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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

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EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

Chap. 2. verse 18 (cont.)

[To get the exact connection with the previous portion of the verse refer to the notes on pp. 41, 42 in last issue of "B.S."]

Thrēskeia (worship) occurs again only in Acts 26:5 and James 1:26; 27. It primarily refers to religious worship with the emphasis on the externalities of ceremonialism; a *cult* rather than a creed. Lightfoot quotes from Philo, the Jewish contemporary of the Apostles, that "generally the usage of the word exhibits a tendency to a bad sense." Angel worship was a practice highly developed in later Judaism, but it would appear as if already it was an element in the Colossian heresy. It contained the idea that God was to be approached not directly, but through a series of angelic intermediaries, of which system Christ was either the highest 'link' with God or the nearest to man at the other end. In either case Christ was robbed of His unique position and character in relation to God and man: The would-be worshipper was duped by a degraded and counterfeit "religion". Then follows the second descriptive clause—presenting some further problems of interpretation.

ha heoraken embateuōn (dwelling in things which he hath seen). The two points of difficulty here are (a) the exact meaning of the verb (see A.V., R.V. & R.V. marg.). (b) The insertion or omission of 'not'. Authorities are divided on both points, and the subject is too long for a note, but Moule puts the matter tersely as follows: "If we reject 'not', the meaning will most probably be that the erring teacher '*dwells in, or dwells on,* what he has *seen*', his alleged visions and revelations, the '*manifestations*' which he says, and perhaps thinks, he has witnessed, and which he prefers to the apostolic Gospel. If we retain '*not*', the meaning will be that he *invades* the region of the Unseen with a presumptuous confidence of assertion, as if he *had* seen it. In either case he might *assert* his enjoyment of angelic or other visions; but in the *latter* case the Apostle denies such a claim if made. (Cp. Ezek. 13:3, '*Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing*'). The R.V. margin (of this ref.) reads "*and things which they have not seen*". Both Moule and Radford accept the A.V. in preference, so also J.N. Darby (*New Trans.*).

eikē phusioumenos hupo tou noos tēs sarkos autou, (vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind) "Vainly"=without just cause or reason (cf. Rom. 13:4; 1 Cor. 15:2). The boasted humility is exposed in its true character: The present participle "being puffed up" indicating habit and development. See 1 Cor. 8:1 for the word in a similar connection. Paul also uses it in other connections in 1 Cor. 4:18, 19; 5:2. The next phrase is more literally "by the mind of his flesh"—the mind (*nous*) is the thinking faculty, the intellect in operation. The Greek preposition is emphatic, "inflated not merely *in* his mind but *by* his mind". These teachers boasted of a higher intelligence and a deeper insight: Paul replies that their boasting was that of a mind dominated by materialism. Rom. 8:5, 6, gives us the bold truth of the utter *antithesis* between mind controlled by the Holy Spirit and the mere fleshly intellect. See Rom. 12:2, where the apostle reveals the secret of true spirituality which consists in "the *renewing* of the *nous*" (cp. 1 Cor. 14:14, 15).

Verse 19

kai ou kratōn tēn kephalēn (and not holding fast the Head,) Note the R.V. here. This is the fourth participle descriptive of the teaching, and the most damaging of all. He has stated the positive side, this gives the negative. It implies the rejection by the false teachers of the only Source of life, growth and spiritual wisdom. To break with the Head is to be "dead indeed" (cf. 2:9. See our previous notes on ch. 1:18). Ephes. 4:15, 16 indicates the true relationship of the Head and every member in the Body individually.

ex hou pan to sōma (from whom all the body,) The Gk. word for head is feminine, but here the pronoun is masculine, from which it is clear that Christ is referred to, who is the Head—"out of whom"; as in Eph. 4:16. *Pan* with *to sōma* occurs only here and in Eph. 4:16, and the emphasis is on "all"—no member can be omitted and no member can be out of "direct life-contact with the Head."

