



# **Thinking About Thinking**

**By**

**Mark McGee**

---

*“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” Colossians 2:8*

---

A literal translation of this verse reads: “Look you lest anyone you there shall be robbing through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ.”

Paul is warning Christians against following a dangerous way of thinking. He knew that would lead to dangerous actions.

### **The Cheaters**

The word **philosophy** comes from the Greek *philosophias*. It comes from combining the words *philos* (“loving”) and *sophia* (wisdom). It translates as “loving wisdom.” It has the sound of something positive, but the Greeks used the word for quasi-religious doctrines and speculations. The Gnostics used the word for their quest for human knowledge, a knowledge opposed to Christian beliefs. They believed in the power of human reasoning rather than Divine wisdom. The Gnostics tried to drag Christ from His position of being the Creator to being one of the created. They emphasized being religious rather than being righteous. Paul accused the false teachers of practicing

“false humility” and “worship of angels.” Paul said their “unspiritual mind” puffed up the false teachers with “idle notions.”

Paul warned the Christians of Colosse about believing the wrong things. He warned them about becoming captives through hollow and deceptive philosophy. Christians **are** susceptible to following after wrong beliefs. False teachers influenced some of the Christians at Colosse to practice a brand of legalism: “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” The words “**do not**” are always suspect. Christ called us to Freedom to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit; not slavery to the rules and commands of men. Paul said the “do not” religion is destined to perish because it is based on human commands and teachings. That kind of teaching has the appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body. Paul went on to say false teachers lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. It is a false religion and that will never work.

We need to hear what Paul is saying in Colossians. It can and does happen to Christians throughout the world every day. Christians learn the truth from God’s Word, just like the Colossians. However, false teachers or teachers with false information move in and take God’s people captive with deceptive teachings. Christians must be on guard against it.

The word “cheat” is *sulagogon*. It comes from *sulao* (“to strip, rob”) and *ago* (“to carry away”). It means “to carry off as booty or as a captive.” The Greeks used the word in the sense of “to kidnap.” It’s figurative of someone carrying away another person from truth into the slavery of error. Dr. Zodhiates wrote: “Figuratively, of the destructive effects of false teachers who rob believers of the complete riches available in Christ and revealed in the gospel.” (“The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament,” World Bible Publishers, 1992)

## **The Battleground**

The battleground is the Christian mind. It would be easier to detect if someone physically attacked us with a weapon in their hands. At least it would be clear the person meant us harm. We would instantly recognize the danger and take defensive actions. Unfortunately, false teachers come with honey in their mouths and arms open wide to embrace us into their false humility. Many Christians don’t even know what’s happening to them. They walk right into the trap of thinking they’re following the teachings of God when, in fact, they are following Satan’s tricks.

How can this happen? Christians have the Living God in their lives. Christ is “in” us and we are “in” Christ. Christians have in their possession the most powerful Body of Knowledge in the Universe: God’s Word. The Word of God lives in them. Many Christians attend one, two or more teaching sessions a week. They talk with other

believers about the great Truths contained in God's Word. Many read and study it daily. How could any Christian be led astray?

*"...through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."*

The Greek reads: *dia tes philosophias kai kenes apates kata ten paradysin ton anthropon, kata ta stoicheia tou kosmon kai ou kata Christon*. Let's look at the key words for understanding.

We've already studied *philosophia*, "philosophy. The next important words are *kenes apates*. They translate as "empty deceit." The KJV translates them "vain deceit." The NIV uses the word "hollow" to describe the meaning of *kenes*. The word means "empty, in vain, for no purpose, devoid of truth." Dr. W.E. Vine says it "expresses the hollowness of anything, the absence of that which otherwise might be possessed." ("Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words," MacDonald Publishing)

It's amazing that false teachers can approach Christians one on one or in groups, present them with empty, hollow teachings which are devoid of truth and fool those Christians into agreeing with them and following their teachings. But it happens every day!

## **Deception and Domination**

The next word is *apates*. It means “to deceive, delude, seduce.” The word is akin to *apatao*, which means “to cheat, deceive, beguile.” Dr. Vine says it is “that which gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement or influence.” False teachers have a mission. That mission is to deceive, delude, seduce, cheat and beguile Christians. Their mission is to lead God’s people astray by kidnapping their minds and taking them captive to hollow and empty thinking. Can’t happen, you say? Look around. The world is full of Christians who believe and practice some nutty stuff. How did that happen? How did people who were in Christ and had the Living God living in them leave the precious thinking of righteousness in Christ to follow some of the craziest, emptiest, most foolish ideas in the world? False teachers took them captive.

