

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Freedom In Christ”

Colossians 2:8-15

2004

Introduction

The US Embassy confirmed just a few hours ago (June 13, 2004) that American, Paul Johnson, was taken hostage by al-Qaeda forces in the Saudi capital Riyadh. His captors have said that they will deal with the hostage just as "the Americans dealt with our brothers in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib".

It must be a fearful thing to be taken hostage. And while we may think of kidnapping as something that happens far away in foreign lands, Paul warns us in Colossians that as Christians we need to be on guard against being spiritually kidnapped and enslaved by false doctrine.

As you may recall from our previous studies in Colossians, the church in Colosse was being infiltrated by false teachers who were teaching what later became known as the Colossian Heresy. In addition to simple faith in Christ ...

1. They put a heavy emphasis on dietary restrictions and religious ceremonies. (Colossians 2:11, 16-17; 3:11)
2. They were preoccupied with and worshipped angelic beings. (Col 2:18)
3. They taught that they had an exclusive, secret knowledge (Col 2:18) and special insight into the spiritual world.
4. They had a heavy reliance on human wisdom and tradition. (Colossians 2:4,8)

I The Trap Of Human Philosophy

See to it = Blepo = “Beware or be on guard” (present imperative command)

2 Peter 3:17 “... be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.”

A. Don't be taken **captive**: [Verse 8a]

Take captive = Sulagogeo = “To strip and lead away as slaves or hostages”

It is used here figuratively of carrying someone away from the freedom that comes from the truth in Christ into the bondage of doctrinal error.

1. Through hollow and deceptive philosophy

Now philosophy sounds rather harmless. After all, philosophy simply means "the love of wisdom." But Paul is specifically warning the church against “hollow” and “deceptive” philosophy.

Hollow = It is used figuratively of things: (a) “without content, without any basis, without truth, without power,” or (b) of the effects, “without result, without profit, without effect, without reaching its goal.”

Examples of hollow and deceptive philosophy:

1. Secular Humanism

Secular humanism is a worldview that is man-centered rather than God-centered. In its simplest form it views man “as the measure of all things.” Man, not God, is the standard by which all norms and values are ultimately determined -- all reality and life is centered on man. Its motto: “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

Illustration:

George Gordon Liddy, Watergate conspirator upon being released from prison in 1977: “I have found within myself all I need and all I ever shall need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in George Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me.”
The Christian Century, September 28, 1977, p. 836.

2. Darwinian Evolution

This belief system assumes that God does not exist, so it needs to arrive at an alternative explanation for creation and the development of the human species. If creation can be explained apart from a Creator, there is no longer any need for God as an explanation for the creation. Despite that its theories are unproven and are now being widely challenged on a scientific level, people remain committed to Evolutionary Theory because the only other alternative is to acknowledge a Creator.

Rom 1:21-22 “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ...”

Humanism and Darwinian Evolution have produced a variety of equally hollow and deceptive philosophies including: Existentialism, Moral Relativism, Hedonism, Communism and even Modern Psychology.

What do all these “isms” have in common? They have all rejected the love of God as revealed in the Gospel of Christ and they have all rejected the wisdom of God as revealed in His Word -- the Bible.

In the case of the Colossian believers, they were being told that while faith in Christ was important – even essential -- there were additional requirements for salvation. BTW, Christ “plus” anything is always one a sign of false teaching: In the case of the Colossian Heresy, it was Christ plus circumcision, dietary restrictions, special religious holidays, Sabbath keeping and angel worship.

Application:

- The way to avoid being misled by these non-Christian worldviews is to develop a Christian worldview through the study of God's word as we allow it to renew our minds and thinking (Rom 12:1-2).
- 2 Tim 2:15-16 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

B. The characteristics of false philosophy: [Verse 8b]

1. It depends of human **tradition**

Human tradition = Paradosis = "Jewish law or Rabbinical traditions"

Illustration: Disciples eating with unclean hands

Mark 7:5-9 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the **traditions (Paradosis)** of men." And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own **traditions (Paradosis)**!"

