



SCRIPTURE:

Colossians 2:1-8

RECAP:

It doesn't require being on the front lines of cultural engagement to know that something has gone off the rails in America and Western culture. The ideologies that are ripping through government, the education system, universities, film, music, the mainstream media, and pop culture are destructive. These ideologies are not only destructive, but they are causing irreparable damage in the lives of people. Ideas have consequences. Theology matters. Bad theology hurts people.

In 1965, Donald Barnhouse wrote a book called *The Invisible War*. He wrote about the violent battle raging around you each day, 24 hours per day. It's a battle for your mind, and the battle is vicious. It's the battle of ideas, and how those ideas shape our lives. In the movie *Inception*, the concept is that there is a group of people who can go into the dreams of other people to steal ideas and knowledge. They are thieves who sell these corporate secrets to others for big money. But in the movie they have a new task. To implant an idea in the mind of a man to dissolve his company. In other words, they are implanting an idea that will shape the behavior and actions of this man.

We live in a world where inception is taking place everyday. Every day there are ideas and ideologies implanted in the minds of children and adults that have the sole aim of shaping how they think, and ultimately, how they live. These ideologies are gripping the minds of our children and young adults and even older adults, leading them away from truth, and even away from God.

This is not a new phenomenon. The battle for the mind has raged since Genesis 3 and the Garden of Eden. "Did God really say" was whispered by the serpent then, and is whispered by him now. This is why we must, as our passage says, "See to it" that we stay the course.

Exegesis of Colossians 2:1-8:

Remember we left off where Paul says that he toils and labors to present them mature in Christ. He does this with all his energy that he powerfully works within Paul. Then Paul continues:

vs 1 -- For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face

"I want you to know..." Why does he want them to know the struggle he has for them? Because he loves them. He's being an example to them. He wants them to be encouraged. He wants to present them blameless. He's not trying to brag or boast in anything he's done, or is doing, rather he is grounding his labors for them in his love and desire to present them as mature.

"Struggle" He is laboring and struggling for the church in Colossae and Laodicea, and the others that haven't seen him face to face. He is toiling to present them as mature, but it isn't easy. The work is hard. It is a struggle.

But notice also that the people he is working so hard to reach and mature in the faith are not people he has met before. He doesn't know them personally. Yet he loves them. This is the unifying work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers. There are Christians in Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia, and so many places that I've never met, but there is a love for them and interest in their faith and well-being. They are my brothers. They are my sisters. We are united in Christ.

vs 2 -- that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ

"that their hearts may be encouraged" He wants them to be encouraged. He desires their joy in the faith, and their strength in the faith. He wants them to be "knit together in love." This is speaking to their unity with one another. They are knit together and it is love that binds them. What goal does this serve? So they can "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ." This knowledge and understanding he wants them to have is of the gospel, which in the next verse he calls the mystery of Christ. Remember, we looked at this in the previous sermon.

The mystery of Christ is the gospel that mankind, including Gentiles, are reconciled to God through faith in Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ.

vs 3 -- in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge

In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So Paul labors for them, and wants them to know it, because he wants them to be encouraged in the full assurance and knowledge that the gospel of Christ gives them. And the reason it gives them this is because in Jesus are hidden all the riches and treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

How is that? What does he mean?

Proverbs 9:10 -- *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

All knowledge and truth is God's truth. There is nothing outside of Him. Christ is before all things. He made all things. Nothing is made that wasn't made through him. What is wisdom and knowledge? It is the discernment and understanding of the world and the way things are. If that's the case, then you cannot have wisdom and understanding outside of Christ. This is why fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. It's all contained in him. This is why Paul says in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Why is this relevant? Because the church in Colossae are dealing with ideologies and philosophies proposing to be true wisdom and knowledge, outside of Christ. Any truth is God's truth, but there are plenty of philosophies that take you away from truth. And Paul is trying to help the Christians to understand they don't need to turn elsewhere for wisdom and understanding.

vs 4 -- I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments

Paul's warnings and writings are to keep them from being deluded and straying. This is similar to what we spoke about with the warning passages. This is a means of keeping the sheep from straying. He doesn't want them deluded (deceived, diverted, confused, watered-down). The delusion can come from plausible arguments (persuasive speech, pithy ways of communicating).

