

## LSB Colossians 2:8 - 15 Empty Philosophies

*NASB77 8 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. 9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.*

Everybody has a philosophy. R. C. Sproul wrote a book titled Everyone's a Theologian. Same idea. Everyone has a philosophy of life based in an understanding of God . . . even if your philosophy is that He is not.

No one, on the street, if you can get them to stop and think for a minute, would say, gosh, I never gave it much thought.

In fact it's sort of all we think about. Flip on the news and the story is; Our nation is polarized. Polarized over what? Our differing philosophies. Our different world views of human thriving and how to achieve it.

Everyone's a theologian and the most popular philosophy numbers wise in our land is that there is no God. Therefore, have at it. All limiting restrictions based in a God who revealed a moral order of right and wrong

is just nonsense. Find your own way. If it feels good and you can somewhat justify that no one else is getting hurt outside of their will, do it.

And the folks who espouse that philosophy, since it also eliminated all of the other limiting "you shall not's", feel so strongly about their unlimited freedoms that they are starting to kill people on the opposing side of the argument. And why not? We eliminate babies because they might limit our freedoms, so is it that big of a jump to eliminate adults with opposing philosophies that would limit our freedoms.

My point is that every human has a philosophy that is driving how they live and what their goals are. Our founders 250 years ago understood this premise very well when they wrote the words; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness into the constitution. From AI;

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are fundamental rights mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, asserting that all people are **entitled** to live, be free, and strive for a fulfilling life. Authored by Thomas Jefferson, the phrase was inspired by the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the philosophical ideas of John Locke.

All of it is based in philosophy. Everyone is somewhere in the mix. Everyone has a philosophy. That's just very basic. Walk across the street and talk to your neighbors and they'll tell you their philosophy. And whatever it happens to be, don't try to change it. We're very stubbornly proud of our working philosophy's. Everyone's got life all figured out.

Our text this morning, if it is understood logically and honestly according to the idea that Paul was presenting to his original hearers, may be the most controversial idea that has ever been espoused from this pulpit.

Because Paul stands up and tells the entire world, your philosophies are empty, they are wrong, and they are nothing but da da goo goo baby giberish compared to . . . having Christ.

*8 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.*

Let's unpack some words, and what they meant to the original hearers, and then we'll put Paul's idea back together in completeness.

philosophy meant to them exactly what it means to us. It's a compound word derived from two words. philo is love. brotherly love, warm affection. And sophia is wisdom. So philosophy is a love of wisdom. Love for and desire for wisdom.

That can be incredibly broad. Because what you believe is wise, I may believe is foolish. In fact Paul tells the corinthians exactly that.

*Let no one deceive himself. If any of you thinks he is wise in this age, he should become a fool, so that he may become wise. / For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness." / And again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 1 Corinthians 3:18-20*

So there is relativity in wisdom. Wisdom in itself can swing wildly dependent on what truth or error it is based in. Good wisdom and bad wisdom. When David cries out; OH! How I love thy Law. in Psalm 119:97 he is espousing a wisdom that is based in truth revealed by God.

*Oh how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than mine enemies; For they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers; For thy testimonies are my meditation.*

David speaks of a wisdom based in God's revealed truth. That isn't the philosophy that Paul speaks of in our verse in Colossians. And Paul is going to define for us the kind of philosophy that he warns us to avoid.

*8 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.*

Paul warns against the world's philosophy. And he uses several descriptors. First it is empty. Empty lies. It's bankrupt because it's based in deceitful lies

But it's amazing how intimidating something so empty can become. How is it that a nobody in noplace, (Tonopah Nevada) the undisputed middle of no place, with a limited IQ comparatively, can tell the most brilliant disputers of this age, you're not only wrong, but what you're saying is bankrupt. Empty!

Christopher Hitchens would turn me into mince meat in 10 seconds flat, but it doesn't change that fact that what I possess is true and full and what he possesses is empty. Bankrupt. Zero. Paul says so, under the inspiration of God.

But the deception is intimidating because brilliant people, people who I totally know have more mental powers by a magnitude than I do, believe the deceptions. They get passionate about the lies they believe.

That kind of passionate intimidation is what is behind the word Paul uses here. *See to it that no one takes you **captive***

Satan **captured** Eve with the powers of his deception. Actually he captured the entire human race in that single deceptive philosophical lie.

