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I mentioned last week that nearly all of the Paul's letters were a response to specific conditions in the church he wrote to.

Colossians is definitely one of those churches.

I'll give you the specifics of the issues Paul raised in Colossae, but I also want to show how the saying, "*There's nothing new under the sun*" applies to this, because even though things are often repackaged with new terms, leaven is still leaven in any generation, and it's always dangerous.

Ever since Satan's appeal to Adam and Eve in the garden, he has watched, studied, and observed humanity for 6000 years and has concluded that when you find something that works, the smart thing to do is to stick with it.

Regardless of the means used, media, people or music, there will always be a call in the atmosphere of this world whispering lies and promises to us to get us to follow the call of Lucifer.

There are several different authors who have tried in their own words to capture the specifics of what Paul was up against in Colossae.

Here are a couple examples:

"The recipients of the letter to the Colossians are warned against a 'human tradition' which is characterized in 2:8 as 'philosophy and empty illusion'. There was a particular form of teaching current in the Lycus valley, to which the church of Colossae and the neighboring churches were exposed. This teaching was superficially attractive, but in fact its tendency was to undermine (Paul's teaching). Hence a warning was deemed necessary."
(F.F. Bruce)

And from J.B. Lightfoot,

“A mere glance at the epistle suffices to detect the presence of Judaism in the teaching which the apostle combats. The observance of sabbaths and new moons is decisive in this respect. The distinction of meats and drinks point in the same direction. . . On the other hand, a closer examination of its language shows that these Judaic features do not exhaust the portraiture of the heresies against which the epistle is directed. “

And of course, these two men and many others sought to relate these warnings to their generation (which in their case was the early 20th century).

The challenge for us is to see the current trends of these historical dangers in the 21st century, which we’ll do as we go through the letter.

I’ll just give one or two illustrations, as we start, from Colossians and 1 Timothy to show what I mean – and these not unique to our generation or even our century, but it shows how the things Paul addressed in his letters have continued long after they were written and are still in effect today. If you find something that works, repackage it, but keep it. First, from 1 Timothy 4;

But the [Holy] Spirit explicitly and unmistakably declares that in later times some will turn away from the faith, paying attention instead to deceitful and seductive spirits and doctrines of demons, [misled] by the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared as with a branding iron [leaving them incapable of ethical functioning], who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from [certain kinds of] foods which God has created to be gratefully shared by those who believe and have [a clear] knowledge of the truth. For everything God has created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified [set apart, dedicated to God] by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

Can you think of any religion in our time that is a carry-over of “you can’t marry and you have to abstain from certain foods” (on certain days)?

It wasn’t called “Catholicism” in Paul’s time it was just 1st. century heretical legalism. Incorporating it into the Catholic religion was a move Satan made from around 300 A.D. forward.

But think about the “why” of this. That’s where it has the potential of impacts those of us who aren’t Catholics.

What’s the advantage to the enemy of forbidding marriage and certain foods? What does he gain?

Every move he makes is calculated and backed by thousands of years of research and an IQ that’s off the charts.

If he can convince the leaders of a global religion to attach asceticism to spirituality, he can move them from dependence on the Lord to a mixture of faith and self-effort which creates an inward attitude of pride and narcissism.

So, just by this one illustration, we can see the kinds of appeals to our flesh and pride that Satan considers effective in turning us away from grace to law and from faith to works.

Now from a section in Colossians Ch. 2, F.F. Bruce raises this point;

“In speaking to what Paul refers to as ‘festivals, new moon or sabbaths’, the sabbath was distinctively Jewish. For the Colossians, observing the sabbath was a sign of untimely subjection to the “weak and beggarly elemental forces” of religion in this world.

The sabbath was part of the Mosaic Law for the nation of Israel and its observance ended when Christ, Who is *our* sabbath, completed the work on the cross (as Hebrews makes very clear). Christ is our rest, not a religious observance of any kind.

Since we’ve already covered the hyper-charismatic movement and Calvinism in past studies, I won’t go there now, but as you probably remember –

- The prosperity gospel is a blatant appeal to the flesh; the lust of the eyes.
- The ‘if you don’t speak in tongues you aren’t spiritual’ movement divides the body of Christ into the haves and have nots, and makes the second group feel guilty and valueless.
- Hyper- Calvinism removes all genuine freedom of choice from us and creates an image of God as a heartless sovereign, dying for and caring about only a small portion of His creation.

You might be thinking that since you already know these things, being alert to 21st century heresy is not that difficult. But the reality is that this is the most dangerous generation in the history of the church when it comes to deception.

