

Back to the Beginning

By: Sewell Hall

About A.D. 60, Paul wrote to the Colossians: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ, *Colossians 2:8*.”

Ungodly philosophy has long been the enemy of true faith. Unlike faith, it ministers to pride, it encourages the notion that the way of man is in himself and that he can discover spiritual truth for himself without divine revelation; it even rejects divine revelation with which it disagrees. It places a premium on human intellect and elevates philosophers above ordinary men. By providing rationalization for sin, it removes the shame that should humble the sinner.

The need for Paul’s warning is evident from the Lord’s letters to the churches of Asia (the province where Colossae was located) and from John’s epistles written from Asia. By the time these were written (possibly 30 years later), human philosophies had infiltrated many of the churches. They had done their pernicious work: questioning the inspired revelation of the nature of Christ, puffing up with pride, disdain for the brethren, and justifying immorality and ungodliness of every kind.

Much is to be learned from John’s inspired challenge to such philosophies in his epistles.

John did not attempt to meet the philosophers on their own turf. The very nature of human philosophy makes absolute conclusions impossible. Any effort to oppose philosophy with philosophy will result in the kind of “useless wrangling” and “foolish disputes” against which Paul warned both Timothy and Titus. Neither did John speak the truth in technical and academic language which would appeal to pride.

Rather, John, guided by the Holy Spirit, spoke with all of the authority of an apostle concerning the basic tenets of the faith: the character of God, the principles involved in sin, the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ, His great work on our behalf, the absolute necessity of fellowship with God and Christ, and the love, the purity, the attitudes toward truth and error which such fellowship requires. And he stated these in the simplest, most direct language possible. In glaring light of such basic truth, the reasoning of ungodly men appeared in its true colors.

Today, Christians are again threatened by ungodly philosophies: Humanism, New Age, and a host of others. Taught in schools and colleges, they enjoy dignity and influence which they do not deserve. They invade our minds through books, TV, paid counselors, and through conversations with our associates. All too often, elements of these philosophies are surfacing in Bible classes and some preaching is more pop-psychology and modernistic theology than Bible. Human philosophy is bearing the same fruit it bore in the first century: pride, questions regarding the nature of Jesus, and rationalization to justify every form of immorality.

“There is only one answer for the religious division and corrupting doctrines of our day, and that answer is the same as it was in John’s day: back to the beginning—back to the source of truth—back to the apostles.”