

Discerning Empty Philosophies

Some passages of scripture are *umbrella verses* that can cover a lot of ground. For example, in Luke 6:27 Jesus said, "...do good to those who hate you." That's an umbrella verse that covers a lot of life. "Do good" might be a thousand different things. Herein the focus will be on an umbrella verse that calls for a lot of wisdom and understanding, Colossians 2:8:

See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.

The challenge is for the faithful follower of Christ to both recognize and avoid the philosophies and empty deceptions of his or her generations. In Ephesians 4:14 Paul refers to the problem as, "the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...." Similarly, in Ephesians 6:11 he warns that, "We must not be ignorant of the devil's schemes. His schemes come in a plethora of ways that deceive many people in every generation.

One of Satan's schemes that often goes unnoticed is the slow creep of what we could call "normalization." That happens when the culture, as a whole, slowly begins to accept a sin and define it as good. God has warned us about that problem for over 1700 years, Isaiah 5:20:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Like the proverbial frog being slowly boiled without jumping out of the pan, many in society and sadly, even some Christians, begin to slowly but surely accept abject sins that previous generations recognized and rejected. The heinousness of the sin is of little consequence. From "little white lies" to abortion and same sex marriage, slow acceptance of sin is common when Christians pay more attention to culture than to scripture. One of the dangers comes for the slow nature of the societal change. The ungodly change, even at its slow pace, must be recognized and confronted by faithful Christians in every generation.

Today, some philosophies and empty deceptions *seem* to be more deceptive than ever, but in reality, every generation of God's people have had to be biblically educated and practically aware to be able to overcome the schemes of the devil. We must, each one of us, make it a personal and individual goal to live life by the gospel, the power of salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Satan's schemes can be extremely deceptive. Our spiritual wisdom must be profoundly deep. If we fall short of this goal, we will normalize sin without realizing our failure.

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