

## COLOSSIANS: STABILITY BY CHRIST'S ALL-SUFFICIENCY AND SUPREMACY

### Part X: The Believer's Complete Stability In Christ From Living In False Spirituality, Colossians 2:11-23

#### C. The Believer's Complete Stability In Christ From Bondage To Legalistic Asceticism

(Colossians 2:20-23)

#### I. Introduction

- A. Today's unsettling, insecure world has led many believers to become unsettled and insecure, so in contrast to today's world, we believers need to focus on the stability and security we have in our Lord.
- B. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians presents Christ's all-sufficiency and supremacy in ways that settle and provide security, and one way it does so is by teaching the believer's complete stability in Christ from living in false spirituality, with one realm of that liberty being freedom from bondage to legalistic asceticism.
- C. Colossians 2:20-23 teaches this provision, and we view it for our insight and edification (as follows):

#### II. The Believer's Complete Stability In Christ From Bondage To Legalistic Asceticism, Colossians 2:20-23.

- A. Paul taught that the believer positionally died with Christ to the physical realm as well as to the paganistically perceived demonic realm of this world, Colossians 2:20a:
  1. The believer's death with Christ was a death to the *stoicheia* of the world, with *stoicheia* lexically meaning *either* "elementary principles" *or* "elemental spirits," Col. 2:20a; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 677.
  2. To explain, the pagan world believed there was a relation between the spiritual and physical realms: the four basic physical elements were "earth, air, fire and water" that "the syncretistic religious tendencies . . . associated" with "elemental spirits," Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 776.
  3. By application, then, Paul taught that the believer died with Christ to **both** the pagan-presumed basic **physical** elements as well as to the **demons** that pagans believed were connected to these basic elements.
- B. Thus, if believers were dead with Christ to the physical elements of this world and also to the supposed demons pagans associated with them, Paul asked his readers why as though still belonging to that realm did they "submit to" (*dogmatizo*, Ibid., p. 200) extrabiblical regulations of the world, Col. 2:20b. At Colossae, these rules were all **ascetic**, directing people to **ABSTAIN from** handling, to **ABSTAIN from** tasting and to **ABSTAIN from** touching material things (Col. 2:21) akin to the demonic asceticism in 1 Timothy 4:1-3.
- C. Paul then critiqued the spiritual emptiness of the ascetic practices themselves, Colossians 2:22-23 (as follows):
  1. He critiqued that the ascetic rules were destined to perish with their use because they were based on human commands and teachings apart from God's Biblical authority, Colossians 2:22. Heeding regulations that are handed down from mere men does nothing to please God Who never gave such regulations to the Church, and the believer should be seeking to please God, not man, Galatians 1:10.
  2. Paul also critiqued the heeding of such rules as false spirituality: heeding these rules produced a false wisdom with self-imposed worship, false humility and a uselessly harsh treatment of the body, Col. 2:23a.
  3. Finally, Paul critiqued that practicing such rules lacked the capacity to restrain sensual indulgence of the sinful nature anyway, for "denying the body its desires merely arouses them" when one is not relying on the Holy Spirit to handle the sin nature, Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 679. Rather, true spirituality comes by relying on the Holy Spirit to boycott the sin nature with its lusts, what thus equips the believer to live a truly godly life apart from frustration, Romans 8:3-4; Galatians 5:16; Ibid.

***Lesson:*** (1) *Since the believer positionally died with Christ on the cross, he died to the physical world as well as to any paganistically perceived demonic association(s) with the elements of the physical world. Accordingly, the believer should not heed extrabiblical regulations regarding that realm.* (2) *In addition, extrabiblical rules are practiced in spiritual futility because of their intrinsic emptiness: (a) such rules are destined to perish with the use since they were not instituted by Scripture's God, and thus heeding them cannot please Him; (b) heeding such extrabiblical rules only produces an artificial spirituality with its false wisdom, its self-imposed worship, its false humility and its senselessly harsh treatment of the body and (c) heeding such extrabiblical rules cannot restrain sensual indulgence anyway, for only by relying on the Holy Spirit of God to obey God can the believer effectively boycott the sinful nature to live a truly godly life.*

***Application:*** (1) *May we realize that our positional identification with Christ in His death frees us from all duties to heed regulations set by man regarding this world or its paganistically perceived spirit realm.* (2) *Rather, our obedience is to be solely an obedience to Scripture's God in the power of the Holy Spirit.* (3) *May we thus avoid all rules outside Scripture that provide a false spirituality and often lead to false guilt in those who cannot keep them.*