

Colossians 2:8–10

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

Lead You Away as a Prey — What Philosophy and Vain Deceit Do

Darby's rendering is more vivid than the King James: *see that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit*. A prey is something seized by a stronger force and carried away — often without the prey being fully aware of what is happening to it. Many have been led into philosophies and systems of thought genuinely believing they had found something new and valuable, not realising they were being taken captive. Philosophy here is not a neutral pursuit of wisdom — it is the tradition of men and the elements of the world, arranged into systems that appear profound but are not after Christ.

The obedience of the mind is as real a thing as the obedience of the hands. Ephesians 2:3 speaks of fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind — the two are put on a par. Intellectual departure from Christ has the same character as the more obviously fleshly kinds. The will is at the bottom of both: it is the will set against God that drives the intellect to the conclusions it reaches and controls the flesh in the directions it takes. To question that will, to bring the mind into the obedience of Christ, is what the verse is pressing.

The Elements of the World — Not Elemental Spirits

The rudiments of the world — in verse 20, the same phrase appears: *if ye be dead with Christ from the elements of the world*. Some translate this as the elemental spirits of the world, as though the warning is against certain spiritual forces rather than against the world itself. But that blunts the real force of the passage. Christ did not die to elemental spirits — He died to the world. The elements of the world are the basic, characterising principles that constitute what the world is as a system apart from God — what lies at the root of it and controls the whole. And the force of verse 20 is that if we have died with Christ from those very elements, we ought not to be living as though we were alive in them.

Those elements vary in their surface expression across different human systems — different economies, different forms of government, different philosophies — but at the bottom of them all is the same departure from God, the same attempt to build happiness and order without Him. John identifies them in 1 John 2: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. Those are the elements. Every human system, beneath its particular form, is an arrangement for the fulfilment of these things. And the teaching of men — the tradition that explains and commends each particular system — is what verse 8 warns against as the vehicle by which these elements take Christians captive.

For in Him Dwelleth All the Fulness of the Godhead Bodily

Set directly against the philosophy and vain deceit of verse 8 is the declaration of verse 9: *for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*. The contrast is total. On one side: the partial, incomplete, half-baked systems of men that may have the appearance of wisdom but lack the substance. On the other: all the fulness. Not fifty percent. Not most. *All* the fulness of the Godhead, dwelling in Him, and dwelling bodily.

This is a statement about the incarnate Son. It was the Son who became man — not the Father, not the Spirit. Yet as incarnate, as the man walking here on earth, all the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Him bodily. He had no body before the incarnation — yet taking humanity into His person, He became the centre and dwelling place of that fullness in manhood. This is something the mind cannot take in — no man knows who the Son is but the Father (Luke 10:22). There is an added depth to the person of the Son because of the incarnation that is absolutely beyond the reach of finite reasoning. But it is received by faith, and faith appropriates it.

The Lord said: *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father*. Every word, every work, every way of the Lord Jesus as He walked here was by the power of the Holy Spirit — the third person of the Godhead. In that man who walked through Galilee and Judaea, the fulness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwelt — bodily, in manhood. Those who complain of the complexity of the Trinity and prefer the simpler idea of one divine person have simply exchanged one mystery for another — for the existence of a causeless, eternal God is no less beyond the finite mind than the Trinity is. The Trinity is not a complexity to be argued against — it is the most precious doctrine there is, because it means that love has never had a beginning: it has always existed among the divine persons.

Ye Are Complete in Him

Verse 10 follows directly from verse 9 with the personal application: *and ye are complete in him*. If all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, then the one who is in Christ lacks nothing. Nothing is to be sought outside Him. No philosophy, no tradition of men, no rudiment of the world can add anything to one who is complete in Him. The very thing that the deluding voices at Colosse claimed to offer — deeper insight, higher wisdom, greater completeness — was already fully possessed by every believer who was in Christ. He is the Head of all principality and power. There is nothing above Him to be attained. There is no

principality or power that has more than He has or can give what He does not already give. The Christian who grasps this has the only real antidote to every form of philosophical or religious beguiling — not because he is cleverer than the deceiver, but because he already has everything in Christ.

— *Study ends* —