

# Colossians Chapter 1

Matthew P. Smith

## To those in Christ (Col 1:1-2)

Paul begins his letter with a greeting that links himself and his recipients to Christ. In many ways this is a typical ancient greeting, containing the sender's name, the recipients and a greeting.

A few things are noteworthy however. The inclusion of Paul's credentials as **an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God** immediately sets Paul apart from a mere sender while the specificity of the type of recipient, **faithful brothers**, sets the recipients apart from those merely professing to be brothers in Colossae. Finally, the greeting is no mere wish for their good but a specific reminder of what is theirs **in Christ**, namely the grace and peace that comes only from God.

## Colossians 1:1

Paul had many credentials he could have used to introduce himself to the Colossians. That he needed some sort of introduction is clear from Colossians 2:1, where it is revealed that this is a church that had never seen Paul in person. Epaphras, Paul's colleague (Col 1:7-8), was the one to actually found this church and Paul will refer to this mutual relationship multiple times (Col 1:7; 4:12).

Paul does not lead with his relationship to Epaphras however, he leads with his own unique authority as an apostle. Though the Greek word *ἀπόστολος* *apostolos*, translated as **apostle**, can be used in a general sense as one sent by another, in Paul's case, the term is decidedly formal and uniquely authoritative (Gal 1:1-2:10). Paul alone, as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8), was the sole apostle to the Colossians. That this appointment was done by the will of God himself sets Paul apart from the false teachers in their midst. The implication of his unique authority to speak is thus evident even though he did not yet know them personally.

## ▀ Dig Deeper

Paul's additional reference to Timothy is consistent with his greeting in many of his epistles (Philem 1; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:1)

## 💡 *Paul and Timothy*

Timothy is not a joint author of this epistle but a close companion of Paul. That he is so

prominent in the introduction to many of Paul's epistles makes him uniquely noteworthy. Timothy seemed to hold a special place in Paul's heart evidenced by Paul's constant reference to him (1 Thess 3:2; 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19-24) and the two specific letters to him (1 Tim 1:1-2; 2 Tim 1:1-2). He is likely introduced in this letter to show that he is an approved workman of God (2 Tim 2:15) who will continue to carry on the work of Paul after he is gone (2 Tim 4:1-6).

## Colossians 1:2

Having established his God given credentials, Paul turns to address the Colossians in theological terms. Though he does not use the Greek word ἐκκλησία *ekklēsia*, translated as **church**, often as he does in many of his other letters (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Paul confidently addresses them as brothers, at once emphasizing their equality in the family of God due to their shared faith and their position in Christ. Further, they are called **saints** (Gk, ἅγιος *hagios*) by Paul, further emphasizing their status before God.

### ■ Dig Deeper

#### **Saints**

Paul's repeated use of the Greek word ἅγιος *hagios*, translated as **saints**, to describe normal Christians (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1) is both scandalous and encouraging. It is scandalous because it refers to imperfect sinners who are decidedly not yet glorified and worthy of the term. It is encouraging because it speaks to the definite future of the believer. Theologically, the term is richly drawing on the Divine promise of a future glorification given to those who have been justified and are currently being sanctified by faith.

True biblical Christianity is at once at odds with every other religious ideology in its use of this term as the normative designation for believers. In every other religion a person must become righteous before they are treated as such. Paul is emphasizing through his use of this term the very opposite idea. When Paul tells the Corinthians to change their behavior (1 Cor 1:10) he does so by beginning with a reminder of who they are in Christ (1 Cor 1:2). In other words, they are to act like saints because they are already saints positionally due to the finished work of Christ. This emphasizes the most scandalous reality of the substitutionary transaction of the cross. This is easiest seen in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where Christ is said to have been made sin in some sense so that the believer might **become** the righteousness of God. Theologically, it is obvious that Christ did not become sin literally in his actual being (ontologically) any more than the believer becomes righteous literally in his actual being (ontologically) through faith. Christ on the cross was rather declared to be sin and then he was treated as such, even though he remained the perfect Son of God. On the other side of this, the believer, because of his faith in this substitutionary act, is now declared to be righteous and then treated as such, even though he

is not actually righteous. Paul alludes to this very fact when he speaks of not having a righteousness of his own but rather the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ (Phil 3:9).

Another way to envision this is to recognize the significance of the fact that justification proceeds sanctification in the Christian life. This idea is alien to every other religious ideology on the planet setting Christianity apart as a religion of grace not works.

#### ■ Dig Deeper

The rest of Paul's greeting is typical for him emphasizing the central theological emphasis of his ministry: God's grace (Acts 20:24) and the peace that comes through it. Grace and peace are mentioned in the introduction of every one of Paul's letters (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Philem 3) making it impossible to read Paul without keeping these twin realities in mind.

### **We always thank God for you (Col 1:3-8)**

In one sentence, spanning five verses in the original Greek, Paul informs the Colossians that he and his companions thank God for them constantly, due to the good report he received by Epaphras about them (Col 1:8). Generally speaking, this is a relatively typical greeting for Paul who habitually thanks God for his readers and God's work among them. However, it is obvious that there is more going on in this greeting. Specifically, Paul points to the fruit of the gospel in their lives expressed in their faith, love and hope (Col 1:4-5) and links this experience with the global work of God through the gospel (Col 1:6). The faith they shared was thus introduced as considerably more than a local religious cult. The Colossians were part of something bigger and Paul is setting them up to understand that the local false teaching they were being exposed to was meant to destabilize them from the true gospel (Col 1:23).

### **Colossians 1:3**

The first person plural of the Greek verb εὐχαριστέω *eucharisteō*, translated as **we thank**, would remind the Colossians of Timothy's agreement with the words of Paul in this letter and his continued part in praying for them. It is reasonable to assume that Paul is establishing Timothy's association with him, and thus the true gospel, for the sake of future ministry among the Colossians.

It is noteworthy that Paul and Timothy had not merely prayed for the Colossians but that they did so **always** (*Gk, πάντοτε pantote*). This is extraordinary when it is remembered that Paul and Timothy had not evangelized or even visited the Colossians yet.

Also of particular interest is the emphasis Paul makes in his reference to God. It is usual for Paul to say he gives thanks to God (1 Cor 1:4; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3). It is usual for him to give thanks to God our Father (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2). He did so in the previous verse (Col 1:2). What is unusual is for him to refer to God: **the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. In a letter set to emphasize the preeminence and centrality of Christ, Paul does not neglect the work of the Spirit (Col 1:8) or the Father (Col 1:12-14) showing the full trinitarian expression of the Godhead.

#### **Colossians 1:4**

The reason for Paul's constant prayer is the good report he received about them. Their faith in Christ was visible due to their love for **all the saints**, an expression referring to the church. The Colossians had proved they were disciples of Christ by their love for one another (Jn 15:8-12), and consequently Paul had heard about it (Jn 13:34-35) and proceeded to thank God for them and pray for them constantly. This means that their love was visible, a point brought out by the Greek word ἀγάπη *agapē*, translated **love**.

