

5/30/99

The Insufficiency Of Philosophy
Colossians 2:8

The number of brilliant men that have lived on this earth is impressive and some have ventured to tell us about God, the world and the purpose of man such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, but when you place them next to Jesus and compare what they said, it is sheer speculation to God's word.

Philosophies of men are not God's revealed truth but elements by which people attempt to find meaning to life or be joined to God apart from Jesus Christ.

- The doctrinal section runs from. 1:15-3:4
- Within the doctrinal we have the polemic section combating the heresy, which is the heart of the epistle. 2:8-23
- It deals with philosophy and it's insufficiency. vs. 8
- Followed by the sufficiency of Christ. 2:9-15

Paul warns the Colossians of the insufficiency of philosophy which is characterized by three things. Col. 2:8

- I.** The warning about philosophy. vs. 8a
- II.** The source of philosophy. vs. 8b-c
- III.** The contradiction of philosophy. vs. 8d

I. The warning about philosophy.

* "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit". vs. 8a

A. The deception was dangerous.

- 1.** The apostle warned the Colossians by telling them to beware.
 - a.** The word beware "blepete" means be constantly looking out, it is a clear warning to be cautious and on their guard in view of imminent danger.
 - * Appearing 135 times in the New Testament.
 - b.** The tense is in the indicative mood identifying a real dangerous situation not a hypothetical one.
 - * Paul used the same word for the Judaizers at Philippi, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!" Phil. 3:2

- 2.** The warning is regarding anyone.
 - a.** The caution is directed at the false teachers at Colosse who were denying the sufficiency of Christ.
 - b.** The caution would also serve for anyone who would try to take them away from Christ or add anything to Christ at any time in the future.

B. The deception was decisive.

1. Their goal was to cheat the Colossians.
 - a. The word cheat “sulagoeo” is made up of two words.
 - 1) The word “sule” which means booty taken in victory.
 - 2) The word “ago” which means to lead or to carry.
 - 3) The words combined mean to plunder or make spoil of a person, appearing in this form, only this one time, in the New Testament.
 - 4) The word regularly was used for taking a captive in war as booty.
 - 5) The word was used of a slave dealer carrying people off.
 - 6) The word was used of one kidnapped.
 - b. The apostle Paul is depicting the false teachers as men-stealers, spiritual kidnapers.
 - 1) Men are taken captive at Satan’s will. 2Tim. 2:26
 - 2) Men take captive gullible women loaded down with sins. 2Tim. 3:6
 - 3) Men by coveteousness will exploit people with deceptive word and many will be merchandize by false teachers. 2Pet. 2:3

C. The deception was subtle.

1. The method is through philosophy.

- a. The word philosophy “philosophies”, is made up of two words.
 - 1) The word “phileo” describing fondness on the mental plain.
 - 2) The other is “sophia”, meaning wisdom.
 - 3) The words combined mean the love of wisdom.
 - 4) The word appears in this form only this time in the New Testament and one other time in a different form “philosopher”. Acts 17:18
- b. The word “philosophy” is preceded by an article identifying the specific heresy at Colosse.
 - 1) It stands in direct contrast to the true wisdom of God, Christ.
 - 2) It stands for love of wisdom, more than love for Christ.
 - 3) Paul is saying to the Colossians that human philosophy desires to seduce them and to spiritually rape them, of their chastity in Christ, leading them captive from the simplicity in Christ. 2Cor. 11:2-3
2. The second method is deceit.
 - a. The same article that precedes the word “philosophy” identifying the heresy at Colosse, also identifies the second noun “deceit”.

- b. The word deceit “apates” has the idea of bait to trick and ensnare someone through delusion by giving them a false impression either by appearance or influence.
 - 1) It is used of the deceitfulness of riches that choke the word of God. Matt. 13:22
 - 2) It is used of our old life deceiving people to fulfill our lust. Eph. 4:22
 - 3) It is used of the deceitfulness of sin. Heb. 3:13
- c. These heretics with their combined Judeistic and Gnostic philosophy were desiring to ensnare the Colossians by removing them from Christ.
 - 1) The attempt was trickery by the love of man’s wisdom of words and ideas that were mere speculation about God’s truth.
 - * All subject truth must be judged by the object truth of God’s word!
 - 2) These words and ideas result in taking captive man and blinding him to the truths of God. 2Cor. 4:4
 - * Though the noun deceit identifies the method, it also identifies the goal of their philosophy!

