

THE PRISON EPISTLES: NURTURE FOR OPPRESSED BELIEVERS

II. Colossians: Nurture In Living Focused On The Supremacy And All-Sufficiency Of Christ

I. Nurture In Focusing On Christ's Supremacy And All-Sufficiency Contrary To Asceticism (Colossians 2:20-23)

I. Introduction

- A. The Christian Church has long been affected by asceticism, the false spirituality "that revels in rules of physical self-denial," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 679. (1) For example, the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent decreed: "'Whoever shall affirm that the conjugal state is to be preferred to a life of virginity or celibacy, and that it is not better and more conducive to happiness to remain in virginity or celibacy, than to be married, let him be accursed.'" (Canon 10)" (Loraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 308) (2) Some Evangelicals teach it is spiritually advantageous for a believer to fast as it brings him closer to the Lord with greater spirituality in his Christian walk!
- B. The Colossian heresy involved a degree of asceticism, so Paul exposed and countered it in Colossians 2:20-23, a passage we do well to understand and apply in view of the religious asceticism we face today (as follows):

II. Nurture In Focusing On Christ's Supremacy And All-Sufficiency Contrary To Asceticism, Col. 2:20-23.

- A. The false ascetic rules Paul mentioned in Colossians 2:21 move from the level of not handling on then to not tasting to end in even not touching, increasing in their levels of severity regarding self-denial, Ibid. Such an advance in severity is typical of asceticism in its effort to alleviate one's self of the sense of incessant guilt via an ever increasing level of harshness in self-denial, Ibid.
- B. However, Paul gave several reasons why asceticism is inappropriate for believers in Christ, Col. 2:20, 22-23:
1. First, believers in Christ have no positional reason still to feel guilty: they are positionally dead with Christ to the "basic principles" (*stoicheia*) of this world, no longer under their jurisdiction by the sin nature to heed them, Colossians 2:20; Ibid. Indeed, believers are dead even to the Mosaic Law that was given by God (Romans 7:4a) so that they are now spiritually alive in Christ to serve in newness of the Holy Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter of the Law, Romans 7:4b, 6; 8:2-4.
 2. Second, if a believer heeds the ascetic rules of this world, such practices are all destined to perish in effectiveness before God as soon as they are observed, for they are based on man's authority, not on God's authority, Colossians 2:22 NIV, a fact we can apply to the asceticism issues mentioned in our introduction:
 - a. Regarding claim in the Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Church that one is accursed to suggest the marital state is at any time to be preferred to celibacy, (1) Paul taught in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 that people would teach demonic doctrines in the latter days, one of those being the forbidding of marriage. Thus, exalting celibacy as more righteous than marriage borders on demonic doctrines. (2) Also, Hebrews 13:4 directs that marriage is honorable in every way, and the marital bed undefiled, but immoral people God will judge. (3) Though celibacy is preferred to marriage for one with the gift of celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:8), Paul taught that those who did not have this gift of celibacy were to marry, 1 Corinthians 7:9.
 - b. As for fasting and spirituality, nowhere in Scripture is fasting ever taught as a vehicle of improving one's spiritual walk. Indeed, were that possible, then spirituality would be by a work opposite the New Testament teaching that it is by dependence on the Holy Spirit through faith, cf. Romans 8:3-4!
 3. Third, though heeding ascetic, self-denial rules initially gives an appearance of divine wisdom, with its "self-imposed worship," "false humility" and "harsh treatment of the body," it fails itself to restrain "sensual indulgence," Colossians 2:23 NIV! It cannot reign in the lusts of the sin nature, what is possible only by the control by the Holy Spirit, cf. Galatians 5:16-23, as we can apply to our introduction issues:
 - a. Immorality among the "celibate" Catholic priests was so rampant in the Protestant Reformation that the reformers Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Knox, openly targeted for criticism, Ibid.
 - b. Many in false religions of the world practice fasting, but are not spiritually helped toward gaining righteousness before God with it, so this practice is not itself a spiritually profitable practice for Christians!

Lesson: Paul countered the asceticism in the Colossian heresy, noting it was inconsistent with the believer's death to such rules in Christ and resurrection to a new life in the Spirit, that ascetic rules arise from human authority, not from God, and that heeding these rules fails to cause one to reign in the lusts of the sin nature.

Application: May we rest in our position in Christ as dead to the world's rules and risen to newness of life in the Holy Spirit that we might live above asceticism.