

Colossians 2:8-10 *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.*

MY COLLEGE INITIATION

It was in the fall of 1965 that I, at a tender age of 18 years old was leaving my home and headed for college at the University of California at Santa Barbara. As a freshman to be, I had enrolled in a full unit load of beginning general education classes, one of which was Philosophy 1A. It was to be held in Campbell Hall - a 900 seat auditorium – both Intimidating and stimulating to a young freshman!

And, the class was to be taught by Dr. Harry Girvetz, the head of the philosophy department, renowned for his free thinking and challenges to his students to do the same. (Now long retired, a philosophy department building at UCSB bears his name, reminding all of the significance he gave to the study of philosophy at UCSB.) This is how a present internet website describes him: *“Dr. Harry Girvetz, Professor of Philosophy, was a major force in shaping the history of the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California. He was a leader in university affairs, a notably successful and influential teacher and an important figure in liberal causes and in Democratic party politics in the West.”*

As a relatively new Christian, I was anxious about the influence such a class and such a college professor would have on my young faith. I knew even then, what I know far better now – that the philosophy of the world can lead many a believer astray. Now before I left for college, I bought a spiral notebook for each class I would be taking. And on the inside back of the front cover, before I left home, I wrote a Bible verse that had been shared with me by a wise Christian mentor. It was Colossians 2:8 in the King James Version::

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

Armed with this warning to “beware” in my notebook, I entered the first day of my philosophy lecture in late September of 1965. I remember I sat toward the back of the hall, which was clamoring with the other 900 students between me and the empty stage. Right at the 9 a.m. start time of the class, Dr. Girvetz walked onto the stage, and a hush came over the full house of students. He walked confidently to the overhead projector which lit up the screen over the stage and wrote in large letters: *“Premise: truth is relative.”*

My college adventure and spiritual battle had begun – I, armed with the truth of God’s Holy Word, both in my notebook and in my heart.

THE SOMBER WARNING (v. 8)

This warning in Colossians 2:8 was initially aimed at the heretics of the first century who were bombarding the Colossian church with what they considered to be a “higher teaching” than what Jesus had taught. The warning to us today is that unless we are firmly grounded in the truth of (1) who Jesus is, (2) what the Bible teaches, and (3) who we are in Christ, we are susceptible to being “taken captive” by the false thinking of the world.

I like the King James Version translation of “Beware” over the less dramatic “See to it” of the more contemporary versions. It strikes a more somber tone as to the grave seriousness of guarding our minds from being influenced by erroneous teaching. “Takes you captive” is literally “taking you away as spoil” as if we were being dragged into error by the devil himself, through

exposure to false doctrine. But we have no one to blame but ourselves if we are taken captive, for we are warned to “beware” – literally “be wary” of the “tradition of men” and the “elementary principles of the world.” If we are not grounded in Biblical truth we are at risk!

Man’s way of thinking, apart from God, always makes a degree of sense, but it is “elementary” or “simplistic” in its assumptions and deductions. You can’t see, feel or prove the existence of God by normal scientific means, therefore He must not exist, they say. Church is but a social organization that gives a sense of belonging and purpose, but has no spiritual benefit, they say. And if our spiritual root system is shallow, or to use a different metaphor, if our spiritual foundation is weak, we set ourselves up for spiritual capture by the world’s alternative humanism – which say, “who needs God, for man is sufficient in himself.”

THE 3 CRITICAL DOCTRINAL KEYS

Verses 9 and 10 give us the 3 critical doctrinal truths that we must fully affirm to protect us from being “carried away” by error. They are the central teaching of Colossians, and truly of the entire New Testament of Scripture.

1. Jesus was fully God in human flesh
2. Christ-followers are complete in Jesus, lacking nothing spiritually
3. Jesus is fully in control over all rulers and authority

To give them just one word each, these doctrines would be:

1. INCARNATION
2. SANCTIFICATION
3. LORDSHIP

INCARNATION (v. 9)

The doctrine of incarnation is, as stated simply here in Colossians, that “*in Jesus all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*” The incarnate God was fully in human flesh as Jesus walked the earth. In fact, the incarnate God is still now fully in human flesh in heaven, since Jesus’ resurrection body will forever bear the image of the human form.

