

The Iron Men of Fellowship of Champions

Colossians 1:2

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Opening Prayer

Colossians 1:2

- "Colossae" - which is the plural feminine form of the word colossal = monstrosities'.
- "saints" - Who are the saints? Discuss. Believers. The word "hagios" (forms of hagios include sanctify and holy) means set apart (practically speaking for the purposes of God). This regards any true convert to the Christian faith. The word does not imply a special class of Christians who have performed some miracle, experienced a stigmata (bleeding, scars, etc. corresponding to the crucifixion wounds of Christ), or who have led an exceptionally virtuous life.
- In Roman Catholicism, saints have the authority (falsely) to intercede with God on behalf of people on earth (i.e. - praying to the dead, a form of necromancy, expressly forbidden in Scripture).
 - 1Ti 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.
 - Isa 8:19 When they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should a people not consult their God? [Should they] [consult] the dead in behalf of the living?
 - Le 19:26 'You shall not eat [any meat] with the blood. You shall not practice divination nor soothsaying.
 - Le 19:31 'Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.
 - Le 20:6 'As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the prostitute with them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.
 - Le 20:27 'Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist must be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; [they have brought] their own deaths upon themselves.'"
 - De 18:10-12 There shall not be found among you [anyone] who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, a soothsayer, one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who consults the dead. 12 For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God is going to drive them out before you.

- Ga 5:19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, 20 idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions,
- Ac 19:19 And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and [began] burning [them] in the sight of everyone; and they added up the prices of the books and found [it to be] fifty thousand [pieces] of silver.
- Catholicism also holds that saints do not have to pass through purgatory (both are nonbiblical Catholic doctrines). Since “saints” are merely born-again Christians.
- “faithful brethren in Christ” - Who are the faithful brethren in Christ? Discuss. The faithful brethren are those among the saints who serve the Lord with faithfulness, diligence, piety and especially loyalty - not following after heretical teachings.
- “brethren” also implies a common parentage, God the father. We are who are born again are born of the Spirit of God through faith in His Son, and we alone are His children. All humans are not God’s children. Only those who have been begotten of the Father.
 - Joh 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.
 - Ro 9:8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.
 - Ga 3:7 Therefore, recognize that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.
 - 1Jo 3:1 See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God; and [in fact] we are. For this reason, the world does not know us: because it did not know Him.
- All others are children of the devil. These may seem to be harsh words, but consider the Scriptures.
 - 1Jn 3:10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother and sister.
 - Jn 8:44 You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own [nature,] because he is a liar and the father of lies.

- “saints and faithful brethren in Christ” - These are two distinct groups, one overlapping the other. Both are true believers, but Paul distinguishes between the two groups because he is writing to address the Gnostic heresy there. He is upholding the “faithful brethren” by affirming their doctrine, and he is correcting those among the “saints” who are either spreading heresy or who are following the heretics.
- “Grace to you” - This is not a polite cliché or a trite platitude, but rather indicates Paul’s desire for the saving grace of God to pervade the church at Colossae. What is grace? Discuss. The unmerited favor and lovingkindness of God. Grace is getting what we do not deserve. If a hostess is gracious, it is so because she is more kind and generous to her guests than they deserve. Grace is extended without regard to the worthiness of the receivers of it. Paul is blessing the believers at Colossae with the hope of God’s grace being lavished upon them.
- “peace from God our Father” - Among the Jews, “peace” from God was regarded as more than calmness of mind or the absence of discord, but wholeness, spiritual prosperity, contentedness and good relations with others within the church. Paul’s desire for such peace in the church at Colossae was certainly especially appropriate, given the Gnosticism he is battling in his letter to them.
- The Gnostic Heresies: Gnosticism was a rogue sect/cult of Christianity.
 - Attacked from Within - Gnosticism infected many local churches, as their false beliefs were being taught inside the churches.
 - The Gnostics claimed to be Christian teachers, a facade that made them all the more dangerous - especially to those who were not well studied in the Scriptures.
 - Gnostic beliefs were syncretistic (a fusion or absorption of many different belief systems), but incorporated enough truth so as to mislead true Christians.
 - Perhaps the worst of the beliefs fused into their system was paganism (worship of nature, created things), philosophy, angelolatry (idolatrous worship of angels), and the self-denial of asceticism.
 - Special Knowledge - It was an arrogant pretention to special knowledge (false knowledge). A few years later, Timothy, who had been with Paul when he addressed the Colossian Gnostics by letter, was the pastor at Ephesus and himself received a letter from Paul reminding him of evils of false knowledge.

- 1Ti 6:20 “Timothy, protect what has been entrusted to you [the Gospel], avoiding worldly, empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’”
- Elitism - The Gnostics believed themselves to be the spiritually and intellectually superior (elite) possessors of the secret and exclusive knowledge (enlightenment) required for salvation. Thus, salvation was not by faith, but rather (falsely) by special knowledge.
 - Ep 2:8-9 “8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this [is] not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
 - Tt 3:4-5 “4 But when the kindness of God our Savior [Christ] and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in righteousness, but in accordance with His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,”
- Experience over Scripture - The Gnostics developed their own rites and rituals which they believed to provide the means of salvation.
 - Paul declared this Gnostic philosophy to be hollow and deceptive in Col 2:8 “See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.”
 - They were convinced that the knowledge necessary for salvation came through mystical experience rather than intellectual apprehension of the Word of God.
 - Experience is not the arbiter of spiritual truth. Experience is subjective, but God’s Word is objective, absolute truth.
 - People today question the existence of absolute truth - those facts which are always true, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances, and can never be changed.
 - Truth is absolute, or, logically, it isn’t truth. God’s Word is truth. Thus, God’s Word is always true, applies to all people, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances, and cannot be changed, ever.
 - Relativism teaches that all beliefs and points of view (religious, moral, etc.) are equally valid.

