

Place: Lurgan Baptist 9:12:2012

COMPLETE IN HIM

Reading: Colossians 2:8-23

7. BELIEVER BEWARE

Steve Wagers tells the story of the Andrea Doria. As it moved swiftly through the North Atlantic, patches of fog made the darkness seem even deeper. In contrast, the atmosphere aboard the Italian luxury liner was light and festive. It was one big party. The final parties of the voyage, in anticipation of the next day's docking in New York, were in progress. But the sharp, unexpected lurch of the ship, coupled with a grinding crash and flickering lights, spread panic among the passengers. Then the ship stabilized, and the lights burned bright and steady. The panic of the passengers ebbed, and a deceptively reassuring voice was reported to have come over the liner's intercom system. Again and again it was repeated, "*This is no emergency.*" But, a thirty-foot slash in the ship's side, where she had been fatally stabbed by the sharp bow of the Swedish liner Stockholm, remained open to the sea. The Andrea Doria sank, and fifty people died on that summer night in 1956 all because of a danger that was neglected.

It seems as if the apostle Paul had no doubt about the reality of the emergency in the church at Colosse. The situation called for immediate and drastic action. The

church was about to be destroyed from the inside by false teaching. Thus, Paul sets forth the sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ to meet every need in the life of the believer. In essence he says "***Believer beware.***" We pick it up in the (2:4) where Paul says, "*And this I say lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.*" Three more times in this chapter you find a similar statement. Look at (2:8) "*Beware lest any man spoil you*," in (2:16) "*Let no man therefore judge you,*" and (2:18) "*Let no man beguile you*," Now what does that little phrase tell you ? It tells you that these false teachers who had come to the church at Colosse wanted the Colossian believers to accept what can only be called additions to Christ. They were basically saying you need something in addition to Jesus Christ. The basic premise of those false teachers was this. Jesus Christ is not a unique Saviour, Jesus Christ is not an all sufficient Savior, you need something in addition to Jesus Christ, or you need a substitute for Jesus Christ. You see, these false teachers,

1. Wanted to teach an additional philosophy: (2:8)

2. Wanted to introduce a system of astrology: (2:8)

3. Wanted to impose circumcision on Christians:

(2:11)

4. Wanted to lay down ascetic rules and regulations:

(2:16, 20-23)

5. Wanted to introduce the worship of angels: (2:17)

No wonder Paul says "*Believer beware.*" (2:8) You see, in this chapter Paul is dealing with the proposed substitutes for Jesus Christ, those philosophies, those

theologies, those doctrines, those beliefs that would say that you need something more than Jesus Christ. You see, here in this section which lies at the heart of the epistle Paul deals with four substitutes for Christ that are proposed. Look at the first one.

(1) THE PERIL OF INTELLECTUALISM

Do you see the word “*philosophy*,” in (2:8) ? This is the only time in the New Testament that it occurs. It simply means “*the love of wisdom*.” Now the word philosophy in and of itself is not a bad thing. I mean had Paul not one of the most brilliant minds in all the world ? What about Augustine ? What about Jonathan Edwards ? You see, you do not have to check in your brains at the door when you enter in to the Christian faith. You do not have to assassinate your brains to believe the Bible and to believe in the simple gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I heard about an old boy that prayed one time, he said, “*Lord, I thank you for my ignorance and I pray you’ll make me ignoranter.*” My God does not put any, any special merit on ignorance in the Christian faith. Bless God, for the apologists in our midst who can defend the faith. But Paul is speaking here of pagan philosophy. He is setting before us,

(a) THE EMPTINESS OF GODLESS PHILOSOPHY:

For he describes it as “*vain deceit, empty deception,*” Philippians translates it “*high sounding nonsense,*” and

that for two reasons. To begin with it’s the tradition of men and not the truth of God’s Word. The word “*tradition*,” really means to give over, or to hand down, and it means the passing of human speculation down from one generation to the next. Moreover, Paul says it’s “*after the rudiments of the world.*” The word “*rudiments*,” is a very interesting word, it really means one in a series of things. Like for instance, one, two, three, four, five, six. Four is one in a series of numbers. Or like A, B, C, D, E. C is one in a series of letters. And so rudiment’s means the basic elements of the thing. Sometimes it was used to refer to the elemental spirits that people believed ruled the world. There were people who actually believed that the heavenly bodies and the stars ruled the world. Now nobody would believe that today would they ? Well, how many millions of people every day consult the horoscope because they believe the stars have something to do with human conduct ? Still again, Paul says this philosophy is “*not after Christ.*”

