

Beware: Empedocles' Four Elements & the Cult of Pantheism, Col 2:8; Avoid False Teachers & Heretics, Rom 16:17; Keep away from the Unreliable, 2 Thess 3:6

- r.) We learn of some of the false ideas that Empedocles derived from his philosophies from:

Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia, 15th ed., s.v. "Empedocles":

An anticipation of the modern law of conservation of energy is found in his view that nothing either comes into being or is destroyed, but that things are merely transformed depending on the ratio of basic substances [fire, air, water, and earth] to one another.

Like Heraclitus \ her-a-klit'-as \ [sixth-century B.C. Greek philosopher who wrote in a similar vein], Empedocles believed that two forces, Love and Strife, interact to bring together and to separate the four substances. Strife makes each of these elements withdraw itself from the others; Love makes them mingle together. The real world is at a stage in which neither force dominates. In the beginning, Love was dominant and all four substances were mixed together; during the formation of the cosmos, Strife entered to separate air, fire, earth, and water from one another.

- s.) Emerging from these philosophies came the notion that the elements were eternal and incorruptible. The struggle between Love and Strife is a human viewpoint stab at explaining the angelic conflict and leads to the false doctrines of pacifism, world peace, and disarmament.
- t.) Further, if everything is made of these four elements then apart from them there is nothing and from them proceed all visible things:

Friedrich, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:672:

στοιχεῖον [*stoicheion*]. From the constant fluctuation of their admixture proceed all the visible things that were and are and will be: plants, animals, men, and even the gods—"for I became at once boy, girl, plant, bird, and fish." Thus, properly speaking, there is neither birth nor death but only the mixing and the changing of what is mixed. In Empedocles the elements are called gods in the strict sense of the word.

- u.) This proves that there is nothing new under the sun. Empedocles had his fifth-century B.C. version of evolution and a cosmology that promoted earth worship.
- v.) These "philosophies" developed by Empedocles and other Greek writers had been passed down as the "tradition of men" and had emerged in Colossae as a deception that captured the souls of doctrinally ignorant believers.
- w.) The "philosophy" that was popular in Colossae in the first century A.D. was that the earth was a god and that the four elements were simply members of that body. According to:

Friedrich, Theological Dictionary, 7:686n107:

The Christians of Colossae think Christ is the universal god whom one must worship in the elemental powers.

- x.) It is to this "philosophical" development in the community of Colossae to which Paul refers when he uses the phrase, "the elements of the world."
- y.) Paul is not opposed to philosophy for everyone should have a love for wisdom but only if that love is directed toward the wisdom of the Word of God. It is this distinction he makes with the final phrase of the verse, "and not in keeping with Christ."

- z.) Actually the preposition here is the accusative of norm and standard by which something is governed of **κατά, kata**. Thus the translation should be “and not according to the standard of Christ.” This preposition is also used in association with the phrases “tradition of men” and “elements of the world.”
- aa.) What many of the Colossian believers had gotten themselves into was a philosophy in complete opposition to the “philosophy” of Christ, that is, the wisdom found in the Word that reveals Christ not as “elements of the world” but the Creator, a fact already established in Colossians 1:16-17 (also see John 1:1; Heb 1:3).
- bb.) This verse is helpful in establishing the foundation for human viewpoint, human good, and evil that often emerges as either anthropocentric speculation on the part of pseudo intellectuals or religion on the part of the superstitious. Here is the expanded translation of:

Colossians 2:8 - See to it that no one takes you prisoner through the agency of philosophical propaganda and deceitful lies, according to the standards of the tradition of men and according to the standards of the elements of the world, and not according to the standards of Christ.

- cc.) Here is a paraphrase that takes this verse and cautions the young Christian to beware of the propaganda that is so prevalent in our day and designed by the Dark Side to lure them into behaviors that will not only destroy them personally but also contribute to the downfall of our culture, our society, and our way of life:

Colossians 2:8 - [Paraphrase] Be on the alert so that you will not be taken captive in the Invisible War through the agency of the Progressive’s philosophical propaganda regarding premarital sex and by its deceitful lies that amount to nothing more than pick-up lines according to standards that promote Libertine amorality and according to standards of human wisdom that are absent biblical support and therefore not according to the standards of Christ.

2. Avoid: ἐκκλίνω, **ekklinō** and, when in the middle voice, **περίστημι, periistēmi** are synonyms which mean “to avoid,” “to shun,” or “to turn away from.”

Romans 16:17 - Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from [present active imperative of ἐκκλίνω, **ekklinō**] them.

Titus 3:9 - Avoid [aorist middle imperative of περίστημι, **periistēmi**] foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

v. 10 - Reject [durative present middle imperative of παραιτέομαι, **paraiteomai**: continue to avoid] a factious man [αίρετικός, **airetikos**: a heretic] after a first and second warning.

3. Keep away: στέλλω, **stellō**.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 - Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from [στέλλω, **stellō**] every brother who leads an unruly life [present middle infinitive of ἀτάκτως, **ataktōs**: lifestyle and behavior patterns that are outside biblical standards with an emphasis on slothfulness] and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

34. These verses are designed to maintain order in the church at large and order in the souls of its individual members.
35. It is important that the advancing believer not allow fellow members of the church to distract him in his advance.
36. Therefore, the Bible gives guidance on how to manage those whose personality traits or behavior patterns come into conflict with biblical standards.
37. The only way these people can correct their behavior is to continue to attend Bible class. Believers who allow them to become a distraction during the process fail people testing.
38. If your spiritual advance is challenged because a fellow church member is out of sync with doctrine then you have joined him in cosmic function and the both of you are out of fellowship.
39. Use the biblical principles we have just noted to remain in fellowship: (1) “beware of” or “be on alert,” (2) “avoid” and (3) “keep away from” them.