

Introduction

Tell the story of Steve's work colleague and his experience of going to Wellington to work.

Today we are looking at Colossians 2:8-10

'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.'

In that passage Paul is telling the Colossians that they need to be careful not to be taken in by some very clever and persuasive people. Those people had twisted the scriptures in a way that distorted the gospel, the gospel which the Colossians have believed in and been saved by, and through which amazingly, they and we have been united with Christ who is the head over all creation.

Paul was concerned that the Colossians were being deceived by fine sounding ideas. Philosophy is a way of thinking about the world, the universe, and society and determines our world view and therefore controls the way we live. We live in a world that is full of all kinds of philosophical ideas that can very subtly undermine our faith. There is an illustration which tells us that in the old day's bank tellers were trained to distinguish between counterfeit bank notes and the genuine article by becoming so familiar with the real thing, with its colour and texture and fine detail, that they would instinctively know when a counterfeit note crossed the counter. The point of the illustration is to encourage us to be so familiar with the bible and its truths that we will instinctively discern false teaching.

With respect to the letter to the Colossians it's undoubtedly beneficial to understand the philosophical thinking they were contending with because it helps us understand the important eternal issues involved which are relevant to us. But it is equally important for us to understand what's behind the thinking of the world we live in today. We need to discern the true light from the guy who only thinks he is the light and is not.

The thinking of the modern world is, as I am sure you are aware, radically different to Christian thinking. We're faced with issues quite different to those faced at Colossae in the 1st century. However, one very important similarity is that the world view of the Colossians in the 1st century and ourselves, as Christians in the 21st century should be built on the very same foundation, which is the inspired eternal word of God.

Darwinism is a fundamental element of the thinking in the world around us. As a result it's probably true to say that the majority viewpoint is that life is just an accident. We're told that any other belief is unscientific. However we have it on very good authority that the scientific evidence for the hand of a creator is almost overwhelming these days (and very different from what Darwin had) especially since the discovery of DNA and its structure. Clear evidence is present in many other scientific disciplines ranging from Astronomy to Zoology. But the world doesn't want to know the truth, which in some ways is quite frightening. Why? Because the shaky edifice of modern philosophy is built on a lie which seeks to completely rule God out of the reckoning. And anything that's built on a lie will inevitably collapse into chaos.

Sustaining the lie is why there's so much opposition to Bible in Schools, or having prayer in Parliament or why people want to change the National Anthem, because the thinking which dominates so much of our world strongly

resists even the notion of the Christian God. To acknowledge the great creator who rules over all things would send their whole crazy edifice crashing down, so it has to be fiercely defended, right or wrong.

Today's Post Modern Thinking

One outcome of all this is that the philosophy which guides much of today's thinking is what is termed post- modernism and it manifests itself in various ways. I'm not going to pretend that I have any expertise in this area. Therefore for the next part of my message I've drawn on the wisdom of Martin Iles who heads up the Australian Christian Lobby and has a much better grasp of things than I do. I quote him verbatim.

Martin Iles tells us "One significant characteristic of the present world is that there is a huge cultural clash. As a result there is a lot of debate about what love and hate are.

I think it's true to say, for example that most people think that LGBT people should have their rights after years of abuse and to do so is being loving.

Whilst many Christians think that LGBT people need to know God more intimately and that he has plans for their lives and we think we're being loving.

To love someone means to serve and look after their best interests. However, we may disagree about what their highest and best interests are.

For many - especially young people, the philosophy directly behind their thinking is this. It is centred on living for yourself, living out your identity, expressing who you really are, following the whims and desires of the inner person more or less being me, being empowered to be me and being empowered to live out who I think I am.

That is why we live in a generation of self- love, self- esteem and self- gratification. It's why we live in a generation that uses identity more than any generation ever before them. That's why we live in a generation that's started to build laws around identity because this is now the highest and most sacred thing. Once we had blasphemy laws to stop people insulting God. Now we have vilification laws to stop people insulting my identity.

Notice we've changed what is most sacred and praise worthy and this is a massive collision of world views. That is why many people think that Christians are totally barking mad. And the difference is this; the Christian actually thinks that the inner self, the desires of the heart, are the last things we should live for. The self and the identity are corrupt, they are deceitful, they're unreliable, they're restless, they're full of sin from which we need to be saved. In 1 John 2:16 the apostle calls it 'the lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the pride of life.' Jesus says in both Matthew 15: 20 & Mark 7: 23 that it is what flows out of the heart that defiles a person. There's none that does good or seeks after God, says Paul (Romans 3:10). The heart is above all things desperately wicked, says Jeremiah 17:9. We could go on. Christians have at some point in their lives been brought to the realisation which Paul describes when he wrote, 'that he is the chief of sinners' and that realisation is a moment in time in the Christian's life. And that realisation continues to live with us (or is meant to). The effect is that Christians live a life of radical humility, not pride. The world at large is what marches under the flag that says 'Pride in my identity.' That's not the Christian way. In fact it is the exact opposite. Christianity is a life of seeking God not self. 2 Cor. 5:15 tells us 'Christ died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them.' Christianity is a life of shaping ourselves into what is good, not declaring ourselves to already be good. Christianity looks up not within. Christianity puts

to death self and puts its focus on Jesus Christ. Why? Because we've come to see the truth about God and the truth about ourselves and what is truly good, and what truly needs to be changed.

