

Ye Are Complete in Him

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"—Col. 2:8

ACCORDING to Col. 2:1, it is evident that Paul had not met the Colossian believers face to face—he had not met them personally and individually—and yet he expresses his deep, loving concern for their spiritual welfare—

“For I would have ye know what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.”

Here, as in many portions of his writings, is plainly revealed Paul's fellow-feeling for his brethren in Christ. And herein is Paul proving a reality which is the result of affectionate obedience to God. That is, the individual members of the Body of Christ are likened unto the individual members of the natural body; and, as there is a fellow-feeling throughout the different parts of the physical body, so also there **MUST** be a fellow-feeling one for another amongst ourselves, **if we are truly members of the Christ-Body**, as exemplified by Paul.

We should have a loving concern for all the brethren and sisters, including those we have never met personally. Also, our concern should find an outlet, if in no other possible way than through the means of communicating with one another by the written word.

Since he was concerned over his brethren, Paul writes to them and also writes an epistle to the Laodiceans (which we do not have today), giving instructions in Col. 4:16 that these letters be exchanged for their mutual benefit. We should see that his aim in writing to them was to build them up in the New Man in Christ Jesus, in whom they were complete (2:9-10), not merely to write about their problems and troubles.

Thus, everything in our lives—all circumstances and situations—are not simply problems and troubles as the people of the world understand and experience these; but rather, all should be viewed and understood in spiritual terms, with the full realization that all which is occurring in our daily lives is designed in the love and mercy of God to "work together for good" (Rom. 8:28).

So when we are faced with severe troubles and vexing problems, these are for the trial (testing) of our faith in God, that faith may be strengthened and, thereby, removing the severity from our troubles and no longer finding vexation in solving our problems. In fact, most of our problems and troubles themselves would no longer be encountered, but diminish in proportion to our faith increasing towards the ideal we are striving for—even a faith that can move mountains, and a faith that works by love.

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IN Phrygia, in Asia Minor, where Colosse was located (with Laodicea about 11 miles away), history tells us that in the first century when Paul wrote to the Colossians, this region of the world was rife with men speaking "mysteries" and "secrets." There were heathen philosophers expounding their mysteries and pagan religious teachers preaching theirs. There was much mystic thought in circulation, with everybody believing in such in some form or other, including the most learned and most "wise" and most respectable of that day and age. Some of this popularly accepted mystic teaching was creeping into the ecclesias.

In every age—with ours no exception—God's people are in danger of embracing man's ideas. Paul expresses this danger in various verses of his epistle to the Colossians, as in 2:8—

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

Here, in another form of words, Paul again says that the pattern of completeness is Christ, and that outside of Christ all is of the flesh, of man, of the world.

We must beware, not permitting any man to beguile us (2:18), lest the traditions and rudiments of men and the world insidiously do their inevitable work of replacing the Truth with lies and vanity and things wherein there is no profit.

While there was much mystic thought and sentiment in circulation in Phrygia, Paul too speaks of a mystery. He combats false mysteries with what was once a true mystery in the Divine Plan of Salvation. Paul writes of that mystery which is salvation in Christ, offered by the grace of God to not only the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Continuing to speak of the Gospel, Paul says—

"Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the Word of God;

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is CHRIST IN YOU, the Hope of Glory" (Col. 1:25-27).

Pagan preachers and worldly philosophers spoke of their mysteries which were reserved for the initiated few only. In the Revelation, where the expression, "the depths of Satan, as they speak," is used, the underlying insinuation of those who use these words is the same. That is, these "depths" are to be fathomed (understood) exclusively by the initiated few.

But such theories of mysticism do not belong to true Christian doctrine, while they do belong to the tenets of mystical Babylon, as can be seen in its vain attempt to harmonize the ideas of pagan polytheism with the Oneness of the God of Israel, resulting in that mystery of the triune god whose chief characteristic is its incomprehensibility to the mind of man.

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BUT Paul's inspired teaching is about a mystery that is now made known by God, so that it is no longer to be kept secret. And, because it is revealed, it is to be comprehended by the mind of man.

This is the FELLOWSHIP OF THE GENTILES—God's salvation in Christ extended to all mankind.

