

Colossians 2

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 16 June 2009 00:00

I once worked in a position where, as a trained professional, I wrote company policies and ensured everything was top-rate and of the very best quality. To me, it was part of being a professional and was essential, as we were dealing with people's lives, often on an emergency basis.

But, my superior, also in the same profession, became annoyed, and told me "There's no need to be so perfect in everything!" This was because my insistence on providing the very best of care and service was rooted in both professionalism and Christian honour. With her, it was a matter of money and laxity. As I kept pushing for professionalism, so her own unprofessional attitude was highlighted. And, of course, my professionalism cost the company more! Therefore, I had to go!

In the Christian life, Christians must always be the very best they can be. Their motives and ethics must be transparent and obvious, and aimed at perfection, even if it never gets there. In this chapter, Paul is talking about aiming for perfection, though on this earth we will never be quite there. It is what God demands of us. Have you heard Christians say "If I found a perfect church, I wouldn't join it"? Well, that is just popular fancy, and is not worthy of any Christian. We are called upon to strive to be perfect, even as Christ is perfect. No, we will never be 100% perfect in this life, but we must still strive.

Some Christians fall into the trap of neurosis. Most never get out of it again. Not because it is impossible, but because they prefer their misery to the joy of a godly life. It gives them an excuse to stay in a dark pit of their own choosing, because it is easier than living an holy life. And every one of us can get into that pit at any time, unless we keep our eyes on Jesus.

Others, and this accounts for the majority, remain at a very superficial level in their faith, and never seem to rise above a mediocre veneer of spiritual life. This is not how God intends it; He demands the very best from us, with utmost integrity and effort. To mimic a popular advertising slogan: 'Jesus is not just for Christmas, He is for every day' – He is Lord of all and must take preeminence in our lives, all the time. Give God everything, and He will reciprocate and give you more!

Verses 1 - 5

1.

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For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2.

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

3.

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4.

And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

5.

For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

Paul tells the Colossians that he would love to meet them face-to-face, and this set up a 'conflict' or frustration in him, because he was under house arrest in Rome, so could not travel. As has already been said, though Paul wrote primarily to Colosse, his letter was also meant to reach Laodicea and the other cities and villages in the Lycos Valley.

Today, even in areas where local churches are numerous and close together, each church invites its own speakers, based on personal preference, rather than on prompting by the Spirit or on the qualities of the preacher. This did not happen in Paul's time. The same preachers and teachers visited all the churches. Why the difference? In those days, there was one faith, one baptism, one Lord, and all preachers and teachers taught the same things.

Nowadays, local churches have preferences and so some choose Apollo, some Peter, some

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Paul. Scripture alone is not considered. Instead, whatever pleases a particular local church is the key. In this way, sound men are rejected in favour of easy-listening or specific popular beliefs. This is the essence of denominations, of course, which should never exist. Just as a confusion of beliefs should not exist... and which cause some to reject this very Bible study. It does not agree with their personal beliefs, which are usually heretical or the result of bad teaching by uncalled pastors.

I know an ex-butcher. He often told me of the exploits of butchers, whose manipulation of meats is shameful! One trick used to sell meat that has gone past its prime was to just cut off green bits. Red-coloured lights are used above the counter, to make the meat look fresher. Another trick is to cover it with spices and peppers, etc. This was done routinely out of necessity in the Middle Ages, when cold storage was a problem and meat was rarely available. But, today, butchers do it just to retain maximum profit.

Many local churches are just like this. Their reason for existence and their savour has long gone. They have nothing to offer by way of testimony or witness. So, they cover their sorry state, or even their heresy, with soft words, popular speakers, and superficial theology. By doing this they suffer spiritually, dishonour God, and perpetuate lies.

Often, fellow believers can start out well, believing what is necessary and meaning it. But, as they walk in and out of the world, they tend to stay there at times, gathering in what is not proper for them. This can be in little things. But, each little thing mounts up in weight until the load crushes spiritual life. This is when beliefs are held loosely, and error counts for nothing. 'Give and take' is used as a spiritual rule, rather than zero-tolerance for error, as God would demand. These are Christians in error. To allow each small thing to slip by is to open the flood-gates to mightier errors.

Achan committed grave sin in God's eyes, by keeping the garments of the world. (Joshua 7:19-26). For his sin he was stoned to death in the Valley of Achor ('valley of trouble'). This was his reward for allowing the world too much access to his soul. Many Christians, including me, sometimes do this, often not thinking much about it, because the thing we allow, in our eyes, is so small.