It leads people away from Jesus Christ and, the Lord Jesus is the only way to God, He is the only way to heaven, and you will never be saved unless you come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Godless philosophy. You see, pagan philosophy is a philosophy that seeks to find the answers to the great questions of life apart from God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. It has no room for God, it has no room for the Bible, it has no room for the cross of Jesus Christ in its system of thinking. Pagan philosophy tries to answer the great basic questions of life. By the way, there are only three of them did you

know that ? Philosophy through the ages has sought to answer three questions. Question number one. *Where did I come from ? That's the question of human dignity.* Question number two. Why am I here ? That's the *question of human duty.* Question number three. *Where am I going ? That's the question of human destiny.* My those are the three basic questions in life, and pagan philosophy tries to answer those three questions apart from God, the Bible, or Jesus Christ. So Paul is setting forth here (a) and over against that he sets forth,

(b) THE COMPLETENESS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY:

I mean do you see the **Saviour** here ? Do you see **His Deity:** “ *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead,* ” is that not what the false teachers at Colosse were denying ? My the sum total of who God is resides permanently in Jesus Christ. “ *All the fullness,* ” of the divine essence dwells in Jesus Christ. He was God, He is God, and He ever shall be God. Do you see **His Humanity:** “ *for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, in a body.* You see, the incarnation is the tremendous truth that Jesus Christ, who is fully God, became a man in human form. Do you see **His Authority:** for He was not one of a series of lesser beings emanating from God rather He is God Himself and thus the head over all the angelic realm. But what has all this talk about “ *fullness,* ” to do with the Colossian believers ? Well, do you see the **Saint** here ? “ *And ye are complete in him,* ” Same word translated fullness in (2:9) is translated complete in (2:10) You

are filled with all fullness in Him. Why do I want anything else then if I've got it all in the Lord Jesus ? My when you get Christ you get it all. Why we have entitled this series “ *Complete in Him,* ” Why ? Because when we come to know the Lord Jesus as our personal Savior, He becomes everything we ever need to live the life we need to live. My life is not complete in rituals, routines and religion. My life is complete in Jesus Christ. My life is not complete in what I do, what I say, where I go, or what I wear. My life is complete in Jesus Christ alone. William Randolph Hearst, was the renowned millionaire newspaper publisher. He was an avid collector of rare pieces of art. Over the years, he had collected tremendously beautiful works of art that cost millions of dollars.

One day, he read about a particular collection of art work that he wanted desperately to get his hands on. He notified his agent, and told him to find those rare works of art. His agent began a world-wide search for the collection. He went to sales exhibits, trade shows and art museums looking for these pieces. In about a month the agent had found the art that he was sent to look for. *He found it in William Randolph Hearst's own warehouse.* Mr. Randolph had the art the whole time. My are looking for treasures you possess but you don't even know it ? Are you looking in every place except the only place that it can be found, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why don't you let Him be to you, for you, through you and in you what He wants to be ? You see, He's all you need. (1)

(2) THE PERIL OF RITUALISM

Do you remember Constantine ? He declared Christianity to be the state religion ? The result was whole masses of unconverted people were added to the church and pagan ritual and ceremony of pagan religions was now moved into the Christian faith. And so, you see, all of the special days that were observed for pagan gods now became days of Christian observance. *Ceremonies that were used to worship pagan gods now were incorporated into Christian worship of the Christian God.* And sacraments became necessary to salvation and holy days became necessary in order to obtain holiness. It was indeed a dark day for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ because ritualism became a vital part of the Christian faith from that time on. Now of course ritual in and of itself is not wrong, there is nothing wrong with a ritual. I mean, when we have a marriage there is a ritual that we go through. We say certain words, we ask the couples to do certain things, that is the ritual of marriage. So ritual in and of itself is not the problem.

