

Watch Out for Counterfeits

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[0:00] If you would open up your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2, I'm going to read for us verse 6 through 23.

It's an extended passage. I'll be preaching on verses 8 through 23, but hear the word of the Lord. It's on page 1169 of your pew Bible.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty conceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off of the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.

[1:08] Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith, and the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him.

Having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this He set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him. Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and the worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by His sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you die to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used, according to human precepts and teachings.

[2:38] These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity of the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

May God bless the hearing of His Word. Imagine, all of us in this room have been recruited by the U.S. Secret Service to become agents in the counterfeit currency division.

Our job is to spot and remove counterfeit currency within circulation of the United States. Do you know how they're going to train us?

My understanding, the primary way agents of the counterfeit division are trained is actually by becoming intimately familiar with real U.S. currency, so that they actually feel what a \$20 bill feels like, texture.

They smell what a \$20 bill smells like. They hear a distinct crumple when a \$20 bill is crumpled.

[3:51] It tastes a certain way. They see the colors in the layout that are distinct of every \$20 bill ever issued legitimately by the U.S. government.

By becoming incredibly familiar with real U.S. currency, they spot fakes. Up until this point in the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul has been training us in the real thing of Christianity.

The real deal. Biblical Christianity. And most prominent feature in biblical Christianity is the centrality of Christ in all things.

The controlling center. He is the firstborn of all creation. He's the firstborn from the dead. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Reigning now. In one person, there is this hypostatic glory.

Fully God. Fully man. One person. Paul's been training us really well in spotting fakes. We just didn't know it. Who Christ is and what Christ has done.

[5:04] He determines what we live for and what we don't live for. There is another kind of counterfeit in circulation in our culture and around the world.

Counterfeit claims on reality. Philosophy is man's attempt to answer the big questions. Where do we come from?

Who are we? What's wrong with the world? How do you make it right? And right now, there are empty philosophies in circulation trying to answer these questions.

The thing you need to understand about philosophy, what you think, what you believe to be true inevitably shows up in the way you live your life.

Your philosophical commitments show up in your daily practice. That's the way that God has wired us. And so, in order to help us spot counterfeit philosophies and practices, we've got this passage in front of us.

[6:21] Colossians 2, 8-23. But Paul has started with the real thing. Chapter 2, verse 6. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.

This passage in verses 8-23 has a series of admonitions. Warning with a reason. And so, we're going to walk through these admonitions.

It starts on the philosophical level. What you think that's going to spend our most time this morning. And then it moves into practice. How certain ways of thinking show up in everyday life.

So, we'll make our way through these four admonitions. Christian agent, are you ready to do some spotting of counterfeits? Let's go. Admonition 1.

There's this warning in verse 8. Be on the lookout for philosophies that will take you captive. That will hijack you.

[7:28] We all know September 11, 2001. Four U.S. domestic flights were hijacked by men posing as passengers.

And after hijacking those flights, those men's intent was to make those planes flying bombs. Three of them landed.

Reeking destruction. Killing thousands. Sending our culture into chaos. We all remember. Many of us remember those days. There's another kind of hijacking going on, brothers and sisters.

It's not as visible as September 11, but it's devastating people. It's wreaking havoc.

It's wreaking havoc. Leading to chaos. Ultimately bringing people into destruction. God in verse 8 is warning us to be on the lookout for these destructive ways of thinking and believing that hijack people.

[8:43] In verse 8, you see this philosophy is described as empty deceit. Deceit is literally falsehood.

Misleading people into what's not true. Maybe it's partially true, but it's not fully true. It's deceitful. And it's empty.

There's no soul-satisfying substance to these philosophies. They'll leave you wanting according to human tradition.

These philosophies are sourced in the human brain. That should tell you right out of the gate. It's not from God. According to the elemental spirits of the world.

That's Paul talking about demonic activity behind these philosophies. These devastating philosophies. These deceitful and empty philosophies.

