

Colossians 2:8-10 Philosophy or Christ

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Introduction

Philosophy is man's attempt to answer the great questions in life and attempt to find meaning in one's existence. Philosophy means "love of wisdom". Most of the philosophers studied in college attempt to answer these questions apart from God.

Romans 1:21-22 states to result of human philosophy, "because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became **futile in their thoughts**, and their **foolish hearts were darkened**. ²² **Professing to be wise, they became fools.**"

Today the Church is under attack here in America. One of Satan's favorite tactics is Philosophy.

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Introduction

The National Study of Youth and Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill took a close look at the religious beliefs held by American teenagers, they found that the faith held and described by most adolescents came down to something the researchers identified as

"Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism consists of beliefs like these:

1. "A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth."
2. "God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions."
3. "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about one's self."
4. "God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem."
5. "Good people go to heaven when they die."

When it came to the most crucial questions of faith and beliefs, many adolescents responded with a shrug and **"whatever."**

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Worldview Systems

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

- Be happy, feel good about self
- God engages only when necessary
- Salvation by earning God's favor
- Individual is the moral authority
- All truth is personal, subjective
- God places very limited demands on people
- People should protect themselves

Biblical Theism

- Be Obedient and Christ-like
- God is always engaged with us
- Salvation is through Christ alone
- God is the moral authority
- God gives absolute moral truths
- God expects people to live "Holy"
- Believers must engage the culture

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Introduction

Further studies by Barna indicate that this “fake Christianity” is common and growing among Americans under 50 years of age. **38% of adults** in this group adhere to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism over other worldviews including **Biblical Theism**, Secular Humanism, Postmodernism, Nihilism, Marxism (along with its offshoot, Critical Theory) and Eastern Mysticism.

Those under 50 surveyed:

- (91%) Do not believe that people are sinful and need salvation through Jesus Christ.
 - (88%) Trust sources other than the Bible for moral guidance.
- (76%) Contend that good people get to Heaven through good behavior.
- (71%) Do not believe that the Bible is true and reliable communication from God.

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Introduction

The city of Colossae also had its philosophers. The church faced the danger of being infiltrated by false teaching. Paul knew that the church needed a strong doctrinal foundation and a proper Biblical view of the world (worldview). Paul is now going to deal with the attacks of the false teachers.

Paul does not state what the false teaching was. However, one can, however, reconstruct some of the false teaching from 2:8–23. It contained elements of philosophy (2:8–15), legalism (2:16–17), mysticism (2:18–19), and asceticism (2:20–23). Like today, false teachers state that Jesus was neither God nor the source of all truth. That was the frontal attack on His deity and sufficiency.

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Colossians 2:8-10

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

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The Deficiency of Philosophy

Colossians 2:8

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Paul is concerned that those who have been transferred from Satan's domain to Christ's kingdom not become enslaved again. He voiced a similar concern in Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." He calls the Colossians to "**beware**." There must be constant watchfulness because danger is near. The church constantly faces the danger of false teachers. Jesus says in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." In Matthew 16:6 he warns, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

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Paul specifically warns them to be careful **lest anyone cheat you**. **“Cheat you”** literally means “to kidnap,” or “to carry off as booty, or spoil of war.” To Paul, it was unthinkable that those who had been ransomed and redeemed should be vulnerable by ignorance and become prisoners in the spiritual war by some spiritual predator with false doctrine.

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Paul describes the means the false teachers would use to kidnap the Colossians as **philosophy and empty deceit**. In Paul’s day, philosophy had to do with theories about God and the world and the meaning of human life. It was a broader term in Paul’s day and was used by Josephus to talk about the philosophical sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes.

Paul goes on to describe this philosophy as **empty deceit**. Though the false teachers at Colossae considered their view the epitome of wisdom, Paul dismisses it as **empty deceit**.

“Deceit” means “a deception, fraud, or trick.” The philosophy of the Colossian false teachers was not what it appeared to be. It sounded good and seduced the minds of those deceived by it, but it was a mere illusion. There is no value in such human philosophy, no matter how deeply and profoundly religious it sounds.

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Paul then gives two sources for this empty philosophy. The tradition of men is the first. Just because people have believed something and handed it down through the years does not make it true. Tradition usually serves merely to perpetuate error.

A second source for this false philosophy is the basic principles of the world. It is difficult to reconstruct the exact meaning of that phrase. The Greek word "principles" refers primarily to the letters of the alphabet. It literally means "things in a row." Paul might be describing the false belief system of the Colossian errorists as childish. To abandon biblical truth for empty philosophy is like returning to kindergarten.

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The real answers to life are not found in the traditions and philosophy of men. They are found only in Christ. Listen to what Paul says to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 1:18-20

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

²⁰ Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

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The Sufficiency of Christ

Colossians 2:8b-10

and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

These verses present the majesty of Christ's Person and His complete sufficiency. Verse 9 is perhaps the most definitive statement of Christ's deity in the epistles. It is the rock upon which all attempts to disprove Christ's deity are shattered. The Colossian heretics were saying Jesus was not God, and that statement is demonic at its core. All false teaching about Christ are Satan's distractions to keep people blinded and from coming to Salvation. It is a spiritual battle for the souls of men, women, boys and girls. Paul's defense was not to get wrapped up in their false logic. Instead, he simply points to the truth of and in our Lord Jesus Christ!

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All false systems of religion, cannot save. In Christ alone **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form**. He alone has the power to save. **Fullness** was a term used by the Colossian errorists. They believed the divine was divided in its expression among the various emanations. Paul, however, insists that all the fullness **of Deity**, not a part of it, dwells in Christ. **Dwells** means "to settle down and be at home." **Godhead** is a word emphasizing divine nature. That nature of God that continually abode in Jesus Christ was not some divine light that merely lit Him up for a while, but was not His own. He is fully God forever. And as the One possessing all the fullness of Deity, Christ **is the head of all principality and power**. He was not one of a series of lesser beings emanating from God, as the false teachers maintained. Rather, He is God Himself and thus the head over all the angelic realm.

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The Colossian false teachers apparently taught a form of philosophic dualism, believing that spirit was good and matter was evil. Hence, it was unthinkable to them that God would take on a human body. Paul counters that false doctrine by emphasizing that all the fullness of Deity dwells in Christ **bodily**. The One who took upon Himself human nature at Bethlehem will keep that humanity for all eternity. He will forever be the God-Man.

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Because Christ is who He is, we **have been made complete** in Him. His fullness is imparted to us. There is a play on words here. Jesus has the **fullness** (complete) of God and we are **complete** in Him! As a result of the Fall, man is in a sad state of incompleteness. He is **spiritually** incomplete because He is totally out of fellowship with God. He is **morally** incomplete because he lives outside of God's will. He is **mentally** incomplete because he does not know ultimate truth.

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At salvation, believers become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4) and are made complete. Believers are **spiritually** complete because they have fellowship with God. They are **morally** complete in that they recognize the authority of God’s will. They are **mentally** complete because they know the truth about ultimate reality.

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So What ...

Everyone has a choice, whether to follow human wisdom or to come to Christ. To follow human wisdom is to be kidnapped by the emissaries of Satan and his false system, which leaves a person spiritually incomplete. To come to Christ is to come to the One who alone offers completeness.

May those of us who have found Christ never doubt His sufficiency by turning aside to follow any human wisdom.

If you have not accepted Jesus’ gift of forgiveness and completeness, I hope that you would do so today!

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