

Beware Lest Any Man Spoil You

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Introduction

According to the NKJV, Colossians 2:8 says, “*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*” The NASB reads, “*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.*”

Beware/See to It

Thomas defines *blepō* as “to look (at)” [991]. BDAG say it means “(1) to perceive with the eye, see... (4) to pay esp. close attention to something, notice, mark..”

This is a danger warning! If we see a man waving a red flag on the highway, it is an indication that we need to slow down, find out what the danger is, avoid it, and proceed with caution. This is a call to constant watchfulness and vigilance. The Bible repeatedly warns us to “Beware!” (Matt. 16:6; Luke 12:15; Phil. 3:2-3; Heb. 3:12).

Lest Anyone Cheat You/That No One Takes You Captive

Thomas defines *sulagōgeō* as a compound of *sulaō* [to plunder] and *agō* [to lead, bring, carry], meaning “to carry off as spoil” [4812]. BDAG say it means “to gain control of by carrying off as booty, make captive of, rob... in imagery of carrying someone away from the truth into the slavery of error.” This word occurs 1x in the NT (Col. 2:8).

It is related to the idea of “spoils of war.” We are engaged in a war with Satan (Eph. 6:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:8). Our adversary and his followers are cunning and crafty (2 Cor. 11:1-3, 12-15). If we are not careful we will be lead away captive (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Through Philosophy

Thomas defines *philosophia* as from *philosophos* [a philosopher], meaning “the love or pursuit of wisdom” [5385]. BDAG say it refers to “philosophy, in our literature only in one passage and in a pejorative sense, of erroneous teaching.” This word occurs 1x in the NT (Col. 2:8).

Philosophy refers to the love of knowledge and pursuit of wisdom. In one sense, this is entirely in accord with the spirit and teaching of Christ. However, in the New Testament age “philosophy” had come to refer to elaborate systems of human reasoning and speculation that exalts itself against God (Acts 17:16-21). Human philosophy is devoid of real truth and offers no hope (1 Cor. 1:18-31; 1 Tim. 6:20). Philosophy leads men away from the light of God’s inspired word into the darkness of human speculation. The philosopher is like a blind man in a dark cellar at midnight trying to catch a black cat that is not there!

Empty Deceit/Empty Deception

The Greek word *kenos*, here translated “empty,” “(1) pertains to being without something material, empty; (2) pertains to being devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value, empty fig. extension of mng. 1; (3) pertains to being without purpose or result, in vain” [BDAG]. The Greek word *apatē*, here translated “deceit” refers to “(1) deception, deceitfulness; (2) esp. pleasure, pleasantness that involves one in sin” [BDAG].

Many things in this life are deceitful: riches (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19), lusts (Eph. 4:22), unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:10), sin (Heb. 3:13), and self (2 Pet. 2:13). False teachers are particularly deceitful. They do not come wearing a sign which says “I am a minister of Satan. I’m here to rob you of your soul.” Instead, they are as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29). False teachers conceal their own barrenness. However, if you test them by the word of God, they will be found empty (Eph. 4:14-15; 1 John 4:1).

According To The Tradition Of Men

Thomas defines *paradosis* as from *paradidōmi* [to hand over], meaning “a handing down or over, a tradition” [3862]. BDAG say this word, which literally signifies a “handing down/over,” means “(1) handing over of someone to authorities, surrender, arrest; (2) the content of instruction that has been handed down, tradition, of teachings, commandments, narratives et al.” This word occurs 14x in the NT (Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; 1 Cor. 11:2; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6).

Tradition basically refers to “that which is handed down.” There is nothing inherently wrong with traditions per se. It all depends on their source: Are they from God or man? Tradition is good if it comes from the right place (1 Cor. 11:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; 3:6). However, traditions of men are additions to God’s law that will bring us into bondage. Exalting human ideas above the ways of God, they set aside God’s commandments (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13).

According To The Basic Principles Of The World/According To The Elementary Principles Of The World

Thomas defines *stoicheion* as from the same as *stoicheō* [to be in rows, fig. to walk by rule], meaning “one of a row, hence a letter (of the alphabet), by ext. the elements (of knowledge)” [4747]. BDAG say it refers to “(1) basic components of something, elements; (a) of substances underlying the natural world, the basic elements from which everything in the world is made and of which it is composed; (b) of basic components of celestial constellations, heavenly bodies; (c) of things that constitute the foundation of learning, fundamental principles; (2) transcendent powers that are in control over events in this world, elements, elemental spirits.” This word occurs 7x in the NT (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20; Heb. 5:12; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12).

In summary, this word refers to basic components, building-blocks, foundational elements, and fundamental principles, such as the physical elements of nature; the rudiments of music (*do-re-me-fa-so-la-te-do*), the letters of the alphabet and their associated sounds (*a-e-i-o-u*), etc. Biblically speaking, it is used of:

- The Rudiments of Nature (2 Pet. 3:10, 12)
- The Rudiments of the Law (Gal. 4:3, 9)
- The Rudiments of the World (Col. 2:8, 20)

- The Rudiments of the Gospel (Heb. 5:12)

In this context, it refers to the base things of the world that appeal to carnal minds (1 John 2:15-17). Satan's appeal remains the same: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (Gen. 3:1-6; Matt. 4:1-11).

So often gimmicks and worldly enticements are used by churches to increase their numbers: entertainment, food, large membership, beautiful building, etc. Only the gospel will draw people to Jesus (John 6:44-45; Rom. 1:16-17). If you draw with something else, you will draw people to something else!

Conclusion

These things are not authorized by Christ. They take men away from the Lord and weaken their trust in Him as the all-sufficient Savior. Any teaching that does not harmonize with divine revelation is false. In Christ you have all that you need. We find completeness in him. Do not allow yourself to be carried away with any teaching that is not according to Christ.

Let us beware of being led astray by the error of men. Hold to the gospel of Christ with unwavering loyalty, for this is the only sure and safe path (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:16; 2 John 9-11; 1 Pet. 4:11).