

After giving us the command to walk in the same manner as we received Christ Jesus the Lord, Paul wastes no time in also giving us a command to be diligent to guard ourselves against those who would attempt to deceive us by their claims that we need to gain “more” of God or “more fullness of God” through any other means than our union with Christ Jesus the Lord.

**And our vulnerability is in the desire to bridge the gap between our present experiences in this body with the promises of God in Christ Jesus.** This is a real tension that we all experience, and this experience of frustration, mentioned by the apostle in his letter to the Romans as “we groan within ourselves awaiting our adoption, the redemption of our bodies,” between the “already” of our union with Christ Jesus and the “not yet” of our future hope of glory, can lead us to be fooled because we genuinely, and rightly, want the glory NOW.

What I mean by this is that our union with Christ, the hope of glory, is largely tied to waiting for its completion at His return. We still await the experience of it, and this is the plan and determination of the God who has done it. There is, within the gospel work of God through Christ Jesus, this “already and not yet” aspect. That is, God has already achieved everything necessary for the fullness of our salvation “in Him”, and thus it is certain and complete. And yet, we do not yet experience this fullness, because we are still living in a world where sin is present and powerful, even though it has been defeated and mastered by the risen Christ.

Paul told the Philippians of this same struggle, based upon his union with Christ Jesus, when he wrote,

**“...because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness – a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ's faithfulness. My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained this – that is, I have not already been perfected – but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.”**

It is this strain of suffering, this frustrating futility, this groaning grief, which makes us vulnerable to empty philosophies which promise escape such tension and suffering in this present time.

Such deceivers promise power *today* which God does not promise *today*. They twist His words and try to deliver tomorrow's blessings to be experienced today by means other than Christ Jesus the Lord and the sharing of His sufferings. And we want to avoid suffering, so we are apt to be manipulated by those who promise it, even in "empty" and fraudulent ways. **Therefore, we are to "be on the lookout!" for such ones *from within the Church.***

Such a danger is not new. Let me read for you an address given by a well-known preacher:

"It is a serious step, in these days, even from the worldly point of view, to become a Christian. There was a time, not so very long ago, when the faithful Christian was supported by public opinion or at least by the united opinion of the visible church. But that time has gone by. The man who today enters upon the Christian life is enlisting in a warfare against the whole current of the age.

Of course the conflict can be avoided. It can be avoided if the one who professes Christianity adapts his message to the desires of those who are about him, if he examines various types of religious experience...and chooses the one which he thinks best adapted to the modern world. There is certainly no offense in such a Christianity as that....But very different is the case if the Christian proclaims without fear or favor the gospel that is contained in the Word of God. A Christian who proclaims such a gospel is bound to face the opposition not only of the world but increasingly, I fear, of the church.

I cannot tell you that the sacrifice will be light: it is as serious thing to stand against the whole current of an age; it is a serious thing to be despised and hated by the generality of one's fellow men. That that is increasingly the lot of the true Christian today. He will not, indeed, be inclined to complain; for he has something with which all that he has lost is not worthy to be compared; and he

knows that despite temporary opposition the ultimate future belongs to him and to his Lord. But for the present he is called upon to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. It can hardly be said that unworthy motives of self-interest can lead a man to enter into a calling in which he will win nothing but reproach.”

**-J. Gresham Machen, 1929**

It is easy to forget the promise of the Helper, the Comforter, the Encourager, of the Holy Spirit given to us “as a down payment” of that future experience in the presence of God, when sin is no longer present and the curse is finally reversed in the entire Cosmos. It is easy to cease to be satisfied with the down payment and be fooled into believing that we can have the whole inheritance now, but *not according to the Christ*.

Thus, the apostle gives us some tools by which we can keep a lookout over our lives to avoid being deceived and led away from the Christ in a futile search for fullness and completeness outside of Him and His power and His sufficiency and His cross.

**The first thing to notice is the warfare language that Paul employs here.** Such fraudulent tactics and means are not harmless or impotent. They are dangerous and evil. Paul describes the result of such deception here when uses the word, “takes captive.” It is a word which means to carry off a prisoner of war, or to haul away the spoils of war. The danger implicit in such a metaphor is self-explanatory. To be deceived by any attempt to gain the fullness of God’s intended blessings apart from or in addition to the person and works of Jesus Christ the Lord, is to be captured and dragged off into enemy territory. It is the opposite of the fullness of wisdom, it is “empty deceit.” It is the opposite of power, it is to be captured.