[9:57] Ultimately are sourced in the demonic world. Designed to deceive. Designed to debilitate. To destroy. To blind people. To blind people. To Jesus Christ.

These philosophies are not according to Christ. Verse 8. They diminish Christ.

They distract from Christ. Some deny Christ. And as a result, all of them decentralize Christ.

They make Jesus an extracurricular activity. Not the controlling center of all things. So whether realized or not.

So whether realized or not. Those who are advocating these empty philosophies. Are misleading people. Blinding people to the truth of Christ.

[10:58] Central in all things. Imagine an all-you-can-eat buffet. It's not tough for me to imagine that. But this is an interesting buffet. Because they are serving up multiple philosophies.

There's hedonism. The unbiblical pursuit of unrestrained sexual pleasure. Miley Cyrus is serving that up. It makes sexual pleasure the controlling center of someone's life.

There's scientism. It's the bumper sticker. Science is the answer. Without any reference to the God of science.

It ends up basing all of existence on what you can discover through your senses. Bill Nye, the science guy, is serving that up.

Neoconservatism. It's this unbiblical philosophy that seeks to ground morality and ethics outside of the Bible.

[12:06] People, this is going to hit home in some of you. Jordan Peterson. Ben Shapiro.

Got to be careful. They're dishing stuff out. And you got to ask the question, where's the Christ? Where's the Christ? Expressive individualism is a phrase that I want to get into your heads. You may not be familiar with that word.

I want to familiarize you with that phrase. It's a philosophy that is in wide circulation in our culture today. You're in it.

You don't know it. It's shown up in music. It shows up in the shows you watch. The movies you watch. The podcasts you listen to. Chances are it's in the schools that we send our kids to.

[13:06] It's in your workplaces. It's shown up all over the place. Governmental agencies. It's all over the place. This book right here, which I strongly commend. Strange New World by Carl Trueman.

He helps us to see where this idea of expressive individualism came from and how it is in circulation throughout our culture.

Here's how he defines expressive individualism. It's the belief that each person must act based on expressing his or her core feelings and intuitions.

In other words, you make yourself into your own image, whatever you want that to be. Whatever you feel like that should be. These are the things being served up in the buffet of our culture with what to believe.

It's a buffet table of empty philosophy. It'll leave you wanting, and it's not according to Christ. Do you know how to spot a counterfeit philosophy?

[14:16] Here's how you spot it. Is this person, is this philosophy, is the practice proclaiming Christ as the controlling center of all things?

If it's not, you've got some kind of counterfeit on your hands. And you need to proceed with caution. That's the warning.

Brothers and sisters, I hope you're feeling that. What buffet are you eating from? In verses 9 through 15, Paul turns from the warning in verse 8 to now he's going to give you the reason for the warning.

And it's in stark contrast to the empty philosophies of this world. He says there's another buffet. And there's only one in the buffet. Jesus Christ.

Oh, this is so good. The reasons he gives are just manifold. What he's going to say here is this.

[15:31] Don't be taken captive by empty philosophy. Be captivated by the fullness of Christ.

Check it out. You ready? This is where he starts. Verse 9. For in him, 9 and 10. For in him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. In Christ, in that one person, full godness and full humanity. Hypostatic glory filled with the fullness of God. He referenced that in 115 and 119 as well. There's no one like him. Verse 10.

Verse 10. We are told as followers, believers of Jesus, we've been filled with this Christ in whom is fullness. We don't need any of the empty stuff.

Because we've got fullness in Christ. All that we need. Yes and amen in Christ Jesus for life and godliness. Don't be filled with empty deceit.

[16:37] Be filled with the fullness of Christ. Fullness of Christ. Then, look at verse 11 and 12.

You've been united to Christ. Not just filled with the fullness of Christ. United to Christ. 11. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh.

By the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism. In which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised him from the dead. Anybody notice the word circumcision showing up?

Here's what was probably going on in first century Colossi. The false teachers were kind of pushing a philosophy that had a religious element to it.