vs 5 -- For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

He is unified with them even though he isn't with them but he is also establishing his apostolic authority with them. He's not there, but his leadership and teaching are still with them. He wants to see them walking in good order, in the truth, and see the firmness of their faith, not wavering.

vs 6 -- Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him

When we see the word "therefore" we know it is referencing everything that came before it. In light of those things, he wants them to walk in the Lord in the same way as they received him, which was by faith, and in truth. It was by faith in the truth that they received him, so they should walk in him the same way. They should live out their lives by faith and truth.

vs 7 -- rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Notice these phrases he uses: rooted, built up, established. These are words about foundations, holding firm, and steadfastness. Their lives should be lived by faith and truth in Jesus, grounded deeply, and abounding in thanksgiving (gratitude, joy). There is cause for thanksgiving because they have the truth and walk in it.

vs 8 -- See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

He tells them to "see to it." This means they should pay attention, and be alert. He doesn't want them taken captive. This is war language. Captives in war are led off as spoils of the victory. Paul doesn't want Christians taken as spoil by the philosophies and empty deceits of man. This includes the surrounding teachings in the culture or the church. They can have an origin of human tradition (people) or elemental spirits (Satan and demons). The thing that separates these teachings off as heresy and false ideas is that they originate from those other sources and not according to Christ. They don't align with God's Word. They don't align with God's truth, THE truth.

Application:

1. Everyone is susceptible to being taken captive by plausible arguments.

We need to walk in humility to understand that nobody is above falling prey to these plausible arguments. The reason they're called plausible, or persuasive, is because they appeal to the mind or the heart. Why is it possible for us to get deluded? Because our hearts and minds are corrupted by the fall, it has some default tendencies to rebel, stray, believe lies, and adopt beliefs raised against the knowledge of God.

So our minds latch onto things that are not true. Our hearts are also fickle and they often want the opposite of what God commands. Because of this we can be persuaded and deluded by arguments that give us what our flesh wants.

Example: Many with same sex attraction look for justification to act on those desires by finding arguments that would try to justify acting on homosexual desire. It's not hard for them to find plausible arguments.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 -- For the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires. So they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Example: Many in marriages that don't want to remain in, but don't have biblical grounds for divorce, will look to find arguments to justify ending their marriage by saying things like: **A.** God doesn't want me to be unhappy, **B.** they haven't been there for me spiritually, so in a way that's abandonment. **C.** I haven't been happy in years, **D.** we've just grown apart, it's best for everybody. Plausible arguments are easy to find when your flesh is looking for a justification to do what it wants.

For these reasons, everyone is susceptible to being taken captive by plausible arguments and being deluded.

2. Be aware of the philosophies and human traditions in our day.

We could dive into many of the surrounding philosophies and human traditions that Paul was thinking about when he wrote to the church in this letter, but the application for us to know the challenges of our own day.

A. Critical Theory / Intersectionality -- This philosophy is the fruit of Marxism. It's often called social marxism. It categorizes everything around power and hierarchy. Everything boils down to oppressors and the oppressed. When Critical theory or intersectionality is applied to things it categorizes everyone together, not on the basis of their individual actions, but on the basis of skin color, sexuality, gender, religion. Each category has oppressed and oppressor lenses. I am the ultimate bad guy in the intersectionality matrix: white, heterosexual, Christian male. This philosophy says I'm the root of every problem in the world, and the only way to fix the world is to minimize my voice, and to center other voices. Remember, none of this is based on merits, but on these intersectionality points.

B. LGBTQ issues -- Homosexuality has become normalized in our culture, and it is even making headway with Christians. The transgender movement is now the issue of the moment, and many Christians don't recognize how quickly it is gaining momentum in our culture. You need to understand what the culture is saying on these things, but more importantly, you need to know what God says about these things.

C. Abortion -- This issue isn't new, but also isn't going away. Even if the Supreme Court strikes down Roe v Wade, the battle becomes about each state's decision. So it turns into 50 fights to protect the life of the unborn.

