

DON'T CHOOSE CAPTIVITY OVER CONTENTEDNESS IN CHRIST! (Colossian 2:8-10)

Please take your Bibles and turn once again to Colossians 2. **Why did God lead Paul** to write a letter to this small, insignificant church—one that many commentators suggest is the “least important church” that Paul wrote to? **One of the main reasons** was because **Epaphras**—the man God used to bring the gospel to Colosse and start the church there—visited Paul in prison with some **concerns about false teaching** that was creeping in. So Paul writes this letter to **warn them** about the tactics and teachings of the false teachers—and to point them to the **supremacy—and sufficiency**—of Christ!

But why did God have this letter **included in His Word**? Stated another way, **how** does **what Paul wrote** to the Colossian believers nearly 2000 years ago apply **to us now**—today—in Necedah, Wisconsin? There are several reasons, but I’m going to point out just **two**.

- 1) One reason is because **false teaching** is not just a thing **of the past**—it is still happening today!
- 2) A second reason is this: because **the antidote**—the “medicine that counteracts **the poison** of false teaching”—is still the **supremacy and sufficiency** of Christ!

--**What were the tactics** of the false teachers in **Paul’s day**? Verse 4 says they **deceive** with enticing words!

--**What are the tactics** of false teachers in **our day**? They **deceive** with enticing words!

What is the “preventive medicine” Paul prescribes for us to not be affected by the poison of false teachers?

Verse 7 says to be “**rooted** in Christ”—a reference, I believe—to salvation. Verse 7 also says we are to be “**built up**” in Christ—meaning to **grow** in Him. Remember, **God** does the building—but we **provide the materials**! And we are to be “**stablished** in the faith”—steadily growing in our understanding of God’s Word.

And then—in vs 8—Paul begins to get into the **specific teachings** of the false teachers. For the sake of context, please follow along as I read verses 4-10. This morning—as we focus on verses 8-10—I want us to be challenged with this thought: “Don’t Choose Captivity over Contentedness in Christ!”

First, let’s consider...**1. The danger of captivity**

We see that in vs 8 where it says, “Beware lest any man spoil you...”

A. The meaning of being “spoiled”

When we hear the word “spoil” or “spoiled,” a couple of meanings come to mind. **One meaning** has to do with what’s in our **garden**—or our **refrigerators**! Fruits and veggies can **become spoiled**—like when a **banana or tomato** rots...and **turns to mush**...and is no longer fit to eat—unless, of course, you are a **chicken or a pig**!

Another meaning of spoil is part of the **job description** of a **grandparent**. Notice I said “grandparent”—**not parent**. Parents **shouldn’t spoil** their children—but grandparents are “supposed to!” (Not sure where that is written, but that’s a fairly common occurrence, isn’t it?) In this case, **spoiled** means pampered—and getting **what** they want, **when** they want it, **in the way** they want it. Is that **good** for a child?

Not at all! And that means **grandparents shouldn’t** do it either!

But **neither of these two definitions** fit what Paul was warning against here in vs 8. The word “spoil” in vs 8 comes from a Greek word that is **used only here** in the Greek NT. It means to “carry off as spoil, to lead away as booty, to plunder.”

The **Topical Lexicon in Biblehub** puts it like this: Spoil “portrays the **violent act of seizing defeated foes** or confiscating valuables after a battle. The single New Testament appearance carries the picture of **believers being treated like plunder that is dragged away from its rightful owner**. The term therefore fuses two ideas: **aggressive deception and forced relocation from safety in Christ** to bondage under error.”

Strong language, isn't it? Is Paul being **overly dramatic**? Obviously not because that is **what God wanted** him to write! So just as a **literal lion** wants to violently **jerk a lamb from the flock** and carry it off as prey, Satan—as a **spiritual lion**—uses false teachers to drag away **God's lambs** from His flock!