And most likely had a significant Jewish twist to it. You just need to be circumcised Christians. Then you're in good standing with God. And Paul's like, there's a better circumcision?

[17:42] Check this out. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands. Do you know what that's referring to? A God circumcision. Of all men and women in Christ.

And that is on the basis of the putting off of the body of flesh. That's a reference to 122 of Jesus' body.

The circumcision of Christ therefore is the death of Christ. That's apostolic shorthand addressing this issue in the church saying, You've been circumcised.

Set apart for God through the circumcision, the death of Christ. Which then follows. You've been united with his death. You've been united with him in his burial.

You've been united with him in his resurrection. You've been united with Christ in all his gospel goodness. Dead to sin. Alive to God.

[18:41] In Christ Jesus. And that's what water baptism represents. That's what it symbolizes. That union with Christ. We've got a baptism coming up.

We're going to have it here on a Sunday morning in May. Let it sing. So filled with Christ. United to Christ.

In verses 13 and 14. You've been made alive with Christ. Talk about fullness. fullness. There is no human philosophy that can give you new spiritual life.

None. And there's no human philosophy that is able to do what God has done through Christ in order to make you alive. And we see that in verse 13.

You were dead in your trespasses in the uncircumcision of your flesh. God made alive together. He made you alive. Having forgiven us all our trespasses. How? By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

[19:45] We had an IOU to God. For all of our intentional and unintentional sinning against Him. It was a legal script against us.

And in Christ at His cross. God nailed it. Christ suffered all of the wrath for all of our IOUs.

Forgiving us. Making us alive. How about that for fullness. Don't settle for empty trash.

When you got Christ's fullness. And then in verse 15. He's not done. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.

In the cross. Crossed. The cross of Christ and His resurrection. was God's decisive victory over sin, death, and the devil in all of the rulers and authorities of the demonic world.

[20:59] All of them. All of them. You're in triumph, brother, sister, in Christ. In Christ, you are in His triumph in which He shamed them all through His death and resurrection.

They've got no more power over you. Here's the fullness. Filled with the fullness of Christ.

United to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Made alive together with Christ. Triumphant in Christ. There's fullness. Get that in your head. And when you see and become intimately acquainted with all of this gospel richness.

Then you spot the fakes. There is no human philosophy that can deliver like that. This is the first admonition.

There's the warning. Don't be taken captive by this empty philosophy of men. And the reason. Be captured by the fullness of Christ and what He's done for you.

[22:22] Christ's fullness is better than the emptiness of expressive individualism. Christ's fullness is greater than the emptiness of hedonism.

Christ's fullness is greater than the emptiness of a godless conservatism. How do you spot a counterfeit philosophy? You first become intimately acquainted with the fullness of Christ. Do I have an amen? And now let's look. Move from these philosophical underpinnings of what you believe. Move from this.

To practice. To practice. How it shows up. Paul turns that corner. Admonition number two. In verses 16 and 17. Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink.

Or with regard to a festival or a new moon. Or a Sabbath. That's the warning. Here's the reason. These are a shadow of the things to come. But the substance belongs to Christ.

[23:29] Apparently, when you drop Jesus from being the controlling center of your life. Something else takes the spot. And often times it's a legalism.

A, hey, I'm going to be good with God if I do this or do that. Or not do this and not do that. In this case, it had to do with your diet and your calendar.

What was on your plate and on your table. And what was showing up in the family calendar. This could be a Jewish kind of twist here of these false teachers saying, hey, you got to eat kosher. Or it could be someone's telling these Christians they couldn't eat idol meat. The calendar, they needed to observe all the Jewish holidays.

Or they needed to observe the Sabbath. They needed to go to synagogue on Saturday and gather with the church on the Lord's Day. That would raise a lot of questions.

[24:42] And there was judgment happening from these false teachers onto this church for what they were and were not doing. And Paul is saying this.

Don't let people who are not proclaiming Christ tell you what to do when it comes to eating and calendarizing.

Because they're not living for Christ. He goes into verse 17 with a reason. When you, what you consume and what you calendarize.