Listen to this from Eric Sauer,

“In the matter of Biblical interpretation, there is no one so active as the devil. If he cannot destroy you any other way, as a last resort he will get you to read the Bible, with himself as the interpreter.

One of the things I had wondered for quite a while and just couldn't get my head around it was this: Since Revelation 2 & 3 is not only a grouping of letters to seven 1st Century churches, it's also a layout of church history with Laodicea being the predominate characteristic of the church globally in this last generation.

There's no sin mentioned in the letter to the Laodiceans, just an accusation that they were completely oblivious to their real spiritual condition “you say you are rich . . . but don't realize . . . “

But I keep hearing about how two-thirds of the church in our time is under persecution and that it will probably come here too. And I always assumed that a persecuted church is a purified church – hearts wide open to God; safe from deception.

And then I came across this: Listen to this information from those who are, or have been, inside the persecuted church in China:

“A common misperception in the West is that in contrast to the Three Self churches, all underground churches in China are biblical. This is untrue. While many underground churches in China are biblically sound, there are also many that are not, including those influenced by the Charismatic movement, prosperity false gospel, and cults like Eastern Lightning, New Testament Church, and Shouters. The greatest need of the underground church in China today isn't free Bibles or even protection from persecution, (which tends to purify, spread and grow the church) but Biblical teachers, including missionaries, who can exegete the Bible and share the Truth.”

It's my belief that persecution and to large extent, purification, will eventually be a global phenomenon – but so will deception.

Laodiceans simply don't see the real condition of the church, especially in our country.

In the past when I asked pastors why Satan hates us so much and persecutes us whenever and wherever he can, the normal answers I got were things like:

“Because God loves you, and the enemy wants to hurt those God loves”

or

“Since Christ is now in heaven and Satan can't get to Him as he could when He was here, he goes after His followers.”

Those things are partially true, I'm sure, but to say “Satan can't get to Christ because He's in heaven” shows a total lack of understanding the nature of the Church as the body of Christ.

It's like Paul wrote in 1 Cor 12; “When one member suffers, we all suffer” – and that would include the Head of the body. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, so when Christians suffer under the hand of the enemy, they are actually sharing in the sufferings (present tense) of Christ.

Christ personally feels every fist that reigns down on us.

In Acts 9:4 when the Lord confronted Saul of Tarsus He said,

(Saul) fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

But in the Old Testament when persecution against God's people was happening, like under Pharaoh in Egypt, the Lord said,

Let My people go! (Ex. 9:1)

Israel was not a part of the body of Christ; only the church has that position. The Old Covenant was a different dispensation and a different relationship.

Regarding a general lack of understanding of what the church is and why it is so important in this cosmic battle between Christ and Satan, I want to share some comments by Sparks on Eph. 1:18,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know....

The Holy Spirit's illumination concerning the church is a thing so difficult to explain to any who may not have experienced it. But to those who have seen it, it needs no explanation. It makes such a difference on all these matters. You will be able to teach all about the church as the Body of Christ; you may read it all in books, and still there may be no real expression or comprehension of it. Then one day it is as though the heavens opened and the thing broke upon your spirit, and you saw it; and all kinds of adjustments became necessary in life. You can say – I saw that the church was no denominational or national thing; I believed in the oneness of all believers. Yes, you can say all that! And yet there is something more. That something can only come by revelation. You can have the other, the correct doctrinal information, and it will just take you so far. But get that something more, and it will take you a long way ahead. It brings you into the realm of the conflict, the battle and the cost, but you are out in an altogether new realm. It is necessary to God's end. It is one thing to say these things and point them out and emphasize them; you say: "How do you get it? We see what you mean, it is all quite clear, but we have not got it!" Well, if you really are of the undivided heart, if your heart is wholly set upon the Lord and you see as far as you can see these things, and have very definite dealings with the Lord about it; (it may not be in a day, it may be slowly, steadily, quietly) you begin to move into a new realm of understanding. And you find that your point of view changes; your standard of values changes; your insight changes. It may take months, but at the end of the time you say: "I am changed! Something has happened to me. I can no longer accept what I used to accept!" It may be like that, or it may come in a flash. How it comes does not matter very much, the fact is the importance of this thing – spiritual illumination. The apostle prayed that these to whom he wrote might have it. Let us pray that we might have it, and that all the Lord's people might come into that.

If I were to speculate on the workings of Satan, the principalities and powers and the demons that coordinate the activities of this planet, I'd say this world is surrounded by, and engulfed in, a massive web of death.

Death is what came in with the fall; it was the universal fruit of Lucifer's rebellion against the Lord of Life.

Not just physical death and decay, but primarily and more immediate, was spiritual death.

