

## Colossians, Chapter Two, Lesson Four

STRENGTHENING THE FLOCK Colossians 2:16-23

### STIMULATE

\*\* We have become very familiar with the New Testament practice of teaching by way of reminder. Last week we saw the apostle Paul remind the Colossians in six different areas concerning their relationship with Jesus Christ. Do you recall that list?

They were:

- 1) We were circumcised in our heart through faith in Jesus Christ.
- 2) We were buried with Christ and raised with Him through faith "in the working of God".
- 3) God made us alive with Him, when we were dead in our transgressions.
- 4) God has forgiven us all our transgressions.
- 5) God canceled and removed our debt, by nailing it to the cross of Christ.
- 6) Christ was victorious in paying for our sin and satan knows it!

These are wonderful truths of which we would do well to live out our lives each day under their influence.

### MOTIVATE

\*\* Today we will see Paul take the Colossians to the next logical step in his letter. Having reminded them of such profound truths, he is now going to be "**Strengthening the Flock**" against spiritual heresy by referencing those same truths. The Christian life is totally dependent upon the application of God's truth and not just the hearing of it. We can be strengthened in our own walk if we will apply what we learn from the Word of God, and we too can serve the Lord by "**Strengthening the Flock**" through a proper use of His Word. Let's look at our passage together.

Read passage (V.16-19) (V.20-23)

Opening Prayer

### *Strengthening the Flock*

### INVESTIGATE

**V.16** \*\* How do we know that Paul's instruction for today is based upon the truths he shared with us last week?

He begins his thoughts with "therefore" - a direct reference to what he has just said. Because of our firm foundation in the "working of God" (V.12), we should be able to stand confidently against any heretical attack that may come.

\*\* So, armed with God's truth, what are we to avoid?

Do not let anyone "act as your judge..." lit. "do not let anyone judge you"

\*\* Is Paul saying that Christians do not judge one another?

No - We have learned that we are accountable to each other, that our lifestyle matches what we have learned. If we stray from obedience to Christ and others perceive it, that "judgment" is used to win us back to a close walk with the Lord.

cf. 1Corinthians 5:9-13, Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 15:14

\*\* Well, if we are to "judge" one another, what does Paul mean by "let no one act as your judge"?

In the realm of spiritual legalism, we obey One Master through the careful understanding of His Word. We do not follow the legalistic teaching of spiritual leaders who try to add works to belief in Jesus Christ. cf. Romans 10:4 and Galatians 5:1

\*\* To what four areas does Paul now refer as being prime for the influence of religious legalism?

- 1) Food or drink - Leviticus 11, Dietary Laws cf. Romans 14:13-17, Acts 10:9-16
  - 2) Festivals - Annual: i.e. Passover, Pentecost from Leviticus 23, cf. 1Corinthians 5:7
  - 3) New moon - Time of sacrifices, Numbers 28:11-14 cf. Hebrews 7:27, 10:10
  - 4) Sabbath day - A sign to Israel of the Old Covenant, Exodus 31:16-17
- cf. Acts 20:7, 1Corinthians 16:1-2

**V.17** \*\* According to verse seventeen, what was the purpose for those things which all came out of the Old Covenant with Israel?

They were all "a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ". A shadow has no reality in and of itself. The reality of salvation was always bound up in the Person of Jesus Christ - those things simply were a reflection of the One who would come and fulfill God's plan for the redemption of man.

True spirituality does not consist merely of keeping external rules, but of having a genuine inner relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

**V.18** \*\* Never-the-less, there were in Paul's day and there are some in our day, who would want to disqualify us from our eternal reward because we do not follow man made rules of religion. How do we know it was happening right there in Colossae?

Paul instructs them to "let no one KEEP defrauding you of your prize..."

They were constantly attacking the simplicity of the gospel, by adding to it or by changing it.  
cf. Galatians 1:6-9

\*\* Paul now lists three of their man made activities, which only drew them further away from the truth. What are they?

- 1) self-abasement - a false humility in which they delighted themselves.
- 2) the worship of angels - cf. Matthes 4:10, Isaiah 6:1-4 and Revelation 19:10
- 3) taking their stand on visions - they claimed to be spiritually superior, because of their own personal vision or revelation. cf. Hebrews 1:1-2

**\*\*** What was the source for these visions which the heretics and false teachers claimed to have?

They were "...inflated without cause by [their] fleshly mind..."