- 3) This goes for all false religions, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, T.M., New Age, etc.
 - 4) God’s Word is based on truth, for God cannot lie!
- c. The quality of the content of this deceit is identified as empty.
 - 1) The word empty “kenos”, means hollow, fruitless and void of truth, power and hope, contrary to the gospel.
 - 2) The word is used of things that will not succeed, that are of no purpose and will result in no effect.
 - 3) To the Greeks philosophy was the highest effort of the intellect and virtue.
 - * “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge--by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith”. 1Tim. 6:20

Illustration

In an examination at a Christian school, the teacher asked the following question: What is false doctrine?”

Up went a little boy’s hand, and there came this answer: “It’s when the doctor gives the wrong stuff

to people who are sick.” Although the little boy had obviously confused **doctrine** with **doctorin’**, he arrived at the correct definition.

Application

1. Paul told the Corinthians that God declared, “For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”. 1Cor. 1:19-23

- a.** Philosophy in its technical sense is used for the “conscious endeavor of thought, by speculative process, to interpret the whole of human experience, as a consistent and systematic unity, which would be the ultimate truth of all that may be known.” (New International Bible Encyclopedia)
- b.** The Classical usage is the overall interpretation of the universe from a

particular viewpoint, such as Plato, Aristotle, his disciple, or Socrates.

- c.** Thomas Aquinas saw philosophy as an overall interpretation of the universe secured only by reason apart from special revelation. (Bible)
- d.** Modern critical philosophies, positivist and analysts, define philosophy as the attempt to investigate and clarify meanings and relationships rather than an attempt to arrive at any ultimate truth. (Baker's Dict. of Theology)
 - 1) Why?** Because many philosophers have despaired in their search for ultimate truth.
 - 2)** We live in a society of relativism, situational ethic and value clarification!
 - 3)** Zophar was a philosopher and asked Job, “Can you search out the deep things of God”. Job 11:7-12
- 2.** Paul told the Galatians that even if they themselves or an angel come to them and preach an other gospel than that which they had received, that person was to be anathema. Gal. 1:8
 - * Each person is responsible for his or her own stand against deception.
 - a.** Josephus said there were three philosophies of the day, that of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.

- b. Now we all have a philosophy of life, and they consist of what we believe and trust to guide our lives.
 - c. Paul says that we are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 1Cor. 1:30
3. Paul told Timothy when he left him at Ephesus, to command some to not teach any other doctrine. 1Tim. 1:3
- a. For there were those desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they said nor the things which they affirmed. 1Tim. 1:7
 - b. Christ was the only way to God. Jn. 14:6, Acts 4:12
 - c. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Col. 2:3

Paul declared to the philosophers of his day in Athens, to the Stoics and Epicureans, the truth, power and life, but they mocked him thinking Jesus and the resurrection foolish.

-Because the gospel was neither according to the elements of the world, traditions of men, therefore they were carried away as booty by their philosophy, empty, fruitless dissolution.

This is the warning about philosophy!

II. The source of philosophy.

* “According to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world”. vs. 8b-c

- A. Their teaching was according to the traditions of men. vs. 8b
 1. The word traditions “paradosis” means that which is handed down from generation to generation.
 - a. In our text it is used in a negative way because it’s origin and source is only human, not divine revelation.
 - b. Peter points this out regarding our redemption not being according traditions of our fathers but divine revelation. 1Pet. 1:18
 - c. Paul uses the word for biblical teaching. 2Thess. 2:15, 3:6, 1Cor. 15:3
 2. That is not to say that all tradition is wrong.
 - a. There is much good tradition of morals, ethics and culture that is good to pass down to our children.
 - b. The tradition that is wrong, is anything that opposes the teachings of Christ.
 - 1) Be it by adding to God’s word.
 - 2) By taking away from God’s word.
 - 3) By placing the tradition on equal authority with God’s word.

