

THERE'S HOPE!

Colossians 2:1-23

In 2008 Oprah devoted her radio shows to teach *A Course in Miracles*, a book by an atheist. It claims (1) Jesus is not God, (2) Satan, evil and sin do not exist and (3) the Bible cannot be trusted. The author insists that Jesus dictated the book to her. Note her instructions:

“Some of the ideas the workbook presents you will find hard to believe, and others may seem to be quite startling. This does not matter. You are merely asked to apply the ideas as you are directed to do. You are not asked to judge them at all. You are asked only to use them. It is their use that will give them meaning to you and will show you that they are true.”

Can you say “brainwashing?” Shades of David Koresh, Charles Manson and Jim Jones. In 62 A.D. Colossae in ancient Turkey is riddled with religious scams that blurred Judaism with pagan cults, insisting that faith in Christ is not enough. This prompts Paul to write this letter. **Let's read Colossians 2:1-23.**

“1 I want you to realize that I continue to work as hard as I know how for you, and also for the Christians over at Laodicea. Not many of you have met me face-to-face, but that doesn't make any difference. Know that I'm on your side, right alongside you. You're not in this alone. 2 I want you woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God's great mystery. 3 All the richest treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embedded in that mystery and nowhere else. And we've been shown the mystery!

“4 I'm telling you this because I don't want anyone leading you off on some wild-goose chase, after other so-called mysteries, or ‘the Secret.’ 5 I'm a long way off, true, and you may never lay eyes on me, but believe me, I'm on your side, right beside you. I am delighted to hear of the careful and orderly ways you conduct your affairs and impressed with the solid substance of your faith in Christ.

“6 My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live Him. 7 You're deeply rooted in Him. You're well-constructed upon Him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.

“8 Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that's not the way of Christ. 9 Everything of God gets expressed in Him, so you can see and hear Him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ and the emptiness of the universe without Him.

“10 When you come to Him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything. 11 Entering into this fullness is not something you figure out or achieve. It's not a

matter of being circumcised or keeping a long list of laws. No, you're already in - insiders - not through some secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin. 12 If it's an initiation ritual you're after, you've already been through it by submitting to baptism. Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as He did Christ.

“13 When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive - right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, 4 the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross. 15 He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the cross and marched them naked through the streets.

16 So don't put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services or holy days.

17 All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ.

“18 Don't tolerate people who try to run your life, ordering you to bow and scrape, insisting that you join their obsession with angels and that you seek out visions. They're a lot of hot air, that's all they are. 19 They're completely out of touch with the source of life, Christ, who puts us together in one piece, whose very breath and blood flow through us. He is the Head, and we are the body. We can grow up healthy in God only as He nourishes us.

“20 So, then, if with Christ you've put all that pretentious and infantile religion behind you, why do you let yourselves be bullied by it? 21 'Don't touch this! Don't taste that! Don't go near this!' 22 Do you think things that are here today and gone tomorrow are worth that kind of attention? 23 Such things sound impressive if said in a deep enough voice. They even give the illusion of being pious and humble and ascetic. But they're just another way of showing off, making yourselves look important.”

“Eat Your Heart Out, Sherlock” Colossians 2:1-7

Paul affirms his readers' courageous faith in Jesus and unveils perks hidden until now which are ours thanks to the cross. He wants us to go deep into the “secret” which is “Christ in us!” This means we have the very character of God (**Ephesians 1:4-10; 1 John 4:1-6**).

Being *born again*, as Jesus put it, is not about *doing* but *believing*, with thanksgiving, letting Him guide all you are, think, say and do. Paul wants us to rely on Christ unlike the churches in Corinth and Galatia who were misled by flawed human thinking (**2 Corinthians 11:1-6; Galatians 1:6-20**).

DISCUSS: How can you avoid being spiritually deceived?

“Can't Buy Me Love” Colossians 2:8-19

In *The Message* the late Eugene Peterson updates Paul's original Greek:

“Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that’s not the way of Christ. Everything of God gets expressed in Him, so you can see and hear Him clearly. You don’t need a telescope, a microscope or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ and the emptiness of the universe without Him. When you come to Him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.”

When you commit to Jesus, you get “spiritually circumcised,” i.e., the “fleshly” layer of inconsequential, holier-than-thou do’s and don’ts is removed, lifting you from *spiritual death* to *spiritual life* (**Galatians 6:12-15; Romans 2:28-29; Ephesians 2:11-16, 4:17-24**).

Overnight the world has been thrown into a catatonic state of panic by the coronavirus. How do we respond? Certainly not with fear, but with power, love and a sound mind. Jesus calls us to fear those who can destroy our soul, not just kill our body (Matthew 10:28; 2 Timothy 1:7). “Situations that contain opportunities to be anxious are actually a test of our peace,” writes Graham Cooke. Each problem has God’s provision.

DISCUSS: Cooke writes, “God wants to show us more and more of His character and nature every day, so He allows opportunities for us to rely on Him.” What are you learning from this virus experience?

Bread That Builds Strong Bodies Colossians 2:20-23

When by faith you said “yes” to Christ, He deleted the record of *all* your sins – past, present and future (**Titus 2:11-14**). You’re now equipped to *be* and *do* all He put you on earth for, with access to His unlimited resources. **You’re a co-heir with Christ, i.e., half of the Son’s inheritance and standing with God the Father have been credited to your spiritual account (Galatians 3:23-26)!**

In his *Mysteries of the Apostle Paul* author Henry Klopp sums up what the risen Christ disclosed to Paul: ***“No one gets into heaven because of their good deeds, and no one is excluded from heaven because of their bad deeds. The issue is not what we have done, but what we have believed and whom we have chosen to serve”*** (Romans 4:1-16).

Whether asceticism (physical deprivation) or monasticism (ecclesiastical exile), God ascribes no eternal worth to human efforts to achieve holiness (**Matthew 7:21-23**).

Cooke writes, *“We were in sin, and He loved us. Why is this important? Because it proves that His love is not conditional on our performance as Christians. Instead, His love is based on His own nature. Nothing we can do can make God love us less. Nothing we can do can make Him love us more! He loves us because He is love. Being beloved is our identity in Christ; it’s the*

name by which God calls and accepts us.’ Paul simply says, “God made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Choose Life HOPE!

Refusing God’s offer means you’ve *chosen* unending torment in a place made NOT for sinners but for Satan (Matthew 25:41). God desires hell for no one! So He sacrificed His Son to delete the eternal consequences of your sin. ***"God gave us eternal life; the life is in His Son. So whoever has the Son has life; whoever rejects the Son rejects life. My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God's Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life ..."*** (1 John 5:11-13).

If you have not done so yet, now’s the time for you to accept God’s gift of eternal life. Let’s pause now while you call on Jesus and close the biggest – and best – deal you’ll ever make.

His Deal

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