

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: www.churchredeemeraz.org

Series: Exposition of Romans
Number: 169
Text: Rom. 12:1-2; II Cor. 10:3-6; Col. 2:4-8
Date: Nov. 18, 2012 (am)

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L. W. Johnson

THE MIND AT WAR (Part II)

When people hear the expression *Spiritual Warfare*, the overwhelming tendency is to think of something depicted in the movie *The Exorcist* or vividly described in the popular books of Frank Peretti – where casting out demons is the key to spiritual victory.¹ The Bible clearly teaches the reality of Spiritual Warfare – but the focus is on how Satan *blinds* the minds of men into believing lies (II Tim 2:25, 26). In II Cor. 10:3-6 and Col 2:4-8 the emphasis is on how people are held captive by false teaching. John MacArthur said it well – “Remember: Our real enemies are not mere flesh and blood. This is cosmic warfare, engaging the armies of hell, which are arrayed against Christ. Their weapons consist of lies of all kinds – elaborate lies, massive philosophical lies, evil lies that appeal to humanity’s fallen sinfulness, lies that inflate human pride, and lies that closely resemble the truth. Our one weapon is simple truth of Christ as revealed in His Word.”² In both II Cor. 10:3-6 and in Col 2:4-8 the thought of being taken captive is highlighted – but one is first case it is something that we do, while in the second case it is something we avoid. In both cases, the emphasis is on the mind. Even though the times have changed from Paul’s day to ours, the concerns are the same. The late Carl Henry observed “Modernity, therefore, needs to be liberated not only from the shackles of unbelief, but also from its bondage to wrong beliefs. Prominent among these beliefs is the notion that science, as mathematical physicists ideally pursue it, is the only reliable method of knowing. Modern empiricists sponsor an ideological totalism of their own when they confer explanatory crown rights on a theory of truth that cannot decide the final truth of anything. Naturalism, as Ronald Nash says, is ‘not a decision based on science...It is...a religious decision,’ indeed, an *irreligious* decision. Its presuppositions preclude acknowledging the reality of God, the supernatural, divine Providence, unchanging truth and good, and an afterlife. Its restrictive and reductive assumptions provide no evidence of open-mindedness. They reflect rather a dogmatic closed-mindedness to comprehensive truth. While splitting atoms and chasing quarks in search of an ultimate explanatory principle, naturalism’s intellectuals have lost the infinite and omnipresent Deity. Naturalism retains no basis for the discerning of spirits, for distinguishing God from the devil, for differentiating good from evil, truth from error, theology from ideology, or valid idea structures from myth. Whereas, even the best pagan minds of ancient Greece argued that human life loses meaning if we cannot distinguish truth from opinion, modern pagans taper truth in order to claim everyone’s right to one’s own opinion. The only place where the word *truth* seems any longer safe is in the dictionary...The Christian outlook cannot be effectively maintained by piecemeal retention of a few selected and respected tenets and the surrender of other important elements. The fact is, the naturalism that now pervades many influential universities of the modern world is far less vacillating in what it believes or disbelieves than are some so-called religious institutions. Naturalism does not selectively dispute only the doctrine of creation, or the human fall, or the singular divinity of Jesus Christ, or His bodily resurrection. Naturalism’s mindset and willset is hostile to the entire body of miracle and the supernatural. It disputes the Hebrew-Christian view in its totality.”³

PAUL’S EXHORTATION TO WALK IN THE FAITH (Col. 2:6-7)

A. *fides qua creditor* – or – *fides quae creditor*?

1. View one: have our conduct accord with the principle by which we entered life (6-7). The apostle has just warned the Colossians against the deception of the false teachers (vv. 4-5), and now he appeals to them to continue in the sound life of faith. But we have

two differing views of the meaning of verse six. One view is that Paul is reminding them of the principle by which the Colossians were brought to life, that is, by faith, (subjectively considered) and accordingly is exhorting them to continue in that type of life, the life of faith in Christ, *fides qua creditor*. That is surely an important truth, but I am doubtful that that is what Paul means here.