Outside the body of Christ (and unfortunately in many places within it) the world is literally impregnated with all the implications of spiritual death and corruption – physical decay, lies and deceit, suffering of humans and animals, pride and lust, murder, human trafficking, religion and a million other schemes of the enemy to deceive the nations and steal, kill and destroy the life of the church.

I love the way this author puts it,

The whole question is that of the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, and it is that which is coming out today as never before in the history of this world as the supreme issue. Who is going to be Lord in God's universe? Who is going to have world dominion? The enemy is still seeking to reach that end through man along the line of the lie, and we have never before known of his method being so tremendously, so universally and so insidiously employed - the lie! So much so, that for months past, this world has rocked on this question. Who can be trusted? Who can be believed? Who is speaking the truth? What man can you have confidence in? There has spread over the earth an atmosphere of discrediting by lies. Truth falters, trustworthiness has been smitten almost to the ground. The lie, the propaganda of lies: and all, mark you, with this one end in view, namely, to get a grip on the dominion of this world. That is Satan's work behind what we see going on.

From the demonic net that circles our planet, we are watching, sensing, a black cloud of evil and deception is settling down over the nations of this world trying to extinguish all light, righteousness and truth.

This is Satan's final push to secure unquestioned world dominion and receive the direct worship of all its global citizens.

But we have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son.

Darkness and deception are trying to smother us, but if we abide in Christ, we will not only *not* be defeated, we will be used by the Lord to expose the works of darkness.

Spiritual eyes can penetrate the deepest darkness just as unregenerate eyes can't see the brightest light.

Our current position and eternal destiny, as children of God, is a kingdom of complete transparency and righteousness.

Conformed to the image of Christ, there will be no shadow caused by turning in any of us. We will finally be pure to the core of our being.

For those outside of Christ this author explains it well,

“When man becomes separated from the glory of God in eternal damnation he will be completely separated from every phase of God’s provision. That state is called the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 13). There shall be no ray of light to pierce the absolute darkness; no drop of rain to quench an insatiable thirst; no morning star to point to the break of a new day. . . It is outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Hell, then, is nothing more or less than the fulfilment of man’s desire to be independent of God and is the ultimate consequence of his own choice.”

Where would we be apart from the grace of our Savior?

Behold therefore the kindness and severity of God: severity indeed upon those having fallen, but kindness of God toward you (Rom. 11:22)

I will close our study with the implications of this last phrase – “but kindness toward you”.

I’m going to share a quote from Alva McClain’s book, “The Greatness of His Kingdom”.

“In the kingdoms of man, the consummation of human attempts at social improvement and political organization, the most important things are the guiding principles, laws and systems. The captains and kings are not the most important factors. There is no indispensable man. It is not so in that future government portrayed by the prophets. There the Ruler Himself is the indispensable figure. What the world needs, as the prophets saw clearly, is not primarily a better philosophy of government or a more perfect system of legislation, but a Person who has the character, wisdom,

and power needed to for God among men. This is the central theme of prophecy from first to last. The restoration of man's lost dominion must come through a Person. It is not to some impersonal organization, but to the King upon whose shoulders the government of God must rest. Even the kingdom itself has no glory except that its luster is borrowed ray derived from the glorious Person of it's wonderous King. "

As Paul wrote in Rom. 11:35,

For from Him [all things originate] and through Him [all things live and exist] and to Him are all things [directed]. To Him be glory and honor forever! (Rom. 11:36)

From the smallest microbe to the largest galaxy, and everything in between, all is an expression of the personality and power of the second Person of the trinity – the Son of God.

The creation in its unblemished, unfallen form perfectly expresses the glory and character of Christ.

There is so much more to our Savior than we could ever imagine or even fully discover – and we are to share in the fullness of His glory, not only in His coming millennial kingdom, but forever.

As those finally conformed to the image of Christ, bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh; as the spiritual and eternal body of God's Son, we are the crown of all creation and the visible means of the highest and most personal expression of the glory of God in Christ.

When we look at the horizon – looking in every direction as far we can see; everything within that horizon is life as we know it, as we experience it through our five senses. The horizon is the farthest limit of our vision. It's the ultimate range of everything in our world.

As Paul puts it in Col. 1:16-17,

For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, [things] visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities; all things were created and exist through Him and for Him. And He Himself

existed and is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. [His is the controlling, cohesive force of the universe.]

The Triune God has made the Son of Man the Horizon of all His interests and activities. Christ encompasses and sustains all of creation. And we are chosen to be the fullness of Him that fills all in all.

Contemplating these things, a missionary once wrote,

“If Christ be God and died for me, then there is no sacrifice too great that I could make for Him.”