Just shadows. Compared to Christ. The Jewish dietary laws, just shadows.

The Jewish holy days, just shadows. At best, they pointed to what was to come. Christ. Christ. And so what he's saying there is, hey, don't get wrapped up with this stuff.

[25:47] It's empty shadows, not Christfulness. Isn't it good to know that in Mark 7, we hear that Christ has declared all foods clean?

That's good news. It doesn't matter. If you think that alcohol is by nature evil, you're not lining up with your Bible.

Because your Bible makes it very clear that alcohol is not the problem. Your Bible forbids drunkenness. And as far as calendars go, one of the things that we struggle with is what happens on October 31st.

It's either you are a lights on Christian or a lights off Christian. And what we're learning here is like, compared to Christ, that's just nothing.

We've got to be thoughtful about these things, right? But when Christ becomes your controlling center, it does inform what you eat, how you eat, how much you eat.

[27:03] And he becomes the first priority on your daily schedule. How do you spot a counterfeit? Counterfeit practice?

Well, you become intimately acquainted with the real thing and say, hey, is this a shadow or the real thing? Admonition number three, don't be condemned by those who are condemned.

There's a warning and there is a reason. And the reason he gives centers actually on the false teachers. The warning is this. Verse 18, let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and worship of angels.

When Jesus drops out of the controlling center, people will say, you've got to have an experience. Sometimes that's a religious experience. This warning against asceticism and worship of angels, those two things were probably operating together.

Asceticism is this idea of being severe to your body, denying your body food, and denying your body sleep, and denying your body sexual relations with your spouse, so that you can have some kind of otherworldly religious experience.

[28:25] It's quid pro quo. It's like, God, I'll do this for you. If you do something for me. The worship of angels was one of two things. It was either the actual worship of angels, which God clearly forbids, Revelation chapter 22, 8 and 9, or it's joining the angels in the worship of God.

You could imagine how something could happen like this. It's like, okay, these false teachers are saying, they've put Jesus on the periphery, and it's like, you've got to have these experiences. So deny this to your body, this to your body, and this to your body. And maybe you will have, be brought into this otherworldly plane of being in the presence of the angels as they're worshipping God.

That's what you need. It's not what you need. Do you remember that Wendy's commercial with that old lady?

She goes to this burger joint, and they give her this burger, and it's all bun, no meat, and she's at, what's she ask? Like, where's the beef?

[29:46] False teacher. Where's the beef? Where's the Christ? You want me to pursue an experience?

You want to make that the controlling center of my life? Where's the Christ in that? Paul's saying, don't let these false teachers rattle your cage.

Don't let them judge you if you're not having this kind of experience. It's about Christ. And then he goes into the reasons. I'm going to just blaze through them.

The first one is authority. These false teachers who are insisting on this asceticism and worship of angels, they're going on in details about visions.

That's their authority. Oh, I was in my private prayer room, and God gave me this vision, so therefore, you need to do this. Going on and on. They're not giving you God's word, Paul says.

[30:55] That's a red flag. He goes on to say, not only are they living by visions, but we read that they are puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.

That puffed up is kind of like shadows. Empty. Who's been to the Wisconsin State Fair? The giant cream puff. Man, that will fill you up, right?

No. It's empty. It's hot air. False teachers are like cream puffs. Sweet, no substance, but deadly. These religious experiences, these false teachers were advocating were not just puffing other people. It was puffing them up. The biblical language there, puffed up is another way of talking about pride.

They think too highly of themselves. They have no reason for it. It's their fleshly minds. They're thinking, I'm having these visions. I'm very special. They're not. They just think they are.

[32:12] Paul's saying, you're going to trust someone like that? It's the next one that is amazingly shocking. These false teachers were not holding fast to the head.

Jesus Christ. 118. These false teachers, they were puffed up. They were vision-driven, prophetic visions, not God's word, because they're not holding fast to the head.