- c. Their tradition was doing violence to the sufficiency of Christ.
- B.** Their teaching was according to the basic principles of the world. vs. 8c
1. The phrase basic principles “storcheia” means the rudimentary teaching of elements of the world systems, the elementary instruction.
 - a. The phrase is used of things set out in a row, ABC of alphabet.
 - b. The phrase is used in a spiritual sense contrasting the law with Christ. Gal. 4:3-4, 9-10
 - c. The phrase is used for the need of being taught the first principles or elements of the oracles of God. Heb. 5:12
 - d. Paul uses the this phrase further on to identify their ritualistic teachings, practices and religious ceremony. Col. 2:20
 - 1) Jewish ceremony. vs. 11, 14
 - 2) Legalism. vs. 16-17
 - 3) Mysticism. vs. 18-19
 - 4) Asceticism. vs. 20-23
 2. The phrase is also used for the physical elements of the universe.
 - a. Paul tells the Galatians of their conduct before Christ serving the basic elements of the world. Gal. 4:3

- * Sun, moon, stars, horoscope, ouija boards, palm reading, pagan gods, etc.
- b. Peter uses the phrase for the physical elements of the world that will be dissolved after the thousand year reign of Christ. 2Pet. 3:10
 - c. Paul could very well be using the phrase to include the supernatural powers of intermediates of emanations or aeons, as they are mentioned throughout the doctrinal section.
 - 1) Principalities and powers are mentioned. 2:10
 - 2) Jesus triumphed over them after the resurrection, making an open display of them. 2:15
 - 3) The worship of angels was certainly one of the false teachings of the heretics. 2:18
 - * Carlos Santana freely propagates his worship of angels and the doctrine as he did in his sold-out concert in Mexico City, in the early nineties.

Illustration

If we don't use the Scriptures to learn about God, man, sin, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, angels, Satan, redemption, etc., then we are left to ignorance and

conjecture which can only result in inferior and corrupt knowledge about God and man because it is based on human intelligence.

“The seriousness of errant doctrine can be compared to a missile aimed a mere one degree off target. The difference seems slight and negligible at first, yet the results of the error increase dramatically throughout the flight of the missile, until it totally misses its intended target.

* So it is with false doctrine. At first it may seem to be a tolerable mistake, a little error and not that serious, but as with all errors, the effects compound over time until they become so serious that they may not be correctable.”

Application

1. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You have made the commandments of God of no effect by your traditions”. Matt. 15:6

a. “But in vain, they worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.” Matt. 15:9

b. “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees”. Matt. 16:6 (hypocrisy and rationalism)

2. Do you know the Only thing we are to pass down from generation to generation, the faith once delivered to the saints Jude 3

a. We are to be good Bereans and examine to see if what we hear is true. Acts 17:11

b. Paul told Timothy to pass the gospel down to faithful men that they in turn can teach others. 2Tim. 2:2

3. The things and elements of ceremony, rituals, works and philosophy that establish a person’s own righteousness is an insult to the established righteousness of Christ, as the Jews. Rom. 10:3

a. The Christian does not philosophize about God or life, he simply gives God’s Word as fact! 1Cor. 1-2

b. We have received all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue. 2Pet. 1:3

b. We are to give an answer to everyone who asks about the reason and hope that lies in us with meekness and fear. 2Pet. 3:15

c. Paul declared to the philosophers of his day in Athens, to the Stoics and Epicureans, the gospel truth, power and life, but they mocked him thinking Jesus and the resurrection foolish.

* Because the gospel was neither according to the elements of the world, traditions of men, therefore they rejected it and were carried away as booty by their philosophy of empty, fruitless deception but a few believed. Acts 17:22-34

This is the source of philosophy!