One of the most important words in Colossians 2:8 is *kata*. It is used three times. The KJV translates it “after.” The NIV translates it “which depends on” and “rather than.” *Kata* means “according to, dominated by, holding down.” It is a preposition with a root meaning of “down.” It has slightly different meanings depending on the case of the noun to which it’s joined. *Kata*, in Colossians 2:8, is joined to the words “tradition,” “principles,” and “Christ.” All of them are in the accusative case. “According to” is the best translation. Keep in mind the background of the word – the idea of something dominating something else.

## Capture and Control

False teachers kidnap the minds of Christians by dominating and holding down their thinking. It's an issue of control. They capture a Christian's thinking process, then control it. Paul explains that false teachers do this in three ways: (1) tradition of men, (2) according to the basic principles of the world, and (3) not according to Christ

Human traditions (*paradosin ton anthropon*) are teachings or doctrines of men delivered or communicated from one person to another. They are "man-made" traditions. False teachers pass along through informal and formal educational processes the beliefs of other people. They make it look and sound good. It can be enticing to follow the mental leading of strong people who have gone before. It's the process of believing in the wisdom of others who may have accomplished great things in life. False teachers capitalize on that human desire to follow others. They use flowery words and point back to years of tradition to follow. "It certainly must be right if others did it in the past," is part of the attack of the false teacher.

Worldly principles (*stoicheia tou kosmon*) were the basic elements of thinking in the world. Greek philosophers had designated the four basic and essential elements of the world (earth, water, air, and fire) as keys to their philosophy. Their false teaching came from the way they manipulated these basic elements into the way humans should think and believe. The beliefs and teachings of ancient Greek philosophers are still used today in our schools and colleges. False

teachers take those teachings and build an entire society of thinking around them.

## **Clashing with Jesus**

“Not according to Christ” is clear. The thinking and teaching of false teachers clashes head on with Jesus Christ. There is no possible way a false teacher can uphold Christ as the Bible presents Him. Jesus is too powerful, too loving, too gracious, too forgiving, too wonderful for a false teacher to teach Him that way. Paul wrote, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1) Paul was writing about Christians going back under the Mosaic Law, but the basic principle of Christianity is the same. Jesus Christ gives us Liberty. He invites us to **think** and believe what the Holy Spirit teaches, but it’s our choice. Christ is “in” us guiding us to the Way of Truth, because He is the Way and the Truth. That’s contrary to what false teachers will do. They want to rob us of our liberty. They want to control our thinking. They want Christians to believe only what they tell them to believe. They don’t want Christians to choose for themselves. That’s not like Christ at all.

False teachers have a big bag of tricks. They can look and sound like Christians. They can fit right in to a Christian environment. Then they open up their bag and here it comes. First, it’s an emphasis on human traditions. Second, they push the importance of worldly principles. Third, they admit Christ was a good teacher but certainly



not God and certainly not as wise as whoever they're pushing at the moment. False teachers often put someone else in Christ's place. They make more over someone else than they do Christ. They will admit to Christ's existence but certainly not to His Position as the Almighty God. That's why Paul made it clear in Colossians that Jesus Christ was:

*“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Colossians 1:17-18*

How can you spot a false teacher; a “dangerous thinker?” One of the first things to look for is someone who wants to control the thinking of others. Control is a primary issue with false teachers. They do not exist to help people grow. They don't want you to learn the Bible on your own. They don't emphasize methodical and inductive study of God's Word. Their mission in life is to kidnap and control the thinking of God's people. False teachers know that if they can control the way Christians think, they control everything else. They can control what you read, what you see, who you see, how you make your money, how you spend your money, where you live, who you live with, etc. Some false teachers have taken their captives all the way to suicide, which is the ultimate control.

## **Run for Your Life!**

If anyone tries to control you in any of these ways, RUN!! Run from them as fast as you can. Get away from them. Break off the relationship. Get away like you're trying to escape a burning building. Running away is exactly what you would do if they had a club in one hand and were trying to grab you with their other hand. You wouldn't let them take you captive without a struggle. It's the same thing with false teachers. Their mission in life is to kidnap you. They use mental clubs and grabs. They will work you over until your mind and thinking belong to them. I can't say it strong enough: **get away from false teachers with all speed.** They mean you no good. They only want to hurt you. What they do to you can ruin your life. They will rob you of your freedom in Christ and give you slavery to false beliefs in its place.

*“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” Colossians 2:8*

Copyright © 1990-2015 GraceLife Ministries

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”