For since all (Jew and Gentile) have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and since all are of the same flesh and blood nature (sinful flesh), if God offers salvation in Christ to the Jews, He is just and gracious and will not exclude the heathen—the Gentiles—but will include them too in this glorious salvation in Christ, as many as will believe unto the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

In order that the Colossian believers do not get the mistaken impression that this mystery of the fellowship was being whispered in secret to an esoteric few, Paul tells the Colossians that the Gospel is come unto them as it is in all the world (1:5-6) and that it is being preached to every creature which is under heaven (1:23). The Gospel was truly being proclaimed to all nations and peoples, as one witness to this historic fact is found in the following comment—

"Pliny . . . in his famous letters to the Emperor Trajan (not long after Paul wrote to the Colossians) writes:

"Many of every age, rank and sex are being brought to trial; for the contagion of that superstition (Christianity) has spread over not only cities, but villages and country'."

Even in remote, isolated places, the Gospel was preached and finding believers. This grand point—the world-scope of the spread of the Gospel—is further emphasized by Paul when he tells the Colossian believers of "Christ in you, the hope of glory," adding in 1:28—

"Whom we preach, warning EVERY MAN, and teaching EVERY MAN in all wisdom; that we may present EVERY MAN perfect in Christ Jesus."

So the Colossian Ecclesia was not a unique community. Nor were they to be content with broad generalities or vague principles regarding their salvation in Christ, which is characteristic of pagan mysteries and secrets. The Gospel is just the opposite, and the opening verses of chapter 2 indicate detailed knowledge—

“For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,
"In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Again Paul is saying that ALL that constitutes COMPLETENESS is in and of Christ.

And of the word "acknowledgement" here used, we are given to understand that the Greek implies "full and accurate knowledge" or "thorough knowledge." Through Christ, this accurate, thorough, detailed knowledge is available to all believers, and is not confined to a select few or to an inner circle. This accurate, thorough and detailed knowledge is, of course, to be based only on God's Word, according to what has been caused to be written for our learning and instruction, accepting nothing that cannot be tested by God's Word to be true.

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BUT even in using God's Word as the touchstone of truth, we must be careful to rightly divide (or handle) the Word of Truth. Our nature is to readily accept things which simply appear to be true, but are found on a close examination to be spurious. By "spurious," we mean not only that that which appears to be true is false, but also that it does not originate from the light source. One such example of truth-in-appearance-only is the worshipping of angels, mentioned by Paul to the Colossians in 2:8—

"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."

On the surface, a plausible line of reasoning for the worshipping of angels can be construed from the Scriptures, as follows—

1. Angels are immortal spirit-beings (Ps. 103:20, Ps. 104:4).
2. They supervised Creation (Gen. 1:26).
3. The present world is in subjection to them (Gen. 28:12; Dan. 10:13).
4. The Law of Moses was delivered through them (Gal. 3:19).
5. They are in the presence of God (Matt. 18:10).
6. God's Name is in them (Exo. 23:21-22).

In addition, this plausible line of reasoning for the worshipping of angels is prompted by a "voluntary humility," by which it is implied a man considers himself too "humble" to worship the Deity directly, so he worships a lesser being, invoking angels. We see all these tendencies and many others in the rituals of the Apostasy, and we must constantly guard the Truth against their subtle influence.

From such reasoning and testimony as this, and against the background that was prevalent in the first century concerning the homage paid by men to sundry orders of deities and demons (still current in subtle disguise), we can see how even the very elect could be deceived into worshipping angels.

But the genuine test of whether or not such worship is acceptable to God are the overwhelming facts that—

- (1) Only God should be worshipped (Gen. 20:3) and
- (2) Nowhere in the Scriptures are believers commanded to worship angels.

From the vantage point of our day, we may feel secure and confident that such deception is self-evident to us and therefore we are in no such danger as were our first century brethren and sisters.

If so, then we are deceiving ourselves into thinking we cannot be deceived; and there is no more deceptive self-deception than that.

For the basic truth pertaining to the children of God (and to all men) is the same today as it was in the days of the Colossian brethren and as it ever has been since man first believed a lie. That is: **our natural inclination—the heart left to itself—continues down to our day to be deceitful and wicked (Jer. 17:9).**

The lesson is this: just as the first century brethren were vulnerable to the belief of worshipping angels, so also there are unscriptural matters of this spurious nature which in appearance are plausible but in truth are not pleasing in the sight of our Heavenly Father.

