

COLOSSIANS: CHRIST OVER ALL AND IN ALL (study 3)

Lord & Liberator

Study 3a: TWO TYPES of TRADITION (2:1-8)

2:1-3 The MYSTERY of CHRIST & his Body: Note that the ‘hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ are available to those ‘knit together in love’. What are the implications for those separated from the church? (Prov.18:1)

The genuine doctrine of the Christ consists in (1) the recognition of the historical person Jesus, and (2) the acceptance of Him as the Lord ... ‘In Christ,’ so the Apostle seems to say, ‘you have attained the liberty and the intelligence of manhood; do not submit yourselves again to a rudimentary discipline fit only for children ... In Christ you have been exalted into the sphere of the Spirit: do not plunge yourselves again into the atmosphere of material and sensuous things [tou kosmou].’ [Lightfoot 176,180]

Others might lead them astray with specious talk of mysteries; but there was one mystery above all others -- the mystery of God, unfolded in Christ alone -- and Paul’s concern was that they should come to know this all-surpassing mystery, and know it as an indwelling presence. As against all those who tried to intellectualize the Christian faith, speaking of knowledge (*gnosis*) as if it were an end in itself, Paul emphasizes that the revelation of God cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love with the Christian community. So, in Eph. 3:17f., it is only as Christians are “rooted and grounded in love” that they can acquire the power to “apprehend with all the saints” the fulness of God’s revelation. [Bruce 223]

2:4-7 Does Paul expect the Colossians to receive ‘advancing light’ on ‘God’s mystery’? (1 Cor.15:1,2; Gal.1:7-9)

[2:6] This short sentence introduces us to the whole concept of tradition in apostolic Christianity. The idea of tradition, together with the terminology used to express it, is common in Judaism, where it specially designates the handing down of the oral law and its interpretation from one generation to another. ... When Paul says that his readers have “received” Christ Jesus as their Lord, he uses the verb which was delivered by tradition. In other words, the Colossians have received Christ Himself as their “tradition”, and this should prove a sufficient safeguard against following “the tradition of men” (v. 8). ... It is well to note that in the New Testament “tradition” has this better sense as well as a worse one; it is good to recognize and hold fast the true tradition, while rejecting those that are false. [Bruce 226,227]

[2:7] ... just as you were taught, (for the old truth is the eternal truth;) [Moule 129]

[2:3,7] They had accepted our Saviour in this threefold way. He was the Divine Messiah, the human Jesus, and the supreme Lord. They were to continue as they

had started, expressing their life in consistent conduct in union with Him. This thought of “walking,” is familiar in these Epistles, and the idea is that of complete and continuous manifestation in character and conduct of everything involved in the reception of Christ Jesus the Lord. [Thomas 71]

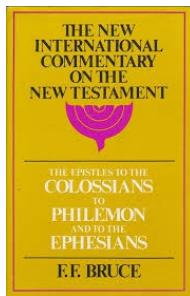
[2:7] Thanksgiving is referred to no fewer than six times (seven if [*en chariti*] of 3:16 is included in the count) in the space of four short chapters of Colossians (1:3,12; 2:7; 3:15,16,17; 4:2 ...) [O’Brien 108]

[2:7] Thanksgiving is the end of all human conduct, and is as the farmer’s crop which laughs in thankfulness for the toil of the plow. It is the grand refrain of this epistle. [Nicholson 186]

2:8 If they DO receive ‘new light’, from whom will it come? (2 Thess.2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor.11:2; cf. Matt.15:6)

[2:8] The “philosophy” in question would assuredly include Him somehow in its terms. But it would not be “according to Him.” It would take its principles, and draw its inferences, *a priori* and from other regions; and then bring Him in as something to be harmonized and assimilated, as far as might be. But this would mean a Christ according to the system of thought, not a system of thought according to the blessed Christ. And for St Paul the one true system of spiritual thinking must be altogether “according to” Him. It must have Him for Alpha, and for Omega, and for all the alphabet between. [Moule 142]

[2:8] The effect of such a system of thought was the undermining of the basic Christian doctrines of creation and of the incarnation and mediation of Christ. For if God and the material world cannot come into direct relation, the world cannot be God’s immediate handiwork, the Divine Word could not really have become flesh, and communication between God and man, in both directions must be carried on through an indefinite series of intermediaries. [Bruce 229]



Study 3b: The MYSTERY of GOD – CHRIST (2:9-15)

