

“Christ Is All and In All”

Paul’s Exhortations to Hold Fast to Christ #3

“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize”

Intro: Each of Paul’s exhortations in Colossians two can give us insight into how to avoid the influences of false religion.

The first exhortation “walk in Him” teaches us that the best defense against false doctrine is active obedience to the Lord’s teaching.

The second exhortation “let no one take you captive” teaches us that Satan presents his false teaching under the guise of “philosophy” or love of wisdom and truth.

The third exhortation “let no man judge you” teaches us that false teachers may take legitimate commands of God out of context and bind them improperly upon others.

Now let’s consider the fourth exhortation:

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (Colossians)2:18-19

In this exhortation Paul assisted the Colossians in overcoming the influence of false religion by giving a real portrait of the false teacher.

Portrait of a false teacher

The false teacher’s character (motivated by pride while pretending to be humble)

For Paul the Colossian heretics were a walking contradiction.

By delighting in self-abasement

They tried to give every appearance of piety, even resorting to restrictive lifestyles to impress others with their dedication. But inside they were full of pride; they were even proud of their humility!

Inflated without cause by his fleshly mind

While on the one hand professing humble service, they were inwardly full of pride. Instead of being motivated by spiritual principles, they were driven by fleshly attitudes.

This inconsistency between inward attitude and outward profession was the first indicator that the teachers influencing the Colossians were hypocrites.

The false teacher’s method (rejecting Christ’s revelation while claiming personal revelation)

Some interpreters have thought that the false teachers conveyed their self-abasement by pretending that they were unworthy to go directly to God; so instead they would seek the revelations of God’s angels and

what they might learn from the visions that came from such experiences:

Delighting in the worship of angels

It appears that the false teachers had sought to gain special knowledge that others did not have by the mystical practice of angel worship (a practice that existed in that area even centuries later).

Taking his stand upon visions he has seen

It may very well be that some “vision” came to them from their angel worship; but such a vision could hardly be heavenly. It became the basis for the false teacher’s pride and rejection of the Lord’s teaching and may have very well been Satanic in origin.

Of course the real problem for these false teachers was that they were: *not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God*

The profession to offer some deeper truths revealed by the angels was taking the Colossians away from the simple truths already revealed by the Lord, truths that would nourish them in their spiritual lives!

The false teacher’s legacy (defrauding the righteous of heaven while promising to give them more

The lure of false doctrine is that it presumably is going to give you more knowledge of God; but in reality it takes away from us what is most valuable! Thus Paul wrote:

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize...

This phrase translates a Greek word rare in the NT meaning something like “to be disqualified”. It is the picture of an umpire in an athletic competition who rules against someone receiving what was ostensibly his through victory. Cf. rule’s committee in modern sports

The false teachers could really have added nothing to what the Colossians possessed; for they were already “complete in Him”. So to follow the false teachers was not to gain more but to be robbed or defrauded of what they already possessed!

Application for us

Paul’s description of the false teachers at Colossae gives us pretty good clues for what to look for in those who would lead us astray. And it is amazing to see how closely it parallels Jesus own warning:

A false teacher pretends to be something externally that he is not internally!

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are

they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:15-20)

Often the founders of major religions are guilty of what the Bible explicitly teaches is immoral.

Mohammed was noted for his taking numerous wives, in one case, a nine year old girl!

In Joseph Smith's case, received a special revelation for his wife indicating that it was acceptable for him to take a second wife!

A false teacher will ultimately substitute his “revelations” for Christ’s!

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ (Matthew 7:21-23)

Is it coincidence that founders of false religions have sought to legitimize their teaching with professions of communications with angels of God?

In Mormonism, the angel Moroni gives Smith the book of Mormon.

In Islam, Mohammed is caught up in a whirlwind to Jerusalem.

A false teacher will lead those who follow him to destruction.

Jesus' words, “Depart from me...” and his warning, “Beware” make it clear that there are consequences for turning away from the Lord to false teachers.

First we lose the spiritual growth that comes from abiding in Christ.

Second we lose the prize that comes from holding fast to Christ.

In the end, the result of following a false prophet is always the same— simply put, disobedience to God's revealed word! The prophet says, “Trust me! I know God said this; but He also told me that this is o.k. too!”

Conclusion: Of course, not every one who gives a different interpretation of a Scripture from us is a false prophet. Sincere believers in the authority of Christ alone don't always agree about every Biblical point; but we should not let this lure us into a lax attitude about the reality of false religion. There is a real danger to overcome in every generation. We must be wise enough to know when someone is “defrauding us of our prize”. Knowing the features of a false teacher will help us sort out truth seekers from the false prophets.