2. View two: have our conduct accord with the truths we received when we entered into life (6-7). Instead of taking the “as” as a reference to the principle of entrance into life, it should probably be taken as referring to the truths they believed when they entered into life. In other words, the apostle is reminding them of the doctrine of Christ they had accepted. The use of the term “taught” in verse seven, as well as the general context, which has to do with the heretical teaching they were exposed to (vv. 4-5, 8), supports this second view. Thus, Paul is simply saying: Live your Christian life in accordance with the things you have been taught about Christ, the architect, creator, and sustainer of the universe, the one in whom all saving fullness dwells and who has redeemed and reconciled His people by His cross (cf. 1:15-23). Such a great Creator and Savior can be trusted to satisfy all your needs. You do not need the heretical teaching of the Gnostic Judaizers. Let the Holy Spirit through the Word about Him root and build you up in Him, establishing you in the faith, (objectively considered). That is the abounding and thankful life, *fides quae creditor*.

II. PAUL’S EXHORTATION AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS (Col. 2:8)

- A. Worldly philosophy is contrary to faith (cf. 6-7). Paul has emphasized the divine activity of rooting and establishing believers in the faith in verse seven, particularly in the use of the passive voices. Now, however, the responsibility of the believer comes to the fore. He writes in verse eight, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” In one sense what Paul is saying is this: Beware of being led away captive by those whom you have led away captive in your Head, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. v. 15). But, first, he points out that philosophy, such as that of the heretics, is contrary to faith. Faith and dependence together, while human philosophy and rationalism go together. Of course, Paul is not arguing against logical discourse. He has in mind systems that have no place for Christ, for human sin, and for divine salvation by a divine-human Redeemer. It is probably necessary at this point to say that it is unlikely that Paul is speaking of philosophy in general, as we know it today. He rather has in mind the teaching of the Gnostic Judaists. The term *philosophy* was widely used in the ancient world of almost any kind of teaching. In fact, magicians, to capture attention, called themselves “philosophers.”⁴
- B. Worldly philosophy has its source in human wisdom (8). The apostle, after suggesting that philosophy is vain deceit,⁵ further describes it by saying that it is “after the tradition of men,” a phrase that states that the subject matter has a human source.⁶ It is likely that Paul would have included here much of what our day calls “secular humanism,” teaching that has a human origin and is often opposed to the doctrines of the Word of God.
- C. Worldly philosophy is inferior to God’s truth (8). Paul also calls the teaching, that is, the philosophy, teaching “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” There is disagreement over the precise force of the word translated here by “rudiments.” It can refer to elemental beings, that is, world or cosmic forces of the word translated here by “rudiments.” It can refer to elemental beings, that is, world or cosmic forces, or the heavenly bodies, such as the stars. These meanings are doubtful here. The word was also used of elementary sounds or letters of the alphabet, such as the ABC’s. And some teachers have suggested the last meaning here, that is, Paul would be saying, “Why should believers run after the “philosophy” of the Gnostic Judaizers, the ABC’s of solid truth, if it is any truth at all, when they have Him, the Alpha and the Omega, the one “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge?”

III. PAUL’S APOSTOLIC WARNING

- A. The Imperative: a call to watchfulness. “Be careful” is a present imperative of command from *blepo*, “to look at,” but it is also used of mental functions like “direct one’s attention to something, watch, beware, be on guard.” It is a command for a constant circumspect watchfulness because of the dangers lurking at every corner in the world or society due to Satan’s many deceptive devices through his world system of ideas and false teachers who, through often appearing as angels of light, are agents of darkness.