And **wolves** do the same thing! Notice what Paul told the leaders of the church of Ephesus in **Acts 20:29** “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous **wolves** enter in among you, **not sparing the flock.**”

Does that still happen **today**? It sure does! In 1956, a man by the name of **William Schnell** wrote a book about his **involvement with an organization** that he joined as a **young teen** thinking it would help him **develop his faith** in God. Instead, it did the opposite! In the foreword of his book, **Schnell wrote**: “It is not a learned treatise you are going to read here. It is simply the heartfelt story **of a slavery so deep**, that it took me **thirty years to get free.**” The name of the book? “Thirty Years a Watchtower Slave,” subtitled: *The Confessions of a Converted Jehovah's Witness!*

Next, let's consider...**B. The means through which we can be “spoiled”**

How do false teachers lead the unsuspecting away captive? **What are the means** through which we can be trapped and enslaved? “Through philosophy and vain [empty] deceit.”

At first glance, it seems that Paul is suggesting **two** things—philosophy and empty deceit. However, sometimes the Greek word for “and” can mean “even, that is, or namely.” In other words, the words **after** the “and” expand on the words **before** the “and.”

We have an example of this in Colossians 1:2. Paul wasn't writing to two separate groups—the saints **and the** faithful brethren. He was writing to the saints, **even** the faithful brethren.

And that is what I believe we have going on here in Colossians 2:8. So it is not philosophy **in general** that Paul is warning against—it is philosophy that is **vain** (meaning empty or hollow) and **deceptive**. In other words, “beware lest any man spoil you—takes you captive—through “hollow and deceptive philosophy.” Arthur Patzia writes: “This teaching is **hollow** because it does not **contain the truth**; it is **deceptive** because it captivates people and prevents them from **seeing the truth**” (NIBC, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, pg 51).

So what does this hollow and deceptive philosophy consist of? **Three things** are listed here in verse 8.

1) The tradition of men. What did Paul mean when he wrote “the tradition of men?” Paul is obviously not referring to traditions like having **turkey for Thanksgiving Dinner**—or having **hot chocolate** on Christmas Eve! Pretty safe to say he is using it in the same way Jesus did! Notice the verses I have for you on your outline. **Mark 7:6-7** “He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷ Howbeit in vain do they worship me, **teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.**”

So the Pharisees in Jesus' day were teaching their **own commandments** as doctrine. Jesus doesn't stop there, though. **Mark 7:8-9** “For **laying aside the commandment** of God, ye **hold the tradition of men**, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. ⁹ And He said unto them, Full well **ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.**”

--In **Jesus' day**, the Pharisees chose their tradition—their teachings—over God's commandments.

--In **Paul's day**, there were those who taught a hollow and deceptive philosophy based on man's so called “wisdom” over God's Word.

--And in our day, **the Roman Catholic Church** claims that their teachings are equal to—or more important than—the teachings of the Word of God!

2) The rudiments of the world. The **English** word “rudiments” occurs **only twice** in our KJ Bibles—and both are in this chapter! But the **Greek** word that it comes from—“stoy-KHI-on”—occurs **seven** times—and Paul used it **four** of the **seven**.

According to **Thayer's Greek Lexicon**, it means “any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise; an element, first principle.” An every day example is “the ABCs.” The elementary principle we need to learn in order to read and write are the **letters of the alphabet!**

But what did Paul mean when he wrote that the ***hollow and deceptive philosophy*** of these false teachers was after—***according to***—the ***rudiments*** of the world? That is a highly debated subject! Here are the ***two*** most common suggestions:

a) Elemental ***teachings*** of the world—meaning an attempt to earn God’s favor by “rule keeping.”

b) Elemental ***spirits*** of the world. A note in my **Ryrie Study Bible** states the following: “the rudiments of the world equals the elemental spirits of the universe; i.e. the cosmic spirits of the Hellenistic syncretism.”

Ryrie goes on to say: “Apparently their philosophy involved **regulating their religious life** by observing the **movement of the stars**, which they associated **with the powers of angels** who were worshipped by some (v. 18).” Those that **support this view** do so because Paul mentions that the false teachers taught angel worship (Col 2:18)—and because of Paul’s references to Christ being over principalities and powers like it says in Colossians 1:16—and just a couple of verses down in Colossians 2:10.

