

Read : He 1:1-4

Illustration: In a video based on his book *3:16 Stories of Hope*, Max Lucado illustrates the odd nature of the statement that "all religions lead to God":

All roads lead to heaven. Well, the sentence makes good talk-show fodder, but does it make sense? Can all approaches to God be correct? How can all religions lead to God when they are so different? We don't tolerate such logic in other matters. We don't pretend that all roads lead to London or all ships sail to Australia; all flights don't lead to Rome. Imagine your response to a travel agent who proclaims they do. You tell him you need a flight to Rome, Italy. So he looks on his screen, and he offers, "Well, there's a flight to Sidney, Australia, at 6:00 a.m."

"Does it go to Rome?" you ask.

"No, but it offers great food and movies."

"But I need to go to Rome," you say.

He says, "Well, let me suggest Southwest Airlines."

"Southwest Airlines flies to Rome?"

"No, but they win awards for on-time arrivals."

You're getting frustrated, so you reiterate: "I need one airline, to carry me to one place—Rome."

The agent appears offended: "Sir, all flights go to Rome."

Well, you know better. Different flights have different destinations. That's not a thickheaded conclusion, but an honest one. Every flight does not go to Rome. And every path does not lead to God.

Prayer:

The letter to the Colossians was a corrective to false teaching that threatened the church and undermined the truth.

Although not specifically stated, the nature of the false teaching going on can be inferred from the statements Paul makes in opposition to it in chapter 2:4,8;16;18; and 20-23.

The gospel of Jesus Christ was being adulterated with a syncretistic approach to faith, which blended ideas from Judaism, pagan philosophy, and the mystic religions.

The tendency of others to introduce ideas from other philosophies and religions on a level with Christian truth was what the Colossian believers were up against. This is our greatest temptation today - how can we make what we want to believe as equally binding as what God says in the Bible even when it is contrary to what the Bible teaches.

Either man determines the standard for what is true and to be believed or God does in the Bible. Take your pick. I'll stick with Ro 3:4 "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

What is the same in any age is man's propensity to repeat the sin of the Garden over and over again and that is to reject what God has said in the Bible and to believe someone or something else - the results are always devastating (Pr 14:12 "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.").

The most effective way to expose what is false is to present the truth. When you know the real thing, what's counterfeit or false becomes obvious. This is precisely what Paul does in this letter and we'll be looking at how he counters the false concepts being taught head on in the weeks ahead.

As Christians we dare not compromise the truths of God's word with man-centered philosophies and legalism.

Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith. Christianity is Christ-centered, if it's not, it's not Christianity.

The place that Christ holds in any religious teaching determines whether it is true or false.

There were Greeks and Jews and Phrygians in the Colossian church. It would be natural for them to cling to their own familiar ideas and want to incorporate them into Christianity.

False teachers mixed Biblical truth with their worldly philosophies and doctrines of Jewish legalism and Oriental mysticism.

The false teaching Paul addressed acknowledged that Jesus was good, but more was needed. To really have it all special knowledge was needed and certain things needed to be done which involved four worldly man-centered approaches to experiencing spiritual fullness in life:

1. Gnosticism (2:4 – start at v1, 8 – start at v6 - **Read**): The Gnostics held that having special secret knowledge enabled a person to enter into the full experience of spiritual reality - a philosophy of life that Paul referred to in v10 as hollow and deceptive because it was based on human wisdom and the basic principles of this world. (Jesus Christ is the some total of all knowledge and wisdom 2:3).

Gnosticism was rooted in dualism, which was the Greek philosophy that both the material universe and the immaterial universe were co-eternal – matter was not created by God because it existed from the beginning – God simply shaped what was already there. What does the Bible say? Ge 1:1 records, “In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth”. The writer to the Hebrews in He 1:10 quoting Ps 8:6 says, “In the beginning, O Lord, **You laid** the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the **work** of **Your** hands”. And again, in He 11:3 we read, “By faith we understand that the universe was **formed** at God’s command, so that what is seen (*the material universe*) was not made out of what is visible.” God created from nothing (*ex nihilo*) the material he used in His creative activity.