And this warning applies to “anyone” who might do so. There is no particularization here of the type of person whom we must beware. This is vital, because we tend to give the benefit of the doubt to those who are winsome, or likable, or intelligent, or compassionate, or whatever appeals to some set of values which we find very important. Yet, the most dangerous wolves aren’t the wolves who come dressed as wolves, or even the wolves dressed as sheep. The most dangerous wolves are the wolves

which come dressed as shepherds to be trusted and followed and heeded, because they sound smart, passionate, compelling, learned, wise, and faithful. It is these supposed shepherds, those who tout their love of wisdom, but who go on deceiving and being deceived, by teaching things, both publically and/or privately, not according to Christ.

It is these respectable leaders who are more likely to snatch you away from the gospel as their prey and take you into the slavery of error and sin.

And the weapon by which such deceivers do this is philosophy, which is really just empty deceit, futile in its capabilities and hiding its enslaving nature. In other words, what promises fullness, those philosophies which claim to get you closer to God, more of God, the fullness of God, are in reality the opposite of fullness, and lead to the opposite result – they lead you way from the full fountain of living water, bubbling over in its sufficiency, to the broken cisterns which cannot hold water, hollow and empty and stagnant because they are insufficient and impotent.

**Now, a few words about the term, “philosophy.”** First, it is a very general term used to refer to a general love of knowledge, which is literally what the term means, *philo + Sophia*, love + wisdom. It came to be used to describe philosophical teachings, schools of thought, traditions and worldviews, and even religions. Such systems always involved teachings which claimed to describe the Real underneath the visible, the ultimate foundation of all which is true and existential, even the elemental principles of reality and their relationships. In other words, the biggest questions of reality.

Such views attempt to answer the same questions which God has answered in Christ Jesus, but without submission to Him as Lord or dependence upon Him as the Christ.

There are a multitude of such philosophies, such empty deceits, so it would be impossible to mention them all, but here are some broad strokes of such deceits. First, there are many such worldviews which deny the necessity of Christ Jesus altogether. I am not going to cover those, because they are not as deceptive to you who already recognize the necessity of Jesus. The deceptive philosophies are the one which try and claim the necessity of Christ for salvation, but then add some other means or methods to “fullness” or “deeper relationship”, or the like, with God.

You see, this whole threat lies in the context of means and methods, the “how” we can obtain God’s blessings now, between the “already” and “not yet.” And the second reason that we are vulnerable to these deceptions is that we desperately want to control our own fate. We want something to boast about, to look back on and say, “I did it!” You cannot manipulate Christ. Therefore, impersonal means and methods become much more tantalizing to lean on. Philosophies of achievement tempt us.

And in order to make our achievement, our attainment, more attainable, such deceptions must minimize some aspect of God’s character and some aspect of the sufficiency of Jesus.

**Any so-called Christian movement, or denomination, or group which hides one aspect of God’s character, whether that be love or justice, mercy or wrath, is a dangerous deception which can lead many astray.** This is the problem with the modern evangelical church in America today. It denies the holiness of God, the justice of God, the supreme and ultimate authority of God over all aspects of our personhood and turns God into a jilted lover, a devoted doctor, and a congenial grandfather who really wants us to be happy by fulfilling our deepest desires *and obtain our own dreams*, but without changing our dreams to be in line with His. It elevates God’s love over and above His other attributes.

Therefore, you have those who say that they are Christians, but who continue to walk in the sins for which Jesus had to die, *and justify them as God’s desire*. Those who embrace that which God has revealed to be so heinous that His Son had to die to rescue us from them.

You have those who call themselves “Christians” and claim that sexual relationships outside of God’s design of heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman are honored by God and should be fully pursued. You also have heterosexual “Christians” who deny the Christ-centered icon of marriage and who simply have sexual relationships with those to whom they are not fully committed to in marriage. It is justified as acceptable Christian behavior and *the means to the fullness of life*.