2. It depends on the basic principles of this world

Basic principles = Stoicheion =

- a. Things in a series or row (ABCs)
- b. It can also mean "elemental spirits" and is a reference to the demonic powers that inspire false doctrine.
 - 1 Tim 4:1 "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."

These philosophies are elementary, rudimentary truths, perpetuated by demonic powers, which have the effect of returning people to childish actions and childish views of life.

3. It is **opposed** to Christ

False teaching always focuses on demoting Jesus by either:

- a. Claiming that Jesus was a prophet, a moral teacher, even a model man – but certainly not God in the flesh.
- b. Or they regard Jesus as a supernatural being, one of many ascended masters, who taught us truth, but certainly has no power to save mankind from sin. (This is the teaching of the New Age movement)

2 Peter 2:1 "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them -- bringing swift destruction on themselves."

II The Supremacy Of Christ

- A. In Christ all the **fullness** of deity lives in bodily form [Verse 9]
 Paul said the same thing in Col 1:19 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ...”

Fullness = Pleroma = “To be filled full” (or “Jam packed”)

Deity = Theotes = “Godhead or divinity”

Lives = Katoikeo = “To permanently inhabit”

Translation: “In Christ, the complete Godhead permanently lives.”

What is Paul saying? **That Jesus Christ is nothing less than God!**

Application:

There are many who would have you believe:

1. That Jesus has God in Him or that He represents God.
2. That Jesus reveals God or points us to God.

All those statements sound noble and flattering. But all of them understate the case because Jesus IS God!! Any teaching that diminishes Christ’s identity or work is a rejection of the truth of God’s Word.

1. You have been given fullness in Christ who is: [Verse 10]

Fullness = Pleroo = “To fill full or fill completely”

Paul is saying: “You have received everything you’ll ever need in Jesus Christ, who is ...”

- a. The head over every power and authority

In the NT, “power and authority” often describes ranks of fallen angelic beings.

In Ephesians 1:19-20, Paul states that Christ, who was raised from the dead, is now “seated at [the Father’s] right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

Translation: Jesus Christ is head over all!

- B. In Christ you were also **circumcised** [Verse 11]

Gen 17:10 “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.”

Circumcision was a Jewish rite that took place on the 8th day after the birth of a baby boy where the foreskin would be cut away. This was a visible symbol of the cutting away of the sinful nature and a reminder that this child was part of God’s community of faith.

It was an outward sign of belief in the promise of God to Abraham.

But physical circumcision never saved anyone!

Most of the Colossian Christians were Gentiles who had never been physically circumcised. But they were being taught by these false teachers that they had to be circumcised to be right with God.

Acts 15:1 “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

1. In the **putting off** of the sinful nature

a. Not done by the hands of men

b. But done by Christ

Rom 2:28-29 “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.”

2. Having been **buried** with Him in baptism [Verse 12a]

Only one other place this word is used in the NT:

Rom 6:3-4 “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore **buried (Sunthapto)** with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Paul says these Gentile Christians don't need to be circumcised since what circumcision symbolized in the OT is now expressed in the NT through baptism, which illustrates our identification with the death and resurrection life of Jesus.

3. Having been **raised** with Him [Verse 12b]

a. Through your faith in the power of God

1. Who raised Christ from the dead

Col 3:1-4 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

So Paul exhorts the Colossians to beware of the deceptive philosophies of the false teachers because as believers they had already received fullness of life through Christ by their death (true circumcision), burial (true identification), and resurrection (true life from the dead) with Christ.

III The Freedom Of The Believer

- A. Our condition prior to receiving Christ: [Verse 13a]
1. We were **dead** in our sins (deeds)
 2. We were dead in our sinful nature (fallen condition)

Dead = Nekros = “A (spiritual) corpse”

Eph 2:1 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ...”

Notice that Paul didn’t say that we were handicapped. Or that we were sick or simply misguided by our social surroundings.