The Greeks loved knowledge and prided themselves in their sophisticated philosophical systems which they claimed gave them a superior secret knowledge into divine mysteries that they maintained was necessary for salvation.

The Gnostics stressed salvation through knowledge and held to a bewildering variety of views that set a transcendent God apart from the material world, which was viewed as evil. The spiritual world was believed to be good - God was spiritual and therefore could have no part in the material universe.

The Biblical teaching of God becoming man was preposterous. This relegated Jesus to a lower life form and the idea of a bodily resurrection was absurd. God would not contaminate Himself in this way. Jesus Christ did not become man nor could He truly suffer on the cross. Salvation was not dependent upon faith or works but upon knowledge of one’s true nature. You think New Age is new, think again.

The Colossian heresy undermined the centrality of Jesus Christ to Christianity. To minimize who Jesus Christ is and what He has done and to lose sight of His significance in the lives of believers is to reduce our hope to wishful thinking at best.

2. Legalism (2:11;16, 17 – **Read**): Gentile Christians were being told that they needed to conform to Jewish rules, regulations and O.T. requirements in order to be truly Christian.

The Jewish legalists taught that there were ceremonial requirements for salvation such as circumcision, asceticism or the practice of self-denying disciplines as well as dietary laws and observing holy days.

By retaining circumcision, food-laws and festivals Jewish Christians brought the whole basis of man's acceptance with God into question. What makes a person acceptable to God? Doing what things? How many things? How often? How well? Salvation from sin and acceptance by God is by His grace through faith, that's all!

3. Mysticism (2:18 – **Read**): The mystics placed their weight on visions and meditation believing that this brought them in touch with higher spiritual realities resulting in spiritually fulfilling experiences. The idea of angel intermediaries was a direct challenge to the supremacy of Christ. "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Ti 2:5).

Mysticism pressed beyond external forms of religion to an attempted direct knowledge of God, especially in prayer, meditation and in trance-like states.

4. Asceticism, which Paul described in vv20-23 as physical self-denial based on a man made system of rules – **Read**.

Asceticism was a system of spiritual discipline preoccupied with the renunciation of the material world and the body characterized by the abandonment of the world's goods, refusing to please bodily desires, obedience to a rule of life designed to guide the soul on its upward journey into the presence of God. Ascetic practices were regarded as the standard mark of true holiness.

Paul went toe to toe in his letter with these four worldly man-centered approaches that suggested there were a variety of ways to encounter God and to experience spiritual fullness in life.

What is characteristic of each one of these false ideas was that they depended on man and what he could do and not God and what He has already done for us in Jesus Christ.

Paul insisted that what the Colossian believers had in Christ was greater than anything else (We have been given fullness in Christ - 2:10). There is no secret knowledge, or spiritual powers, or angelic intermediaries, or rituals, or rites, or traditions, or observances, or ceremonies, or practices than can give us what we already have in Christ. Christ is our life. We are to trust in and depend on Him, not ourselves, our spirituality, or self-imposed disciplines that we engage in to prove how righteous and acceptable to God we are. No human philosophy or practice can grant what only Christ can guarantee no matter how good they may sound or seem to be.

Jesus Christ alone is central to the faith and believers are complete and have the fullness of God available to them in a personal relationship with Him. There is no need to look beyond what He offers us in Himself (2:9-10).

How do you find spiritual fulfillment in life? You can try to find it in a variety of ways but it can ultimately only be found in Christ. Christ in us is the key to a fulfilling life. "All the fullness of God lives in Jesus" (Co 2:9).

If you believe that anything more than Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation from sin's penalty, then you are believing a false Gospel and need to take seriously the warnings in this letter.

What is most important for the church today is the doctrine of Christ. The best safeguard against counterfeit teaching about Jesus is knowing Jesus as He truly is from the Bible.

