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5 November 2026
THE LETTER OF ST. PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS (V)
"Warning Against Heresies!"

We recall that one of the reasons St. Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colossae was his concern about the influence of heresies on the still-young community of Christians there. Epaphras, who carried out the mission there on his behalf, had reported this to him.

Why are heresies so dangerous, and why have they posed such a great threat from the very beginning, throughout the entire history of the Church, and right up to the present day? Saint Gregory the Great is sometimes credited with introducing the prayer for peace that immediately follows the Lord's Prayer in the Mass, which explicitly states: "Come to our aid with your mercy, that we may always be free from sin and protected from all confusion."

Our minds are enlightened by the light of the Holy Spirit, who reminds us of all that Jesus did and said. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has embraced the truth of the Gospel and is at its service. Our minds now assent to the truth we have come to know, and all our thoughts and actions are called to serve the truth, and thus God. We must remain in this way and thus attain eternal life.

But if an error were to spread within the Church, then a deception, a false light, a distraction from the truth, a relativization, would come between the Holy Spirit and our minds and would have the corresponding effect. A clouding of the cognitive process sets in; the mind becomes increasingly darkened, and even the will, which had entered into the service of the truth, is affected.

If this error is not recognized and eliminated, or is even regarded as a "kind of enlightenment," then the will actually enters into the service of the error and spreads it. The purity of the doctrine is undermined, and the poison of false teaching penetrates ever deeper into the body of the Church. The greater the good that is attacked and distorted by error, the greater and more destructive the consequences.

The Apostle is well aware of this, and as the one responsible for the mission, he wastes no time in warning the flock entrusted to him:

"See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." (Col 2:8-15)

Paul immediately follows his first warning with the proper response that must be given to false philosophy and false teachings, for these are all the work of human hands, and one might add that they are not infrequently even demonically inspired. Therefore, they have no authority in matters of faith, which comes from Christ alone. They lack a supernatural character. That is why they cause confusion.

When Paul then speaks of the true circumcision in Christ, which is not performed by human hands, he certainly also has in mind the Jews who had converted to Christ, some of whom persistently insisted on circumcising the Gentiles who had come to faith. This, too, was confusing for the Church, for with the Lord came grace and truth (John 1:17), and it was now incumbent upon all to live in Christ.

Paul makes it clear once again:

"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, "Do

not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh." (Col 2:16-23)

Because this topic, namely false teachings and how to deal with them properly, is so important, I will continue discussing it tomorrow.

Meditation on the day's reading: https://en.elijamission.net/the-sublimity-of-the-knowledge-of-christ-2/