- B. The Danger: taken captive by the false teaching. The Greek word for “captive” is *sulago geo*, “carry off as booty, or as a captive, or rob someone.” It is used here figuratively of carrying someone away from the freedom that comes from the truth in Christ into the bondage of error. Jesus said, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free,” but when we move away from Christ, even though the false teachers are promising freedom (cf. 2 Pet. 2:18-20), we are taken into bondage. The false teachers of this world are seeking to claim believers as their booty and so rob them of the fullness of Christ’s life. “Deceive” is *paralogizomai*, which means literally “to reason aside,” and then “to defraud, delude, distort.” This word is used in the Septuagint in Genesis 29:25 of Jacob’s complaint to Laban because Laban had tricked him with Leah rather than Rachael. The false teachers at Colosae were attempting to trick the Colossians by the method they employed. The method the false teachers used is seen in the statement, “through arguments that sound reasonable.” The term here is *pithanologia*, “persuasive speech.” It is derived from *pithanos*, “persuasive,” and *logos*, “word, argument, speech.” In this context Paul uses it in a negative sense of speech that sounds convincing and reasonable, but is actually false. This word only occurs here in the New Testament, but in “...other literature it is a word of the law court and refers to the lawyer’s persuasive speech and its power to influence an audience towards an unjust verdict. In Classical Greek the word referred to the use of probable arguments as opposed to demonstrable arguments”⁷ The false teachers were probably promoting some of the tenets of biblical Christianity to make their system of knowledge sound good and reasonable, but any deviation from the truth is a distortion of the truth and plain heresy. Regardless of what they were saying, these false teachers were failing to hold fast to Christ as the supreme head from whom the body of Christ must draw her life and all her resources (2:18-19). As in II Cor. 10:3-6 – the Apostle is concerned about so-called intellectual/philosophical argument that is raised up against the claims of the Gospel of Christ, i.e. mental structures that dismiss or rationalize sin, promote unbelief and dismiss any thought of accountability before God. This can be religious in nature (false religion) or purely secular as in the various forms of naturalistic, humanistic evolutionary philosophy and psychology. Phillip Johnson, who has written extensively on the subject, declared “The most influential intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, educators and politicians and judges in America and the world are naturalists,” end quote. Do you know what a naturalist is? A naturalist believes that God only exists in the mind, in the fantasy of religious, non-intellectuals. They control our courts, they control our government, they control our universities. In our universities naturalism is the idea that nature is all there is and that is the virtually unquestioned assumption on which all matters of life are based. Man, says evolutionary science, which is the reigning authority, is the purposeless end of a process that didn’t have him in mind.”⁸
- C. The Source: human traditions, elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. This human philosophy is described by three phrases that define its source: (1) it is drawn from human traditions, (2) it is inspired by the elemental spirits of the world, but (3) it is not according (it ignores) the person and work of Christ in whom all the fullness of deity lives (vs.9). “Tradition” is *paradosis*, “a handing down or over” and is used of teachings, commandments, and narratives. As with “philosophy,” there are biblical or divine traditions that have their source in God’s special revelation, and human traditions, those that come from man’s own ideas and theories. Human traditions may be neutral and harmless as in the order of church worship, special events and ceremonial procedures, or policies in the conducting of human affairs, but the concern is when they, as here in Colossians and with the tradition of the Pharisees, nullify the teachings and commands of Scripture (cf. Mark 7:1-13). Further, as to their source, these vain philosophies are inspired by the elemental spirits of the world. “Elemental” is *stoicheion*, “one of a row (like a letter of the alphabet), and by extension, the elements of knowledge.”⁹

CONCLUSION:

We need to be ready to recognize and resist such heresy. As Jesus warned us, “*many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*” (Matthew 24:11) But the source of these deceptions is not merely man’s capricious mind and imagination. Rather, it’s “*the serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.*” (Revelation 12:9) And we need to discern his tactics! Ephesians 6:10-18, which outlines the main truths in the “*Armor of God,*” includes this reminder:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

False philosophies come in all sorts, sizes, shapes, and colors and we are in no short supply of them today, i.e. *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Gospel According to Judas* are only the most recent. And regardless of nature, they all have their negative impact on the believer's walk in Christ if he or she is not careful both to watch for them and to recognize them for what they are—deceivers, distorters, and enslavers. And no wonder, Satan, our archenemy and the deceiver, is behind every one of them through his host of demonic powers that are actively at work in his world system. This is why we pray each Lord's Day "deliver us from the evil one" when we recite the Lord's Prayer.

