

Philosophy and Empty Words

Commentary for August 1, 2010 — The Basis of Modern Christianity

Two verses at the end of this month's article "Modern Recognition of Universal Salvation" provide a quick and easy analysis of the theology of modern orthodox Christianity, and even its origins. They are Colossians 2:8 and Ephesians 5:6. Together these two verses tell where the unbiblical teaching of orthodox Christianity came from and why they continue to hold power over Christian denominations today. According to the apostle Paul, there are two major sources of error in the *ekklesia*. Read the "[August 2010 Newsletter](#)."

Philosophy

The first source of error is "philosophy" and "vain deceit," which comes from two sources:

**"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit [empty seduction],
after the tradition of men,
after the rudiments [elements] of the world, and
NOT after Christ."**

• **Colossians 2:8**

"**Philosophy**" (Greek, *philosophias*) was a common term describing a system of sophisticated thought derived from beliefs and teachings that came from, as Paul says, two sources: human reason ("**tradition of men**") and spirits ("**rudiments of the world**"), but not from the Messiah, meaning Christ's message and teaching through the apostles and the Holy Scriptures.¹ Paul identified philosophy with vain deceit, each influencing the other.

As Dr. Martin notes in Chapter 2, "[The Law Was Given by Angels](#)" (from his book *The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine*), this Greek phrase "**rudiments of the world**" is better rendered "**the elements of the world.**" Paul is referring to spirit beings called "elements," also termed "**principalities and powers**" in Colossians 1:16 and later in Colossians 2:10, 15.

So philosophy and vain deceit came from tradition of men and elements of the world. If these teachings were heeded by the Colossians or anyone, they would result in their being taken in spoil. The image Paul is conveying is that of being taken captive or taken prisoner in warfare, seized as property or booty by victors in a conflict.

Empty Words

The second source uses the phrase "**empty words**" which describes many theological terms used today by theologians and scholars, particularly the three most important theological

¹ Luke mentioned philosophers in Acts 17:18 when Paul spoke before the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at Mars Hill in Athens, Greece.

terms of "trinity," "hell," and "immortal soul," each lacking any substantial biblical evidence, much less biblical explanation or discussion. Compare this interesting verse from the Concordant Version below and compare it with the translation you prefer:

"Let no one be seducing you with empty words, for because of these things the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness."

• ***Ephesians 5:6, Concordant Version***

"Empty words" are those which cannot be defined and are endlessly argued over because (1) they have no biblical source, and (2) they can mean whatever a particular advocate wants those words to mean. All too often theologians insist these terms are "implied" in Scripture or are "understood" to be true even though they should be basic and very important concepts.

Consider the "trinity." This supposedly important term deals with the nature of God, a subject encompassing the entire Bible. Yet the term is never used in Scripture, it is never discussed, and in fact 1 Corinthians 8:6 directly contradicts any possibility of a trinity being true. The members of the *ekklesia* at Corinth were baby Christians, ignorant of many basic facts, and they had forgotten other facts of salvation. They misunderstood the nature of God when Paul gave them that information the first time he was with them in person. He corrected them using simple language, concepts, and words. If the trinity was true, Paul's presentation in 1 Corinthians 8:6 would have been the perfect opportunity to teach them about one-in-three or three-in-one, etc., supposedly key to understanding the trinity. He does nothing of the kind.

Likewise, the direct and clear statement of universal salvation in Romans chapter 5 comparing Adam and Jesus Christ can be easily understood by the ordinary people in Paul's audience. Only when "**empty words**" are used which are not biblical do things get muddled. The article this month deals with universal salvation, eternal punishment, and hell.

Let me give an historical example of President Bill Clinton who gave answers to legal questions put to him under oath: "**It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is.**" Another time the President answered a question this way: "**It depends on how you define 'alone'**" (1998 grand jury testimony on the Monica Lewinsky affair). While these are answers, they are "**empty words**," evasive, and words that attempt to avoid the truth. So too are many theological terms used today in Christianity. They are words with no biblical origin.

Housekeeping: A Speaking Engagement

Click occasionally on "[A.S.K. Events](#)" at the top of the ASK homepage. I will attend a conference in Sacramento, California, Saturday & Sunday, August 7-8, 2010 at the American River College, 4700 College Oak Dr, Sacramento, CA in the "Ranch House," south of Davies Hall near College Oak Drive and Orange Grove Ave. All are welcome.

I speak Saturday about 11 am on "Universal Salvation in the Catholic Church." Contact Charles Rutsch (CharlesRutsch@gmail.com) or call 916-515-9355 for details. Map: http://arc.losrios.edu/about/Campus_Map.pdf.

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