2:9 The only occurrence of the Greek term *theotes* in the NT. Since it is here combined with *pleroma* (fullness), is there any doubt which ‘elementary principles of the world’ (v.8) Paul is warning against? (1 Tim.3:16; 4:1)

[2:9] “The Godhead” here is the word for the essence of deity, whereas “divinity” in Romans 1:20 uses another word for the quality of deity. [Robertson 80]

[2:9] The additional words “of deity” specify what dwells in Christ in its entire fullness. [*theotes*] (“deity”), is the abstract noun from [*ho theos*] (“God”) and is to be distinguished from [*he theotes*] (“divine nature,” “quality”), the abstract from [*theios*] (“divine,” Rom.1:20 ...) [O’Brien 111]

THEOTES
– the
essence
of Deity

2:10-12 What do Christians already have? (Eph.1:22-2:22; note Gk tenses, esp. vv.4,6,8,13,14, 18,19)

There is only one message of hope to modern man in his frustration and despair, and it is the message which Paul proclaimed to the Colossians. Christ crucified and risen is Lord of all; all the forces of the universe are subject to Him, not only benign ones but the hostile ones as well. They are all subject to Him as their Creator; the latter are subject to Him also as their Conqueror. And therefore to be united to Him is to be liberated from their thraldom, to enjoy perfect freedom, to overcome all the power of evil because Christ’s victory is ours. The redemption that is in Christ

Jesus is a cosmic redemption; its healing virtue streams out to the farthest bounds of creation; but it is a personal redemption too. The Conqueror who is enthroned at God's right hand, supreme above the universe and filling it with His presence, is the One who reigns as King in each believer's heart. Though "now we see not yet all things subjected to him" (Heb. 2:8), yet we are assured that because of His redemptive act, all creation will yet be "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). And even here and now those who have already entered into that liberty may well be persuaded, with Paul himself, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". [Bruce 242]

2:13-15 What is the force of the illustration in v.14?

[2:13] Low thoughts of Christ result from low thoughts of sin. When I realize the enormity of my iniquity I know that only the Daysman for whom Job yearned can save me from such a load of guilt. He, because He is God and Man, can "lay His hand upon us both" and thus by making atonement for sin bring God and man together in holy, happy harmony. [Ironside 80]

[2:14] And in giving you this new life with Christ, God has broken you clean away from your past. He has freely forgiven your sins. Those sins represented, so to speak, a mountain of bankruptcy which you were bound to acknowledge but could never have any hope of discharging. You had violated the ordinances of the law, and nothing that you might do could afford redress. But Christ has wiped the slate clean and given you a fresh start. He took that signed confession of indebtedness which stood as a perpetual witness against you, and cancelled it in His death; you might actually say that He took the document, ordinances and all, and nailed it to His cross as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers who were holding it over you as a threat. [Bruce 238]

[2:15] Had they but realized the truth, those "archons of this age" -- had they (as Paul puts it in another epistle) known the hidden wisdom of God which decreed the glory of Christ and His people -- "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). But now they are disabled and dethroned, and the shameful tree has become the victor's triumphal chariot, before which His captives are driven in humiliating procession, the involuntary and impotent confessors of their overcomer's superiority. [Bruce 240]

"Low thoughts of
Christ result from low
thoughts of sin"

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What did John Newton, composer of Amazing Grace, think of Christ?

John Newton has well written:

"What think ye of Christ?" is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of Him:
As Jesus appears in your view --
As He is beloved or not,
So God is disposed to you,
And mercy or wrath is your lot.

Some take Him a creature to be --
A man, or an angel at most;
But they have not feelings like me,
Nor know themselves wretched and lost.
So guilty, so helpless am I,
I durst not confide in His blood,
Nor on His protection rely,
Unless I were sure He is God.

Some call Him a Saviour in word,
But mix their own works with His plan;
And hope He His help will afford.
When they have done all that they can:
If doings prove rather too light
(A little they own they may fail),
They purpose to make up full weight,
By casting His name in the scale.

Some style Him "the Pearl of great price,"
And say, He's fountain of joys;
Yet feed upon folly and vice,
And cleave to the world and its toys.
Like Judas, the Saviour they kiss,
And while they salute Him, betray:
Oh! what will profession like this
Avail in His terrible day?

If asked what of Jesus I think,
Though still my best thoughts are but poor,
I say, He's my meat and my drink,
My life, and my strength, and my store;
My Shepherd, my trust, and my Friend,
My Saviour from sin and from thrall;
My Hope from beginning to end,
My Portion, my Lord and my All."