So ***which*** is it—and ***how*** do we decide? Here’s how I do it. I already mentioned that Paul used the word ***four*** times—one of which is in this same chapter. Notice what it says in Colossians 2:20 (read). Pretty safe to say that in this verse—especially in light of verses 21 and 22—that “rudiments of the world” has to do with “rule-keeping”—***not evil spirits!*** And if we were to look at Galatians 4:3 and Galatians 4:9, we would see that Paul is once again talking ***about rule-keeping***—not evil spirits!

And since ***three*** of the ***four*** times Paul uses the word “stoy-KHI-on” it refers to “rule-keeping,” I lean toward it meaning the same thing here in vs 8!

Are there those now—in our day and age—that promote the idea that ***rule-keeping gets*** you to heaven? Yes—there are! I don’t think I’m going out on a limb to suggest that ***most*** “religions”—if I can use that word—promote a ***works-based*** salvation! But Paul is writing ***to believers***—those who were ***already saved!***

Are there those that preach ***rule-keeping for sanctification***—for growing as a Christian once you are a child of God? Yes—there are! I remember one man telling me he was ***saved by faith***—but he ***kept himself saved by works!***

“Works don’t work” to ***get us saved***—and “works don’t work” to ***keep us saved***—or to make ***us grow!***
Galatians 3:2 “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Answer? We receive the Spirit ***when in faith*** we “call upon the name of the Lord” & are born again!
Galatians 3:3 “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

Rhetorical question, right? We are not ***made perfect***—meaning mature—***by the flesh***; our own efforts and works. Just as we ***begin*** in the Holy Spirit, we are also ***made mature***—we grow—by the Holy Spirit.

God does not want us to be ***rigid robots*** that ***keep rules*** because we fear Him! Instead, God wants us to grow in ***a relationship with Him*** whereby we ***commune heart-to-heart*** with Him...and ***depend*** on Him... and ***lovingly submit*** to Him because we want ***to please the One*** who loved us—and gave Himself for us!

What does the hollow and deceptive philosophy ***consist of?*** What kind of false teaching can take us captive?

1) First, the traditions of men.

2) Second, the elementary teachings of the world that promotes rule-keeping.

3) Third—in the end of vs 8—“and not ***after***”—not according to—“Christ.”

Is there teaching that ***detracts*** from Christ—that promotes the idea that He is ***not quite*** enough? There is, isn’t there—especially in this “neck of the woods!”

--Do supposed “***visions***” from Mary, the mother of Jesus, take away from the supremacy of Christ? **Yes; they do!**

--Do “***prayers***” directed to Mary take away from the supremacy of Christ?

Yes; they do!

--Do ***statues*** in a yard—depicting Mary—take away from the supremacy of Christ?

Yes; they do!

Any teaching that implies Christ is ***not enough***—and that you need something or someone besides Him—is hollow and deceptive! And in the next two verses, Paul gives us ***two reasons*** why Christ is all ***we need***.

First, in vs 9, we have... **2. The doctrine of Christ's deity (vs 9)**

Notice again what it says: "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Steven Cole wrote that this "is one of the most direct and clear statements of the deity of Jesus Christ in all Scripture." (Bible.org). MacArthur made a similar statement.

Let's break this verse down a little bit.

--"For in Him [Christ] **dwelleth**..." Dwelleth—dwells—is in the **present** tense. That means it is a **continual** dwelling—not an occasional one. Jesus **is...has been...**and **always will be**, God!

--"All the fullness" repeats what was said in Colossians 1:19. It is as if God wants to make sure we "get it." In Jesus dwells not only **the fullness** of God—but **all the fullness** of God. In other words, Jesus does not **lack anything** that God **is** or that God **does**.