#### **Colossians 1:5**

As Paul refers to their faith and love he is quick to refer to the hope it is all based on. Hope is placed last in this familiar triple reference of faith, hope, and love (Rom 5:1-5; Gal 5:5-6; Eph 4:2-5; 1 Thess 1:3), in order to bring the discussion around, not to the act of hoping but rather to emphasize the thing hoped for, a thing stored up in Heaven for them. Hope is said here to be **laid up** (Gk, ἀπόκειμαι *apokeimai*) for them in the sense of it being reserved or preserved for them. Paul uses this same language in speaking of the believers' inheritance being **kept** in heaven (1 Pet 1:4) and his crown of righteousness being **laid up** in Heaven (2 Tim 4:8). Paul is thus speaking, not to their act of hoping but to the objective content of their hope: **the word of truth, the gospel**. The momentum of this argument is driving towards the supremacy of Christ who is himself the hope of the gospel (Col 1:23, 27).

#### **Colossians 1:6**

This gospel that has come to the Colossians is the same gospel that has been bearing fruit in the whole world. This reference to **the whole world** is not so much an exaggeration as to the scope of the gospel's spread but an expression of its universal impact for all places and people groups (Rom 1:8; 10:18; 1 Thess 1:8), exemplified in its spread in the Greco-Roman world (Eph 2:11-3:13). Paul is linking the Colossians to an argument he is quickly coming to: Christ being

supreme over all things, ought to be preeminent in all things (Col 1:15-20), including the Colossians worship and religious affections. This will serve as a stark contrast to the regional false teaching infiltrating their church (Col 1:21-23).

### **Colossians 1:7**

Paul is quick to emphasize, referring to Epaphras specifically, the mechanism God used to bring the gospel to the Colossians. Implicit in this reference is that he was sent at the behest of Paul. In effect, Paul is authenticating Epaphras' ministry among them over against the false teachers of the day (Col 2:6-7). He refers to Epaphras as being a beloved fellow **servant** (Gk, σύνδουλος *syndoulos*), and **faithful minister of Christ**, to reinforce this fact.

### **Colossians 1:8**

Epaphras served not only as a messenger from Paul to the Colossians, but as a messenger from the Colossians to Paul, bringing to him the good report about their **love in the Spirit**. It would have been encouraging at the outset of the letter to see that Paul was encouraged about them and their faith, especially in light of some of his concerns. By referring to their **love in the Spirit**, he is referring to the very real work of God among them visible in their Spirit empowered **love** (Gk, ἀγάπη *agapē*) for one another (Jn 13:34-35). Paul has thus established the genuineness of his apostleship and the genuineness of their faith at the outset of his pending polemic.

### **We always pray for you (Col 1:9-14)**

The second half of Paul's greeting is a recounting of his prayers for them. Earlier in his introduction (Col 1:3) Paul, having told the Colossians that his prayers for them were constant, now elaborates as to the specifics of his prayers for them. He prays for them to be filled with a knowledge of God's will and to have **all spiritual wisdom and understanding**, so that they can walk in a worthy manner, fully pleasing to the Lord (Col 1:9-10). He emphasizes God's work in them to empower them to endure with thanksgiving and joy the hardships in their lives (Col 1:10-12). As he does this his focus is upon God's work in redeeming them and qualifying them to **share in the inheritance of the saints of light** (Col 1:12-14). Paul's prayer for the Colossians serves as a beautiful example of how believers ought to pray for one another. It is also a reminder that the antidote to false teaching is not ignorance or anti-intellectual emotionalism but a **full** knowledge that leads to a right action.

### **Colossians 1:9**

Paul uses the first person plural pronoun **we** (Gk, ἐγὼ *egō*) to include Timothy in his report regarding his prayers for them. The phrase **from the day we heard**, is likely an echo of his

earlier remark that the gospel bore fruit among them **since the day you heard**, making it plain that their position in Paul's prayer life was immediate and not reliant on any merit on the part of the Colossians. Specifically, he prays that they might be **filled** (Gk, πληρώω *plēroō*) **with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**. This idea of being **filled** or **full** is a theme that will continue throughout the rest of his letter (Col 1:19, 24, 25; 2:2, 9, 10; 4:12, 17). It is also in direct contrast with the ritualistic approach to meritorious achievement promoted by the false teachers (Col 2:16-23). The word **knowledge** (Gk, ἐπίγνωσις *epignōsis*) a compound of the Greek word γνῶσις *gnōsis*, also translated **knowledge** combined with the Greek preposition ἐπί *epi*, often translated as **upon**, emphasizes that the **knowledge** they are to be filled with is to be deep and precise. When Paul then speaks of **the knowledge of his [God's] will**, he is not asking for them to know the direction for their lives in as much as he is asking for them to have a complete and permanent understanding of Christ and his supremacy in every aspect of life (Col 1:15-23). Paul points out that this knowledge was to be a **spiritual wisdom and understanding**, making it clear that this understanding was not something they could learn like most things, but was revealed by God himself (James 3:15-17; 1 Cor 1:17-2:16). This was again a direct repudiation of the proto-gnostic flavor of false teaching in their midst (Col 2:16-23).

### Colossians 1:10

The infinitive **to walk** (Gk, περιπατέω *peripateō*) is used by Paul to express the result of right knowledge. The fruit of being filled with a true knowledge of Christ is a true walk with Christ that is fully pleasing to the Lord. Paul describes more fully what this walk entails using four present tense participles: **bearing fruit, increasing, being strengthened, and giving thanks** (Col 1:10-12). In this verse the participles **bearing fruit** (Gk, καρποφορέω *karpophoreō*) and **increasing** (Gk, αὐξάνω *auxanō*) show that the result of a worthy walk is **bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God**. This method of pleasing God and **bearing fruit** as a by-product of his work in them (Col 1:9) would be in direct contrast to the false teaching of merit being the basis of understanding and knowledge (Col 2:16-23).

### **Walk Worthy**

Paul frequently uses the image of walking to illustrate the Christian life. He tells the Galatians to **walk** by the Spirit (Gal 5:16), and to **keep in step** with the Spirit (Gal 5:25). For Paul this walk is the result of knowing God, not a means to know him (Gal 4:8-11; 5:11-15). He tells the Romans that they were meant to **walk** in newness of life because they were raised from the dead in Christ (Rom 6:4). He goes on to tell them that the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them who are **walking** according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4). This **walk** is reliant on a proper orthodoxy (Rom 8:5-8) and the test of their genuine love for their brother is seen in their **walk**

(Rom 14:13-15). This is similar to the point John makes in his first epistle, again showing that right belief (orthodoxy) and right practice (orthopraxy) go hand in hand (1 Jn 4:20-21). After describing to the Ephesians what God has done for them (Eph 1:2-23) he describes how they used to **walk** (Eph 2:1-3) and goes on to describe how they are now to **walk** (Eph 2:10). Later he tells them to **walk** in love, because Christ loved them and gave himself up for them (Eph 5:2), culminating in his imperative to **look carefully** how they **walked** (Eph 5:15). Paul tells the Philippians to imitate those who **walk** according to the example they have in him (Phil 3:17), as a result of knowing Christ (Phil 3:1-18). The point is summed up by James who writes that real faith leads to real action (James 2:14-26). In other words, a true believer must walk their talk. These verses are not making the case that works are necessary for salvation but that they are the certain result of salvation. He will lay out the specifics of this walk later in the letter (Col 3:5-17).