For instance the Jewish people had all kinds of rituals and those rituals had been given by God himself. That's the background of what we find in these verses here. But Paul now says you no longer need the shadow when the substance has come. Look at (2:17) My the model is useless when the real thing is available. *Ritual has its valid place but the danger comes when you turn ritual into ritualism.* Ritualism is excessive devotion to the rituals instead of the reality that the

rituals are intended to convey. That's why some people get all hung up on certain trappings of worship, that's why some people get very occupied with burning candles and things like that. Vance Havner used to say. *" when they light the candles it's a pretty good sign the power has gone off."* My is this not the danger of ritualism ? You see,

(a) ***RITUALS CANNOT SAVE THE SINNER:***

Nobody can be saved by observing ritual. It is not ritual that saves. Here Paul uses the example of circumcision. This was a sign of God's covenant with the Jewish people. (Gen 17:9-14) Though it was a physical operation it had a spiritual significance. Here's what God said to the nation of Israel, *" Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart and be no more stiffnecked."* (Deut 10:16) God was saying the outward ritual of circumcision is intended to convey a heart matter. But do you know what happened ? Circumcision was used by some as an essential to salvation. Do you recall (Acts 15) ? *" Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved."* Do you see what they had done ? They had taken the ritual and they had turned the ritual into the means of salvation. Paul also speaks here of baptism. You see, baptism pictures our union with Christ. It symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. (Rom 6:3-4) But some people latch on to the symbol and say you've got to be baptized in order to be saved. My it's the blood and not the water that saves. You are not baptized

in order to be saved you are baptized because you are saved. And so, you see, ritual can't save the sinner.

(b) RITUALS CANNOT SANCTIFY THE SAINT:

That's why Paul says in (2:16) You see, these false teachers were telling the Colossians that it was not enough to have Christ they needed to keep the Jewish ceremonial law in relation to **diet** (Lev 11:1 Acts 10:9 Rom 14:17) and in relation to **days**. (Lev 23:1 Num 28:11) But Paul says they are “ *a shadow of things to come*. ” A shadow does not exist in and of itself. It is caused by a material object or person. It has reality only in that it points to the substance which formed it. Thus, all of the observances of the old covenant simply shadowed the main object, the Lord Jesus Christ. These things found their ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Roy Laurin put this matter into perspective, when he said,

Any system, professing to be Christian which makes days and diets a condition of salvation or even a virtue after salvation, is doing so in the face of scripture.

My don't let anybody tell you that by keeping a certain day is going to make you any holier. You see, true spirituality does not consist merely of keeping external rules but of having an inner relationship with Jesus Christ. (1) (2)

(3) THE PERIL OF MYSTICISM

This may be defined as the pursuit of a deeper or higher subjective religious experience. The peril that Paul had in mind here was Oriental mysticism, the belief that a person can have experience with the spiritual world completely apart from the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Now what Paul does is what he's done all through this chapter. Paul puts the two alternatives before us, he shows us the false on the one hand and the true on the other hand. He shows us on the one hand fantasy and he shows us on the other hand reality. You see,

(a) THE ADVOCATES OF MYSTICISM:

Where wrapped up in a false humility that was actually an expression of pride. Here's what they were saying, “ *I am not good enough to come directly to God so I will start with one of the angels*. ” My trying to reach God the Father through anyone, or anything other than His Son, Jesus Christ is idolatry. Here were false teachers engaging in the worship of angels thus denying the truth that there is “ *one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus*. ” (1 Tim 2:5 Matt 4:10 Rev 19:10 22:9) In addition to all this they were taking their stand on visions they had seen. My is this not where we are today ? You see, there are those who claim that they have special knowledge that other people don't have, and that they have visions that other people don't have, and they have access to information that other people don't have. Now of course in New Testament times there was no Bible like we have today. They had only the Old Testament the New Testament books were

in the process of being written. So there were men who were gifted to be prophets who were able to speak the Word of God. *Evidently the Lord gave them direct revelation out of heaven because the Bible had not been completed, the Word of God had not been finished in the canon.* (Acts 11:28) But when the final word of the Revelation was written, God put a full stop. My here is the question is the Bible enough or do we need more ? Well, God places a curse on anybody that will add to the Word of God or take away from the Word of God. You see, God has completed His revelation to man and I've got news for you, there are no new revelations going on, God put it all right there in the pages of the Bible. You see,

(b) THE ANSWER TO MYSTICISM:

Is Christ. Look if you will at (2:19) You see, spiritual growth comes from union with Christ. The Lord Jesus said, *" Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine no more can ye except ye abide in me."* (Jn 15:4) My is there not a tendency in these last days to move from objectivity to subjectivity, to shift the focus from Christ to experience ? Is this not what the Charismatic Movement does ? It often puts Scripture in the background and visions and revelations in the foreground. That's you young folk need to be careful as to where you go, who you listen, and what you hear.