Now, at the root of each of these is a denial of the authority of Christ Jesus, revealed in the Scriptures, and, therefore, a denial of the Christ. That is, they are according to some philosophy based upon the worldview of man, and though they express a faith in Jesus, it is not Jesus the sin-bearing, sanctifying Christ, and the “fullness” of life which they subscribe is not according to the Christ for whom sin was such an egregious and heinous offense against God and His creation that He had to shed His innocent blood to atone for it, and who alone reigns with perfect wisdom and knowledge and righteousness.

In our pride, we assume that Jesus must be like us, when instead we are called to submit ourselves to Him and His ways, even in the most deeply conditioned part of our souls. You see, when a person comes to Jesus Christ, he or she must come on God’s terms, not their own terms. We don’t come to barter with Christ, we come to “receive Him as Christ Jesus the Lord.”

Yet, for many today, the empty and deceptive philosophy takes upon itself the name of Jesus, but subtly makes the entire gospel about God meeting my needs, God healing my sickness, God serving my goals, God fulfilling the desires of my heart, rather than God being completely and utterly merciful in exposing my sin by His law in order to rescue me from it, to unite me to His Son to answer for them, and by His Spirit to transform me into the likeness of Jesus in moral purity and humble submission and obedience to the Father as He transforms the desires of my heart to come into line with His.

While the deception of yesteryear may have been to deny God’s love and mercy, and to run fully upon one’s own moral aptitude and works, today you have those who like the mercy and love and forgiveness of God, but who deny the absolute authority of God as revealed in His Word. Instead, you have many deceptions today which appeal to impressions about God that they have in their heart, who base their teaching upon intuitions which they depend upon as God’s voice, but which depart from the central tenet of the Scriptures, the authority of God and His self-glorifying work of bringing all things under the lordship of His Son. Anyone who claims, “God spoke to me in my soul,” or, “I heard God speak to me” should be immediately subjected to the test of the Word of God in the Scriptures.

In fact, if you listen to one of the Christian radio stations for very long, you will find a lot of songs about God's love, but not much about God's justice and the need for repentance and submission to Him. We want *positive* Christian music, by which we mean not so much about the severity and detriment of sin, but only about good feelings about life and love and health and victory and power and greatness and destiny. In talking about hope, we have hidden why we have become hopeless to begin with.

Paul mentioned a few paragraphs earlier in the letter that we need to be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. How often do we hear songs about this? How often do we pray like this? Be on the lookout for what is missing in such Christian claims, because every effective deception leaves out some truth, and we are the weaker for it, and are in danger of being carried away into total apostasy when we detach ourselves from the Christ of the Scriptures for some impression or intuition claiming to be God's voice, even the result of such intuition is kind, or gentle, or compassionate.

Some philosophies add to Christ, teaching that we must gain something which Christ Jesus did not complete. Whether it's the Roman Catholic teaching of venial sins and mortal sins, purgatory, or the expiating power of the Eucharist, the philosophy is that fullness with God is finished by your efforts, by your faithfulness, by your works, rather than by Christ Jesus.

The Mormon doctrines are similar, the Jehovah's Witnesses also. Progressively evangelical churches are doing the same, whether through legalism or mysticism. Such so-called Christian sects deny the sufficiency of Christ Jesus, both existentially and practically, "Christ alone" is rejected, and lead many away to destruction by their additions. Be on the lookout.

**Because note the three-time repeated phrase "according to." This phrase expresses the grounds, or reasons, for such philosophies.**

First, He says to beware of worldviews which are "according to the traditions of men". Now, not all traditions are bad. In fact, Paul praised the Corinthians for "holding firmly to the traditions as I passed them onto you," and warned the Thessalonians not to

tolerate the idle behavior of those who did not work because it was “not in accordance with the tradition that you received from us.” Therefore, it is not traditions that are bad, but rather “traditions of men” which are not the adequate basis for any godly wisdom.

**Traditions are simply the explanations and expectations based upon commonly shared belief of what is true.** As such, traditions which are based upon the malleable and sporadic values of man will waver and drift by every wave of doctrine and the cunning behaviors of those who can persuade and deceive others. This is the way of fallen man and the sway of the enemy of God in the garden. “Did God say?” is still the first step in the traditions of men. It questions the absolute nature of God’s Word, and ultimately of God’s Christ.

