

COLOSSIANS: CHRIST OVER ALL AND IN ALL (studies 4,5)

Obedience – outward or inward?

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again. GAL.4:9 (NASB)

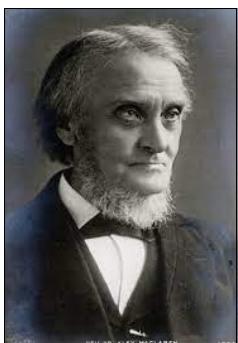
Study 4a: WILL WE HAVE LAW – or the LORD? (2:16-23)

2:16-19 In contrast to those ‘holding fast to the Head’ (v.19, NASB), on what do the Colossian ‘wise ones’ take their stand? (Gal.4:1-11)

[2:18] The phrase “the mind of his flesh” – “his unspiritual mind,” as Ramsay puts it – is a striking locution, quite out of keeping with the Greek concept of the relation between body and mind. Here it means the attitude and outlook which are characteristic of the old nature, before the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit has taken effect. [Bruce 250]

In contrast to the direct revelation claimed by the ‘wise ones’ (v.18), how do believers normally get their nourishment from Christ? (Eph.4:10-16)

[2:19] The whole stress of the imagery, which necessarily outruns the physical conditions of the human body, is upon our *immediate connexion in divine life with Christ*. [Moule 178]



Alexander
Maclaren

“Higher tastes
drive out lower
ones”

[2:19] Christ is the source of all unity. Churches have been bound together by other bonds, such as creeds, polity, or even nationality; but that external bond is only like a rope round a bundle of fagots, while the true inward unity springing from common possession of the life of Christ is as the unity of some great tree, through which the same sap circulates from massive bole to the tiniest leaf that dances at the tip of the farthest branch. [Maclaren 249]

2:20-23 Are there lessons here even for orthodox churches? (Rom.5:5; 13:8-10, but note also vv.12-14)

[2:20] Death always means separation, and this is the reason why it is described as “from the rudiments of the world.” [Thomas 88]

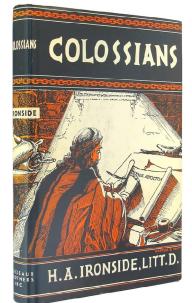
[2:20] Higher tastes drive out lower ones, as some great stream turned into a new channel will sweep it clear of mud and rubbish. So, if we are joined to Christ, He will fill our souls with strong emotions and interests which will deaden our sensitiveness to things around us, and will

inspire new loves, tastes, and desires, which will make us indifferent to much that we used to be eager about, and hostile to much that we once cherished. [Maclaren 250]

[2:21] What sort of regulations are these which the elemental powers impose? Completely negative ones: “Don’t, don’t, don’t.” There may be a stage in a child’s development when he must be told not to do this and not to touch that, before he can understand the reason for such prohibitions. But when he comes to years of discretion he can appreciate his parents’ point of view, he can look at life from a responsible angle, and do what is proper without having to conform to a list of prohibitions such as are suitable and necessary for the years of infancy. These would-be teachers were trying to keep the Colossian Christians in leading-strings; Paul insists on the liberty with which Christ has set them free. The imposition of prohibitions from without can do nothing to create a new nature within. [Bruce 254]

[2:23] St Jerome tells how, having lived a lecherous life in his youth, after he became a Christian he fled from all contact with the gross and vulgar world in which he had once sought to gratify every fleshly desire. He left Rome and wandered to Palestine, and there lived in a cave near Bethlehem, where he sought to subdue his carnal nature by fasting almost to starvation. And then he tells us how disappointed he was when, exhausted and weary, he fell asleep and dreamed he was still rioting among the dissolute companions of his godless days. The flesh cannot be starved into subjection. It cannot be improved by subjecting it to ordinances whether human or divine. But as we walk in the Spirit, and are occupied thus with the risen Christ, we are delivered from the power of fleshly lusts which war against the soul. [Ironside 112]

[2:23] So asceticism, like many another tendency and habit, grows by indulgence, and demands abstinence ever more rigid and separation ever more complete. And the whole thing is out of date, and a misapprehension of the genius of Christianity. Man’s work in religion is ever to confine it to the surface, to throw it outward and make it a mere round of things done and things abstained from. Christ’s work in religion is to drive it inwards, and to focus all its energy on “the hidden man of the heart,” knowing that if that be right, the visible will come right. It is waste labour to try to stick figs on the prickles of a thorn bush ... [Maclaren 251]



“Not” or not “not”?!