III. The contradiction of philosophy. vs. 8d

* “And not according to Christ”. vs. 8d

A. Philosophy rejects the person of Christ.

1. The fact that He was a man that once walked this earth, was recorded in history and declared to be God offends the natural man.
2. If they recognize He was who He said He was, God, the Messiah of God, then they have to deal with their rejection of His teachings.
3. That would make them accountable to God and one day be judged by Him.

B. Philosophy rejects the authority of Christ.

1. They can not except that the words of Christ are the standard for truth.
2. They can not believe that everyone else is wrong and under God’s judgment.
3. They in fact believe that their authority is greater and superior to Christ’s.

C. Philosophy rejects the teachings of Christ.

1. The teachings of Christ leave no room for any other system or religion to bring man to God.
2. The teachings of Christ declare man to be a sinner, not a good person.
3. The teachings of Christ is the best standard to experience life to the fullest.

Illustration

The first college, Harvard, was established for “Christ and the Church.” In his bequest of the first large gift to what is now Harvard University, John Harvard said:

“Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies; to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all knowledge and learning and see that the Lord only gives wisdom. Let everyone seriously set himself by prayer in secret to see Christ as the Lord and Master.”

Above Harvard’s gates are etched today these words: “After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had built our houses, provided necessities for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God’s worship, and settled the civil government; one of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance learning, and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.” #249

* The many of the major universities were established by Christians and then were taken over by the liberal and free thinkers, ever as Princeton, Yale, etc.

Application

1. The theory of evolution is the religion of our day.
 - a. That man has evolved from a simple form to a complex form through millions of years.
 - b. Yet the time factor needed for the complexity of the cell itself would need more time than proposed.
 - c. Not one transitional form has ever been found but we do know that the so called most famous findings were deceptive frauds.
 - 1) Java Man comprised the findings of a skull cap in 1891, a thigh bone a year after found 50 feet from the skull and a premolar tooth in 1898, estimating it to be 500,000 years old. (Dr. Bubo's missing Link)
 - * Yet he knew the truth of his hoax and confessed in 1922.
 - 2) Peking Man was found in China 1920-1930 and consisted of fragments of skulls, jaws, and limb bones that were found. One tooth was found and declared to be Peking Man, the missing link, by David Block.
 - * 1941-45 all materials that constructed Peking Man disappeared except for two teeth and never seen again.
 - 3) Dawn Man was declared to be 500,000 years old 1912, in 1950 they checked for amount of fluids in the bones and found to be about 2,000 years old and the teeth

- had been treated with iron salt to make them look older, a complete fraud
Pitdown Man.
2. Existentialism isolates people.
 - a. It says that you must experience for yourself a non-rational "Final Experience" which will give you meaning for life, but it cannot be communicated, it is beyond words. (a leap of faith).
 - b. Therefore no two individuals can have the same experience.
 - * One of the chief men was Kirkegard.
 3. Humanism is belief in man.
 - a. The belief in man's potential, goodness and that he alone directs and makes his life without account-ability to any supreme being.
 - b. Resulting in situational ethics, value clarification giving rise to abortion, homosexuality and pornography as a personal choice.
 - c. Mocking purity and chastity, calling good evil and evil good.
 - 1) Romans tells us that the creature (man) was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope. Rom. 8:20
 - 2) That void can only be filled by Jesus Christ.
 - 3) No amount of philosophy, psychology, logic or spiritualism will reveal God to

you or bring satisfaction because they are not after Christ. 1Cor. 2:9-16

- 4) Peter says, “You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also, fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked”. 2Pet. 3:17

This is the contradiction of philosophy!

Conclusion

This week-end U.S.A. Today had article on going to a higher power and what adults would ask God is they could get an immediate answer.

1. 6% , how long will I live?
2. 7% Is there intelligent life elsewhere?
3. 16% Why do bad things happen?
4. 19% will I have life after death?
5. 34% What’s my purpose here?
6. The remaining 12% other things.

Paul has warned the Colossians of the insufficiency of philosophy which is characterized by these three things.

- I. The warning about philosophy is clear!
- II. The source of philosophy is man!
- III. The contradiction of philosophy is certain!