

Christ has defeated the powers of darkness on the cross. We share in his power and authority over sin and death and the grave.

(4) Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises that were made to God's people. As Christians we are now the covenant people of God.

We are called to grow in maturity in Christ by getting rid of sinful practices and cultivating Christian virtues.

Christian Herter was running for reelection as governor of Massachusetts, and one day he arrived late at a barbecue. He'd had no breakfast or lunch, and he was famished. As he moved down the serving line, he held out his plate and received one piece of chicken. The governor said to the serving lady, "Excuse me, do you mind if I get another piece of chicken. I'm very hungry." The woman replied, "Sorry, I'm supposed to give one piece to each person." He repeated, "But I'm starved," and again she said, "Only one to a customer." Herter was normally a modest man, but he decided this was the time to pull rank and said, "Madam, do you know who I am? I am the governor of this state." She answered, "Do you know who I am? I'm the lady in charge of chicken. Move along." She knew her position and wasn't about to be intimidated.

CONCLUSION

Do we as Christians recognize the significant position in which we stand because of Christ? We have everything we need in Christ. Our sins are forgiven by virtue of his cross. We are already living eternal life. We do not need to turn to anything else or anyone else for our spiritual well-being. Let us heed the warning and obey the command.

ILLUSTRATED LETTERS

4. WARNING AND COMMAND

Colossians 2:16-23

INTRODUCTION

A woman pulled up at the red traffic light. When it turned to green she had difficulty getting the car into gear and driving off. Then she stalled the car. By now the light had changed back to red. Looking in her rear-view mirror she saw the line of cars behind her. When the light went green she began to panic and again missed driving off. The man in the car behind her got out and walked over to her. Embarrassed beyond words and fearing what he would say, she opened her window. "Excuse me, ma'am," he said, "But what shade of green are you waiting for?"

Traffic lights give warning and command. This is what we have in the letter to the Colossians.

WARNING

Paul starts by saying, *Watch out! Be on your guard!* A group of teachers have come into the church at Colossae and are leading church members astray. It is so dangerous that Paul uses the language of taking captives in times of war. These false teachers are 'people-stealers' who are out to trap the Colossians and take them into spiritual slavery. The false teaching that is being warned against is:

HUMANISM This teaching is **empty deceit**. It leads away from a proper understanding of Christ. It was based on human traditions but was inspired by the devil. Pagan philosophy was handed down from teacher to student and so it became acceptable. The false teachers were not bringing advanced learning as they pretended. It had to do with astrology. Life is governed by the stars. If you were born under a lucky star you will succeed, but if you were born under an unlucky star there is no way you will find happiness. You must not take any important decision without consulting the stars. Astrology keeps you in the grip of an unyielding determinism. Do not do anything until you have read your horoscope! Everything is fixed by the stars. There was one way out. The false teachers said they had secret knowledge to give the right password, the right formulae to release you. Jesus can't do that. He can help in many things, but not that fatalism of the stars. It is the old heresy that surfaces again and again: Christ...and.... You need more than what's in the Bible. You need more than what Christ has done. No you do not.

Col 2:9 - 10 ⁹Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the

universe without him. ¹⁰When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.

REGULATIONS The false teachers also wanted to impose strict regulations; do this do not do that. Some aspects of pagan philosophy encouraged asceticism: punish the flesh to free the spirit. There was also a prohibition on eating certain foods in OT. This false teaching was urging a return to the food laws of the OT. This had been a very real issue in the church as it moved from Judaism and Gentiles came into the church. Peter had to learn the lesson that he must not consider unclean that which God has made. The Council of Jerusalem decreed that Jewish food regulations should not be imposed on Gentile converts. The false teachers wanted to make the Christian life one of rules and regulations. Fasting and abstaining will make you more spiritual. You will have a heightened awareness of the spirit-world, open to visions and trances. Here are two dangers.

1. It can create a spiritual elite. I fast more than you; I see more visions than you do. Therefore, I am a better Christian than you. We, therefore, judge other Christians to be defective.

2. Instead of centering on Christ, it makes our own experience and philosophy the guiding principle. We are not in the same situation as the Colossians, but our danger is that we could be led into New Age thinking. New Age emphasizes human potential and is fascinated with extraterrestrial beings, UFOs, astrology, magic, witchcraft, ecological concerns and practices like channeling spirits from the beyond. It also brings together and tries to blend many experiences so we can transcend and go beyond the limitations of everyday life. It looks to forces that might be available to help us control our own destiny. If Christ, is given attention, he is seen as one of many manifestations of the all-pervasive divine consciousness.

Col 2:20 - 23 ²⁰You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, ²¹“Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”? ²²Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. ²³These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.

RITUALISM The false teachers gave an over-important place to ritual, especially in observing special days. **Festivals, new moon and sabbaths** were all Jewish observances going back to commands in the OT. Paul makes it clear in a number of places that the Christian is freed from such legal requirements and obligations.

The false teachers at Colossae were not just saying there must be a return to Jewish observance. All these are related to the spiritual powers of the stars that they say govern our lives. Cosmic powers controlled the calendar making certain festivals including the new moon and the sabbath as required observances. These rituals are not about honoring and worshiping God, but attempts to appease the spiritual powers.

It is not wrong to observe certain days or perform certain rituals. What is wrong is when there is no spiritual counterpart. When Christmas is only a time for over-spending, over-eating and over drinking, then, as the Puritans did in C17, it should be abolished. Ritual must not restrict and confine, for the Christian is the freest of all people.

Christianity is too free and exuberant to be trained down to `times and seasons'.... Its feast is daily, for every day is holy; its moon never wanes, and its serene tranquility is an unbroken Sabbath. (Eadie)

Quakers do not observe the sacraments. They believe that the whole of life is sacramental. No particular observance or practice is more sacred than another. They do not regard Sunday as more holy than other days. All days are the Lord's days, all are holy. Every meal at every table is the Lord's Supper. Not only Quakers, but all Christians, should remember Christ every time bread is broken.

R W Dale of Birmingham, England was writing an Easter sermon, and when half-way through, the thought of the risen Lord broke in upon him as it had never done before. "Christ is alive," I said to myself; "alive! and then I paused ;— alive! and then I paused again; alive! Can that really be true? living as really as I myself am? I got up and walked about repeating 'Christ is living!' 'Christ is living! At first it seemed strange and hardly true, but at last it came upon me as a burst of sudden glory; yes, Christ is living. It was to me a new discovery. I thought that all along I had believed it; but not until that moment did I feel sure about it. I then said, 'My people shall know it; I shall preach about it again and again until they believe it as I do now.'" For months afterwards, and in every sermon, the Living Christ was his one great theme; and there and then began the custom of singing in Carr's Lane on every Sunday morning an Easter hymn.

COMMAND

Remember who Christ is and what he has done.

(1) He is exalted over all creation, and Lord of all including the cosmic powers.

(2) Through Christ, God has secured redemption and reconciliation for all who put their trust in him.

(3) Remember you are “in Christ”. There is a relationship and solidarity with him in his death and resurrection. We are released from the hold that any spiritual powers may have over us to separate us from God.