



A new creation focus through Colossians ...

## Early Gnosticism and Visionaries

In the religious realm there have always been those who drew attention to themselves or gained leverage by claiming to be visionaries. In the days of King Ahab of Israel, all the false prophets were claiming to have visions from God, encouraging Ahab to go to war against Syria. They gained earthly leverage and fame by telling the king what he wanted to hear. Of course, the true prophet of the Lord — Micaiah — had a different message that was not what the king wanted to hear, and was sent to suffer the privation of nothing but bread and water until the successful return of Ahab. As the Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah concerning all the false prophets, "I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:21). The apostle Peter brought the concept forward in his second epistle, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). The war for the mind and soul of each person on this planet is a fierce one.

- ◆ **Visionary inflation** — The developing *Gnostics* claimed to have inside information to which the apostles were not privy. The so-called Gospel of Thomas, for example, begins with these words: "These are the *hidden words* that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down" (emphasis added). Those *hidden words* are the signal that this is supposedly new information. Paul apprises the Colossian brethren about these types. "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize," warns he, "by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Colossians 2:18). Since in Greek philosophy the body was bad, one of the ways to handle the body was by "self-abasement" — whipping it, or punishing it in some way. Paul was telling the brethren not to be impressed by such punishment, often so extreme as to attract a lot of attention. Nor were they to pay any attention to those who claimed to be able to see angels and worship them, or any of the other multitude of things that this type of people claim to have seen. To follow such visionaries was to follow them to spiritual death, to be defrauded of the prize of eternal life.

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- ◆ **Hold to the Head** — The Lord Jesus had made it plain that all the doctrines and revelations were going to begin with the apostles. Any New Testament prophet could only iterate on what the apostles were also revealing. Thus another name for the teachings of the new covenant is the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). The false brethren, taking their stand on their supposed visions, were "not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God" (Colossians 2:19). The positive exhortation is clearly to hold to the true teachings of Jesus, revealed to modern day brethren in what is written in the word of God. Then the body of Christ, comprised of various members with different gifts and capacities, grows with the real growth that comes only from God.

The prize very obviously is the eternal life which comes through the proper resurrection from the dead. The battle for the soul is a fearsome one, in which the prince of darkness creates every possible form of diversion and false doctrine, appealing to every possible weakness of the flesh. Hence the apostle Paul warns them, and through them he warns us, of the tremendous dangers of the deceptive appeal coming through the visionaries of the day. The developing Gnosticism of his day has not died; it just morphed slightly and changed its name to Catholicism and Calvinism. Let no one defraud us of our prize!

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