The greek word in the original text is (Strong's 4812) sylagōgēō (from sylōn, "a prey, a victim" and (Strong's 71) /ágō, "carry off") – properly, to carry off like a predator with its prey; to spoil (used only in Col 2:8).

A totally descriptive picture. One morning I was driving towards some firewood early in the morning and I watched an amazing sight. An eagle had a squirrel or small rabbit in it's talons and it was flying over the

highway and it dropped its prey from perhaps 80 feet up, onto the highway, presumably to kill it with the impact.

The word Paul uses here is that idea. Philosophy will capture people and carry them away as spoils to be killed. Paul is pretty blunt.

And yet we're sort of embarrassed to be Christians and we want to be accepted by academia. We want a middle way. We want to be winsome, somehow, to this world. We want to seem friendly with its philosophy. Ever hear that well meaning little phrase. Be winsome so that we can win some.

Beloved, at the end of the day, our belief system is so offensive to this world, there's no middle ground. I love Charlie Kirk. If you watch him engage, he absolutely IS the most winsome person in the room, while he tells them they're totally wrong. His love and affection for his opponents was indisputable. It was obvious. He had zero animosity towards the people he was actually trying to help. While he told them they were wrong.

If we aren't offensive, we're probably doing it wrong. Finding inoffensive middle ground is how you get captured and carried away. That's Paul's warning. Now, how does Paul describe this world's philosophy?

*8 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*

First of all, and we've already mentioned this. Philosophy is empty lies. It's bankrupt. Empty. And it is deceiving. Deception is how Satan rolls. Pretty little lies. So pretty. So alluring. So smart sounding. So attractive. So irresistibly appealing. Just like the fruit Eve took a chomp out of. Now Paul gets to the bottom line.

*according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ*

Philosophy is man based. It is the pinnacle of what man can discover, apart from God. Philosophy is man's best truth's apart from God, probing in darkness.

What are the elementary principles of the world? Most of the commentaries will tell you, it's ABC 123. Childish things. Basically nothing. These guys are intimidatingly brilliant and yet their theories are bankrupt. Empty. Da da goo goo. Elementary.

But I think, that's right of course, but I think it means common revelation, built into the creation by God, that God lets us find out. Mathematics. Science. Common graces available to the righteous as well as the wicked.

Think how sophisticated we've gotten from elementary things that God has allowed everyone to have. Mathematical principles that generated scientific inquiry. The Periodic table of elements. Communication. Words! Both incorrect ones and true ones. God has given common grace to find things out.

Everybody's talking about AI. The pinnacle of science and binary mathematics combined with electricity to literally catalog all knowledge. And yet all of it, outside of the book we hold in our hands, the written revelation of God, is nothing more than the elementary principles of the world.

Man can achieve mind bending things, but all of it is bankrupt, empty. Because all of the most sophisticated math and science cannot reveal God. We've got the hubbel telescope to show us the vast universes and galaxies and electron microscopes to explore DNA, and yet we haven't found God.

Slide rules calculated us to the moon in 1969, but God wasn't there. The elementary principles of the world is what God allows us to find out, but God Himself remains impossible to know about . . . except for what He chooses to reveal about Himself . . . and He reserves that knowledge to

believers who have bowed before His Son Jesus, whose sins are forgiven, and . . .

. . . and this is the most important thing of all for our subject today, God reveals Himself to believers who have, by regeneration been made alive, together with Christ who rose from the dead.

True wisdom and knowledge of God, actually knowing God, intimately and personally is the gift of God to those who are the elect, who have been forgiven of their sins and rebellion, and who have been quickened from spiritual death to spiritual life.

If that life is opened up to you, all of a sudden, the world's smartest people who don't know God are like babies going da da goo goo. Those who have Christ have magnitudes more true wisdom and true knowledge than the worlds most accomplished and brilliant thinkers.

Paul expands on this idea in his first letter to the corinthians. The dichotomy of the worldly wisdom in comparison to the foolishness of the gospel is unchanged in 2000 years.

The world got a whole lot more sophisticated in it's worldly philosophies and the gospel has gotten comparatively dumber than ever. That alone should argue for this book. The world got smarter, the christians by comparison to the world look dumber than ever, and yet 2000 years later, the same truth is more true now than it was 2000 years ago when Paul said it to Corinth.