But, remember – a tiny poisonous mushroom produces instant death! When we decide to join with others, who are generally in error, or simply lukewarm, we will be affected in some way or another. Why? Because we join them in the first place, even before they say or do anything. We

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leave them shaking hands and smiling – but to what effect? What is the point? If they are lax Christians, then we have no real business with them, unless it is to advise them of their state. So, do not deliberately seek to join with them. They must first change.

An unexpected meeting in the street is fine, but we cannot otherwise sanction the deliberate seeking out of those in error. These are weak Christians who we must try to help. It is not our task to just meet with them and say nothing. *They* must join with *us* – we should not seek them out continually... unless we speak up and counsel them.

One reader said, with great confidence, that it was alright to meet with lax or erroneous Christians, because Jesus did that when He ate with tax collectors and prostitutes. Yes, Jesus ate with them, but He did not consort with them as a deliberate policy or for social reasons! He was with them for one purpose only: to preach the Gospel and to show that even the most hardened sinners can come to Him. It is not an open instruction for us to mingle freely with sinners or to accept what they say and do!

Be careful, for a journey begins with a single step. Before we know it we will become lukewarm ourselves. Do not enter the Valley of Achor, for it spells trouble. Just dipping a toe into the Valley will affect you. Even then, hope is offered, if we repent.

Paul wanted to visit the Colossians to comfort them and to aid with true doctrine and pastoral care. He wanted their hearts to be “knit together in love”. That is, to be united by common beliefs and to come to common conclusions regarding their faith, all under the banner of love – agapē – affection and good will. (Really, this one word for ‘love’ requires a far more detailed explanation, for it is more complex than is realised).

This love should lead the Colossians to “all riches of the full assurance of understanding”. ‘Riches’ means to have an abundance, a fullness of what enriches the soul. We are told how we obtain this fullness: “through the full assurance of understanding”. This assurance is the utmost confidence given by having knowledge, complete with understanding, of the things of God.

This is used by God to give us “the acknowledgement of the mystery of (the trinity).” The word ‘acknowledgement’ means a precise and accurate knowledge of everything ethical, moral and spiritual. The ‘mystery’ is that which was hidden: the will of God (as shown in the Gospel, for

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example).

Now, if we read all that together, we see very revealing facts. We are shown that God's will can ONLY be known through our knowledge of Him. This involves our salvation, which gives us a live spirit, able to communicate with God. A major focus is placed on having an in-depth knowledge of God's word, because this is our only real source of how to live our lives and how to gain blessings. Without knowledge we cannot possibly understand what God says. And once we have this deep knowledge we will become immensely and spiritually confident, not in ourselves, but in the Lord.

This means that Christians who say they have a 'simple faith' and are not bothered to 'delve too deeply' cannot, in any way, have genuine confidence in Christ. Nor can they pray with any real sense. Nor are they able to oppose evil or bad doctrines. Nor are they able to trust God to lead them, or to know what His will is for their lives. As always, a brief scriptural text contains the seeds of a great number of truths.

In the world, men and women strive to be 'professional'. A professional knows all there is to know about his profession, and keeps his skill and understanding up to date. Only the professional can give good service in matters of his profession. In some ways, a genuine Christian is like a professional. He or she endeavors at all times to know as much as possible about God and His will. Bad knowledge and practices will be abandoned and replaced by what is good and true. And everything thought, done and said, will be in accord with God's word. *That* is a true Christian!

Most Christians do not even come up to the ankles of genuine believers, who strive constantly to know God and His will! Yes, they are saved, but their spiritual state is low. To put it in terms of the professional above, they are as useful as someone who has just started to train in their new profession. Their claimed faith is negligible. Their usefulness is almost nil. Their spiritual state is only just 'ticking over'.

Can you see what I am getting at? If not, then you will not know God's blessings. You might think you do, and might claim you have them – but it is all for show, and you know it. Christians together as local churches often reinforce their unbelief by *claiming* to love God and honour His name! But, when they get home, they know in their hearts that their life is a sham, and they know nothing of God, except on a superficial level.

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We will never be absolutely perfect in this life... yet God demands that we work hard towards perfection. Do you? Do I? So many of us accept what is less, thus allowing what is best to be submerged. In our time we are seeing a widespread hatred for Christians and a very dark time approaching. We cannot afford to be sentimental about Christian values and beliefs. We need to be tied to genuine and deep Christians, not to people who think dirty water is nutritious soup! And this is what Paul's letter is all about.

We **MUST** get to know Christ and the Father (verse 3), for only they have the key to the "treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (See study on chapter one for an explanation of this term). What idiots are we, if we search for earthly treasures that can only last until we die, and ignore heavenly treasures that will last forever?

