

Christ & His Rivals

Colossians 2:6-23

Paul has laid the foundation of his letter and the Christian life: Jesus is the image and fullness of God, and the glorious mystery hidden from the ages has been revealed—Christ is in the church (1:15, 19, 27). Christ is seen in the church when it reflects in the Trinity, but temptations would come to grow and advance by various other means than faith. Paul meets these rivals of Christ head on and so should we.

From Faith to Faith

The Colossians began by faith (1:4), and so Paul exhorts them to continue in the same way (vv6-7). Again he tells them to walk, and as we saw in the last chapter, this is just faith in motion (1:9-10 cf. Rom. 1:5). In Christ they have been deeply rooted like a tree, and so being built like house, their faith settled like a legal issue, and overflowing like a deep jug with thanksgiving which spills over all of life.

Facing Rivals

Healthy churches and healthy Christians come up against rivals of Christ. The only question is when and what kind they will be. There were particular rivals in Colosse, but we can see their similarities to ours.

- I. Philosophy and Vain Deceit Just because you are trafficking in spiritually, doesn't mean it's good or connected to God. The world is full of fallen spirituality, as well as hoaxes and scams. There is no critical spiritual knowledge or experience for us beyond Christ wherein we find full deity of God (v9). All authority is in him, and he in us (v10).
- II. Circumcision Christians did not have to become Jewish through circumcision in order to be part of God's people. They already were circumcised without hands by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, that is, taken out of fleshly Adamic people and identified with Christ and the new humanity found in him (v11). This is not only an unseen phenomena since we are visibly baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. Our faith is in God who continues working powerfully (v12).
- III. Record of Debt In Christ we died, and so did the demands of the law against us. Our record of debt was against us and stood between us and God, but he took it away *by nailing* it to the cross (v14; cf 2 Cor. 5:21). Both the Jewish and pagan authorities stripped Jesus naked, beating and publicly humiliating him (v15)—and in the greatest paradox of all time, he reversed it upon them. The sins of God's people and those who would oppress by sin were defeated. To see the cross is to see Jesus' triumphal procession and his retinue of the saved world with him. Your condemnation died with Christ.

No False Judgment

Because Christ has conquered Satan, sin and death, they are told to resist people who would wrongly bind their conscience. The Mosaic dietary restrictions and festival calendar were all about Jesus, so observing them is like backtracking after you've arrived at the destination (vv16-17). Some people were focusing on their own spiritual experiences, promoting ascetic practices, and thereby indulging the *flesh* and cutting themselves off from Christ. Christians died to the world in Christ, and therefore only answer to him (v20). He says if you can expel it from your body, it doesn't defile you (Matt. 15:17-20; cf. vv21-22). These rules might appear righteous and spiritually helpful, but they're only helpful to the guys who made them up and do not help restrain sin. God's people look to Jesus, and when we do we see our freedom from pride, exclusion, and sin, and the victory that is ours.