Sadly we live in a society of people who have actually fallen in love with themselves to the degree that they see the basic difference and beliefs that come out of our beliefs as hate. Therefore they say our achievements are invalid and our virtue is erased. And yet it is that simple difference that really explains what is at the heart of all this. It's not hatred it's actually a different understanding of what love is. Because it is a different understanding of what is sacred and good. What is truly in our best interest. Is it the inner self or is it what God gives? It's the conflict Paul identifies in Romans 1:25 where he says the godless, 'worship and serve the creature rather than the creator.' Paul calls it the truth versus the lie." End of quote

When Paul wrote to the Colossians and told them to 'See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy,' he was thinking of a very different world to ours, but without a doubt his call should resonate with us today. And verses 9 & 10 should also resonate with us.

Fullness in Christ

In verses 9 & 10 Paul writes; 'in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ.' Ross has called this series 'Jesus' Supremacy' for a reason. Paul having warned them about deceptive philosophy hammers away again at the theme which is the pivot, the very core of his letter which is; Why, oh why would you even listen to these deceptive philosophies when all the fullness of God dwells in Jesus and Christ lives in you?! In other words why would you exchange all the glories of God for a crock of offal?

Let's now put the phrase 'you have been given fullness in Christ' under a microscope. It contains a whole cornucopia of wonderful meanings which we haven't time to explore. When something is put under a microscope the purpose is to reveal not the whole object but just to magnify a tiny part of it in great detail. So I've selected one facet and tried to tease out just a little bit of what Paul means when he says 'you have been given fullness in Christ.'

So peering through the microscope what do we see? We see Paul telling the Colossians that the Lord is their shepherd, in him they'll find everything they will ever need. He makes them to live, spiritually in a place which is like a fresh green pasture where there is plenty of food for their souls. A place where they can rest from all their works and rest in the work Christ has done for them. It's somewhere where there's plenty of fresh water and they can drink from the fountain that will never run dry. The person who drinks of that water will never thirst again. Yes they will go through days when they feel a bit weary but he will restore them if they keep trusting in him and he will supply all their needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus. Yes he'll lead them in the paths of righteousness. They won't need to go buying lotto tickets or to watch third rate TV shows. Nor will they need to drink wine to raise their spirits but they should be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they will delight themselves in the Lord he will give them the desires of their heart.

Yes they will go through some pretty dark and tough times when their faith will be tested but they shouldn't give way to fear because the Lord will be with them and the rod of his word will be a pillar they can lean on and the inner working of the Holy Spirit will strengthen them in their times of need.

There will be times when they have to face real enemies who will undoubtedly mock them and try to make fools of them and possibly persecute them but

they'll find that the Lord will be with them and that there will be fruits in abundance such as love, joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Yes they will be able to walk confidently through these trials and their lives will be like a sweet smelling fragrance amongst their brothers and sisters in Christ. But to those who don't know Christ they will be like a really bad smell, the smell of death. That will result in some of their enemies realising their own awful state of spiritual deadness and may make some seek Christ but will probably cause others to display a negative, defensive attitude, even responding violently.

Having said that, Paul wants to encourage them to not stray and to stay on the path they have embarked on because God is very generous. Evidence for knowing that is that he didn't even spare his own Son but freely gave him up for them all. That is why if they stay the course they will end up being more than conquerors through Christ who loves them. Paul is absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

And he wants them to realise that there is a lot more to come. He wants them to know that God is very merciful. Their present bodies are only a temporary place to live in, like a tent, but when that tent is destroyed, which it will be, they'll have a building from God to dwell in forever, a house no less, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. He wants them to know that they might find themselves groaning a bit from time to time because living in a tent can be difficult especially when it's getting a bit old and worn out but that should make them more earnest to make sure they're in a good place spiritually as they get ready to move. It's probably also good for them to realise that the

quality of life they live in Christ here will determine the quality of the house they will live in, in eternity.

Now we can be sure that all those things were in the back of Paul's mind when he wrote to the Colossians, because many of them are found in his other letters or elsewhere in the scriptures and they are only a little part of what 'having fullness in Christ means.' Undoubtedly those things were in his mind when he warned them not to be led down the garden path by the strange philosophies of his day. We can be sure that if he was around today he would be saying to us at Fairfield Baptist don't buy into post- modern thinking but be filled with Christ.

So the challenge to us is to discern what is driving the thinking that is behind many of the opinions that come to us through what is called the media and social networks and stick true to the eternal word of the living God which has proved to be reliable and trustworthy for at least 2,000 years. As I said at the beginning we need to be sure that the light we are living by is the true light and not coming from someone who mistakenly thinks they are a light and aren't because nobody is prepared to take them down.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. Amen