Illustration: *Mark Buchanan, "Singing in the Chains," Christianity Today (February 2008), p. 33*

Arthur Burns, a Jewish economist of great influence in Washington during the tenure of several Presidents, was once asked to pray at a gathering of evangelical politicians. Stunning his hosts, he prayed this prayer: "Lord, I pray that Jews would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Buddhists would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ."

And then, most stunning of all: "And Lord, I pray that Christians would come to know Jesus Christ."

How well do you know Jesus Christ as a child of God – not know about Him but know Him personally at a deep soul level?

Colossians magnifies the person and work of Jesus Christ to counter the heresy denying Christ's deity. The only safeguard against any false intellectual system is a strong Christian theology.

How do you grow to spiritual maturity - what's the process? Paul explains this in 1:9-12.

1. Knowing what God says in the Bible (1:9) through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, which is applying what God says in the Bible in your daily life (1:9).
2. Acting on the truth involves living a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing Him in every way (1:10), which involves bearing fruit in every good work and
3. Growing in the knowledge of God that can come only through doing what God says and experiencing the results of what that brings about in your life. As we do God's will we'll come to know Him better and in a personal way.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is God in the flesh – He is the "image of the invisible God" (1:15)

Image in Gr thought shares in the reality of what it portrays - Jesus perfectly represents God, because He is God. Jesus is the living expression of God Himself, the embodiment of deity - first in existence, in power, and in position. Jesus created all things in heaven and on earth (1:16). Jesus created the material world and is supreme over it in stark contrast to the false concept of God held by false teachers. Jesus is preeminent not some lower order of being (1:17)

Man is not a good being locked inside an evil body, he's a sinner, alienated from God and an enemy of God through wicked thoughts and evil behaviors (1:21).

God has acted in a decisive way to bring man into a right relationship with Himself, not through some secret knowledge that frees the intellect but by His physical body through death.

The heart of the Gospel is Christ in you - Christ's life in the believer brings hope for what is to come. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus (2:3).

Doctrinal truth is to bear fruit in practical Christian conduct.

Because believers are one with Christ, alive with Him, rooted in Him (2:7), hidden in Him (3:3), and complete in Him (2:10), it is utterly inconsistent for us to believe that we can live life without Him.

We are going to be exploring the following life applications in the Sundays ahead:

1. We are to learn the truth to **live it** not simply to know it.
2. We are qualified by God for Heaven in Jesus Christ (1:12) who is our hope - Savior (13-14), eternal God (15), Creator (16,17) Head of the Church (18).
3. We have a new life in Christ (3:1-7; cf Ro 6:1-14, Eph 2:1-10)
4. We are to stop living the old way, bound by sin and without Christ (3:8-9), and are now set free to live the new way in Him (3:10-25)
5. We are to be devoted to prayer with sensitivity to the ministry opportunities God presents to us with thankfulness (4:2)
6. We are to pray for open doors to share the Gospel message (4:3,4; cf 1 Pe 3:15-17)
7. We are to be wise in our dealings with others taking advantage of opportunities to reflect the character of God in our words and in our actions (4:5,6)

What's critical for us to come to terms with as believers in Jesus Christ is:

1. We have a living hope in Jesus that affects how we think and act and view the future.
2. There is no comparison between man's ideas and God's truth (2:4). Man-made philosophy and tradition may have worldly appeal but are empty and of no value (2:8).
3. Legalism robs us of our freedom in Christ having us rely on religious activity for right standing with God instead of relying on His grace (2:21).
4. Emotional religious experiences (religious mysticism) cannot offer true spiritual fullness.

Illustration: Expositor's Illustration File – Christ, Sufficiency of, Ron Dunn

Imagine for a moment the number of words it took to write the 30 volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica? Millions of words. An even more amazing thing is that it was written using only the 26 letters of the Alphabet! They didn't have to go outside of the alphabet to write that massive set. It provided all that they needed. Jesus Christ called Himself the Alpha and Omega – the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and we do not have to go outside of Him for anything that we need as believers either.

Benediction: Re 1:5b,6