Consider these ideas and false philosophies which are pervading our culture: God helps those who help themselves; He will love us more if we are good; He will judge us according to our accomplishments; Anything that feels good must be good; Self-expression is the only way to self-realization; Enjoyment is enrichment; Christ is the best of all good men—an example of living for us, nothing more; What we are is what we acquire; Our worth is determined by our productivity.... And so it goes. Everything—from the playboy philosophy to materialism, astrology to scientism, sensualism to sorcery—is seeking to possess the American mind to manipulate our behavior and motivate our spending. The major problem facing our Evangelical churches today is the rampant pursuit of entertainment as the major element in defining "church." Make it "fun" and people will love it! Set's a theme-park atmosphere. These "seekers" will be attracted and consider our church as being perceived as "cool" or "hip" and especially "relevant." On top of the seeker-sensitive mind-set which dominate our landscape we now must contend with. The "Emergent Church" crowd. Berit Kjos recently warned, a flood of mystical temptations is sweeping through churches and culture. They beckon us "let go" of the old inflexible Word and explore the new ways of the world and spirit. Naturally, a growing consensus of "open-minded" seekers claim that God's truth is "too divisive" to fit their new vision of global unity and experiential spirituality.¹⁰ One of St. Paul's most difficult tasks was that of keeping his new churches firm in their faith. They were so young and inexperienced, and were so easily led astray by people who came to them preaching perversions of Christian truth with every possible type of persuasiveness. One verse in which he tries to drive home his message with a remarkable variety of expression is Col. 1:23. The relevant part of the verse, in the Revised Version, is: 'Continue in the faith, grounded (stable, R.S.V.) and steadfast (settled, A.V.), and not moved away (not shifting, R.S.V.) from the hope of the gospel which you heard'. What a picture this verse builds up! Christians are to be as firm in their faith as people who have a fixed home and are not perpetually roaming around. They are to be as little liable to cracks as a building whose foundations have gone down to the rock. They are to have deep roots so that no wind can blow them down. They are to be firmly supported like a building with its buttresses. They are always to be found in the same place, not shifting their view with every new opinion. It need not be said that all this is not an argument for stagnation, for failing to move forward. No one can imagine St. Paul arguing for that! It is, however, a plea for knowing our faith, for holding it fast, for not taking up strange views that do not belong to the Gospel, and for being utterly dependable and reliable both in our faith and in our practice. The Colossians needed that plea – and we still need it today.¹¹

ENDNOTES

¹ Peretti's best seller *This Present Darkness* (Crossway, 1986) sold over three million copies and was followed up by *Piercing The Darkness*. Both books did much to advance the unbiblical notion that there were territorial evil spirits who are the source for various sins, i.e. anger, lust, drunkenness, etc. The best critique of this popular perception is David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Baker, 1995).

² J. MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Thomas Nelson, 2007) p. 49.

³ Carl F.H. Henry *Gods of This Age or... God of the Ages?* (Broadman & Holman, 194) p. 5 and 80.

⁴ Peter O'Brien, *Colossians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1982), p. 109.

⁵ The use of the one preposition, DIA (KJV, "through") with the word, "philosophy," and the absence of a definite article before the phrase rendered, "vain deceit," probably means that Paul regarded "vain deceit" as descriptive of the philosophy the Colossians were encountering. It had no significant content, was faulty, deceitful (cf. O'Brien, pp. 109-10). Other commentators call the phrase, "vain deceit," explanatory, or descriptive, or qualifying.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, 1975).

⁸ Phillip Johnson *Reason In the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law & Education* (IVP, 1995) p. 7

⁹ I owe this over-all analysis to my late Prof. of Theology, S. Lewis Johnson Jr. and his lectures on Colossians.

¹⁰ Kjos, "From Gnostic Roots to Occult Revival," *Crossroads* (April, 2006).

¹¹ H.K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied In Depth*, (Bagster & Sons, 1977) p. 187.