

A REVIVAL OF PAGANISM

The last pagan emperor of Rome was Flavius Claudius Julianus. He died in 364 AD. And his final words were profound... "You have conquered, Galilean."

Flavius' words were a reference to Jesus - and an admission of defeat.

In just 300 years Christianity had overwhelmed paganism, and had prevailed as the primary faith of the empire. Pagan Rome was now Christian Rome.

Who would've thought that now in the early days of the 21st century we'd be witnessing a revival of ancient Roman paganism. It's making a comeback.

Pick up a New Age newspaper, and you'll see a myriad of advertisements... from pyramid and crystal power - to astrological counseling - to shamanistic awakenings. The list of faddish

philosophies goes on and on.

Remember, though, the words of the wisest man who ever lived. King Solomon said in the book of Ecclesiastes, "There is nothing new under the sun."

In the fiction of CS Lewis, a senior demon named Screwtape is explaining to his apprentice, Wormwood, how to conjure up an effective temptation. Screwtape tells the rookie demon, "Old error in new dress, is ever error nonetheless."

As we'll learn tonight, modern spirituality sounds almost identical to the false doctrine that permeated the church in Colossae. Understand, New Age religion is really not new at all. *The New Age* is simply a re-packaging of *an old lie*.

A CHURCH IN TROUBLE

Colossae was a small town, eighty miles up river from Ephesus. On a modern map you'd find Colossae in eastern Turkey. The book of Colossians was the only letter Paul wrote that was addressed to a people he had never visited.

Most Bible scholars agree the Colossian church was a byproduct of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. In Ephesus, Paul met Epaphras. Perhaps Paul led him to Jesus. Epaphras went home to Colossae and started a church.

The church flourished until false doctrine infiltrated the people's thinking and put a

chokehold on their new-found faith. Pastor Epaphras was a new Christian himself and needed help - so he ran 900 miles to Rome, to consult Paul.

While in a Roman prison, Paul sat down and penned a defense for the truth. Paul dissected the Colossian heresy - a false religious system that would later become known as Gnosticism. Epaphras raced back to Colossae to douse the wildfire, but it would be 300 years before the heresy was finally extinguished.

Devotion Box - There's No Limits With God

In 1: 5-6 Paul remarks that the Colossians had embraced "the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world..."

Understand, the year is 62 AD. It's been just 30 years - 3 decades - since the risen Christ ascended into heaven. There's been no printing press, or motorized travel, or electronic communications. Al Gore hasn't even invented the internet, yet already the Gospel had been spread throughout the whole Mediterranean world.

It proves there's no limit to what God can do through the ability of *the Holy Spirit* - and *the availability of believers with simple faith*.

Devotion Box - How To Pray

1:9-12 record Paul's prayer for the Colossians... And notice Paul prays- but not for their wealth and health and material comfort. His concerns are spiritual.

He prays, not for *thrills*, but to know *God's will*. Not to *walk safely*, but to *walk worthy*. Not for *fluff*, but for *fruit*. Not for an *increase in income*, but for *increase in insight*. Not for *possessions*, but for *power*.

This is how I want you to pray for me!

Devotion Box - How To Know God's Will

Colossians 3:15, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." The Greek word translated "rule" referred to an umpire at an athletic competition. Paul is suggesting what when decisions are too close to call - when it's a bang-bang choice - let the peace of God make the call. Don't ignore your uneasiness. Let God's peace umpire your decisions.

But also, 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." The *peace of God* can be pretty subjective—that's why we also need the *word of Christ*. Let the peace of God rule your heart, while the Word of God sets the rules in your life.

THE GNOSTIC HERESY

The Gnostics believed both good and evil were eternal. The material universe was evil, while the spirit realm was good. Since the true God was holy and would never handle evil he refrained from direct contact with the physical dimension.

This made creation a difficult procedure. The Gnostics taught that God created the world by proxy. He sent out emanations - or divine personifications - to do the dirty work. Each emanation was a little further from God than the one previous.

Since matter was evil the Gnostics denied Jesus' humanity. They taught God would never come in the flesh. They claimed Jesus was a phantom or a ghost. They concocted stories of how He walked on the beach, but left no footprints.

Gnosticism believed the nature of God - His fullness, or "*pleroma*", as they called it - had been chopped up like fine pepper and sprinkled out over the whole religious spectrum. Jesus was one of God's emanations - but just one - as were all the other gods and goddesses and angels. Thus, there was nothing unique about Jesus. He was just one of many links to God. Gnosticism believed that the life of God could be found in anywhere - in anything - animate or inanimate.

It all sounds familiar... Gnosticism was an ancient version of the New Age.

John targeted Gnosticism in 1 John 1:1, "That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life..." Jesus did come in the flesh.

John takes aim at the Gnostics even more directly in 1 John 4:3, "every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God."

In addition, the Gnostics despised the crucifixion. How could anything physical effect salvation? Thus, the Gnostics denied the atoning work of the blood of Jesus. That's why Paul said in 1:14, "in Christ we have redemption through His blood." Paul makes sure we know it's the physical blood of Jesus that saves us.