### **Colossians 1:11**

The third present tense participle describing a worthy walk (Col 1:10) is: **being strengthened** (Gk, δυναμόω *dynamōō*). It has in view the provision of God to enable the believer to bear fruit and increase in the knowledge of God. This idea is antithetical to every merit based approach to God. This strength is not earned but gifted to the believer based on the glorious might of God himself. The specific manifestation of this heavenly strength is seen in the believer's endurance, patience and joy. Two times in this verse and once in the previous verse, the word **all** (Gk, πᾶς *pas*) is used. The word, used to describe the extent of the believer's **power, endurance and patience**, for **every good work** is emphatic. The believer is thus seen to be given the greatest strength, producing the greatest endurance and patience imaginable for **every** good work imaginable. The corollary of this divine enablement is joy. This prayer would seem scandalous to any false teacher advocating works as a means of gaining power. Paul, in setting forth the Colossians' divine provision to walk worthy of their faith undercuts the very premise of meritorious works with the glorious truth of sanctifying grace.

### **Colossians 1:12**

Verse 12 begins with the fourth present participle **giving thanks** (Gk, εὐχαριστέω *eucharisteō*), to finish describing how the Colossians are to walk. A walk that is worthy of the Lord (Col 1:10), will thus be one that is characterized by: visible fruit, increasing maturity, endurance, patience, and joy, wrapped up in an attitude of thanksgiving (Col 1:10-12). Significant is the fact that the Father had qualified (past tense) the Colossians already, not that he was qualifying them currently; God had already qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Again, Paul is emphasizing the Father as the source of their qualification and spiritual inheritance.

drawing a marked contrast to the teaching of the false teachers (Col 2:16-23).

### **Colossians 1:13**

Having established the Father as the source of the Colossians' inheritance in Colossians 1:12, Paul now moves on to describe in more detail the Father's work on their behalf. The two verbs in this sentence are in the past tense denoting the accomplished work of God who has already **delivered us** and **transferred us**, from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son. This emphasis on God's finished work continues the tenor of Paul's argument regarding the certainty of God's present work of sanctification to bring his people to glory. By focusing on God's finished work on behalf of believers he is contrasting the false claims of those who focus on the believers' work to earn God's favor (Col 2:16-23).

### **Colossians 1:14**

Paul had been leading his comments to where they will stay emphatically for the next six verses (Col 1:15-20): upon Christ. Christ is the one **in whom**, there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. This preposition **in**, (Gk, ἐν *en*) is a familiar one for Paul (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 1:5; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 2:4; Eph 1:7; Phil 3:9; 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:12; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:1; Philem 8), especially in this letter (Col 1:2, 17, 19, 28; 2:5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15). Paul includes himself and Timothy, as well as all believers in the first person plural linking all believers to Christ in their redemption and forgiveness of sins. The words **redemption** (Gk, ἀπολύτρωσις *apolytrōsis*) and **forgiveness** (Gk, ἄφεσις *aphesis*) compliment each other, both having in view the idea of deliverance. The nuance lies in the implicit combination of the terms. Paul is again reinforcing the idea that Christ's work, not one's own, is what secures the spiritual position of the true Christian.

### **That he would be preeminent (Col 1:15-23)**

Paul, now moves on to what many consider to be an early hymn of praise to the supremacy of Christ. Key to this is the word **all** (Gk, πᾶς *pas*), used 8 times in this section (Col 1:15-20). The focus nothing short of **all** creation (Col 1:15), **all** things (Col 1:16-17, 20), **everything** (Col 1:18), and **all** the fullness of God (Col 1:19). This is not a random theological treatise inserted in the middle of his argument. It is the basis of it. If Christ is the very image of the invisible God and the firstborn of **all** creation (Col 1:15, 23), if he is the very Creator and sustainer of the universe and **all** created things (Col 1:16-17), if he is head of the Church and the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18), and if he is the very fullness of God (Col 1:19) and the reconciler of **all** things, in **all** places because of his work on the cross (Col 1:20), including the Colossians themselves (Col 1:21-23) than he ought to be the center in **all** true worship, supreme over **all** forms of religious



devotion. In other words, because he is the center in **everything** and supreme over **everything** that exists he, and nothing else, is the center of true spirituality (Col 2:9-16). Paul wanted to make sure the Colossians would **continue in this faith** (Col 1:23).

### ■ Dig Deeper

Wesley and Calvin each capture the essence of Paul's argument and how it fits into the larger polemic of his letter:

Wesley:

“By describing the glory of Christ, and his pre- eminence over the highest angels, the apostle here lays a foundation for the reproof of all worshippers of angels.” ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/Wesley's\\_Notes#19386](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Wesley's_Notes#19386))

Calvin:

“The sum is this — that God in himself, that is, in his naked majesty, is invisible, and that not to the eyes of the body merely, but also to the understandings of men, and that he is revealed to us in Christ alone, that we may behold him as in a mirror. For in Christ he shews us his righteousness, goodness, wisdom, power, in short, his entire self. We must, therefore, beware of seeking him elsewhere, for everything that would set itself off as a representation of God, apart from Christ, will be an idol.”(<https://accordance.bible/link/read/Calvin#90458>)

### ■ Dig Deeper

For a deeper discussion on the possibility that Paul used a Christological hymn in this passage see:

Douglas J. Moo, The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 111–112.

## Colossians 1:15a

There is no question that the third person singular, **he** (Gk, ὅς *hos*), is referring to Christ. Two verses earlier the **he** is referring to the Father who has **transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption** (Col 1:13-14). For the next six verses the subject is Christ and his centrality and supremacy. Unlike the sons of Adam (Gen 5:3), Christ is the true image of God, the exact imprint of his nature (Heb 1:3). In Christ, the transcendent and

unknowable God has condescended to make himself known. In Christ, God has communicated himself to Man (Heb 1:2). In Christ, God has given the final and full revelation of himself (Rev 1:1). To see Christ is thus to actually see the Father (14:9). Paul, is making the case that every other form of relating to God that is not Christ, is obsolete, being a mere shadow of what has already come (Col 2:17).