Paul is saying all this just in case the Colossians listen to liars and heretics, who will try to win them to falsity with soft words and a pleasant smile. Paul encourages the Colossians to listen to him and rely only on Christ, as if he (Paul) was actually there with them. As it is, Paul said, he was overjoyed by their faith and reliance on Christ. They were thinking, doing and saying, what they ought to, and were presently living in the power of God. But they should never be complacent, for this leads to failure... as it did, just thirty years later.

Silver needs polishing daily to look its best. We can leave it a day, and it still looks good. We can leave it a few more days, and it still seems alright. We do not notice the dust settling and dulling the surface, because the process is gradual. But a time comes when lack of attention to its state will make it dull and discoloured. It is the same with us. Sin has a way of creeping up and tainting everything. It can happen slowly, so that we do not see it affecting our lives... until a sudden activity shows us up for what we really are. Do not wait for dust to gather; clean your life daily!

Verses 6 - 9

1.

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

2.

Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

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3.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

4.

For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Paul now says, 'Because you are believers, saved, do as Christ demands'. This repeats Jesus' own statement... 'If you love me, you will do what I say.' The word 'therefore' has great significance. There is an absolute 'law' here – that if we dare to claim salvation, we have *no option* but to live as Christ commands. 'Therefore' can be translated 'because', or 'accordingly'. That is, 'because you are saved, you must live your life in a proper manner, as Christ requires'.

Elsewhere, we are told that if someone who confesses Christ does not think, talk or act like Christ, we may treat him or her as an unbeliever. It does not matter if that person has claimed to be Christian for years; we can only go by the evidence shown in that person's life! To put it another way, we can expect, and demand, that someone who says he is a Christian, should act like one.

We can make such a demand because Christ does. He says that genuine love for Him is shown in one's life. Paul is merely repeating this fact, by saying that if we are believers we will act in a holy and pure way. It is 'oun', a consequence of our salvation. If the consequence (a holy life) is not there, then we can assume the act (salvation) did not take place at all. We can say this because, for a consequence to exist, there must firstly be an action. Yes, we all make mistakes and sin. This is not what Paul is referring to. He is talking about continuous sin and choosing to live without Christ's influence. Sadly, huge numbers of Christians live this way.

Today, too many Christians are getting away with living in sub-saved manner. Some of them are so superficial as to be almost zero-authentic. They are rather like those fake occult medicines known as 'homeopathic'. The essence of the solution is continually watered down until there is no essence at all. And yet, people are led to believe, against all reason, that it does

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them good! How many live this way in our churches? Too many!

In modern times Christians have had an easy life. If someone rebukes them, they just ignore it and say: "How dare you! I am a believer and it is between me and Christ!" No, they are wrong! We are given authority to challenge those who confess Christ but who deny Him in their thoughts, words and actions. We are to judge them. We cannot judge unbelievers, but we can judge each other. The same people say "You have no right to judge me." But, we do. We have the right given by God. We can expect certain standards from those who confess Christ, of ourselves as well as from others.

Our root is in Christ (verse 7), because no-one else can save us. Only He can build us up in the faith and in our knowledge and understanding. For the Colossians, it began with the Gospel as preached to them by apostles and God's preachers. And their salvation led them to have overflowing joy, giving thanksgiving to the Lord.

They already had what was necessary, so they had to watch out for false teachers (verse 8). They used similar words to a called preacher, but they were not teaching truth of Christ. Most churches have men who are tares. They have learned to use Christian and Biblical words. And so the unwary and untaught are easily fooled.

What these fake preachers do is use philosophy, tradition and deceit. It is sometimes thought that 'philosophy' is bad or even sinful. In scripture, though, it is the "philosophy of men" that corrupts and is bad: 'philosophy... after the tradition of men'. There is no need to fear philosophy (though it is dubious when a young Christian reads the subject at university, for most philosophers are humanists/atheists). 'Philosophia' just means a love of wisdom, and each one of us should seek that. It is used of people who zealously seek to advance their skills and knowledge – which all Christians should be doing, in whatever legitimate human activity they participate in.

In this text, Paul is using the word as it applied to men of his time, as 'theosophy'. There were Christian ascetics who indulged in useless arguments over the classes and nature of angels, the Mosaic law and most Hebrew traditions. Obviously, some Colossians had fallen into the trap of taking them seriously, and this took them away from the true study of God. Hence Paul's warning. They were in danger of being 'spoiled' by "vain deceit".

