

BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH
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"The Supremacy of Christ - Studies in Colossians"

Sunday, September 19, 2004 : Study 8 (Colossians 2 : 16 - 23)

"The Effective Gospel - Not Empty Religious Worship"

Notes by Rev. Gary Lockyer

CONTEXT : Where are we in the Series?

We are in the second section of Paul's Colossian letter, from 1: 24 to 2 : 23 It's sub-structure is :

1. The Universal Gospel - Centred On Christ (1:24 - 2:5)
2. The Triumphant Gospel - Not Vain Human Philosophies (1 : (2:6-15)
3. The Effective Gospel - Not Empty Religious Worship & Practices (2:16-23)

Today's Study

A: INTRODUCTION : A COMMON THIRST

"My People have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, & have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." Jeremiah 2 : 13

There are two bad choices ...

1. REJECTION of God's provision for our need to know him in intimate fellowship. (Ps42:2)
2. SUBSTITUTION of anything that appears to meet the need ... but never does.
for example :
 - a. Political structures (Isaiah 31:1-3)
 - b. Religious ritual : (Is1:10-17, 45:20-22; Mt23:23-24)
 - c. Moral virtue (Mk10:17-22; Rom3:23; Is64:6)

The supply of "living water" is ...

1. God's PROVISION - not mankind's invention (John 4:14)
2. FREELY provided (Isaiah 55:1-3; Rev22:17)
3. FOUND only in Jesus. (John 7:37-38)

*"I am the way, the truth, & the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." Jn
14 : 6*

... which brings us back to the centrality of Christ and the

CONTEXT .. of our study in Colossians

Note what God has done in the lives of the Colossian Christians by his grace (1:2b, 6b)

"... qualified you ..." (1:12) "... rescued you ..." (1:13) "... redemption ... forgiveness ..." (1:14)
"... reconciled you ..." (1:23)

With today's Study we end the second section of Paul's letter. He makes the point that having already been given God's favour as a free gift through Christ, it makes no sense to proceed as if we have to EARN his continued favour - by relying on religious ritual or adherence to a rigorous self-discipline - to remain in fellowship with him.

B. THREE WARNINGS

1. LEGALISM; "Don't let anyone judge you" (2:16-17)

"DIET" : 2 purposes in OT : MEDICAL - the rules were set up to guard health.

: PURITY - to educate the conscience.

"DAYS" : To MARK, from the past, God's significant "saving acts" in history

: To POINT to a future and greater fulfilment of God's purposes in Christ

They are the "shadows" of which Christ is the reality. (See also Heb9:9-10)

Legalism always leads to : JOYLESS Judgementalism and a SHALLOW uniformity

2. MYSTICISM : "Do not let anyone disqualify you." (2:18-19)

Mysticism may be defined as "the experience of God." The danger is that it blurs Biblical Authority and we become non-discerning about the "experience". The principle that every "experience" is subject to the Scriptures acts as a brake and corrective.

Such unbridled Mysticism tends to :

highlight MINOR issues (Mt23:23-24)

lead AWAY from Christ by denying his unique nature and purpose.

DENY the Gospel by admitting other ways to know God and fellowship with him.

promote PRIDE ("look how spiritual I am") in the discovery of those "other ways."

3. ASCETICISM : "Let no one enslave you." (2:8, 20-22)

Asceticism : a rigorous denial of normal human pleasures, built on three false assumptions.

a. All pleasure is EVIL

b. Spiritual MATURITY consists in avoiding any pleasurable thing or experience.

c. This is the PATHWAY to God, who himself is not "flesh", but "spirit."

Such practices have no lasting value and come from mere human authority (2:22)

C. SUMMING UP - 2:23

Jesus said that what comes out of a man from the heart - evil thoughts, immorality, theft, murder, slander, - makes him unclean. (Mat 15:1-20) He criticised the Pharisees for being "*whitewashed tombs, painted on the outside, full of corruption within.*" They appeared "righteous," but were full of evil intentions and acts. (Mat 23 :25-28)

Paul makes the same observation here; Externals such as these "seem wise" but are useless in promoting true spiritual growth and maturity. (2:23)

"Such regulations have the appearance of wisdom ... but lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

So what has value?

1. The radical change of becoming a new person in Christ. (Col 1:13-14, 21-22; 2:11-15)

2. The growth of "Christ-likeness" : Col 3 : 12-15

3. A response to God in thankful Worship (Col 3:16-17)

4. A pattern of reconciled relationships with others. (Col 3:18 - 4:1)

..... the shape of the continuing Studies in Colossians.