### *The Image of God*

The image of God is an important concept in the Bible. Perhaps the easiest way to understand the concept is with the command by God to make no graven images of him (Ex 20:4-5). One might ask, what could be so bad about a picture of the invisible God? God's answer would be summed up in the first chapter of the Bible (Gen 1:26-27). God already made an image of himself; a walking, talking, living breathing image of himself named Adam. When Adam sinned, he no longer looked like God, for God is not a sinner. Every child born of Adam was a child born bearing the imperfect image of God through Adam (Gen 5:3). In the simplest way possible, Paul sums up Man's ultimate problem: God is mad at everyone who does not look like him (Rom 1:18). Every lie, every rebellion, every sin is a false advertisement about who God is and God hates it. When Christ is baptized the voice of the Father comes from heaven to declare of him that, "this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). John, in the prologue of his gospel, sums up the significance of this declaration saying that Christ has made the Father known (Jn 1:18). The word used by John is the Greek word ἐξηγήομαι *exēgeomai*, translated as **made him known**. It is the word from which the word exegesis comes. In other words, Christ translated God to Man from the original language of God; he condescended to perfectly explained him to Man in a way he can understand. The true humanity of Jesus is the center point of history and the starting point of a new creation in Christ. Today the believer is wearing, not the fallenness of Adam but the righteousness of Christ (Phil 3:9). The image of God is thus restored in Christ for every believer (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10), with the promise that, just as he has **borne the image of the man of dust**, he will also **bear the image of the man of heaven** (1 Cor 15:49).

### **Colossians 1:15b**

In calling him the firstborn of all creation, Paul is not saying that Christ is a created being as *Arians* (see below) claim but that he is the perfect image of God, the eternally begotten firstborn of all creation. Recognizing Christ as firstborn is not so much a recognition of chronology but of status. For example, Esau was born chronologically first but Jacob was ultimately the firstborn receiving all the rights and privileges of the inheritance (Gen 27:36). In this same way, Christ is the firstborn, having the right of inheritance to all creation (Heb 1:2; Rev 5:1-13). If Christ is the

perfect image of God and the exalted and rightful inheritor of all creation, then he is above every angel, he eclipses every vision, and he humbles every lofty opinion of Man (Col 2:18).

#### ■ Dig Deeper

Geisler aptly notes that:

“One cannot create himself. Jehovah’s Witnesses wrongly add the word “other” six times in this passage in their New World Translation. Thus they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created! But the word “other” is not in the Greek” ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK\\_Commentary#28394](https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK_Commentary#28394))

#### Colossians 1:16

This verse begins with the Greek word ὅτι *hoti*, translated as **because** or **for**, to indicate the reason why Christ, as firstborn, is to have such centrality. In other words, **because** everything has been created by him and for him, he is to be considered the firstborn of all creation; he is to be given primacy as firstborn (see comments on Col 1:15). The next word in this sentence is the Greek word ἐν *en*, translated in this case as **by** could just as easily been translated as **in**, especially followed by the pronoun **him** (Gk, αὐτός *autos*). Christ is not just a part of the created world but the one in whom the Father used to create everything. Everything, includes not just the material world but things in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, things in the highest spheres of existence; thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities. All has been created through him and for him.

When Paul says that all things were created for Christ, he asserting that Christ is supreme being both the source and goal of everything. Paul seems to have this idea in mind when he writes to the Ephesians that God has: **as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1:10)**

It does not seem necessary to parse each nuance of Pauls language concerning thrones and dominions etc. but to see he is including everything imaginable as being under the supremacy of Christ. Regardless of the details of angelic rank or power, Paul is reinforcing the fact that Christ is supreme regardless. Not only is Christ supreme as the creator of every angelic being but every angelic being is made for him. For Paul it is plain, if Christ is worshipped by angels how much more should he, not angels, be worshipped (Col 2:18)?

#### ■ Dig Deeper

Most commentators understand Paul to be describing the various ranks of angelic beings in this

phrase, describing a highly complex hierarchy in the invisible realm. See: (<https://accordance.bible/link/read/Calvin#90461>).

### **Colossians 1:17**

Reinforcing what he said in the previous verses, Paul reminds the Colossians that Christ is not a created being but is himself before all things. In other words, Christ already existed chronologically before creation itself. John, drawing on the language of Genesis 1:1 makes the case that there was never a time when Christ did not exist:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (Jn 1:1–3)**

Further, John began his first epistle speaking of Christ being **from the beginning** (1 Jn 1:1), and speaks of him in Revelation as being **the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end** (Rev 22:13). Jesus himself made this same point when he told the Jews that: **before Abraham was I AM** (Jn 8:58). The point is simple: Jesus is supreme over all things because he is before all things.

That is not all, he is also the one in whom all things hold together. Like the author of Hebrews who points out that Christ **upholds the universe by the word of his power** (Heb 1:3), Paul asserts that Christ is not only the source of all things but the present sustainer of all things. The Greek verb συνίστημι *synistēmi*, translated as **hold together**, is in the perfect tense emphasizing that everything has held together and still does because of Christ. Christ is thus seen as supremely necessary and not at all contingent on anything. His necessity is apparent not only because he created everything but also because he currently sustains everything. Paul is thus speaking of the absolute eternity and omnipotence of Christ. In light of this, how could the Colossians ever entertain worshiping angels (Col 2:18)?

### ■ Dig Deeper

Robertson points out that the word *πρό* *pro*, translated as **before**, with the ablative case shows that this verse is plainly about the timelessness of Christ not his preeminence ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word\\_Pictures#5182](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word_Pictures#5182)).

### **Colossians 1:18a**

Having established that Christ is supreme over everything in existence in the previous verses (Col 1:15-17), he passes on to speak of his specific supremacy over the church, calling him the

head and the church his body. In doing so, Paul establishes more than Christ's supremacy in general but his supremacy specifically which is personally related to the Colossians. He is not just supreme but specifically supreme; he is their Head. This argument, going from the broad to the specific, is a familiar one for Paul, who wrote to the Ephesians that God, **put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all** (Eph 1:22–23).

### *The Body of Christ*

Scripture describes the Church in many ways but none are as rich or profound as the metaphor of the Body of Christ. The Church is thus described as a living person so unified as to be perfectly one (Jn 17:20-23). In the same way a human body is unified yet distinct, so too is Christ's Church (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:4-27). In the same way a human body matures as a body in order to better carry out the will of the mind, so too the body of Christ is called to grow in maturity so as to better obey Christ its head (Eph 4:11-16).

### **Colossians 1:18b**

In speaking of Christ as the **beginning** (Gk, ἀρχή *archē*) he is not so much speaking of Christ as the beginning of creation in general, as he did earlier, as he is speaking of Christ as the beginning of God's re-creation specifically. Calling him the firstborn from the dead, makes this clear. Jesus is the firstborn in his resurrection as he is in creation (1 Cor 15). Though he is also "Very God of Very God" as stated in the Nicene Creed, he is also the supreme human in creation, the rightful king over every king on earth (Rev 1:5). His absolute and exhaustive preeminence is the point. Christ is the perfect Man, the second Adam (Rom 5:12-21), the head of a new race (Eph 2:11-3:13), the source of life for a new people made one in him (Gal 3:28). Paul is driving to his statement that in the church, as well as in all creation, Christ is all in all (Col 3:11).

### ■ Dig Deeper

Geisler commenting on this verse says it this way:

Christ is given first place over all Creation. He is preeminent. The same eternal Λόγος (John 1:1) who "became flesh" (John 1:14) and "humbled Himself" (Phil. 2:8) is now "exalted" by God the Father "to the highest place" and has been given "the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9).