And such traditions of men, particularly those which deceive Christians, are not irreligious traditions, but religious ones. Those that claim spiritual power, spiritual strength, spiritual blessings, by absconding some truth of God’s Word, but then altering it, either through addition or subtraction, to mean something else. It is these “Christianized” traditions of men, then, of which we must be aware.

For example, the tradition of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in our hearts to God is a command in Scripture, a tradition handed down to us. Yet, such singing can subtly swing away from exalting our Father through Christ Jesus the Lord and become a search for good religious feelings and some religious experience of power or catharsis through music, rather than exalting Christ. Singing good words, but relying on the mantra of those words, and laser lights, and fog machines, etc. can lead us to the wavering pursuit of good feelings and exciting experience more than the knowledge and wisdom of God found in the person of Jesus Christ.

Or, the command to give a cup of water in Jesus’ name can deceptively move to become a tradition of man when “in Jesus name” becomes secondary. What once was an ambassadorial role of relieving not only a parched throat, but a soul in danger of the blazing punishment of Hell, the serious responsibility of representing the King with the King’s message of salvation from sin’s judgement through the King’s death and

resurrection, becomes the mere alleviation of a parched mouth as the King's primary message. Subtle. Dangerous. Futile.

Now, it's not like such gifts of water are bad. They are not! They are gracious and kind and good. But they are not the gospel. It's not that having good religious feelings is bad. But they are not worship. If you love me, you will obey me, said Jesus. Worship is not good religious feelings, it is the highest love of the heart...and love is often death to oneself for the honor and flourishing of another. It is worth it, for God is worth it (hence, 'worth-ship'), but it is not always good feelings.

Therefore, we must ask the question of any Christian teaching, "Does this center on man's needs or God's glory?" This is a question that we use when we choose curriculum at EBF or select a speaker at our gatherings. Does this teaching make much of man or much of Christ? Do we leave our gathering boasting of God's grace in Christ Jesus, joyfully submitting ourselves to His authority, or do we leave here boasting of someone else, or just feeling good, or guilty? Is the point of my illustration, as a preacher, make me out to be the hero, or Christ?

Because there are ways in which a teacher or preacher tells a story which includes God, but merely as an ancillary character for my goals and dreams and hopes. When a story is more about my obedience, or my success, or my special knowledge of God, etc., we must learn to discern that God has just been made the supporting actor in his own story. Let us be aware, so that we are not deceived by even the most winsome preachers and intelligent teachers and passionate speakers.

It is something to be said that Jesus promised that the world would hate his followers because it hated Him. It did not hate His love, it hated His authority and His self-proclaimed right to call us to humble ourselves because we are desperately broken and needy and blind. So, if the world accepts us and our message, and sees nothing offensive about it, but still refuses to submit to Him, should we not wonder if our message is of *that* Christ, the Lord, or have we fallen prey to the traditions of men which, being of men, they do not find challenging at all?

The second means of the empty philosophy and deceit is that which is according to “the elemental things of the world.” Now, there is a lot of debate about what these “elemental things” are.

The word, “elementals”, literally has to do with “foundations”, an order of things, like the numbers 1-2-3 or letters A-B-C. If the “traditions of men” are the social or communal set of values which are the basis for one’s worldview or philosophy, then the “elements of the world” are the internal reception of some wisdom via the experience of some fundamental, underlying, power.

This is not so different from the concept of karma or from the elementals of the New Age today, which seeks to obtain power from crystals or high mountain tops or the vibrations of sound or light in creation, because they are the foundational elements of the Universe. This, too, has crept into the visible church. As an example of this, Judy Franklin, a staff member of Bethel Church in Redding, CA, and Ellyn Davis, a Dr. from Sedona, have co-written a book entitle, *The Physics of Heaven*. In it, they describe nothing less than New Age Unitarianism where God’s power is the light within everyone and the sound which is vibrating at the foundation of the Universe. **Franklin writes, “If we will place our hearts in a upper room posture, He is again releasing a sound that will transform the way we think. I believe that sound is going to empower us to do greater works than He did.”** (p3) She then goes onto explain that this power is within us, so we have the power to move many mountains (which she has never done). This god, then, can be tapped into through New Age techniques. They even go so far as to claim that the Church must learn from the New Age if we are ever to know the fullness of God’s power. After moving to Sedona, Arizona, Davis states, “I was intrigued by what I found there. I saw healings and mystical experiences and revelation to rival anything I had seen or experienced in the church....It wasn’t that I wanted to become a New Ager, I just wanted to find out if maybe they had uncovered some truths the church hadn’t.” (p14) And in the last line of that same chapter you can see the appeal to “fuller” ideas of God. She writes, “My hope is that this voyage of discovery we are taking together allows you to be open to deeper understandings of God’s reality.” (p19)