--And let's not miss how the **verse ends**: "all the fullness of the Godhead **bodily**." Christ took on a **real human body**, that suffered hunger...and thirst...and tiredness...and pain...and death! John 1 tells us that **Jesus is...**and **was...**and **always has been God**—and that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us!"

The point again is this: Everything that **God is**, Jesus is—and if we **have Jesus**, we have all we need!

Lastly, in vs 10, we have... **3. The declaration regarding our identity (vs 10)**

Notice what vs 10 says, "And ye are **complete** in Him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

--"**And ye...**" **Who** is Paul writing to? Is **everyone** complete in Christ? Is Paul saying this to **everyone**?

No; Paul is writing to **believers**—those who have been **delivered from the power** of darkness and **transferred into** the kingdom of His dear Son (vs 13)...and have **received the forgiveness of sins** through His blood (vs 14)...and have been **reconciled to God** through Christ's death (vss 21-22).

So as we go through this verse, please know that it **does not apply** to everyone; it only applies to those who are **in Christ**.

--"And ye **are**..." It doesn't say you **might be** complete in Him—and it doesn't say some day in the future **you will be complete** in Him. It says "ye are"—we are— **right now**, complete in Him!

--"And ye are **complete**..." This is not a trick question: If you are **complete—right now**—what are you lacking? And the answer is...**nothing**! We **lack** nothing, because we **have** everything! We are complete in Him!

I love how Steven Cole illustrated this truth. "When you're born into this world, you're **born complete**. You don't **grow arms and legs later**, like a tadpole. You've got everything you'll ever need. You can't use it all until you grow in age and strength, but you've got the whole package right from the start.

It's the same spiritually. You **get everything in Christ** the instant you're born again. You're joined to Him in such an intimate way that Paul often refers to it as being "in Him." As Peter puts it (2 Pet. 1:3), "His divine power has granted to us **everything pertaining** to life and godliness." We may not understand it all or be able to use it all until we grow in the Lord. **But we have it all!**" (Bible.org; Steven J. Cole, Lesson 11: Religion Versus Christ (Colossians 2:8-12); emphasis mine).

Isn't that great?! We have **all we need** in Christ. Are you content with what you have in Christ?

If not, you need to be! Why?

Because if you look **outside of Christ** in hopes of finding that which is only **in Christ**, you are fair game for false teachers to **entice you** and **deceive you** and **carry you away** captive. They will promise you **better and more**—but they can't deliver!

I was helping out at the Food Pantry on Thursday and got into a conversation with a lady who was there picking up food. If I remember the conversation correctly, she told me her husband left her because no matter how hard she tried, she could not be "filled with the Holy Ghost." She left the church, she said, when the leaders of the church told her that her autistic son would never make it to heaven because he couldn't be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Sad, isn't it? False teachers claiming you need a **certain experience** when God says we are **complete in Christ!**

Again I ask, are you content with being complete in Christ? While preparing this message, the Lord brought to my mind Jeremiah 2:13. I have it there for you on your outline; notice what it says.

Jeremiah 2:13 “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

Evil one – forsaking God, the source of life! God is an ever-flowing, never-ending fountain—not a well—from which life-giving water comes from. Why would we depart from that?

Evil two – hew out cisterns—make yourself wells—that can't even hold water!

You see the correlation, right? When you depart from Christ—and look elsewhere for spiritual life and refreshment—you will have a well that doesn't give you **anything!**

If you are a child of God, you are complete in Christ! And if you are complete in Christ, don't depart from Christ!

What is it that God would have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First and foremost, Christ is the source of eternal life. Jesus says in John 10:28 “And I give unto them eternal life...” Have you received from Jesus the gift of eternal life?

If not, that is what God wants you to do today!

2. Second—if you have received Christ—you are...right now...**complete** in Him! That is what God says about you—not what I say about you!

What does God want us to do in light of that thought?

--Dwell on that thought. Think about it often! God said it because He wants us to **know it**—and **enjoy it!**

--And ask God to help you understand more and more what it means.