

Christ in Me

Free in Christ

February 15, 2026

Colossians 2:8-23

Introduction

If your home is like mine, you get no small number of boxes from Amazon throughout the month, and along with that you get no small amount of packaging materials. (SLIDE - Silica Gel) And among those packaging materials are those little packs of silica crystals that presumably help keep moisture from building up inside the package or on the product. And on those little packs of silica gel is a written warning, something like, "DO NOT EAT."

Now, the assumptions behind such a warning are as follows.

1. The person can read.
2. The person can understand what they are reading.
3. That same person might still confuse silica gel with rock candy.
4. That same person might still be tempted to clarify their confusion by putting silica gel in their mouth.

The target audience for these warnings is not the three year-old who can't read but thinks they found candy. The target audience is the person who should know better but doesn't.

And there are many such warnings in this world. (3 slides, pretty quickly)

- Do not put a person in this washing machine.



- This costume does not enable flight or superhuman strength.



- Do not iron clothes on your body.



(TITLE SLIDE)

We laugh at these because the warnings are so obvious that we can't imagine that anybody would actually do any of the things that these labels warn against, and yet clearly some lawyer thought better and covered everybody's bases. Someone really will put a living thing in the washer. They really will get a running head start and try to fly off the roof. They really will get dressed, see too many wrinkles, and try to iron their collar while wearing the shirt. The warnings are there because the potential for problems is more real than we'd like to believe.

Segue

Our text today is not unlike these warning labels. In Colossians 2:8-23, Paul alludes to a false teaching threatening the Colossian church, and on this false teaching he slaps a warning label. It's basically the same warning stated three different ways (just to make sure he's getting his point across), but the idea that he would even have to issue this warning is really surprising given all that he has said is true about Jesus thus far. And so in response to those threats, Paul redirects the church to the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus in light of those threats. This text, then, calls us to consider not only the false teachings of that day and how Jesus is superior, but also some of the false teachings of our day and consider how Jesus is superior.

So let's look at what Paul was labeling, how Jesus is superior to those things, and how Paul's "warning" labels functioned for the church in Colosse. But then, let us heed Paul's warning, applying it to the pressures we are facing in our culture, and see how Jesus is superior.

Body

What Threatened the Church?

As you read through the rest of Colossians 2, what you'll find is that the church was confronted by a combination of (SLIDE) **polytheism** on one side, along with a pressure to observe the laws of the Torah by Jews on the other side, which I'll call **legalism**. And to complicate matters, some of the things Paul mentions may not fit in either of these categories very cleanly. I'll call that **mysticism**.

First, polytheism. We have to remember that Christianity was brand new, and brand new in a culture in which everyone was religious in some way. Some of these new Christians in Colosse had grown up worshipping the various Greek and Roman gods who govern different arenas of life. So, many of the first Christians simply included Jesus as one more deity that they could worship. By and large, this is what Paul is referring to in v. 8. (all red is slides below)

Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ. (v.8)

Also, his rhetorical question in v. 20.

If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? (v. 20)

But not only were there new Christians feeling the pressure from that kind of polytheism, there was also a great pressure from new Christians who came to the Messiah out of Judaism, yet carried in with them expectations that one must also follow the laws in the Torah related to things like diet, observing sacred days, and circumcision. You can see this referenced in v. 16.

Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. (v. 16)

And thirdly, as I mentioned, there are other practices and worldviews pressuring the Colossians that don't easily fit into either of these categories. Notice v. 18.

Let no one condemn you by delighting in ascetic practices and the worship of angels, claiming access to a visionary realm. Such people are inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind. (v. 18)

How is Jesus Superior?

For Paul, to give in to any of these things was to compromise at a detrimental level. To entertain and then practice any of these things was a failure to grasp who Jesus really is and what he did on their behalf.

Why on earth, says Paul, would anyone live in fear of the so-called gods of the Greek and Roman world since Jesus triumphed over them through his death and resurrection?

Why on earth, says Paul, would you live in obligation to all of the laws of the Torah, if your keeping of them never changed your heart anyway and Jesus fulfilled them all for you in his life, death, and resurrection?

Why on earth, says Paul, would you be attracted to these mystical and brutal religious practices if you have the spirit of the living Jesus inside of you?

In short, the incarnation ... crucifixion ... resurrection ... and ascension of Jesus prove that He is supreme and sufficient over all things. Therefore, none of these other things ever need be a consideration. It's common sense. If you believe in the incarnation ... crucifixion ... resurrection ... and ascension of Jesus, it's common sense that you'd not in any way entertain polytheism, legalism, or mysticism.

What Warning does Paul Issue?

And yet they were. In the same way that people actually eat silica gel ... or get into washing machines ... or think they can fly with their Superman costumes ... or iron their clothes while wearing them ... the Colossians were trying to integrate their polytheism, legalism, and mysticism with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So what does Paul have to do? He's got to put a warning label on these other things. He shouldn't have to, but he has to. And his warning is stated in three different ways in v. 8, 16, and 18. (Slide)

Be careful that no one takes you captive ... (v. 8)

Don't let anyone judge you ... (v. 16)

Let no one condemn you ... (v. 18)

In a nutshell, Paul warns the church and you and I that: (SLIDE)

- **Our mind can be captured (v. 8)**
- **Our conscience can be condemned (v. 16)**
- **Our confidence can be stolen (v. 18)**

Now, with regard to the Colossians, let's take Paul's warning and apply it to just one of the things facing that church. Let's take legalism.

- Legalism captures your mind with the clarity of rules and measurable righteousness. But then, because you can't keep all those rules, legalism condemns your conscience through constant guilt over your failures, and then in turns steals your confidence in God's acceptance of you because, again, you haven't kept the rules.