D. Christian Nationalism -- This issue requires some clarity. I have no problem with good ole fashion patriotism. I was in the Army. I love our country and I think we are extremely blessed to live here. In fact, I think the people who are the most critical of America would soil their pants if they were told they had to live in any other country. The reason for that is because there is not another country that comes close to the quality of life or opportunity we have. So we should give thanks to God but let's guard against the sort of conflation of being an American with being a Christian, or thinking that we are the Promised Land, or putting our hope in the Republican party to usher in the Kingdom of God in our world.

3. Recognize the spiritual warfare at play in this fight.

We are not in a battle with flesh and blood alone. Spiritual warfare is happening around us all the time. Satan is real. Demons are real. This is not meant to scare you, but to sober you up. Our enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour. The battlefield of the mind is the place where spiritual darkness can wreak havoc in the lives of people, getting them to do all sorts of evil things.

Stand firm then. Put on the full armor of God. Put on the helmet of salvation and protect your mind from the lies of Satan. Remember, he is a deceiver. He is a liar. He led Adam and Eve to believe God was withholding something from them and so they ate the fruit. He led Judas to think he could force Jesus' hand to overthrow the Romans, so he sold him out for 30 pieces of silver. He led David to believe a census would bolster his ego and praise. He tried to lead Jesus to believe bowing to him would give Jesus all power. But Jesus didn't fall for it. He saw through it but many don't. We need to recognize there is a battle.

4. Study the Scriptures in community with others.

Christians do not walk out our faith alone. We walk in community with other believers. The goal of our fellowship is to sharpen one another. We grow and learn together. As we center ourselves on God's Word, and we are learning alongside others, we mature. This anchor and tether to community is a place where we can wrestle with ideas and philosophies and human traditions. We can ask questions and inquire from others to help us discern God's Word on the issues of our day. Every person needs this.

Find a Life Group. Take a next step into community. Join a men's group or a women's group. Get involved in Young Adults or with Student Ministry. We need others to walk with others if we want to endure and stay the course.

5. Pray for the Lord's help to protect you, your family, and your friends.

He will hold me fast. We've talked about that here. But one of the means of grace the Lord has given us, in addition to the Word and Community, is prayer. Ask the Lord to help you stay the course. Ask Him to protect your mind. Ask Him to give you wisdom and discernment on the things you hear and encounter. But don't stop there...pray for your family and friends to do the same. I have watched too many people I know wander and stray from the truth. I've watched as our secular progressive culture has taken its spoils of people I know. They are captive, enslaved and ensnared. Intercede for those whom you know that are in this position. And pray for those who are not, and ask the Lord to spare them.

There have been battles in war throughout history that served as turning points in the war. In the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Saratoga was the turning point in the war. In the Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg was the turning point in the war. In World War II, the Battle of Stalingrad was the turning point in the war. These turning points shifted the tide of the war. When it comes to the spiritual war we engage in throughout our lives, and Satan's aim to steal, kill, and destroy us, the turning point of the battle is the mind.

Ideas have consequences. Theology matters. Truth matters. Bad theology hurts people. We must be on guard against the enemy's tactic of leading us astray by inception. The thoughts we think shape the lives we live. This is why Paul warns us not to be deluded with good sounding arguments. He warns us not to be taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit based on human traditions. We must stay anchored to the truth -- and His Word is truth.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, who battled most of his adult life over the issue of what the truth of God's Word said versus what was popular and acceptable from the culture, left us with a great quote:

“Peace if possible. Truth at all costs.” — Martin Luther

We want to have peace with men, if possible. But we certainly want to have peace with God, which requires walking in the truth. Peace if possible. Truth at all costs. May we be people of the truth.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where have you personally seen the battle for your mind play out? In school, work, social media, television, books, family, church?
- 2) What is the struggle that Paul has for the church in Colossae and Laodicea?
- 3) What does Paul mean by “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”?
- 4) What are some actions we can take to prevent ourselves from being taken captive by plausible arguments? Are there any other arguments you deal with?
- 5) Why is it significant to realize that our battle isn't just physical but also spiritual?
- 6) Why is it necessary to fight for truth over peace?