(4) THE PERIL OF ASCETICISM

An ascetic is someone who lives a life of self denial and even self mortification in order to become more spiritual. Ascetic practices were popular during the Middle Ages. Sleeping on hard beds, whipping oneself not speaking for days perhaps years. I heard about this monk who enlisted in this monastery where you were just allowed to speak two words each year. The first year they brought him to the head monk for his two words. Do you know what he said ? *" Bed hard."* Another year went round and they brought him again, the second time. Do you know what he said, *" Food lousy."* After the third year he was brought in again and this time he said, *" I quit."* The head monk said, *" I am not surprised because you have done nothing but complain since you come here."* Asceticism or we might call it legalism for there is a link between the two for both subject themselves to rules and regulations. *" Touch not, taste not, handle not."* (2:12) Legalism makes conformity to man made rules the measure of spirituality. I think we could say that,

(a) LEGALISM MAJORS ON THE NEGATIVE:

Legalism is the attempt to live the Christian life on the basis of a series of rules or regulations, it is interpreting the Christian life on the basis of the things that you do not do. In other words legalism is saying that if you don't do certain things then that makes you a good Christian. Now is this not what these false teachers were doing ? They were introducing man made rules which they said promoted spirituality ? This was a religion of don't. *" Touch not, taste not, handle not."*

(2:21) It reminds of a little boy who was introduced to his new school teacher. The teacher asked him for his name, and the young lad replied, “ *My name is Don’t,* ” The confused teacher said, “ *Son, you have misunderstood my question. I asked, what is your name ?* ” The frustrated lad replied, “ *No I understood your question. My name is Don’t.* ” *Whatever I do, my parents are constantly saying, “ Don’t Don’t Don’t Don’t. So, my name is Don’t.* ” I wonder is that how I how you look at the Christian life ? As a series of “ *Do’s and Don’ts.* ” In Finland apparently if you are a good Christian you don’t whistle. For others good Christians don’t wear makeup, lipstick, rouge or that other pancake mix. David Johnston writes, “ *I used to wonder why bowling was so evil while being a dried up old soured puss was ok.* ” Charles Swindoll in his book, ‘ *The Great Awakening,* ’ tells this story.

I was conversing with a man I greatly admire. He is a Christian leader in a position that carries with it heavy and extensive responsibility. He said he was grieved on behalf of a missionary family he and his wife had known for years. The legalism they had encountered again and again on the mission field from fellow missionaries was so petty, so unbelievably small-minded, that they had returned to the States and no longer planned to remain missionaries. He said it was over a jar of peanut butter, that’s right, a jar of peanut butter. Swindoll said, “ I thought he was joking, to which he responded, ‘ No, it’s no joke at all.’ ” (a) But,

(b) LIBERTY MAJORS ON THE POSITIVE:

What’s the positive ? Union with Christ. Do you see how Paul puts in (2:20) ? You see, through our union with Christ we are set free from man made rules designed to produce spirituality. Man made rules can appear wise and pious but they have no value for sanctification. There are things that believers should and most do for their progress in sanctification and one of them is to realize their spiritual position. “ *If ye be dead with Christ,* ” (2:20) My Christianity, spirituality, and holiness is a matter of the heart. It is not based on the outside, but it is based on the inside. This is not to suggest that a Christian should be given over to licence. That is the position which says because you are saved by grace it really doesn’t matter what you do or do not do. No. ***It’s not Legalism, its not Licence, its Liberty.*** (Gal 5:1)

My do you realize that you are a dead man ? Not only that but we are risen with Christ. (3:1) We’ve got a brand new life. You see, legalism says this is the way you’ve got to live, don’t do this because of an outward set of rules. But Christianity says I don’t have to live that way any more, I don’t want to live that way any more for I’m saved. My there are some things I don’t do simply because I’m just saved, I don’t want to do them any more. **You see, Christianity is not being inhibited by rules it’s being inhabited by a Ruler.** “ *Christ in you the hope of glory,* ” (1:27) I have the blessed Holy Spirit on the inside who enables me to do that which is right. My have you ? And are you allowing Him to have His way in your life ?