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WE are complete only with the things pertaining to Christ. Anything not of Christ—anything from the outside—is not of Christ and spoils that completeness. We must seek to be rooted and built up in him (Col. 2:7), and grasp the substance and not the shadow (Col. 2:17), the word of Christ dwelling in us richly (Col. 3:16). We must agonize to—

"Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him:

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10-11).

While all the individual parts of the One Body must add up to the spirit and character of Christ; all the individual parts themselves must be complete in Christ. We must ourselves conform to the godly Image, as Christ was the image of the invisible God, translated by our bro. Thomas as—

"The effulgent mirror of The Glory, and the exact likeness of His Person."

So that there would be no mistake as to what Paul meant by this new image, he proceeds to exhort the believers to put on certain qualities of mind and heart.

But first (Col. 2:23) he had mentioned the "neglecting of the body," apparently having in mind ascetic practices. The doctrine of asceticism teaches that godliness is attained by unusual practices of self-denial and abstinence in reference to the physical body for the purpose of religious discipline.

Truly this definition, interpreted aright, would be in harmony with what God requires of us in overcoming the works of the flesh and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.

But an ascetic (1) did not have a proper understanding of these things concerning sinful flesh; (2) he engaged himself in wrong practices and discipline: and (3) he gratifies the flesh after all! We believe the "Goodspeed" translation here reproduces the thought more clearly. Paul had been speaking about the world and human rules and regulations, and continues, saying—

"Such practices pass for wisdom, with their self-imposed devotions, their self-humiliation, and their ascetic discipline, but they carry with them no real distinction, they are really only a catering to the flesh" (Col. 2:23).

Therefore Paul plainly points out in chapter 3 the believers' death to the things of the world and the flesh, and their new life in Christ with their affections directed to heavenly things.

There is no doctrine of asceticism or mysticism needed to interpret what Paul means by mortifying (treating as dead) our members which are upon earth, since he enumerates: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is really idolatry (v. 5). The Colossian brethren themselves once practised these, as does all mankind living according to things earthly. Paul further tells them they must put off anger, rage and spite; rough, abusive talk must be banished from their lips, and they must not lie to one another (vs. 8-9). Here, what we are required to overcome should be perfectly intelligible and is not included in the ascetic discipline Paul warned the Colossians against.

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AND then, in connection with the new self, newly made in the likeness of its Creator, to know Him fully, where Christ is everything and in us all, Paul's words of edification are (Col. 3:12-15)—

"Put on therefore, as the elect (chosen) of God, holy and beloved, bowels (tender feeling) of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any many have a quarrel against any. **EVEN AS CHRIST FORGAVE, SO ALSO DO YE.**

"And above all these things, put on charity (spiritual love), which is the bond of perfectness (that which completes and fastens them all together).

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts; to the which also ye are called in **ONE BODY.**

"And **BE YE THANKFUL.**"

Here, too, there can be no doubt as to what Paul is saying—no need for asceticism or mysticism or self-glorifying self-affliction, but rather complete, wholehearted, thankful, JOYFUL dedication and devotion in love.

He speaks of love as the "bond of perfectness." The literal bond referred to, and which Paul has in mind, is said to be "an upper garment which completes and keeps together the rest, which, without it, would be loose and disconnected." In keeping with the new man putting on spiritual characteristics as one in olden times would put on clothing, this upper garment completes the dress and it holds all the dress in place.

How fitting that LOVE should be this bond which **COMPLETES AND HOLDS TOGETHER** the qualities of the spiritual character—without which all would be incomplete and not hold together, but fall apart!

Love, the bond of perfectness, binds and rules the Christ-Body. It is love which completes and holds the members of the Body together. We are **COMPLETE** in Christ. We are **HELD TOGETHER** in Christ.

May our hearts be comforted in reading and meditating upon this God-inspired message by the hand of Paul, our hearts be knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding. May Christ (The Glory) be in us, the Hope (promise) of Glory to us.

—N.M. Taken from January 1965 Berean
