

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for February 19: Simplicity and sufficiency

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We live in a complex world with almost uncountable options, which is why some think it's bizarre to say that Jesus Christ alone is the complete answer to life and that there's no other. But, that's exactly what the Bible says, and that's exactly what Jesus claimed.

The Bible says, "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." That's a bold statement, but it's more than just a religious viewpoint; it's an authoritative statement. The Apostle Paul said in Colossians 2:4, "I say this in order that no one may delude you with a persuasive argument."

All the answers you need for time and eternity are in Christ. All the answers for your soul, your sin, your hope for the life to come, they're all in Christ and only in Christ. You will find everything you could ever desire or need in him. That's because "In him you have been made complete" (Colossians 2:10).

Many people say Christ is a part of their life, but not all. They say we need Christ plus philosophy, psychology, ritual and ceremony, miraculous experiences, mystical intuition, and bodily self-denial or immolation. But, the Bible says life is all about knowing Christ. It's through him that sinners are reconciled to God, transformed, converted, regenerated and born again. Apart from him there are no answers either for time or eternity.

In chapter 2 of Colossians, Paul names four things that assault the simplicity of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ—philosophy, legalism,

mysticism and asceticism.

In verse 8, Paul says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world rather than according to Christ.”

Cults and “isms” abound. We live in a world that tells us there’s no such thing as absolute truth, which is why Paul said, “... see to it that no one takes you captive.”

Philosophy is more than empty deceit, it’s an empty lie. It’s a delusion that sounds good, and it attracts and seduces the mind. It has certain properties of rationality, but no spiritual value at all. If you want to know divine, supernatural truth, you don’t go to a human source. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul says the natural man doesn’t understand the things of God because they’re spiritual.

Philosophy isn’t transcendent; it’s baby talk. It teaches nothing more than the ABCs of the world. Human wisdom has no ability to grasp truth beyond human capability. You can’t know the truth about the world of God unless God comes and tells you—and that’s what he did in a supernatural book called the Bible.

He came not only in written truth, but in truth incarnate in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philosophy doesn’t advance man, it goes the other way. It keeps him forever infantile.

There’s a second issue Paul discusses, which is external religion—ceremony and ritual. The Jews wanted to sit in judgment on people as to what they ate, whether they observed the appropriate festival, whether they were circumcised and how they observed the Sabbath day. Paul said all this stuff had a place in the past, but it was only a shadow of what was to come. Christ came, so shadow and ritual was set aside.

No external activity contributes anything to your salvation—only Christ.

The third issue Paul discusses is mysticism. Some people think mystical and spiritual are intermingled. You have a whole movement of people today who take their stand on their so-called visions, their so-called secret revelations, their trips to heaven, their visions of God, their encounters with Jesus, and their encounters with angels. Paul says: “You know what? That defrauds you.”

Many televangelists are hard for me to accept because of their pride and their over-the-top sense of self-importance. You must think you’re pretty important if God talks to you just about every day, gives you visions, revelations and sends angels to do all these things.

Of course, verse 19 says, “These people do not hold fast to the head.”

Who’s the head? It’s Christ. He’s the head. Back in Colossians 1:18, we’re told: “He’s the head of the body of the church. He’s the beginning. He’s the one.”

The last issue is asceticism. And, while it’s a word you don’t hear used much, over the centuries some people have practiced it quite diligently.

Let’s begin with the fact that when you come to Christ, you die to this world. It’s in your past, and you now live in a new world—the kingdom of God. You’re complete in Christ, having all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Asceticism is the attitude that if you’re not of this world, you shouldn’t submit to any decrees of this world—or to doing what most people in society consider normal.

For example, some people today use religion as the basis for not washing their hair. In the Middle Ages, there was such a thing as holy vermin. When

religious people who never had bathed in their entire life had vermin, it was decided it was holy vermin—proving that religious people are just as stupid as nonreligious people when it comes to developing a self-made religion and humility.

Life is in Christ—all truth, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, peace, joy, value, fulfillment, satisfaction, purpose, deliverance, strength, comfort and eternal hope. The Bible calls these the unsearchable riches of Christ.