

SUBVERSIVE WORSHIP

(Colossians 2:6-3:10)

Intro: This section of Colossians sees Paul dealing with the topic of the believers' worship. Paul explores the distortion of the Colossian heresy and then directs the church's attention towards the true object of their affection, Jesus.

READ Colossians 2:8; 16-23

Q. A group of people had infiltrated the Colossian church and imposed a teaching that Paul says was restricting the minds of the believers there. This teaching was probably a form of early Jewish Gnosticism. From these verses, try to identify the key characteristics of this heresy (i.e. attending religious festivals, angel worship, boasting about visions, ascetism).

Q. How do these elements of the Colossian heresy detract from the work of Christ? (i.e. religion based on works detracts from God's grace).

Q. Paul's main objective here is to combat this heretical teaching through emphasising the sufficient work of Jesus. **READ Colossians 2:9-15**. What does Paul emphasise about Jesus?

Q. In this passage, Paul refutes the heresy by emphasising Jesus' full deity in *bodily form*. How could Paul's emphasis of Jesus coming in full *bodily form* refute the heretical teaching of ascetism (harsh treatment of the body)?

Q. Paul also combats the teaching of circumcision by describing a circumcision performed by Christ (2:11-13). What is this, and how does it serve to mark the Colossian believers as different and set apart from the surrounding culture?

Q. This heresy also included a denial of Jesus' full deity and a glorification of the rule of Caesar and Empire. This was a teaching that tried to conform the Colossian church to the dominant belief of Rome, namely, that Caesar reigned supreme as *saviour* and *God*.

Read this inscription below, commemorating the birthday of Caesar Augustus:

"Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a *savior* both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war

and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance excelled even our anticipations, surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the **god** Augustus was the beginning of the **gospel** for the world that came by reason of him which Asia resolved in Smyrna." (Pirane Inscription 9 BCE)

Q. How does Paul's image of God disarming and making a public spectacle of the forces of the Roman Empire in 2:15 help the Colossians, and, by implication us, understand Jesus' full sovereignty over our dominant culture?

READ Colossians 3:1-10

Q. This passage is all about *setting your mind on things above*. To Paul, this meant *seeing Jesus' sovereignty* and *seeing our identity "in Christ"*. What does Paul say about these two things in verses 1-4 and how should this affect our lives today as subversive Christians?

Q. Since Jesus is sovereign, and has given us a new identity in Christ, Paul then urges the believers to eliminate (put to death) anything that seeks to become a "Sovereign" in our life (v 5-10). What are the things that you need to "put to death" in order to make Jesus sovereign over your life?