They were caught up in their own high view of themselves and were promoting demonic wisdom. cf. James 3:15-16

**V.19 \*\*** Besides being caught up in spiritual pride, what major error do these false teachers make?

They do not hold "fast to the head" - which is Jesus Christ. cf. Colossians 2:10, John 15:5

**\*\*** When they fail to hold fast to Christ, what are they not realizing about Him?

The entire body is "being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments - so that it can grow with a growth which is from God.

Remember: 1Corinthians 3:7 - "So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."

**V.20 \*\*** To strengthen the flock against these false teachers, Paul now goes back to reminding the Colossians believers of the fundamental reality of their new life in Christ. What mistake were some of them making in this area of religious legalism?

Some of them were submitting themselves to man made decrees "as if" they were non-Christians living in the world religiously. They had "died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world", but they were living as if they had forgotten that most significant reality. cf. Galatians 6:14

**V.21 \*\*** What kind of decrees does Paul use for an example?

1) Do not handle 2) Do not taste 3) Do not touch

These are just a sampling of the self-denial which was at the heart of religious asceticism of the day. They thought that by following man made rules, they would achieve some form of spiritual advancement.

**V.22 \*\*** Why are those rules and the use of the things to which they refer, insignificant when compared to knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

All of that stuff will perish! cf. 1Corinthians 6:13

**\*\*** Is there any value in "the commandments and teachings of men"?

No! When it comes to spiritual truth, God alone is our source. What men think will be done away with! cf. Mark 7:8, Matthew 24:35, Isaiah 40:8

**V.23 \*\*** Why are people so easily fooled by religious asceticism, by the erroneous teachings of men, to do spiritual works for the promoting of their souls?

Because they have "to be sure, the appearance of wisdom..." This is the politically correct view of religion. Whatever seems right for you, if you are sincere and respectable before others.

\*\* Even though going to "church", or acting piously can look good, there are three areas in which all man centered religion will fail. What are they according to verse 23?

1) It is self-made religion. cf. Acts 17:23

2) It is self-abasement. We saw this before as a false humility we force upon ourselves for the purpose of being seen by others. cf. Mathew 6:5

3) It involves severe treatment of the body. Taking man made religion to a painful level, it is still exulting the creature rather than the Creator. cf. 1Kings 18:27-28

\*\* How valuable is all of this man made effort to be religious, when applied to the war against fleshly indulgence?

It has "no value", in fact it actually makes matters worse by indulging the flesh with spiritual pride.

## **EXTRICATE**

\*\* Let's review Paul's pattern and see if we too can learn how to be "**Strengthening the Flock**". What is the first thing he asks them to do?

Therefore (based upon all that we have in Christ), do not let men act as your religious judge. (V.16)

\*\* While taking our stand on Christ alone, what should we keep in mind when someone comes along with their new revelation or own personal vision?

They have been "inflated without cause" by their fleshly mind. (V.18)

\*\* Since we have died with Christ and now live to God, should we submit ourselves to the decrees of men?

Absolutely not! Christ is our Lord, His word is our guide and we need to witness to religious heretics instead of submitting to them. (V.20)

\*\* As we grow in our Biblical strength, what three areas of the "commandments and teachings of men" are we going to be better equipped to refute?

1) Self-made religion

2) Self-abasement

3) Severe treatment of the body

## **DELINEATE**

\*\* We have witnessed Paul in the process of "**Strengthening the Flock**". As he drew our passage to an end, how did he evaluate all man made religion?

It is all useless and "no value against fleshly indulgence".

## **EVALUATE**

\*\* How does that strengthen you in your walk with Jesus Christ today - especially as you consider defending the faith against religious heresy?

We have the truth which is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work".  
(2Timothy 3:16)

The unsaved world has only man's false system, which is of no value.

### **ACTIVATE**

\*\* How will you use your God given strength and confidence in the battle over the truth? Will you take time to strategize, to plan on how you might correct those who would try to defraud you of your prize?

cf. Jude 1:3

"... I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Closing prayer