([https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK\\_Commentary#28399](https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK_Commentary#28399))

### **Colossians 1:19**

Verse 19 begins with the Greek word ὅτι *hoti*, translated as **because** or **for**, showing that this

verse is an explanation of the previous one. Thus, Christ is preeminent **because in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell**.

In speaking of the **fullness** (Gk, πλήρωμα *plērōma*) of God, Paul is putting to death any notion that would make Christ in anyway less than fully God. He refers to this **fullness** again in Colossians 2:9 stating that, **in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily** (Col 2:9). This same word was used earlier to refer to Paul's prayer for the Colossians to be "**filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (Col 1:9), and will again be used to define Paul's goal of making **the word of God fully known** (Col 1:25). Paul will later remind the Colossians that they are already **filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority** (Col 2:10). He will end his letter reminding the Colossians to **fulfill their ministry** (Col 4:17). In these four cases it is clear that Paul is speaking of completion or totality. Thus God's self-revelation is seen in its totality in Christ; the completeness of God's communication to his creation is Christ (Heb 1:1-3).

#### ■ Dig Deeper

Though formal gnosticism came later, Paul's argument could have been a rebuttal to a possible proto-gnosticism coming into Colossae.

#### **Colossians 1:20**

Paul's use of two Greek verbs, ἀποκαταλλάσσω *apokatallassō*, translated as **reconcile**, and εἰρηνοποιέω *eirēnopoieō*, translated as **making peace**, make it clear that the redemptive work of Christ is in view in this climactic explanation that began in verse 19. In summary, Christ is the Preeminent One (Col 1:18) because of his person (Col 1:19) and because his work (Col 1:20).

In speaking of Christ's work of reconciliation and making peace, Paul does not refer merely to people or the world of people (Rom 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:16) but to **all things** (Gk, ὅ πα *ho pas*). Further he does not speak of this as a future event (Rom 8:19-21) but as a past event. This past event is not a mystery. Reconciliation and making peace happened **by the blood of his cross**. This is important because earlier Paul asserted that Christ is the author of all things (Col 1:16). Since all things have been affected by the sin of Adam (Rom 8:19-21), all things have been put right by the work of the second Adam (1 Cor 15:28-55). The realization of this reconciliation is yet to be worked out in space and time but it has been accomplished already. Indeed, **it is finished** (Jn 19:30).

#### **Colossians 1:21**

The words **and you** (Gk, καί σύ *kai sy*) are emphatic, being placed first in the sentence. Having

just spoken of Christ's work of reconciliation generally (Col 1:20), Paul now speaks of it specifically and personally, reminding the Colossians of their previous condition. The Colossians were previously, not only alienated but hostile, not only in their minds but in their actions. This is similar to what Paul writes to the Ephesian church (Eph 2:12). In other words, this is not a description of the Colossians uniquely but of unbelievers universally. Again, in Ephesians, Paul states that not only the Ephesians but everyone, including Paul himself **once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind** (Eph 2:3). When he says we were **by nature children of wrath**, he is saying that the sinner sins because he is a sinner. The notion that God loves the sinner and hates the sin finds no ground in this idea. God is mad at the sinner and his sin. The fact that God does save those under His wrath is truly the mystery in Scripture. It is thus not a mystery why God does not save everyone but rather why God saves anyone. Regardless, the only thing that can separate the sinner from his sin is the cross, a subject Paul moves on to speak about in the next verse.

### Colossians 1:22

The Greek word *νυνί* *nyni*, translated as **now** is emphatic. . With this emphatic adverb Paul is bringing stark contrast to their previous state of alienation and hostility, declaring that **now** they have been reconciled because of the atoning work of Christ. They are **now** holy and blameless and above reproach and are thus no longer, **alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds** (Col 1:21). All of this due to Christ, the Preeminent One, who reconciled them to God **in his body of flesh by his death**. Paul is setting up an undeniable contrast for the Colossians who will have to contrast this work of Christ with a self made religion claiming to make them holy and blameless before God (Col 2:23)? Regardless of the degree of Paul's polemical intent, the substitutionary glory of the gospel is on full display.

#### ■ Dig Deeper

The Greek word *νυνί* *nyni*, translated as **now** means “at this very moment, an emphatic form of *νῦν* although it now carries the same meaning” ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce\\_Greek\\_Dictionary#10282](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#10282))

#### ■ Dig Deeper

In speaking of Jesus' flesh, Paul may have been combatting a proto-gnostic tendency to minimize the reality of Christ's humanity ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK\\_Commentary#28404](https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK_Commentary#28404)).

### Colossians 1:23

Having confidently established the work of Christ, Paul ends his hymn of praise calling attention

to their perseverance in the faith. He begins with the Greek word *ei ei*, which is translated as **if**, but being a first class conditional clause, is speaking of an event having already been fulfilled. This word makes it impossible for Paul to see anything but a foregone conclusion. If he wanted to show an element of doubt he would have used the less certain Greek word *éav ean*, also translated as **if**, but with uncertainty about the outcome. For Paul, the finished work of redemption was experienced in the present tense reality of a persevering faith. Theologically, the Colossians' perseverance was the genuine mark of God's preservation. Jesus is not only the author, but the perfecter of faith (Heb 12:2). This belief is what gave the apostle Paul the confidence to write that he is **sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ** (Phil 1:6).

Paul did not end with the Colossians however. He zoomed back out to where he began (Col 1:15-20), into the cosmic universal nature and absolute significance of Christ in all creation. Similar to earlier (Col 1:6), it is clear that he spoke of all creation to show that the gospel is the same in every place (He certainly did not mean that every person in all creation had heard the gospel, for then why would he still be striving?). His point is important in establishing the universal and unchanging impact and force of the unchanging gospel. This gospel is thus not compatible with the regulations of self made religion (Col 2:16-23).

### **This is why we toil (Col 1:24-29)**

It follows, after such a lofty proclamation about the supremacy of Christ, that Paul would take a few verses to show how that impacts him personally. Having just told them in the previous verse of his calling to preach the preeminent gospel of Christ (Col 1:23), he moves on to declare the impact it has on his life. He can rejoice in his sufferings (Col 1:24), knowing his calling is from God (Col 1:25-26). He can strive to make the mystery of God fully known, bringing maturity to everyone, including the Gentiles (Col 1:27-28), because the strength of the preeminent Christ, powerfully works within him (col 1:29). In short, Paul wants them to know that Christ is preeminent, not only in all of creation, but also in his ministry. He wants them to know the riches of his glory (Col 1:27).

