

## The Book of Colossians

# 9

## Morning Devotions

In your devotions this morning, read **Psalm 145**. As you read this psalm, talk to the Lord about its content. When you have finished, go back and find one or two verses and meditate prayerfully on them.

## Morning Study

This morning we are going to look at the third section of Colossians – **2:8-23**. In this section Paul is particularly addressing the false teaching of the Gnostics (so we suggest you read page 2 of this study – **Insight: Gnosticism** – before you begin your study of Colossians). This section of Colossians divides into two subsections. Read each subsection, answering for yourself the questions associated with them. Type out your answers or jot them down on a piece of paper and file your answers with your morning study.

### Read Colossians 2:8-14

- ☞ In the light of the Gnostic teaching that flesh was evil and Christ was spirit-being only, why is the declaration of **2:9** so important?
- ☞ Why is **2:10** so significant for the believer in Christ?
- ☞ In **2:11-13**, Paul gives the Gospel's answer to sinful flesh. What is it?
- ☞ In **2:13-14**, what was canceled and nailed to the Cross in Christ?

### Read Colossians 2:15-23

- ☞ Rather than needing “secret knowledge” to break through the powers of darkness, as the Gnostics taught, what is Paul declaring in **2:15**?
- ☞ What does Paul call all the rules, festivals and celebrations of the Law? And where is the reality found? (**2:16-17**).
- ☞ Paul says the Gnostic's “unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.” Why is that the case and therefore what is the answer Paul gives? (**2:18-19**).
- ☞ In **2:20-23**, do the strict regulations to try to control the sinful flesh work? Paul gives the Colossians God's answer to the problem of sinful flesh. What is that answer? (**2:20**).

## Insight

# Gnosticism

In order to understand Paul's letter to the Colossians it is important to know *why* he was writing it. A hideous heresy had invaded the church. Paul writes and, detail by detail, refutes and countermands the lies bringing, in their place, the glorious truth of Christ.

“What then was the heterodox teaching which was ensnaring the Colossians? It bore the name of a ‘philosophy’ (2:8), and had a ‘show of wisdom’ (2:23), thus appealing to the higher intellectual tastes. It paid regard to ‘tradition’ (2:8), which gave it further attractiveness to those who revered the past. It also practised asceticism\* and affected a false humility (2:23) which gave it the appearance of a superior sanctity. This strange mixture of Jewish traditionalism and Greek philosophy stressed two things: reverence for angelic powers (2:18), and a contempt for the body (2:20-3).”<sup>1</sup>

The teaching that was “ensnaring the Colossians” was called *Gnosticism*.

“The Gnostic bewitchers at Colosse were insinuating that their own inner knowledge added completion to the Gospel (the name ‘Gnostic’ is from the Greek *gnosis*, ‘knowledge’), and affected to give (a) a fulness or completion to the truth as it is in Christ; (b) a completive inner knowing of Divine realities; (c) a superior “wisdom” or “spiritual understanding.”<sup>2</sup>

Gnosticism claimed a hidden or secret knowledge – the *gnosis* – which unlocked the secrets of the universe for the initiated. Many Gnostics taught detailed genealogies and myths about Adam, Eve and other forebears. For example, they taught that when Eve ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, she received the hidden knowledge that God had kept from man. Rather than calling her act a sin, they praised it.<sup>3</sup>

“Gnostic women, considering themselves mediators, were promising godliness if the hearer would follow their teaching.”<sup>4</sup>

The Gnostics believed that flesh was evil and Christ was spirit-being only. They also believed they had “secret knowledge” that was needed to break through the powers of darkness to the heavenly realms, sharing scrolls with special chants to do so (these are the scrolls the Ephesians burnt – see [Acts 19:19](#)). This philosophy of secret knowledge, mixed with Pharisaic legalism, was the heresy that was infiltrating the church at Colossae and is the reason for Paul's letter to them.

<sup>1</sup> J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, p.200.

<sup>2</sup> J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?*, p.164-165.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?*, p.168.

\* Asceticism is the practice of severe self-discipline, involving rigid abstinence and austerity.

# MEMORY VERSE

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 2:15

Here are a few suggestions that may help you to memorize your memory verse:

- ➡ Ask the Lord to help you remember his Word (see [John 14:26](#)).
- ➡ Use the version of the Bible you are most familiar with. What you normally read in your Bible is what you need to be memorizing.
- ➡ Don't just memorize the contents of the verse; memorize its "address" (the verse reference) as well. You can do this by following this pattern: Step 1: **reference**; Step 2: **verse content**; Step 3: **reference**. Then repeat steps 1-3. Note that you are quoting the reference twice as many times as you quote the actual verse content. This gives the verse a clear "reference tag."
- ➡ After you have read your memory verse out aloud several times, try going through your memory verse *without* reading your computer screen.
- ➡ Look up your memory verse in your Bible. Look at its immediate context and read the verses that come before and after your memory verse.
- ➡ Print out your memory verse or jot it down on a piece of paper. Take this paper with you when you go to work or do other daily activities. Meditate on the meaning of the verse throughout the day.
- ➡ During your noon appointment with the Lord, take out your memory verse and go over it again. Talk to the Lord about what this verse means to you personally.
- ➡ In the evening (at either your evening study or your evening devotions), see if you can quote your memory verse from memory. Then, without looking at the memory verse itself, see if you can find it in your Bible.
- ➡ The next day, before you begin committing a new verse to memory, rehearse your previous day's memory verse and see if you can remember it (without cheating!).
- ➡ Finally, at the end of the week (possibly on the Sunday), collect all your week's memory verses, rehearse them and see if you can recall them without reading them. Spend a little extra time on any verses you have difficulty recalling.
- ➡ Remember: Don't just memorize a verse. Put it into practice ([James 1:22](#)). It is not being able to quote a verse from memory that counts. It is His Word *abiding* in your heart that counts ([John 15:7](#)). When you actually apply a verse consistently to your daily life, that is when you *truly* know that verse!