

Grow in Freedom

A devotional by Xiwei Wu

Colossians 2:8-19 seems all about perceptions and theology. The passage doesn't seem relevant to believers' daily life and relationship. But if you hold on to the old idea of religion, you bound to measure others and compare self with certain standards, feel tension and defeated. Please note, whatever laws and standard are in your mind, they are not of Trinitarian God's characteristics. Those were brought in from our old unhealthy ways. Some might say, how could you assume God is without standards? Right, God's standard is love. Let's examine verse by verse.

8: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ." The Greek word for "makes a prey" sounds similar to Jewish synagogue, therefore in a smart way, Paul says don't be lured into synagogue¹, i.e. get into Judaism, for Christ the king is central to your faith². He wanted to address Colossians this: don't get trapped by religious and philosophical systems!

9-10: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." Paul made it clear, that Jesus embodies the fullness of divinity, that to have a portion in God's covenantal promise, you just need to know Him. How was Paul so sure? You only have to remember his conversion. A big light told him "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". Only the God whom he worships has

such glory! Brothers and sisters, only when you feel you have Christ's fullness, you can share it.

11-12: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Paul says you don't need circumcise, for you already had what matters most: baptized into Christ. You be with Him because of your faith. Here baptism mainly refers to an inner sense of belonging. Water ceremony is only secondary.

13-14: "And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." In other words, you had not kept the laws, but God has forgiven all your sins because of what Christ has done. Now we don't have pressure to keep Jewish laws, but whatever other religious rules we have, Christ has already canceled them.

15: He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him. When Roman governor crucified Jesus, he thought he'd made a public show in triumphing over a Jewish king, but it is God who celebrates the victory.

16-18: "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 only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ..." So we don't need add other religious systems to be completed. No Jewish laws, nor other religious

¹ N.T. Wright, <Paul for Everyone – the Prison Letters>, page 166.

² There were Jewish Christians who followed Paul to tell another gospel to the churches he established: you gentile came to believe in Jesus that's great, but God's covenantal promise was made to the descendents of Abraham, you better get circumcised. Paul had been angry about this fake gospel.

practices³ to better ourselves. Those practices if are for comparison, really show off oneself that seek to disqualify others.

19: "...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." Christ the King is all we need to hold on. Our growth really is communal that we need to connect and support each other.

It might be challenging to establish such environment, but it is important. Instead of being constrained and urged by rules, God wants us to grow in freedom and loving relationship.

³ Gnosticism is from Greek philosophy that teaches God is pure and great in spiritual world, and material world is corrupted. So they encourage ascetic in sexual and dietary practices.