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Anything that is 'vain' or 'vanity' is empty, without any worth. Deceit, being a lie, is doubly worthless. That also goes for false teaching. At one time I used to argue each point put to me by unbelievers or badly taught Christians. I no longer do so, because I realized it was not my place to argue, but only to state what God says. Sometimes, those who wish me to take the bait, think they have 'won'. Let it be so; *my* task is to *tell* God's word to others, not to argue about it. This is also why I never back down on what I know to be true, whether people like it or not.

It is the philosophy based on man's tradition that is bad. Again, many Christians are afraid of the word 'tradition', but this is needless, for there are two kinds of tradition in scripture: bad and good. Strictly, tradition is what is taught by men, the objective truth. It is only when men twist that truth, that it becomes vain. In our churches today, many things done and said are based on human philosophy and men's useless tradition.

As I write, local churches have made attendance at a Christmas service a proof of our allegiance to God. But, it is only an human tradition, based on Roman Catholic false teaching. Which is why people like myself do not attend the services. To do so would be to deny the truth I know and to support a lie. Most, however, are duped by carols, mince pies, and trying to read sheets by inadequate candle-light in a freezing building!

The church ('fulness') dwells in God. The church dwells in Him bodily. That is, the physical church (the saved) belongs to God, through Christ. As part of that Body we cannot act as we please, but only as God demands.

Verses 10 - 15

1.

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

2.

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

3.

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

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4.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

5.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

6.

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Because God is perfect, everything He does is also perfect, or, complete. Each Christian is 'complete', plēroō. It means that we are all filled to capacity so that we want in nothing spiritual. What makes it seem that we have nothing from God is our own sinfulness and refusal to delve deeply into Him. That is, we ignore God's gift within.

When a man joins the army, he does not go to war in his own T shirt and jeans. He is given a full kit of combat clothes and weaponry. Similarly, every Christian is supplied with everything he needs in this life. But, many turn aside and wear their own T shirts and jeans! Then they wonder why God is not doing anything for them. It is a bit like a poor man being given gold bars to last his lifetime, and then locking them away in a safe, once again to beg for his supper! We are the children of the king of kings! We should live like it.

Our God is no slouch. He is not fake. He is the "head of all principality and power". That is, He controls everything, without exception. 'Principality' in this text means the origin and beginning of everything, the Alpha and Omega. Without Him there is nothing and can be nothing. He is supreme, ruler of all. Thus, He is also owner of all power, exousia. This applies to liberty, physical and mental power, the privileges of those who adopt earthly power (so, rulers' have no power of their own), government, magistrates, and so on. He controls it all. That is how we know leaders who are godless should not be in positions of authority. If they do not obey God, they are rejecting His proper power over them, and therefore they wield human power, not

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God's power.

Christians are 'spiritually circumcised' by God and no longer obey the sins of the flesh. Many of us sin purposely, ruining our own spiritual status and lives, and dishonouring God. We are buried with Him in baptism and, just as He rose again from the dead, so have we, spiritually, at salvation, and will be, physically, when He returns again. We can do so, because of God and His will in saving us. He caused us to be "born again". To put it another way, He regenerated our dead spirits so that we were brought alive, and able to come to salvation (verse 13). Once we are regenerated, He forgives us our sins on repentance and we start to learn from the Master.

Note this affirmation that we are freely elected and predestinated to salvation, and cannot in any way choose our salvation. Though many contact me and angrily claim to choose Christ, I cannot and will not back down from what God says. The text tells us we are 'dead in our sins'. No man who is dead can do anything, because he is a corpse. Thus, he cannot choose to obey God or love Him, nor may he choose salvation and Christ. It is such an obvious truth!

By saving us freely, God cast aside the Jewish laws that once applied to all men (verse 14). No man could be saved by his own actions, because the law was "contrary to us". This means the law was opposed to us, our enemy in a way; it was set against us, and so we could not be saved by law. It only showed us how sinful we were and how lost our condition was. By dying, Jesus 'nailed the law to His cross' once and for all. By doing it, Christ showed all men that their condition and very existence relied solely on Him, and that all power was in His hands. No earthly power or authority or claims have any real effect, and will all be crushed in the last day. Christ's death broke all human powers.

Verses 16 - 19

1.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

2.

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

3.

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Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

4.

And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

Because Christ has all power, and we who love Him obey His every command, it follows that when we obey we cannot be judged. In Paul's day, Jewish Christians were being 'blamed' for eating the wrong things, not complying with Jewish rites and culture, and so on. But, Judaism was dissolved when Christ gave us His Gospel! Paul was reminding them of this fact. He said that no Christian should be judged by others over what he ate or drank, what days he thought were holy, what seasons he complied with, or what he thought were Sabbath days.