The unseeable God is made seeable in Jesus. The unknowable God is made knowable in Jesus. The unreachable God is made reachable in Jesus. Amazing!

Colossians 1:19 *For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.*

The Greek word for “fullness” is “*pleroma*” – a key concept in this book of Colossians. Jesus was and is the “fullness” of God. He lacked nothing that is Deity, for He was fully God in human form. Now we do know that He “laid aside” some of the Godly qualities that could not be housed in a human body, such as His omnipresence – being everywhere at once. Philippians 2:7 says it this way: that he “*emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*”

Anything short of believing that Jesus was fully God, and therefore the only way to God, is heresy. And to believe there are other paths to God exposes one to being carried away by the error of the world.

Yes, Jesus was fully God in flesh, dwelling (literally, “tabernacling”) with us. Affirming this critical doctrine is essential to keeping one rooted and grounded in truth, and not being susceptible to being taken captive to error.

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

SANCTIFICATION (v. 10a)

By now you must know that our Colossians theme is “Be Complete.” This is because the truth that believers are fully “complete” in Christ is specifically mentioned twice in Colossians (1:28,

2:10), and implied throughout. Many translations substitute “fullness.” Indicating that just as Jesus was the fullness of God, so believers are fully housed by the “fullness” of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. This is true, but the “pleroma” of 2:9 is not the “fullness” of 2:10, for we believers are clearly not fully God. I see “complete” as a helpful translation for it implies that we lack nothing that we need in for living a life as God intends.

2 Peter 1:3 *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.*

We don't need a “second blessing.” His one perfect blessing is sufficient. Nor do we need a “full gospel” for the one He has given is full to overflowing. Nor does God require our many deeds of benevolence to assure us of heavenly reward. We lack nothing we need, for we have the fullness of the Holy Spirit indwelling every believer. We need only to access it!

This is the positional sanctification that all believers enjoy. I say “positional” because we will not be perfected in completeness until we see Jesus face to face in glory. (1 John 3:2) We have been made “holy” or “sanctified” (same root word for both) in that God sees us as unblemished by sin, and righteous in His sight. In this wonderful way, we have been “made complete” in Him. Now we must just learn how to act like it!

And affirming this critical doctrine of our sanctification stabilizes us from the ravages of error.

LORDSHIP (v. 10b)

“Jesus is the head of all rule and authority” declares verse 10. Headship is Lordship. And we must affirm that Jesus is in control of all leaders and all institutions, worldwide. Nothing is out of His control, including churches, political parties, tribes and nations – nothing!

One of the great doctrinal errors and lies of the enemy is that you can have Jesus as your Savior but not as your Lord. In other words, you can have your ticket to heaven and still behave any way you choose. After all, he forgives you and sees you as sinless, right?

Paul clearly taught in Romans 10:9, that to be saved you must *“confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord.”* And this confession implies a life dedicated to allowing Jesus to make the rules rather than our own fancy. To the Galatians, Paul wrote this:

Galatians 5:13 *For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do no turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

It is one thing to ask someone if they are a Christian. Many would answer “yes” to that question. But it is a far different thing to ask someone if Jesus is their Lord. Lordship implies obedience, yieldedness and servitude to the will of God. Oh dearly beloved, if Jesus has yet to have your heart in all things, you are vulnerable to following your heart elsewhere. Beware!

“BOTTOM LINE”

Do you want to know how to best “beware” and “see to it” that you are not taken captive to spiritual error? Firmly embrace and live out that (1) Jesus is fully God in the flesh, (2) you are complete in Him, lacking no spiritual blessing and (3) Jesus is the Lord of your life.

And no, Dr. Harry Girvetz. Truth is not relative. Truth is absolute. And Jesus IS the truth. (“Truth is relative” is a self-refuting statement. In saying “truth is relative, one states a supposed truth. But if all truth is relative, then that statement itself is relative as well, meaning we can't trust it to be true all the time. Therefore, there must be occasions where truth is absolute! Yes!)