dia tōn haphōn kai sundesmōn (through the joints and bands)—this follows the order of the Gk. Moule's comment appeals to us where he says, "the physical imagery must not be (unduly) pressed." The prominent thought is the cohesion directly of each several member with the Head, and its dependence upon the Head, as in an organized body. In his comments upon the

parallel passage in Eph. 4:16, Moule says (and with true insight we feel), "the 'joint' thus represents the man's spiritual union with Christ, not union with church organization, which is a thing, however sacred, of another order. The life-flow from the Head to each spiritual Limb is individual and direct. The product of this, not the cause or means of it, is the life of the Body." *Kai sundesmōn* occurs again in ch. 3:14; Eph. 4:3; Acts 8:23; = "bond" in a purely metaphorical meaning.

epichorēgoumenon kai sunbibazomenon (being supplied and knit together)—see opening remark in last para. These are present participles indicating a *continuing* process. The force of *epi* in the first verb is not intensive, but directive, "pointing to the accession of the supply" (Ellicot). *What* is supplied is not stated, for that is not the immediate point. Armitage Robinson (comparing this passage with Eph. 4:16), followed by L. Williams and Radford, finds no reference to nutriment in the context of either passage, but rather the idea of *order* and *unity* as being the true conditions of growth. Moule is here again most helpful of all: "The thing 'supplied' is all the Virtue of the Head; grace in all its forms. . . . The constant 'supply' of the life and power of the Head tends to a constant closer and firmer internal cohesion of the Body, and its spiritual development." It is not an external unity Paul is envisaging but an internal and spiritual unity.

auxei tēn auxēsin tou Theou (increaseth with the increase of God). The cognate accusative defines the nature of the increase as being "of God", that which comes from God, partaking of His life; "which God *Himself* confers"—such is the force of the article before *Theou*.

Verse 20

The polemical part of the Epistle now draws to a conclusion. The apostle has been merciless in his discussion of the doctrines of the false teachers. He now turns to their *ethical practice*, and reveals the utter impossibility of any Christian accepting it without violating the Word of God. There are at least two evils involved in it, viz. (1) extreme asceticism, seen in 2:20-3:4; and (2) licentiousness, dealt with in ch. 3:5-11. He demolishes such ethics on the twofold ground that the Christian had "died with Christ" (ch. 2:20), and had been "raised with Christ" (ch. 3:1), to share in His resurrection life. On these two great spiritual realities, their entire practical life turned.

ei apethanete sun Christō (If ye died with Christ) The aorist indicative carries the thought back to their conversion (not to their baptism, as some commentators would have it), when they were united to Christ by faith in His death for their sins, and given new life in Him. They had made a public confession of this great fact in their subsequent baptism. (See our Notes on vs. 11-13.)

apo tōn stoicheiōn tou kosmou (from the rudiments of the world.) *Apo* with the verb *apothnēskēin* only occurs here, and serves to indicate more completely the severance from the world than the dative *does* in Romans 6:2 (read also vs. 8-11). The two prepositions *sun* and *apo* express the two sides of one truth—they had died in *union with Christ*, they had been delivered *from* the world and its *stoicheia*—"its rudimentary teachings summed up in the law, with its rules and ordinances." (See our Notes on v. 8). What is here taught in reference to the death of Christ is not so much redemption and regeneration but includes (with these) our being *freed from* all fleshly 'natural religion' in whatever guise it comes. The whole force of the world's religion denies death *with Christ* to materialism (Cp. 2 Tim. 2:11).

ti hōs zōntes en kosmō dogmatizesthe (why, as though being in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances,) Not simply being in, but *living* the world's life, partaking of its interests, ideals and ideologies, as if never having been delivered from them. *Kosmos* is the world viewed in its ethical life. The absence of the article may be intended to emphasize the non-spiritual and anti-spiritual content of the world. *Dogmatizesthe* may be middle voice (as R.V.), or it may be a passive—they were *being subjected* to ordinances. Alford inclines to the latter, "it here carries a more keen, because more hidden, rebuke." But there is truth in both, for whilst the false teachers were enticing them into bondage, they were allowing themselves to be enticed. Lightfoot renders: "Why are ye overridden with precepts, ordinances?" "The life of faith and love was giving way to an arbitrary discipline, far different from the obedience of the heart to the will of God in Christ" (Moule).

—A. McD. R.