*17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, **not in cleverness of speech**, that the cross of Christ should not be made void.*

We so badly want some middle way where we can be accepting of the world and it's wisdom, and likewise be accepted by them. Maybe christians can be frien-emy's with the world. Maybe we can change the gospel so it isn't so offensive to the world? Maybe we can be softer about sin and

darkness.

Paul says, nope. If I made the gospel clever some how, acceptable to the world some how, I would in that process need to make the cross of Christ null and void. There is no middle ground.

*18 For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,  
“I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,  
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”*

*20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

It's as if God made His message so simple as to seem idiotic to the watching world, on purpose. Almost as if He wants all of those uber smart uber proud people to reject His lifeline of salvation.

*22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are **the called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Well, beloved, the proof is in the pudding. We're a bunch of saved idiots. Look around. Pinch yourselves, here we are, just exactly as Paul paints the picture. We're so dumb we believed the gospel, and with Christ in us and with us, we've surpassed the whole world and all of it's scrambling around trying to find out God, in the darkness.

*26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise*

*according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, 29 that no man should boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*

And that, beloved, is why we are careful, cautious even, watching over each other like a bunch of dumb sheep in a pen, when it comes to the world's philosophy. We restrain worldly philosophy like a shepherd restrains rabid wolves, drooling outside the pen trying to get at those sheep and carry them off.

That's the picture Paul painted for us in this verse. But what did we get instead. Are we really just dumb sheep in our sheep pen?

Not if you're a sheep connected to Christ. The world can have it's pinnacle of AI knowledge. I have Christ. No comparison. They see me as a drooling idiot. In Christ, I see them in all of their pinnacle of knowledge as people proudly saying da da, goo goo. Christ is far above this world's wisdom. And I am safely hidden in Him.

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Paul doesn't say wisdom and knowledge is bad. Actually wisdom and knowledge is neutral. Neither good or bad. It's the source of wisdom and knowledge that defines whether it is good, or evil.

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The fact is; that I am captured by a philosophy. I have been taken captive by a philosophy that has at it's source, all of the wisdom and knowledge of the Creator of all things. My philosophy is according to Christ.

My philosophy is based in wisdom that is hidden from the entire world but revealed to christians who have been made alive, quickened to spiritual life from the darkness and death, by the Holy Spirit of God. Hidden in plain sight.

People who listen to me think I'm very opinionated. I'm not. Whatever this book says, that's what I think. I don't have an original thought in my head. But I drink in this book, so that, as someone once said about John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress, you can cut him anywhere, and he bleeds Bible.

My philosophy of life is built upon an unobtainable, to the world, wisdom that is according to Christ. A wisdom based in Christ, and not based according to the elementary things of this world.

*9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority*

Now, I want you to look at two words that tell the entire story in these verses this morning. All you need to understand in two words.

*8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception,*

*9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form*

Two ways. Emptiness, or fullness. Bankrupt spiritually, or spiritually rich. My cup is empty, or my cup runneth over.

Now, in verse 9, I want you to zone in on the beginning word, **In Him**. That is Paul's favorite descriptor of a true christian who has been born again, who has experienced a regeneration of spiritual life, who has been quickened, spiritually from death to life. When that happens, we are In Him.

In the book of Ephesians alone, which we recently finished working our way through, Paul uses that phrase; In Him, or In Christ, over 35 times. That's Paul's shorthand for a truly born again christian.

How interesting that Paul employs that same descriptor in his comparison of **empty bankrupt** worldly philosophy as opposed to what we possess, In Christ.

*9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*

In the world, or actually, we could say, in Satan's cosmos, there is nothing to finally grasp and hold but empty bankrupt lies. Empty deceit.

But in Christ, we have not just some fuzzy kind of fullness. In Him we have a spiritual connection to Deity. Christ has connected us to God.

Does that make me a deity. Absolutely not. What it makes me is a previous sinner, whose sins are forgiven, once for all time, who now has a connection, a love connection, a friendship, with God of very God. A connection to Deity

I am IN Christ, and Christ is all the fullness of Deity in a bodily form. But that connection is my source of fullness. Once I was in the world, bankrupt, empty, wandering around in all the worldly empty lies. Now I am IN Christ, and I have His fullness on tap. Empty, full. Bankrupt, rich. In this world, or In Christ.