This is a book written by a staff member of a church whose worship band, Jesus Culture, and Bethel Music, have multiple hits in the top 20 Christian songs on radio last week. What I want you to hear today is that around 30% of the most played music on Christian radio comes from churches where this empty philosophy according to the elements of the world is acceptable teaching on the nature of God. The threat to the Church comes from within the Church. We must learn to discern other means and methods than Christ alone united to us by faith alone according to God's grace alone.

Because the real issue of whether a philosophy is empty or deceitful or not is if it is *according to the Christ*. Anything "not according to Christ" is something to beware and guarded against, because it will drag you off into slavery and error as the spoil of war. It is not for you, it is against you.

So, what is according to the Christ? Remember what Paul has already said and what he immediately says after, the Christ is sufficient because He is the fullness of *Deity* dwelling bodily. This phrase is one of the strongest statements regarding the dual nature of the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.

**For, the word "deity" is a word which literally means "the quality of God."** You could specifically say that it means "God-ness". All that makes God what He is, the Christ is. *All the fullness* of Godness dwells in Him, and in Him alone; not in Nature, not in gravity, not in sound, not in angelic beings, not in humanity. In *the Christ* alone.

And this fullness of Deity dwells *bodily* in Him, in the *incarnate* Christ. He is not only God, He is also man. All that makes Man who he is, the Christ is. This will deserve an entire sermon next week, but it suffices to say that this uniqueness of Jesus, this dual quality of both 100% God-ness and 100% Man-ness, make Him utterly unique, incomparable, and solely sufficient to make us complete. His Godness is not partial, and His humanness is not an illusion.

You don't need to be able to manipulate the spiritual world or the physical world by means of energy healing or vibrations or quantum physics. You don't even need to *feel* some "deeper encounter" to know God fully. **You only need to know the Christ for you, crucified and risen, which has been revealed by the apostles in the Scriptures.** *This*

*Christ's* work is the finished work, and you are made full by you union with Him by faith alone.

Some within that New Age infected church have claimed that whatever Jesus is and does, we are and can do. That our union with Him is existential, rather than relational. Such a teaching is heretical. Jesus Christ is uniquely the fullness of Deity. Thought we are united to Him by faith, we do not become Him. He stands alone as the Lord and the Christ. We are made full in Him, but we are not the fullness. He is the Head over all powers and authorities, not us. We gain all that we are meant to be from Him, and that is more than enough for our hope in these times in between the already and the not yet of God's redemptive plan to make much of His Son.

This means that you have all that you need in order to know God if you are united to Christ Jesus by faith, if you are wed to Him by faith, if you are 'in Him' in such a way. There is a reality, some of which is yet to be experienced and for which we long to experience in its fullness, but the fullness is in the Christ and in the Christ alone.

So, beware of any claim or methodology or promise which makes you out to be the same as Christ, as if the fullness of Deity dwells in you bodily. You are not God, but you are wedded to Him. Beware of any claim or methodology or promise which makes the experience of God's fullness out to be obtainable now. The promise is that we must first share in His sufferings and that our glory is a *hope* to be obtained at His return. And this suffering will be worth it, and our experience of the glory of God will be infinitely worth these brief and momentary ailments. The certainty of our redemption is united to the authority of the Christ to whom everything must submit. He is a person to be known and trusted, not an impersonal force to be manipulated or activated.

This is the Christian hope, the already and the not yet, by which we walk by faith in Christ Jesus the Lord. He alone is sufficient and you need nothing else; everything else is a liability in comparison to knowing Him. He alone will direct your paths and lead you in the way everlasting and bring you finally home to glory when He returns, for when He is finished preparing a place for you, He will come again and receive you unto Himself so that where He is, you will also be – in the presence of God dwelling with man in intimate fullness of glory forever and ever. We endure the weakness in the waiting because the glory of that eternal Day is approaching.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.