### **Colossians 1:24**

For Paul, rejoicing in suffering is a common theme (see below). The challenge is to understand what is meant by the idea of **filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions**. He certainly could not mean that Christ's suffering on the cross was incomplete in any sense, for he speaks of the full payment accomplished by it in Romans (Rom 3:12-26). The author of Hebrews also points out that Christ finished his work **once for all**, and sat down at the right hand of the Father



(Heb 10:10-14). Christ himself, as he gave up his spirit on the cross, said **it is finished** (Jn 19:30). Christ's work for the believers' salvation is unquestionably finished. It is the work in serving and edifying the church that is not. That Christ still suffered for his Church is clear. On the road to Damascus Jesus asked Paul why he was persecuting him, speaking of his Church (Acts 9:4). Christ is in view because the Church, his body, is in view. In other words, Paul was suffering for the body of Christ; for the building up of the Church. Paul was uniquely singled out by Jesus to suffer in this way (Acts 9:16). He understandably saw suffering on behalf of the body of Christ a privilege, not just for him but for all believers (Phil 1:29).

### ■ Dig Deeper

According to Geisler, “the word “affliction” (θλιψις) — never used in the New Testament of Christ's death—means “distress,” “pressure,” or “trouble” (which Paul had plenty of; 2 Cor. 11:23-29). Ordinarily it refers to trials in life, not the pains of death” ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK\\_Commentary#28408](https://accordance.bible/link/read/BK_Commentary#28408)).

### ■ Dig Deeper

Robertson tells us that when Paul speaks of “filling up” what is lacking in Christ's suffering, he is using a “very rare double compound verb (here only in N.T.) to fill (plēroō) up (ana), in turn (anti)” ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word\\_Pictures#5189](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word_Pictures#5189)).

### 💡 *The Christian and suffering*

Paul spoke often about suffering and the attitude that ought to accompany it. He tells the Romans to not only rejoice in the “**hope of the glory of God**, (Rom 5:2), but also to rejoice in suffering (Rom 5:3). He considered **the sufferings of this present time not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed** (Rom 8:18). He later says to **rejoice in hope**, and **be patient in tribulation** (Rom 12:12). In his first letter to the Corinthians he recounts the suffering that came with his calling (1 Cor 4:9-13) In his second letter, he speaks of sharing Christ's sufferings as well as comfort (2 Cor 1:5), of being afflicted for their comfort (2 Cor 1:6) and sharing in suffering together with them (2 Cor 1:7). Later, he refers to affliction as light and momentary in contrast to the eternal weight of glory they were waiting for (2 Cor 4:17-18) and being filled with comfort in all affliction (2 Cor 7:4). These afflictions he details in his service to Christ (2 Cor 11:23-27). He tells the Galatians that his body bears **the marks of Jesus**, referring to his persecution for the gospel (Gal 6:17).

To the Philippians, he speaks of striving to be like Christ and to share his sufferings (Phil 3:10-11), and to the Thessalonians boasts of them receiving the word **in much affliction**, with the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:6). For Paul suffering for Christ was not something to be

avoided but embraced with joy, for in the pursuit of the godly life in Christ Jesus persecution is normal (2 Tim 3:12).

### **Colossians 1:25**

The method of Paul's ministry is here defined to be the word of God. Paul would fulfill his ministry of proclaiming the gospel of the preeminent Christ (Col 1:21-23) through suffering and affliction on behalf of the church (Col 1:24), by making **the word of God fully known**. This is the reason he **became a minister according to the stewardship from God**. He was tasked with declaring **the whole counsel of God** (Acts 20:27), preaching **in season and out of season** the truth of the gospel (2 Tim 4:1-4). This was his aim in life (2 Tim 3:10-16). This was how he would fulfill his ministry (2 Tim 4:5). There is more going on here than Paul speaking about his calling to preach. His preaching of the whole counsel of God was a means to proclaim the preeminent and finished work of Christ and the hope of the gospel (Col 1:23) which was in direct contrast to the religion of works being spread by false teachers (Col 2:16-3:1).

### **Colossians 1:26**

In like fashion to his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of the **mystery** hidden for ages but now revealed (Eph 3:9). The Greek word *μυστήριον* *mystērion*, translated **mystery**, is not speaking of a mystery in the sense of something hard to understand but more like a secret which has not been unveiled. When Paul says that this **mystery** has been **hidden for ages and generations**, he is saying it has not been previously revealed. In his letter to the Ephesians, he explains in more detail that that the **mystery** came to him by revelation (Eph 3:3), that it was about Christ (Eph 3:4), and that it was not in the Hebrew Scriptures (Eph 3:5). Paul's claim here sets up a true contrast to claims of the false teachers in Colossae who were going on in detail about their special visions (Col 2:18).

### **Colossians 1:27**

What is this secret, **hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints** (Col 1:26)? Before he tells the Colossians he reminds them broadly of the fact that God chose to reveal this secret to Gentiles in the first place. In like fashion, in his letter to the Ephesians, he enjoins them to:

**...remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For**

**he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Eph 2:11–16)**

Both Jew and Gentile share in **the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. Paul is speaking of the special prerogative of the church made up of all those **in Christ** (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 5:17; 13:5; Eph 1:4). In the nation of Israel a Gentile had to become a Jewish proselyte in order to have a relationship with God (Ex 12:43-49; Numbers 15:13-16; Leviticus 24:22), but now in one Spirit Jew and Gentile alike are baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13), with no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Rom 10:12). This does not negate God's geopolitical promises to the nation of Israel (Rom 9-11), but it does point to a better paradigm (Eph 2:21-3:12; Gal 2:11-21).

### **Colossians 1:28**

It is not a philosophy or a system of behaviors or even a religion that Paul proclaimed but a person: Christ. He is the ultimate good news of the gospel. Paul again uses the plural **we**, to express that Christ is the content of his companions' proclamations as well. Being that **proclaim** (Gk, καταγγέλλω *katangellō*) is also in the present tense, it is apparent, that this proclamation of Paul and his companions is exemplary. It was done through **warning and teaching with all wisdom**, not for a select few but for **everyone**. In light of the eight uses of **all** in the previous section (Col 1:15-20), it is likely that **everyone**, includes more than those in Colossae but all saints everywhere, in all places.

When Paul speaks of **all wisdom** he cannot mean private revelation, like the false teachers, for he is still using the plural **we**. Further, he earlier prayed for the Colossians to be filled with **all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (Col 1:9). Thus it stands to reason that he is making reference to the direct but accessible revelation of God in the Scriptures (2 Pet 1:16-21). This proclamation of the word of God should then be seen as the effective means of **maturity** (Gk, τέλειος *teleios*) for all saints everywhere (2 Tim 3:16-21). This is in line with the Great Commission generally (Matt 28:20) and the responsibilities of a pastor specifically (1 Tim 3:2; Eph 4:1-11), and would be immediately condemning to the false teachers proclaiming the foolishness of their sensuous minds, in Colossae (Col 2:18).

### **■ Dig Deeper**

According to Robertson, "all like-minded preachers against the Gnostic depreciation of Christ.

This verb originally (Xenophon) meant to denounce, but in N.T. it means to announce (aggellō) throughout (kata), to proclaim far and wide (Acts 13:5)” ([https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word\\_Pictures#5193](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word_Pictures#5193)).