He says we were dead -- without any spiritual life at all!
- B. Our condition upon receiving Christ: [Verse 13b]
1. God made us **alive** with Christ

The Greek emphasizes that we can’t make ourselves alive. Only God can do that through the cross of Christ.

Eph 2:4-5 “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive (Suzoopoieo)** with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved.”
 2. God **forgave** us all our sins

Forgave = Charizomai = “To pardon or rescue unconditionally”

How many of our sins did God forgive? **ALL!** Not just the past sins, not just the present sins, not just the big sins, not just the little sins but **ALL** of them!

Sin can affect the level of intimacy we experience in our relationship with God, but not our relationship to God.

Ps 32:1-2 “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him ...”
- C. Our freedom from regulations and demonic subservience [Verse 14]
1. God **cancelled** the written code:

Cancelled = Exaleipho = “To wipe out, obliterate, erase”

Rom 10:4 “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

The law is not done away with, but the condemnation of it is, because Jesus Christ set aside our punishment by paying in His own body the full penalty for our sins through His perfect sacrifice on the cross.

 - a. With its regulations

Regulations = Dogma = “Religious ordinances or decrees”

Eph 2:14-15 “For [Christ] abolished in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.”

b. That was against us and stood **opposed** to us

Opposed = Hupenantios = “Adversarial or contrary to”

Heb 7:18-19 “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.”

c. And **nailed** it to the cross

It was common practice for the ones who were condemned to die on a cross to have their crimes posted above their head. Above the head of Jesus, from God’s vantage point, was a listing of your sin. Your “criminal record” as a sinner was settled forever, because in Jesus’ substitutionary death, God **nailed it to the cross**.

2. God conquered Satan’s forces [Verse 15]

a. He **disarmed** the powers and authorities

Satan, for a moment, thought that he had won at the cross. But Hell’s greatest “victory” was turned into a defeat that **disarmed** Satan’s legions.

Heb 2:14-15 “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil -- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

b. He made a public spectacle of them

Public spectacle = Deigmatizo = “To openly exhibit”

The public nature of their defeat makes their loss all the more humiliating.

c. He **triumphed** over them by the cross

Triumphing = Thriambeuo = “To conquer and parade in procession”

Paul declares that when Jesus died on the cross he seized these demonic powers by the throat, chained them, and dragged them in triumph behind him, like a victorious Roman general marching through the streets with his chained captives walking behind in total subjugation.

2 Cor 2:14-15 “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in **triumphal procession (Thriambeuo)** in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

Conclusion

There is an unholy alliance between Satan, his demons and the influence of the world that desires to strip you of your freedom and enslaved you once again.

Their strategy is to use:

1. Hollow and deceptive philosophies of the world.
2. False religions that either deny the deity of Christ or deny the gospel of Christ.

3. Religious traditions, rules, regulations, rites, or ceremonies -- no matter how spiritual they might appear that require something in addition to simple faith in Christ Jesus!

God made it possible for you to be free and He wants you to remain FREE!

Gal 5:1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

How should we respond to this glorious freedom?

1. **With gratitude:** We deserved death, but He made us alive!
2. **With humility:** "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!"
3. **With confidence:** "If God is for us, who can be against us?"
4. **With holiness:** Our lives now belong to Him and are to be used for His glory.
5. **With surrender:** Our only reasonable response is to live our lives to please Him!

Are you willing to accept God's plan for your rescue?

1. **Admit** and repent of your sin
Acts 3:19 "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ..."
2. **Believe** in Jesus Christ
John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
3. **Confess** Jesus as your Lord
Rom 10:9 "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
Luke 12:8-9 "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God."

A suggested prayer for a new beginning with God:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I admit I am a sinner. And today I repent of my sin. Please forgive all my sins and give me the gift of eternal life. I believe that your Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for my sins, was buried and on the third day rose from the dead. Please come into my life and be my Savior and Lord. I yield to you my allegiance and the balance of my life. Thank you for hearing my prayer and thank you for giving me new life!"

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