the Word of God. For example, in lands where the Word of God is unknown, it is common to view the matter of animals or food in categories of good or evil, holy and unholy. I have heard that in India snakes and cattle are worshipped. Deadly cobras are turned loose to live among the inhabitants of villagers because snakes are viewed as holy. Cattle are not eaten while people go hungry because cattle are regarded to be holy. I do not know if it is so, and I am sure that our friends in India could either confirm or correct this understanding: people will bring their cow into the house at night to sleep with the family, because these creatures are so revered. It is evil in their minds to kill a venomous snake or eat beef. They have *“changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever”* (Rom. 1:25).

One might not think that these matters do not affect us here in America, but they do. Where you and I might think that it is unhealthy and unwise to say, smoke or eat fatty foods, others see these things as inherently evil. And you are evil for doing so and those who would enable you are evil too. An air of arrogance and self-righteousness arises in these people for they see their cause as inherently “right.” Through political power they seek to impose their standards of right and wrong on the society in which they and we live.

Even Christians get caught up into this worldly way of thinking and begin to espouse nonsense. They are often diverted from focusing on Christ and the gospel and give their attention and resources to causes that are less than important in the light of our understanding of the Kingdom of God. An example of this is the press received by so-called evangelical environmentalists attacking Christians for driving SUVs. They ask the silly question, “What would Jesus drive?” When the question that Jesus would probably be asking is “how are you driving?”

Sometimes Christians get diverted into these tangential areas. I have known young people to be caught up into the worldly teaching about environmentalism to where they no longer see humanity as having the authority by God to use resources as stewards, but rather they have adopted a twisted view of humanity’s relation to God’s creation that says we are to preserve God’s creation in its pristine condition totally untouched by human hands. (And this is not to say that natural parks and preserves are good, for they are.)

Sometimes Christians get caught up in viewing foods in this way. I knew one young girl who became so obsessed with the thought that fat was inherently evil, she refused to eat anything that contained fat. She had adopted the philosophy that she was exposed to in school and she took it to its logical extension. She came to be fixed on this to such an extent that she became emaciated and very seriously ill and had to be hospitalized. I tried to show her that her way of viewing food was inherently wrong. Fat was regarded in the Old Testament as the best portion of the animal and therefore it was offered to God. She cringed at the thought. Her whole life including her understanding of spiritual truth came to be shaped by her wrong understanding of food. Please do not misunderstand, we are not saying what you eat or do not eat has no effect on physical health. What we are saying that it is not a matter of good and evil, righteousness or sin. But when people fall into false doctrine about things that seem to matter little, in time it will have consequences for themselves and others.

The bottom line is this, people become right with God not through what they do, but through faith in what Jesus Christ did on their behalf. Paul addressed the same matter to the church at Colossae, which gives us a good summary of this teaching. He wrote,

Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using -- accordingly to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:16-23)

We will consider this passage soon, Lord willing.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)