### **Colossians 1:29**

Paul’s toil and struggle was for the express goal of presenting everyone mature in Christ (Col 1:28). His method was proclaiming, though **warning** and **teaching** with **all wisdom** (Col 1:28), in the energy of Christ who powerfully sustains him. The Greek word κοπιάω *kopiaō*, translated as **toil**, has in view laboring to exhaustion. Paul wanted to be **poured out** in this good fight (2 Tim 4:6-7). He understood the hardship of his ministry (2 Cor 11:23-28). He was confident however that **Christ powerfully** worked within him. This power was nothing less than the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10), lived out by his faith (Gal 2:20). This grace through faith, that brought all power to his ministry, was the very thing he prayed for the Colossians to have (Col 1:11), and is available to all believers today. This is a powerful contrast to false religion of works being spread in their midst which had the appearance of wisdom, but had no value in actually accomplishing anything (Col 2:23).

#### ■ Dig Deeper

The Greek word κοπιάω *kopiaō*, translated as toil means “being spent or laboring until fainting from weariness.” [https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce\\_Greek\\_Dictionary#8565](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#8565)

# Colossians Chapter 2

Matthew P. Smith

## Stand firm in your faith (Col 2:1-5)

Paul's commitment to the gospel (Col 1:24-29) meant a commitment to the church and consequently a commitment to the Colossians themselves. This section is closely linked with previous section creating a subtle parenthetical aside sandwiched between Colossians 1:23 and Colossians 2:6 (Col 2:6 perfectly picks up the argument from Col 1:23). Paul wanted the Colossians to know he struggled for them, even for those who had not met him personally (Col 2:1), so that their hearts would be encouraged to reach a full assurance in Christ (Col 2:2-3) so that no one would be able to delude the Colossians with plausible arguments (Col 2:4), especially since Paul was rooting for the firmness of their faith (Col 2:5).

## Colossians 2:1

In Colossians 1:29 Paul referred to the toil of his calling **to present everyone mature in Christ** (Col 1:28-29). The implication of Paul loving the Church in general (Col 1:24-29) was that Paul loved the Colossians specifically. Here he personalized his struggle for the Church to show that it was a struggle for the Colossians specifically, and not only the ones he knew personally but even for those who had not met him **face to face**. Paul's love was not for the idea of the Church in some abstract way but for the people that made up each local church specifically (Rom 12:5).

## Colossians 2:2

The specific purpose of Paul's great struggle was the **encouragement** (Gk, παρακαλέω *parakaleō*) and **full assurance** (Gk, πληροφορία *plērophoria*) of the Colossians. The corollary of their encouragement was their unity, their **being knit together in love**. There was to be no false dichotomy between intellect and emotion. Christianity is truth (intellect) that transforms (emotion). It is important to remember that Paul was not writing to an individual but a community. False teaching is divisive among God's people but true unity is based upon a shared **understanding and knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ**.

## *The Relationship Between Unity and Sound Doctrine*

Christ does not call his Church to a general ephemeral notion of unity but to a specific type of unity based on sound doctrine. For example, Paul tells the Ephesians that God gave his Church pastors and teachers **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ** (Eph 4:12), with the goal of a unity in **the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God** (Eph 4:13). The method of this equipping first didactic and involves, **speaking the truth in love**

(Eph 4:15). The aim is a mature church, with individual members capable of understanding sound doctrine so as to not be **tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes** (Eph 4:14).

Contrary to popular belief, doctrine does not divide but is the true unifier of those being transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom 12:1-2). The divisive person is the one focused on unsound doctrine, speculating about what they do not understand (Tit 3:8-11), with a mind set upon earthly things (Phil 3:19). The Church, in contrast, is called to be *sanctified*, set apart, from the world, unified in the Word of God (Jn 17:17). This doctrinal unity is the precursor of the true and experiential unity Christ prayed for (Jn 17:20-23).

### Colossians 2:3

Rather than speaking of **God's mystery** (Col 2:2) in a general sense, Paul focuses on the revelation of **God's mystery** (Gk, μυστήριον *mystērion*), **which is Christ** (Col 2:2). In other words, **the treasures of wisdom** (Gk, σοφία *sophia*) **and knowledge** (Gk, γνῶσις *gnōsis*) are not hidden in an unrevealed mystery like false teachers liked to claim (Col 2:4) but in Christ himself, the final and full revelation of God to Man (Jn 1:1-18; Heb 1:1-2; Rev 1:1). Paul is keeping the focus on Christ bringing to mind the lofty Christology he has just presented (Col 1:15-20). He is also developing the specifics of his prayer that the Colossians would be **filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (Col 1:9) by showing them where to find it: in Christ. Christ is where they would find true wisdom and knowledge. His point is clear: to be filled with wisdom and knowledge is necessarily to be filled with Christ himself.

### Colossians 2:4

Though he has been building his case from the beginning, this is Paul's first explicit reference to false teachers in this letter. The word **this** (Gk, οὗτος *houtos*) beginning the verse is most naturally referring to what he has just said regarding Christ (Col 2:3), linking his warning to his earlier Christology in chapter 1 (Col 1:15-20). He thus has said what he has about Christ **in order that no one may delude them with plausible arguments**. The Greek word πιθανολογία *pithanologia*, translated as **plausible arguments**, has in view a fine-sounding argument that looks reasonable. In context of Paul's warning not to be **deluded** (Gk, παραλογίζομαι *paralogizomai*), these **plausible arguments** are ultimately untrue and deceptive. The antidote to this deception is a maturity that unifies the church in the knowledge of Christ (Col 2:1-3) so that no one would be led astray by deceptive plausible arguments (Col 2:4). This is almost identical to what he says in his letter to the Ephesians, where his goal was to **equip the saints** and build them up (Eph 4:11-12), until they became unified and mature in **the faith and knowledge of the Son of God**, which he calls **the fullness of Christ** (Eph 4:13) so that no one would be led astray

by **human cunning** and **craftiness in deceitful schemes** (Eph 4:14). In both cases, a robust understanding of Christ is the antidote.

### **Colossians 2:5**

Though he has written to warn the Colossians he is careful to point out he is not rebuking them but celebrating their **good order** (Gk, τάξις *taxis*) and **firmness** (Gk, στερέωμα *stereōma*) **of faith in Christ**. Paul having already established his authority as an apostle of God (Col 1:24-29), takes a moment to establish his personal unity with their faith. Though he was absent **in body** (imprisoned in Rome) he was nevertheless with them **in spirit**. He says something similar to the Corinthians as he encouraged them to discipline one of their members (1 Cor 5:3-5). In both cases it seems obvious that he means something more than the nicety of being with them in his thoughts and prayers, for he claimed to be with them **with the power of our Lord Jesus** (1 Cor 5:4). Paul seems to be alluding to the fact that as an apostle of Christ he speaks with the authority of Christ himself (Col 1:24-29), and as a member of the same body of Christ he does so physically united with them (Col 2:2). Though he was **absent in body** he was physically present by means of the spiritual union of the body of Christ. There was thus no division due to his distance (1 Cor 12:25) **If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together** (1 Cor 12:26).