In other words, Paul said that many things we adopt as our own are down to conscience. Unfortunately, the majority of Christians are just like men of the world – they are fearful of being thought badly of, and so they do what every other superficial Christian does. Or, so as not to appear churlish, they accept and do things because someone else asks them to. As Christians we must stand on our own two spiritual feet and do whatever our conscience demands. If we eat food that is blessed to an idol, Mary, or some other false god, and the blessing is in our presence, then we sin. But, if we eat food that was used for idols, and is now on general sale, we may eat it. See the difference? It is what scripture advises.

Some Christians are very strict in things that have no formal Biblical teaching. So, they will not drink anything like wine. They also look down on anyone who does. Where does this come from? Certainly not from scripture! Jesus drank alcoholic wine. Alcoholic wine was used in communion/Passover. We are advised to drink some to settle a stomach. Scripture, however, condemns drunkenness and having our minds and bodies subjugated by alcohol.

The teaching is: if you do not wish to have such things because of conscience, it is up to you. But, you cannot force others to believe the same things. Of course, there is still the proviso not to drink overly much, for obvious reasons. But, there is also a command not to be a glutton! Physically, I can only eat sufficient for my needs - but many will eat well beyond this point. Then it becomes a problem and a sin.

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As for 'holy days', in the Christian life there are no demanded holy days to observe. As hinted at above, such 'holy days' as Christmas, New Year, Easter, etc., are all invented by Rome. On the other hand, if some Christians wish to observe these days, but without reference to Rome, they are free to do so. Yet, they may not force others to do likewise. It is up to personal conscience. However, I note that most of these observances are the result of bad teaching, rather than of genuine concern or belief. We must not reinforce bad teaching by observing alongside others, when we do not actually believe in what they do.

As for the Sabbath, observance of it is by no means free of a proviso or two! It is my personal belief that we should observe the weekly Sabbath (see separate article on the subject), but I cannot force others to observe it, too. But, Paul was not particularly referring to the *weekly* Sabbath in this text. He was referring to the multiple sabbaths known to the Jews. Today, there is a 'twee' movement amongst some Christian sects that uses Jewish words such as shalom, and observe certain Jewish sabbaths. We may not judge them, though we can certainly ask them why they observe the sabbaths and ways of a dead religion.

The reason we must refrain from judging in these matters is that they are, really, of little value on their own and do not affect salvation. The things of this earth are only temporary, shadows, but the Body of Christ, the Church, is very real. Do not confuse what we do with what we are. Any judgment must be restricted to those commands found in scripture. The rest is up to each individual conscience. If what is done is wrong, let the Holy Spirit disturb the conscience until it is stopped! (This does not affect our duty to judge blatant sin).

Paul goes on to warn the Colossians not to listen to men who try to divide them with contrary opinions that cause a man to move away from spiritual victory, by telling him he is unworthy (because he does not do what the other person thinks he ought to do). They should not listen when men tell them this or that is an absolute necessity, when it is not. If they listen, they are then robbed of their "voluntary humility", and go off at a tangent, putting greater store on their own worth than on Christ.

Such men, as we have already seen, advocated the worship of angels, thus causing others to look into matters that are not their concern, things kept secret by God. Those who look into these matters become proud, because they think they have a knowledge others do not have.

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These men also take us away from Christ (verse 19), who keeps the whole Body alive and well. All parts of the Church are connected to Him and cannot be loosed. He alone gives us spiritual nourishment and He alone causes us to grow in God.

Verses 20 - 23

1.

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

2.

(Touch not; taste not; handle not;

3.

Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

4.

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

If, then, Christ is our Head, and we are dead to worldliness, WHY do we observe what is useless? Why bind ourselves to men's ideas about what to observe and what not to do? As Christians we are to meet together, but it is also true that we must stand on our own spiritual feet and decide for ourselves. When others tell us what to eat, what to do, etc., we are to resist. If God Himself tells us, then we may obey.

What we say and do will end when Christ returns, so do not let them bother you. That is what Paul said. Note that he says we should not follow the "commandments and doctrines of men". That is, the teachings founded only on men's ideas and theories. He uses the word 'doctrines', which mean teachings and precepts.

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There is the doctrine of God and the doctrines of men. Those of men are fractured and many, whereas all teachings of God are unified and one. Justifiably, we may refer to the singular 'doctrine' of God, and to the multiple 'doctrines' of men and demons. It is fact that many preachers and believers believe in a system of unattached teachings, which often have no link at all with each other. This is a sure sign they are false.

Superficially, these theories of men seem to be good and useful. Until we search them more deeply! Then, they fall apart. And, in Paul's day, the people he warned against were ascetics, who starved their bodies and minds, which did not honour God at all. There was no wisdom in what they did, so why follow them?

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