- The Bible (Logos = Word = Christ) alone is the source of all spiritual truth, and thus, the Bible is fully authoritative for the spiritual life. No experience required.
- Influence of Judaism - Their emphasis on rituals, traditions, and adherence to certain aspects of Jewish Law (circumcision, holy days, dietary laws) hints at a Jewish element in the Gnostic belief system. Paul argued against such beliefs:
 - Col 2:11 “11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision performed without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings, 14 having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through [Christ]. 16 Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food and drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon, or a Sabbath day, 17 things which are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.
- Aeons - Gnosticism taught the concept of super angels, or “aeons”:
 - These were believed to be “emanations” or “offshoots” of deity, who had some deity but were not fully God.
 - They were created in successive order, each level having somewhat less deity than the previous level.
 - Aeons were supposedly created by God, but the lower level aeons were so removed from God that they were both hostile toward and largely ignorant of God.
 - Lesser aeons created the universe (rather than God who would not have dirtied His hands with something so evil as matter).
 - Christ actually performed the act of creation, and He did so before the fall and the corruption of the universe.
 - Col 1:16 “for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether

thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

- Jn 1:1-3 “1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.”
- If aeons actually existed, He would have created them, as He did angels, including Satan and those who followed him.
- Christ was considered to be of the higher level of aeons - closer to God and fuller in deity than those who created the earth/matter. Ironically, in this sense, the Gnostics argue that the Christ, who created all things, is superior to he - Him - who created all things.)
- Aeons were thought to inhabit the stars, serve as mediators to God, and rule man’s destiny. Therefore, they had to be worshipped and appeased. Paul’s statements in Colossians 2 to “thrones ... powers ... rulers ... authorities” and the “worship of angels” were directed against these false doctrines.
 - Col 2:9 “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,” Jesus is God.
 - Col 2:15 “When [God] had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through [Christ].” Aeons are inferior.
 - Col 2:18 “Take care that no one keeps defrauding you of your prize by delighting in humility (asceticism) and the worship of the angels (angelolatry), taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind”
- Deity of Christ - The Gnostics denied the deity of Jesus, His authority, the sufficiency of His redemptive work, and the resurrection.
 - They produced apocryphal writings (those of questionable authorship or authenticity), claiming them to be Scripture, in order to support their false claims.
 - All false religions must deal with Christ’s deity, and they all deny it. If Jesus is allowed to be God, what He did and said is true. The only way to introduce heresy is to first to make Jesus a man, or

angle, or anything but God. Even so-called Christian cults have to deny Christ's deity to advance their heresies:

- Christian Science - Jesus was the "Galilean Prophet," a mere and unnecessary human. "Christ" is the divine idea.
 - Jehovah's Witnesses - Jesus was Michael the archangel who became a man; only a perfect man, not God in flesh.
 - Mormonism - Jesus is the first-born spirit child of God.
 - Unitarianism - Jesus a great man and a prophet of God, and He may even have been a supernatural being, but not God.
 - More than 20 other Christian cults deny the deity of Christ.
- Asceticism - Gnostics embraced asceticism - self-denial of any form of earthly pleasure - and they taught that the body is evil and must be mistreated or treated as an enemy.
- They believed in the inherent evil of material things (matter), a main cause for their rejecting the deity of Jesus.
 - Since God could not touch or participate in the evil earth, Jesus certainly could not have taken upon Himself human form.
 - Jesus was a man, and Christ was a separate being, a higher aeon.
 - Some Gnostics argued that the body of Jesus was just a temporary illusion or phantom giving only the appearance of being human (God in disguise, so-to-speak).
 - Paul argued against asceticism in Col 2:20-23 "20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of man? 23 These are matters which do have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence."
- Libertinism - Some Gnostics were ascetics, but others were libertines.
- Libertinism was another way of viewing matter and pleasure, seeing it as evil by fully allowing man to actively pursue any pleasure since the body was separate from the soul and was thus unaffected by whatever the body may do.
 - Salvation came through esoteric knowledge rather than works or faith. Thus, repentance from bad works was not at issue.
- Impact of Gnosticism:

- The Gnostic movement itself did not survive beyond the 3rd century.
- The movement's ideas are still present today in:
 - Buddhism (special knowledge required to conquer evil urges).
 - Hinduism (belief in multiple gods).
 - Zoroastrianism (duality - a force of both evil and good, "the force be with you" from Star Wars).
 - The New Age movement, eastern mysticism, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.
- Eventually, the Roman Catholic Church would succumb to Mariolatry, the idolatrous worship of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Gnosticism was occultic, holding to superstitions, astrology, and magic.
- Co 2:3-10 "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this so that no one will deceive you with persuasive arguments. For even though I am absent in body, I am nevertheless with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your orderly manner and the stability of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head [k]over every ruler and authority;"
- 2Ti 2:15 "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

Application Discussion

Closing Prayer

Small Groups

- Discuss current Scripture reading assignment.
- Prayer:

- Anything praiseworthy.
- Areas of accountability.
- Other prayer requests.