

Christ in you...

The message of Colossians



Week 5: Sects In The City

INTRODUCTION – Very Punny, Paul

When Paul warns about being taken “captive” (*sulagogeo*) by empty philosophies, he uses a Greek word that sounds similar to the Greek word for “synagogue” (*sunagoge*). Is he playing with words to make a point?

DINE IN – Learning The Text In Its Context

Colossians 2:8-15

- WATCH OUT!: Paul writes as though the possibility is real that saints who have been set free in Jesus could really become captive again, this time to a legalism that fails to keep Christ in the centre. The image is one of raiders capturing people out of the Kingdom of Christ and carrying them away to prison in a foreign kingdom.
- ELEMENTAL FORCES: The Greek word, *stoicheia*, refers to the basic building blocks or most fundamental units of anything – what notes are to music, bricks are to buildings, and letters are to words. Came to be used of the basic elements of the universe (earth, wind, fire, and water – see “elements” in 2 Peter 3:10-12) and many believed there were spiritual forces behind each of those elements. So, *stoicheia*, could be translated “basic elements” or “elemental spirits” (e.g., compare the NIV and the TNIV). What does your translation say? Is there a footnote regarding an alternate translation? (There should be.) See 2 Corinthians 3:6.
- DEITY & HISTORICITY OF CHRIST: It is hard to explain away the bold statement of **verse 9**. Paul does not explain *how*, but *that* the fullness of God was present in Jesus (and continues to live in that form) he clearly asserts. The statement also stresses that Jesus was a real, historical, bodily expression of divinity. (Contra Tom Harpur (author of *The Pagan Christ*) and Peter Joseph (producer of *Zeitgeist*).
- OUR FULLNESS: Somehow, Jesus brings us into full connection with the Divine. **Verse 10** is vague, but the point is strong – Jesus brings us to fullness.
- CIRCUMCISION: Paul uses circumcision (Lit., “cutting around”) as a symbol of cutting away, not our foreskin, but our sinful nature, our “flesh”. This is the only circumcision (a deeply religious symbol in his former religion) that counts – the one accomplished by Christ on our behalf through his death. (Also see **Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25; Ezekiel 44:7-9; Romans 2:29; Philippians 3:3**.) BAPTISM: As the sign of faith in Christ, water baptism, replaces Old Covenant circumcision. But the nature of the sign (and not just the sign itself) is different in three ways: 1) Gender inclusive; 2) Ethnically inclusive; 3) Sign of personal faith/choice rather than ancestral pedigree. Have you been baptised as a sign of your faith?
- THE END OF RELIGION: When Jesus died, he took with him into death our sin AND the document (Greek, *cheirographon*) that charged our sin against us. This document could refer to: a) a naughty list of our sins compiled by angels for the day of judgement (e.g., see **Revelation 20:12**) – a popular belief in that day, or b) the Old Covenant Torah, filled with laws and the rituals God’s people were bound to in order to obtain pardon for breaking the laws (e.g., see **Ephesians 2:14-16**), or c) a more general reference to the indebtedness and condemnation incurred by human sinfulness. Regardless of the exact meaning, the God we see in Jesus is ultimately concerned more with forgiveness and mercy than justice and punishment.

- Our “IOU” is “Paid In Full”. Karma is trumped with Love.
- IN CHRIST: Somehow, believers in Jesus participate with Christ and benefit from what he experiences as our representative. (Just as the victory of David over Goliath was a victory for all Israel.)
- CENTRING ON CHRIST: Through Christ, God has “taken away” the law document that condemned us. The Greek says literally that he “lifted it out of the centre” (the position occupied by an accusing witness at a trial). Our faith centres on Jesus, not the Law.
- UPSIDE-DOWN VICTORY: The crucifixion of Jesus was a public embarrassment – not for Christ, but for his enemies. Paul never tires of the irony of the cross. Christ stripped (the literal meaning of the Greek behind “disarmed”) the enemy and publically shamed them – how? – by being stripped and publically shamed.

TAKE OUT – Applying The Text To Our Context

TAKE OUT #1: Jesus’ and Paul’s use of parable, metaphor, and imagery suggests that getting and living out the big picture of faith is more the way of Christ than arguing over the fine print (i.e., the *stoicheia*).

TAKE OUT #2: A believer’s baptism is a helpful, practical tool in the ongoing fight against being taken captive by religious legalism. Baptism is an ongoing reminder that we have died to that way of life, have been cleansed from our sin, guilt, and shame, and have risen to the freedom of the New Covenant. If you are a believer in Jesus, have you expressed your faith through baptism?

TAKE OUT #3: Our lives should be Christocentric (Christ-centred) and cruciform (cross-shaped). We keep our eyes on Jesus and learn from his way of victory through sacrifice.

CONCLUSION – Are You Getting It Yet?

Hebrews 12:2

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. After briefly reviewing this week’s message, share one thing that most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you.
2. Talk about this quote from N.T. Wright: *If you want to find the true God, you need look no further than Jesus himself. ... Whatever new idea someone comes up with, this is the acid test: does it have Jesus, the Messiah, the Lord, as its centre and focus? If not, beware.*

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

3. Read our key text, in a variety of translations if possible. a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? b) The *stoicheia* can mean spiritual forces. Today some people are still held captive by their belief in spiritual powers that must be appeased. This is very true in some other cultures, but also alive today in Western society (e.g., lucky amulets, knocking on wood, reluctance to label the 13th row in an airplane or the 13th floor of a building, etc). Christians also have their own version of captivity to fear often surrounding worry about demonic influences. How do we balance our complete freedom and victory in Christ with an honest awareness that evil spiritual forces do exist? Use Scripture to enhance and support your discussion. c) The *stoicheia* can mean the basic elements to a religion. Read the rest of **chapter 2** and talk about how the minutiae of religious life can lead to “captivity”.

SO WHAT?...

4. Reread **2:11-12**. Why do you think God chose baptism as the first symbol a Christian uses to demonstrate their faith? What has been your experience with baptism?

Bruxy Cavey @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, March 9, 2008