They have no substance to give. Not dependent. Not trusting in Christ. Not relying on Him. Not living for Christ. Not proclaiming Christ.

They're not saying Christ is central to all things. They're saying at best, if you can work them in. Paul's, this is kind of the question he's asking.

It's Colossians. What? Why would you ever give an authoritative platform to your life, to someone like that? Who's not even holding to Christ?

[33:25] Brothers and sisters, do you know what we need in this church? What kind of leaders we need? The leaders we need are not those who are not holding fast to Christ, but holding fast with everything they got to Christ, and helping every one of us hold fast with everything we got to Christ, and then reminding us, Christ is holding fast to you, brother and sister.

He will not let you go. These false teachers were untrustworthy, living for themselves, not Christ. And here's the warning.

Who are you listening to? Who are you listening to? Jordan Peterson, Ben Shapiro, Joe Rogan, Rogan, I don't know.

Ted's Talks, in abundance. Allie Ward analogies. Professors, teachers, what are your coaches saying? who are you listening to? Who are you listening to?

What are you listening to? Who are you listening to? Who are you listening to? Who are these people in your life telling you that you should be living for? And where's Christ?

[34:40] Here's something. Listen, I'm a little hot over this one. Has anybody heard this before? Be the best version of yourself. That's all you got?

Be the best version of myself. That's all you got to give me? Compared to Christ?

Christ? To be the best version of yourself is just expressive, individualistic nonsense.

Christ is our fullness. Admonition four is in verse 20, 23. It's a summary admonition.

And it's basically, touching on everything he's talked about so far in verses 8 through 19. And he brings it all together into a kind of a summary argument.

[35:48] It's in the form of a rhetorical question. You can see the question mark at the end of 22. Do you see that? It's a rhetorical question. To make a point. Here's the point.

He's asking, why would you, if you are united to Christ in all of his fullness, be living like in four things that are empty?

That's the argument. And he culminates this whole section with that. His argument is this. It's who you belong to. Who Christ is determines how you live, how you walk.

And if Christ isn't the determining factor, something else is. Christian, why are you living for things that are just empty when you've got the fullness of Christ?

Christ. If Christ is not the controlling center of your life, something else will be. And you can bank on it.

[37:00] It won't result in godliness. He ends in verse 23 with pointing to all of these like religious practices.

And he's like, they don't even get anything done. They can't stop you from sinning. They can't stop you from indulging your flesh. In fact, they will help you indulge your flesh.

Only Christ in his fullness will help you become like Christ. all these admonitions are against this counterfeit philosophy and practices.

A counterfeit savior in salvation. Paul's saying there's no life there. Kick it to the curb. This morning, we've received some training at spotting some counterfeit philosophies and practices.

Counterfeit saviors and salvations. We've seen what these philosophies men really are. What's behind them and that they're empty and deceptive.

[38:19] There's no life in those. Proceed with caution. Christ and Christ alone is our life giving and life governing reality.

reality. Two applications. Application number one, treasure Christ above all else.

Delight in him as the controlling center of your life. That is reality. and when you're delighting in him and becoming more and more intimately acquainted with him, you'll be able to sniff out the counterfeits.

So treasure Christ above all else. If you need help with that, like, I don't, never heard that before.

How do I do that? Come talk to me afterwards. I'll help you with that. Application two. As you encounter people promoting different philosophies, whether it's through your playlist, whether it's through the shows you're watching, the movies you go to, the podcasts you listen to, the schools you're attending, the workplaces that you're in, the gym you work out at, be asking this question. Where's the Christ? And if you're encountering people and philosophies that are proclaiming, not proclaiming Christ and him as the controlling center of all things, you know what you have on your hands?

[40:07] Got a counterfeit on your hands. Don't be taken captive. Rather, be captivated by the fullness of Christ.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, there is none like you. Father, would you pour out your spirit upon us, your church, that we would delight and treasure and guard the Lord Jesus Christ as the controlling

center of all that we are and do.

You are worthy. rescue us, deliver us, make us wise. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.
Amen.