For Gnostics, salvation was re-climbing the ladder of emanations responsible for creation. It was a process of spiritual enlightenment. The Greek word "*gnosis*" means "*knowledge*". To the Gnostics, Jesus was a good starting point for spiritual discovery, but the knowledge of God would be found in a number of places.

Paul, of course, disagrees. The *ancient Gnostics* - and the *modern day Gnostics*, or New Agers - are looking for God in all the wrong places.

THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST

Chapter 1:15-18 give us one of the most majestic descriptions of Jesus in all of Scripture.

In verse 15, Jesus is the "image of the invisible God." The word translated "image" means "*an exact representation*" - in the same form and of the same substance. Jesus was not just some weakened and diluted reflection of God.

He was also "the firstborn over all creation." Both the later Gnostics, and today's Jehovah's Witnesses use this verse to infer that Jesus was a created being, and not truly divine. But Paul's intent was just the opposite. The biblical term "firstborn" refers not so much to birth order, but to status and preeminence.

In Exodus 4:22 Jacob was called the "firstborn" even though he was younger than Esau. Biblically, "firstborn" is a title of authority and privilege. "The firstborn over all creation" doesn't make Jesus part of creation. It makes Him its CEO.

Verse 16, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers." In other words, God did all His creating personally through His Son!

Verse 17, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Jesus is not only the Creator of the universe, but its Sustainer. He holds it all together.

Colin's Law of Electricity states that "*like charges*

repel", yet the nucleus of each atom is made up of particles with like charges, or protons. Scientists have their theories, but no one really knows why the protons remain together. Paul says the atomic glue is Jesus. He is the Creator AND the Sustainer.

When Jesus loosens His grip, 2 Peter 3:10 says "the elements will melt with fervent heat". Instant disintegration - then God will usher in a new world.

Verse 18: "And He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, (*Jesus is head of Creation and head of the Church!*), that in all things He may have the preeminence." Jesus is not a step on the long path to God. Jesus is the end of the search. Jesus is none other than God.

Verse 19 is Paul's crowning statement, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell..."

The Greek counterpart of "fullness", or "*pleroma*", was the term the Gnostics used for the totality of God. Gnosticism said the fullness had been sprinkled over all Creation. Paul said *NO!* The fullness was deposited in one place - a person - Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sum total of all that God is.

Guys, the knowledge of God is not at the end of some New Age rainbow. Here is truth - if you know Jesus... you'll know all there is to know about God.

THE BIG "IF"

According to Colossians 1:20, by Jesus, it pleased God "to reconcile all things to Himself... having made peace through the blood of His cross... to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight - if..."

And here's the condition, verse 23... Notice, it's not just if you professed faith at one time in the past. That's not what covers sin and presents us holy to God. It says, "if... you continue in the faith..."

Verse 23 teaches that our spiritual status - a right stand-

ing with God - is conditional. It's up to you, not only to have faith, but to continue in that faith! Faith is not a one-time profession, it's an attitude in which I must continue.

I used to be staunchly *once-saved-always-saved*, until I took Colossians 1:23, and other verses like it at face value. To me, it's impossible to get around the obvious. I believe you have to *keep believing* if you expect to be saved. Paul wants us to be grounded in our faith, steadfast in our faith, not moved away!

Devotion Box - The Hope Of Glory

Paul explains how Christianity was once a mystery, but now God has revealed His glory. And in 1:27 he says to the Colossians, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Understand - Christianity is not a philosophy we learn - or a set of rules to obey. It's an invasion of my soul. God lives in me! It's not *imitation*, but *impartation*.

I can watch an artist paint a portrait from now to eternity, and never paint like that artist. *Imitation* won't work. For me to paint like that artist God would need to take the Spirit of the artist and put Him in me - *impartation*. That's exactly what God has done. That's how I become like Jesus. The Spirit of Jesus lives in me.

SPIRITUALITY WITHOUT MORALITY

From Colossians 2:8-23 Paul says beware of four dangers: *intellectualism, legalism, mysticism, and asceticism*. Gnosticism was a blend of all the above. It borrowed from Greek rationalism, Jewish legalism, Eastern mysticism, and Roman asceticism. The Gnostics concocted a strange diversity of morality.

There were two extremes...

Since matter was evil some Gnostics believed you should abstain from as much contact with the physical world as possible. These people deprived their body of natural relationships and basic necessities. They practiced austere forms of self-denial. Physical pleasures were frowned upon.

Another group of Gnostics believed that since matter was evil, and humans are made of matter - it was impossible to escape it, so it didn't matter what they did with their bodies. They figured they could live as they pleased. Self-indulgence was the ticket. They had a *spirituality without morality*. They talked about God - prayed to God - chanted, meditated, visualized - then went to bed with their neighbor's wife and thought nothing of it.

Again, does all this sound familiar? The *new age* is nothing but an *old lie*.

SOUNDING SPIRITUAL

Paul warns in verse 8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." The Gnostics sounded spiritual. They used mystical-sounding terminology, and delved into complicated philosophies.

A teenager won the Idaho Falls Science Fair by demonstrating how gullible people are when sophisticated, scientific-sounding terms get tossed around. He passed around a petition calling for a ban on *dihydrogen monoxide*.

