

BEWARE OF ATTACK

Colossians 2:1-8

¹I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. ²I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. ³In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. ⁵For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

⁶And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. ⁷Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. ⁸Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.

Colossians 2:1-8 (NLT)

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Paul agonized over the threat which faced the churches he had founded and those which had been formed by people he had disciplined. It is such a serious threat that he is greatly concerned for its impact upon the churches and the individuals who had professed faith in Christ as Lord.

This week we begin a serious consideration of what was being falsely claimed. Over the next three Sundays our attention will be focused on error *then* and *now*.

What was the purpose of Paul's struggle (2:1-3)?

How can a person come to know the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16)?

The Roman Empire was full of "mystery" religions. These were taught only to those who had undergone "initiation" and who were therefore qualified to watch the rituals which portrayed the actions of the gods. Their vow of secrecy about what they would see kept the "mystery" only for the members of the cult. These rituals gave the "worshipper" greater insight into how these false deities made the world worked. For instance, the seasons were believed to be brought about by things going on among the gods. The participation by the "worshipper" with the "deity" in rituals was the means by which they were prepared for the life to come after death.

What specific danger was Paul trying to prevent (2:4)?

Amidst such danger, what gave Paul joy over these believers, many of whom he had never met (2:5)?

There are many people today who are confused about what “receiving Christ” means. For some it is synonymous with taking communion, while for others it is associated with “walking an aisle and getting baptized.” *What had they “accepted” about Christ Jesus (2:6; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 11:4)?*

In Colossians 2:6, they had accepted the fact that Jesus is who the angels said he was, “Christ, the Lord” and which the Apostles proclaimed that he was (Acts 2:36; 10:36; Romans 1:4; 5:1; 6:23). *How is this belief connected with living the Christian life (2:6-7)?*

What does he mean by “philosophy and empty deceit” (2:8)?

There is a connection between these two nouns and the adjective translated “empty.” The NET Bible translates these as “empty, deceitful philosophy.” The two nouns *philosophy* and *deceit* are joined by one article and although the adjective *empty* is arranged prior to *deceit*, they all probably form a hendiadys. The philosophy being put forth is merely empty deception because although it appears to be wisdom, it will accomplish nothing (2:23).

What are the “spiritual powers of this world” (2:8, also in 2:20; Galatians 4:3, 9)?

One lexical study of this phrase yields the following insights:

Outside the NT the term *elements* (*spiritual powers*) would denote the four elements or the basic materials of the world of which the whole cosmos, and humanity within it, is composed. Only the context can yield any other sense. Gal. 4:3ff, ... seems to number the law among the *elements*, and 4:8–9 seems to include false gods. These references rule out such senses as the cosmic elements, the stars, stellar spirits, or simply spiritual forces. Building on thoughts of his age, Paul is using the term in a new way, describing the *elements* as weak and beggarly. In a transferred sense, the *elements* are the things on which pre-Christian existence rests, especially in pre-Christian religion. These things are impotent; they bring bondage instead of freedom. In Col. 2:8, the *elements* (*spiritual powers*) of the world are parallel to *traditions of men* (*human thinking*). Religious ordinances (2:20) are inadequate as a basis of human existence. It is a delusion for Christians to think that such things can sustain them. By dying and rising again with Christ they are freed from this delusion and the bondage it entails.¹

How can Christians avoid the trap of cults?

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1088.