Good news too simple for Gnostics

The textual authorities seem to be equally divided, though it is thought that the balance favors the omission of the negative as giving the harder reading, which according to the usual principle is more likely to have been the original. If we omit the negative it means that such a person as is here mentioned was only concerned with what his fleshly mind could see, the only standing he could comprehend. He could not stand or walk by faith ... These false teachers made pretensions to know supernatural things by means of visions, yet this pretension to a knowledge of the invisible world did not rest on faith but was the result of vanity of the flesh ... Bishop Moule favors the retention of the word “not,” and of course in this case the meaning will be that the man who talks about the worship of angels is dealing with things about which he knows nothing. [Thomas 85-86]

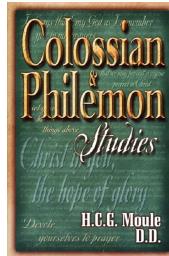
We do not see visions and dream dreams any more, except here and there some one led astray by a so-called "spiritualism," but plenty of us attach more importance to our own subjective fancies or speculations about the obscurer parts of Christianity than to the clear revelation of God in Christ. The "unseen world" has for many minds an unwholesome attraction. The Gnostic spirit is still in full force among us, which despises the foundation facts and truths of the gospel as "milk for babes," and values its own baseless artificial speculations about subordinate matters, which are unrevealed because they are subordinate, and fascinating to some minds because unrevealed, far above the truths which are clear, because they are vital, and insipid to such minds because they are clear. We need to be reminded that Christianity is not for speculation, but to make us good, and that [Christ] ... has made us all to live by the same air, to be nourished by the same bread from heaven, to be saved and purified by the same truth. That is the gospel which the little child can understand, of which the outcast and the barbarian can get some kind of hold ... What needs special training and capacity to understand is no essential portion of the truth that is meant for the world. [MacLaren 248]

**"The Gnostic spirit
is still in full force
among us ..."**

Seek and Set

Here is St Paul's programme, his prescription, for the blessed life, the transfigured life ... Live in heaven, that you may really live on earth.

[Moule 194]



Study 5a: WHERE ARE OUR EYES and MINDS? (3:1-7)

3:1,2 If we are to walk successfully through this world's obstacles, where must our eyes and minds be? (Phil.4:8,9; Eph.2:17,18; 4:23; 5:15-17)

[3:2] Two injunctions are based on these considerations – "seek," and "set your mind upon," the things that are above. The one points to the outward life of effort and aim; the other to the inward life of thought and longing. [MacLaren 255]

Particularly WHAT 'above' should be our chief preoccupation? (Heb.12:1,2)

3:3,4 How do these verses illustrate the vital connection of faith and hope? (1:5(2),23,27; Eph.2:12; Heb.11:1)

[3:1-4] This extract from the apostolic preaching or *kerygma* is not introduced here for an ornamental purpose; Paul is about to commence the parenetic section of his letter, and his parenetic sections regularly presuppose the *kerygma*, by implication

if not expressly. What God has done for us in Christ is the grand argument and incentive for Christian living. The apostolic teaching or *didache* may be distinguished from *kerygma*, but it is founded upon *kerygma*. [Bruce 259]

3:5-7 For those who think that you are the product of your impulses and your environment, what does Paul offer as a reality check?

[3:5] There are bad smells in every city, but only one with depraved nostrils seeks them out and revels in them like a sewer rat or hyena. Some modern artists and novelists call this realism and thus justify the slime that they parade to the public. But most of all, they reveal their own depraved mind given over to uncleanness (Rom.1:24-32) [Robertson 98]

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Are Christ's interests our interests?

But what are the practical implications of being raised with Christ? This, that the believers have now no life of their own. Their life is the life of Christ, maintained in being by Him at God's right hand and shared by Him with all His people. Their interests must therefore be His interests. Instead of waiting until the last day to receive the resurrection-life, those who have been raised with Christ possess it here and now. The new creation – the "regeneration" – has already begun in them. Spiritually – that is to say, "in Christ" – they belong already to the age to come and enjoy its life. [Bruce 259]