The student rightly told the people that dihydrogen monoxide causes excessive sweating and vomiting. A major component is acid rain. It causes severe burns in its gaseous state. Accidental inhalation can kill you. It decreases the effectiveness of automobile brakes. And it's been found inside the tumors of cancer patients. 86% of the people polled wanted to ban the chemical completely. 12% were undecided. But only one person knew that *dihydrogen monoxide* was water.

I had a friend join a cult. He was impressed with the depth of the teaching. But when I went to hear the man, it wasn't deep at all - it was complex and convoluted.

My friend mistook "*complicated*" for "*deep*". They're not the same. The deepest truth I know is "For God so loved the world" - but that's also the simplest. Don't let anyone cheat you out of simple faith in Jesus Christ.

KISSING A SHADOW

Paul says in 2:16, "let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths..." The Seventh Day Adventists used to teach if you worshipped on Sunday and not Saturday you'd taken the mark of the beast and were headed to hell. *Not so!*

Rules don't get you any closer to God, and neither do rituals. Keeping one day holier than the next does nothing to enhance your standing with God. The Jewish feasts and Sabbaths were merely pictures of the work of Christ and the ultimate rest from our works we would find in His. They were symbolic, not essential.

In verse 17 Paul calls the Sabbath laws, "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." What if my wife went on a ten-day trip. Trust me, I'd be glad to see her when she got home. But what if she walked in the door, and rather than embracing her, I started kissing and hugging her shadow. You would think I was ready for the funny farm.

That's what God thinks when people get caught up in feast days and rituals. They're kissing the shadow, rather than the Savior!

Bible Scan - Colossians 1-4

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - Tuesday, September 10th 9:45 AM & 7:00 PM Ladies Bible Study, "Face to Face with Women of the Bible" begins... Friday, September 13th @ 12:00 PM—"Buy Your Score" Men's Golf Tournament for Missions

Next Bible Scan - September 15, 2002 - 1 Thessalonians 1-5

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power." - Colossians 2:9-10

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

Devotion Box - The Hidden Life

In light of the first two chapters Colossians 3:1 tells us, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

Comedian Jack Benny was a penny-pincher. The joke is told of Jack being held up at gun-point. The impatient robber was waving his gun and demanding, "your money or your life?" Benny told him, "Don't rush me, I'm thinking about it!"

It's sad when a person's life is their money...or career...or house...or hobby... or even family... Hopefully, you've discovered that real life is Jesus Christ.

And if Jesus is your life, then set your sights on higher things. Don't be shallow and earth-bound. Gear your mind to think spiritually - in light of eternity.

Verse 3 says, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." The Christian lives a full and satisfied life, but to the outside world it's a hidden life.

People look at your life and remark, "He's a committed Christian, but he's got nothing to show for it." *And in a sense they're right...* our blessings are buried in our heart or waiting in heaven. The Lord we follow is seen only by the eyes of faith. The Spirit who empowers us is more sensed than touched. And our source of joy and love and peace is accessed from the inside—rather than from the outside.

Our lives are hid with Christ. We're like an iceberg. All the world sees is just a fraction of who we are and what we have. The larger part lies below the surface.

But one day... according to verse 4, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Imagine the day when Jesus returns in all His power. The whole world will stand before Him tongue-tied - and jaws dropped - in fearful awe of His glory and majesty. Suddenly your life and devotion - what the world assumed was a waste - will be instantly explained and validated.

The people who know you now will see you standing beside the living Lord - clothed in His grace and glory. In the end the *hidden life* will be the *envied life*.

Devotion Box - What To Wear To Church

Did you know the church has a dress code? You thought we didn't care what you wore to church. Not so! We don't always enforce it, but the church does have a dress code. Of course, our dress code has nothing to do with clothes. It has to do with attitude. Look at 3:12. Paul tells us what to wear to church... Put on "tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, (forgiveness), and love...".

Devotion Box - Turning Work Into Worship

In 1977 Johnny Paycheck released a hit song, "Take This Job And Shove It". It became an anthem for discontented employees all across America. But in verses 22-25 Paul sings a new song. He wants you to... *Take Your Job And Love it!* We can turn our work into worship if we apply the right attitude. Verse 23 says, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."

If you're a Christian it doesn't matter if you're employed by AT&T, GE, IBM, TJ Max, or Taco Bell... in reality, you work for Jesus. Your job is another way to serve Jesus. Don't separate the job from Jesus. You're not just climbing a corporate ladder - you're laboring for the Lord.

Devotion Box - Grace Talk

Colossians 4:6 tells us, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." A Christian needs to learn a new language - grace talk. Season your speech with love and kindness.

SOUL-WINNER AND FRIEND-MAKER

Paul closes chapter 4 with some personal correspondence. It proves that Paul was not only a great soul-winner, but a great friend-maker. Paul had many pals.

Someone remarked, "I went out to find a friend, but could not find one there. I went out to be a friend, and friends were everywhere!" Paul had many friends because he was a great friend to have. He took time out to communicate. And that's what Paul does here... He sends his personal greetings...