

Colossians

Post by “Don” of October 11, 2023 at 10:11 PM

So, as stated in post 3, I got excited about some words and phrases that *could* be interpreted as Epicurean. In fact, [Clement of Alexandria](#) (c.150 - c.215) thought the author of *Colossians* was referring to Epicureans (but also brings in Stoics) in verse 2:8:

[Quote from Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis](#)

(50)(6)He does not mean all philosophy, but the Epicurean variety (which Paul mentions in the Acts of the Apostles [Acts 17.18], criticizing it for rejecting Providence and making a god of pleasure) and any other form which honors the elements without a scientific knowledge of their creative cause, and without any notion of the creator.

51(1) The Stoics, too, of whom he also speaks say wrongly that God is corporeal and moves through matter of the most disreputable kind. (2) "Human tradition" is his term for this intellectual nonsense. ...

That's the opinion of Clement of Alexandria [writing in around 200 CE](#). I will admit I got excited about the "Epicurean" possibilities from the text of Colossians and that Clement had the opinion the author was referring to Epicureans.

Then I looked closer at the list of characteristics of these philosophers the letter's author was warning about in 2:16 and 18:

- Therefore, do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and/or drink
- or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths.
- 18 Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement
- and worship of angels,
- initiatory visions,[i] puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking,[j]
- 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with a growth that is from God.

Maybe I could rationalize the "matters of food and/or drink" or "observing festivals" (The 20th, anyone?)... but then the letter's author goes into new moons or Sabaths. In fact, "matters of food and drink" sound like this "philosophy" being discussed has some dietary rules or forbidden foods that the Christians are eating. It's hard to say without any context. I'm sure the Colossians knew what he was referring to!

The "insisting on self-abasement"? KJV translates that as "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility" with the Greek being *θέλων ταπεινοφροσύνη*. Some dictionaries translate that as "lowliness/humility of mind." That doesn't sound like Epicureans, but the

voluntary humility? Could that be the voluntary "confession" characteristic of parrhesia (frank criticism)? That seems to be a stretch. The word ταπεινοφροσύνη shows up 7 times in the New Testament and can refer to serving the Lord "with all humility of mind" (Acts 20:19). It's also used in Ephesians 4:2 ("with all lowliness and meekness"); Philippians 2:3 ("Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind"); Colossians again in 3:12; 1 Peter 3:8 and 5:5.

The other characteristics that are brought up seem even less Epicurean: Worship of angels? Initiatory visions?? The latter sounds like a mystery cult.

In the end, there are just TOO many loose ends. If *some* of these lines were the only thing in the text, it would be easier to make a solid case that the author was talking about Epicureans. As it is, however, it's a roller coaster - yes, no, could be, no way - leading ultimately to frustration in trying to solve a puzzle with 1/2 the pieces missing forever. I don't think we can accept that the "philosophers" being referred to are Epicureans. Too many things don't add up in the final analysis.