*10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all*

*rule and authority;*

We've been talking about the completeness. The fullness of having Christ as my King and my friend. To have a very real connection to the wealth of Him who spoke everything into existence.

Let's talk about the second half of verse 10. We've been speaking of a great dichotomy. Wisdom and foolishness. Worldly bankrupt philosophies and Godly rich full philosophies. Wandering in darkness, blindly trying to find God, even if you are an Atheist, that's what you're doing, and walking in brilliant light, with God.

At the root of that dichotomy of world views are two opposing kingdoms. Two opposing authorities to reign. In the bible, the word kingdom means an authority to reign.

Satan has stolen the authority to reign over this world. He has usurped authority, and he reigns as ruler of this world. He is an occupier of territory that doesn't rightly belong to him. But occupy he does, because mankind forfeited the rule and reign when they sinned. And all sinned.

Jesus Himself recognizes that Satan is the "ruler of this world" John 12, 14, Eph 2, and many other places. We could do an entire study of the truth of the problem.

We already spoke of this in chapter 1 verse 13. *13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,*

Satan rules a domain of darkness. Satan and all who have sinned and not been forgiven are doomed. They are waiting for final judgement and eternal separation from God, but at this moment in time, Satan rules the cosmos, the systems of this world. That's why worldly philosophies and wisdom is so dangerous. Satan rules this cosmos. He rules this worlds systems.

But that rule is temporary and only possible because God is allowing it to ultimately fulfil **His** sovereign purposes and glory. Look again at the end of verse 10.

*10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;*

Jesus has full rule over and authority over Satan. Satan is a deposed king of a usurped realm that was never his.

You say, if that's true, why does God allow the evil to continue unchecked!!!

Well, first of all, it is not unchecked. In the Bible we have glimpses of Satan interacting with God, requesting permission, as it were, to sift Peter like wheat, or to throw unimaginable tests of faith at Job, or accusing Joshua the High Priest in Zechariah 3. Satan is checked.

If you want to see the world with those checks removed, read the book of Revelation beginning with chapter 6. God lifts the restrictions and Satan and his hoardes of demons terrorize the earth. For a time. 3 1/2 years of terror.

Why then is there so much evil, unchecked? What is God waiting for??

God is in sovereign control of everything, and in fact, God has been very gracious to reveal a LOT of information for us, through His prophets, both old testament and new, of the cataclysmic retaking of this world, from Satan.

It's all pre-planned according to God's sovereign design according to His full glory. He is in full control of every nano second until His times are fulfilled according to His full design and glory. You can read the end of the book.

But for our purposes this morning, in thinking of the great battle of good versus evil, we have escaped the fires of judgement and have run to the safety of forgiveness and life inside of Christ, our King who is King of all kings, including Satan.

Two clashing worlds at war with each other. The authority to reign of God in combat with the authority to reign of Satan. The kingdom of God at war with the kingdom, (small k) of Satan.

The church is called out of and is distinctly separated from the kingdoms of this world that are ruled over by Satan. There's your answer. Yes, evil is present here, and in fact in ruling power here, but God has made a way of escape from Satan's domination, even in this world, at this present moment.

And, oh, by the way, according to the end phrase in verse 10, we have come out of this condemned world, and into the Kingdom that is in ultimate control and that wins the battle of good and evil. The fullness of being IN Christ, who is the King of kings, the head over all rulers and authorities.

It seems appropriate to end our thoughts for this morning by quoting Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus and by extension, for us as well. A lofty prayer as we think about our lofty position, rescued out of this condemned world, but still here, waiting for our redemption, when we are all gathered in safety and victory, to Him, in the air.

*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and*

*gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.*

Read the end of the book. We win. If we are IN Christ, we win alongside of Him.

The philosophy of this world has only this world. This life is all there is. That would cause panic to me. But Godly philosophy understands that there's more than this condemned and judged world. We may be sheep for the slaughter in this world, but we will live and reign with our victorious Lord Jesus in the next world that He is bringing to pass.

And even in this world, with all of it's pitfalls and dangers to christians, we have Him. We hold Him, and He holds us. But our inheritance is in the next world.