See how this works? Now, let's use that framework and apply it to some of the more prevalent worldviews or, as Paul says, "philosophies" of our day and see how Jesus is better than them. I had 8 of them originally, but I whittled it down to 4: humanism, progressivism, nationalism, and conservatism.

Jesus Superiority to Today's Threats

The "Self-Help" Gospel (Humanism) (Slide)

This is a belief system that makes faith about personal fulfillment, self-expression, and psychological well-being, reducing God to a means of self-actualization.

- It **captures our minds** by saying things like, "You are enough. Everything you need—identity, worth, purpose, even moral authority—is already inside of you. What you need is self-acceptance, and Jesus' job is to help you discover your best self." That's how it captures your mind.
- And when life feels empty or broken, it **condemns your conscience** by whispering that your faith isn't strong or that you've failed to live "authentically."
- Then your **confidence is stolen** because your assurance is tied to how you feel about yourself, which leaves you emotionally and mentally unstable.

So you see, humanism flatters you, fails you, then robs you.

Jesus is better than humanism. The Bible teaches that you are not enough to save yourself ... but you are so loved that Christ was enough for you. The gospel means that our sufficiency is never in ourselves—it's in union with Christ. Paul says in v. 10 in our passage, "we are filled with him." So don't let humanism capture your mind, condemn your conscience, and steal your confidence when you know that Jesus is supreme and sufficient for your life.

The Government Gospel (Nationalism) (Slide)

Nationalism within the realm of Christianity equates one political ideology, culture, or nation with the kingdom of God. It takes what is earthly and temporary—government, party, or nation—and clothes it in divine significance. It tells believers that preserving our nation, our culture, or our political power is the same as advancing God's kingdom. Instead of the church being a people redeemed from every nation, nationalism shrinks God's mission down to the size of our borders.

- It **captures the mind** by promising safety and purpose through political triumph.
- It **condemns the conscience** by making loyalty to Christ dependent on loyalty to one's country or party.
- It **steals confidence** by shifting trust away from Jesus' reign to the success of human leaders or systems.

Jesus is better than nationalism. His kingdom is not of this world—it is greater, eternal, and already victorious. He doesn't rule by ballots or borders but by His cross and resurrection. In Him, our citizenship is in heaven, and our hope is secure whether nations rise or fall.

The Change Gospel (Progressivism) (Slide)

Progressivism within the realm of Christianity is a worldview that attempts to reinterpret or soften biblical truths in order to "make" them align with modern culture.

- It **captures the mind** by saying things like, “We’re more enlightened than ancient faith” or “Love means affirming everything.”
- It **condemns your conscience** by shaming you for your convictions. It implies that you are narrow or unloving for (as an example), a biblical standard for sins that the world loves right now.
- It **steals your confidence** by causing you to question the reliability of God’s Word, which leaves you feeling unsure of what is true or trustworthy.

Jesus is better than progressivism. The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus does not teach that truth evolves to match culture. Rather, it teaches that truth endures it to redeem culture. Jesus embodies truth that transforms every age. The same gospel that confronted sin in the first century still calls people to repentance and renewal today. Jesus is not behind the times; He is ahead of them—drawing history toward His kingdom, not chasing culture’s approval.

The Tradition Gospel (Conservatism) (Slide)

Conservatism, as many Americans know it, is not the same thing as the gospel. At its best, conservatism values order, morality, and personal responsibility, and these are all good things. But when those values are detached from grace, they become another way to justify ourselves without Jesus. Conservatism without the gospel is just as dangerous as progressivism without the gospel — because both leave us trusting in human virtue instead of divine mercy.

- It **captures the mind** by making us believe that if we defend the right values, raise our families well, and protect traditional morals, we’re on God’s side.
- It **condemns the conscience** by equating failure in those cultural or moral areas with failure in faith itself.
- And it **steals confidence** by turning obedience into a scoreboard, leaving us either proud when we “do it right,” or crushed when we fall short.

Jesus is better than conservatism. He didn’t come to make us merely moral. He came to make us new. On the cross, He exposed the emptiness of outward righteousness that lacks love; in His resurrection, He brought a kingdom that doesn’t move backward to preserve what was, but forward to restore what’s broken. The gospel doesn’t just create good citizens — it creates redeemed sinners who love God and neighbor from the inside out. Conservatism can make you look righteous; only Christ can make you righteous. Jesus is better than conservatism.

Conclusion

Paul’s warning to the Colossians still stands as God’s warning to us: (Slide) **Don’t let anything capture your mind, condemn your conscience, or steal your confidence—because you are free in Christ.**

Every false gospel—whether humanism, progressivism, nationalism, or conservatism—has one thing in common: ***it promises freedom but ends in slavery.*** They tell you that you can save yourself by doing more, believing better, evolving further, or preserving harder. But each one leaves you empty, restless, and unsure. Only Jesus sets you free.

If you've been living under one of those false gospels—trying to fix yourself, defend yourself, or prove yourself—hear the invitation of grace: you don't have to. Jesus has done everything necessary for your salvation through His cross and resurrection. Today you can lay your burdens down, trust Him fully, and find true life in Him. You can be filled in Him (v. 10)—forgiven, free, and secure. So if you've never surrendered to Christ, call on Him now. He won't ask you to perform; He'll give you new life.

And church, this is our calling too. We are not defenders of culture or ideology—we are witnesses of the gospel. We're called to cultivate the unwavering hope of Jesus in every generation. That is very different than:

- Cultivating the unwavering confidence of the self in every generation.
- Cultivating the unwavering greatness of our nation in every generation.
- Cultivating the unwavering hope of human progress in every generation.
- Cultivating the unwavering values of our forefathers in every generation.

Because when Jesus is supreme and sufficient, the warning label reads simple and strong: ***Don't settle for a substitute. Christ alone is enough.***

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