### **Rooted and built up in him (Col 2:6-7)**

The Colossians, having already received Christ for justification (Col 2:6), needed to remain committed to him for sanctification (Col 2:6b), remaining **rooted and built up in him**, established in the truth they had already been taught with **thanksgiving** (Col 2:7). In other words, they needed to remain content, trusting that Christ was enough not only to justify them but to sanctify them. Paul speaks in a similar way to Timothy when he exhorts him to **continue in what you have learned** (2 Tim 3:14), trusting that God's Word was sufficient and **profitable** (2 Tim 3:16) able to equip every man of God **for every good work** (2 Tim 3:17).

Based on the high Christology of his introduction (Col 1:15-23), Paul uses these verses to state his positive case for confronting false teaching directly (Col 2:8-23). They were not merely to watch out and not get taken **captive by philosophy** (Col 2:8-15). They were to **walk in Christ** (Col 2:6). They were not merely to **let no one pass judgment** on them (Col 2:16) or **disqualify** them (Col 2:18). They were to remain rooted and **established in the faith** they had already received (Col 2:7). They were not merely to not submit to ineffective, man-made regulations (Col 2:20-23). They were to be **abounding in thanksgiving**, content with the person and work

of Christ (Col 2:6-8).

### Colossians 2:6

Paul's use of **therefore** (Gk, οὖν *oun*) at the beginning of his sentence immediately draws from the high Christology of his introduction (Col 1:15-23). This, followed by his reference to their current possession of this very same Christ, **received** (Gk, παραλαμβάνω *paralambanō*) through faith, makes the command to **walk in him** seem obvious. Why would they not walk in him? **He is the image of the invisible God** (Col 1:15), the Creator of **all things** (Col 1:16), **He is before all things**, holding **all things** together (Col 1:17). How could they ever turn from so great a salvation? **He is the head of the body**, head of the church in which they were a part (Col 1:18, 21-23). In him was found **the very fullness of God** (Col 1:19), and through his finished work all things were reconciled (Col 1:20). To now command them to **walk in him** (περιπατέω *peripateō*) was the very essence of actually receiving this same Christ as their **Lord**. The Colossians were being called to obey Christ rather than anyone else (Gal 5:16-25), for there is no other Christ than the one who is Lord, no other Christ than the one who is to be obeyed. Having said this, Paul also wanted them to obey this Christ as **Lord** in the same way they did **as they received him**. In short, he wanted them to walk in the faith they already possessed. In a more polemical way he says the same thing to the Galatians: **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** (Gal 3:3). This is the basic argument of his whole letter, that Christ, not man and his efforts, is the center of Christian faith. Because he is the center in everything and supreme over everything that exists (Col 1:15-18, 20), he is also the center of true spirituality (Col 2:9-16).

#### ■ Dig Deeper

*“Walk” (KJV, NASB) or “live” (NIV) was a regular term for behaving according to God’s laws (see comment on Gal 5:16), and “receive” was often used for Jewish teachers of the \*law passing traditions on to their students. Paul thus exhorts the Colossians to continue in what (and whom) they were taught, not according to mere human traditions (2:8).*

(Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, 2d; Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 573.)

### Colossians 2:7

Paul uses four participles, **rooted**, **built up**, **established** and **abounding**, to modify the Greek imperative, περιπατέω *peripateō*, translated as **walk** from the previous verse (Col 2:6). In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he calls for them to become mature so that they would, no longer be tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph 4:14). The Ephesians were to grow up into maturity



(Eph 4:15), built up together like a body (Eph 4:16). It is noteworthy however that in his letter to the Colossians he uses the perfect tense for the participle **rooted** (Gk, ῥιζόω *rhizoō*), which emphasizes the completed action of having been rooted already with the result of still being rooted. It could be easily translated *having been rooted*, drawing attention to their current maturity. In essence, Paul is not so much telling the Colossians to become rooted but to remain rooted in Christ as they walk. This is consistent with the other three present participles he used which emphasize the ongoing action of being **built up**, **established** and **abounding**. In other words, because they had already been **rooted**, having received Christ (Col 2:6), they were being **built up** in him and being **established in the faith just as they were taught**, **abounding in thanksgiving** at what they already had in Christ. This emphasis, drawing attention to what they received through faith in Christ at salvation (Col 2:6), renders a stark contrast to the false teachers who obviously were promoting the need for something more (Col 2:8, 16, 18, 20, 23).

### **Let no one take you captive (Col 2:8-23)**

Paul's assault upon false teaching, his great struggle (Col 2:1), is here made plain. The Colossians, having already received Christ through faith (Col 2:6-7), were to see to it that no one could take them captive through the philosophies and empty traditions of men (Col 2:8), for in Christ was all the fullness of God (Col 2:9) and through Christ, and his finished work, came true spirituality (Col 2:10-15). Thus, they were to let no one pass judgment on them in regards to their liberty in Christ (Col 2:16-17), and to let no one disqualify them in regards to their union with him (Col 2:18-19). How could they even consider a merit based approach to God when they had already died to it in Christ (Col 2:20-22)? False teaching might have appeared to be wise but it was the exact opposite and was literally of no value (Col 2:23).

Paul's essential argument is thus made clear: It is Christ, not man and his efforts, that is the center of true Christian faith. Because he is the center in everything and supreme over everything that exists (Col 1:15-18, 20), there were no secret teachings, traditions, dreams, rituals, recipes or philosophies to add to their spirituality (Col 2:8,16, 18, 21-22). They had Christ (Col 2:6-7).

### **Colossians 2:8**

The polemical purpose of Paul is here stated plainly: **See to it that no one takes you captive**. The Colossians were to be on their guard against those trying to imprison them through false teaching. The Greek word συλαγωγέω *sylagōgeō*, translated as **takes you captive**, is used only here in the New Testament and has in view *carrying off as spoil or booty*. The image created is that the Colossians are a prize for the false teachers. In a similar vein, Paul, in his letter to the

Galatians, speaks of the false teachers who **make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them** (Gal 4:17). Later he remarks that they wanted to use the Galatians to make **a good showing in the flesh** (Gal 6:11). For the Colossians the imagery is likewise vivid. Paul shows that the false teachers want to trap them with **empty deceit**, by using another rare (also used only once in the New Testament) Greek word, φιλοσοφία *philosophia*, translated as *love of wisdom* or philosophy. Having just proclaimed Christ as the source of all **wisdom** (Gk, σοφία *sophia*) and knowledge (Col 2:3), he exposes the source of the **philosophy** of the false teachers: **empty deceit** and **human tradition**, according to **the elemental spirits of the world**. The phrase, **elemental spirits of the world**, will later be described as the false idols of self-made religion that is based on **human precepts and teachings** (Col 2:20-23). Again Paul is reinforcing the fact that inherent source of the false teachers' wisdom is self. Thus, because the philosophy of the false teachers is **not according to Christ**, it is disqualified.

### Colossians 2:9

The **philosophy** and **empty deceit** of the previous verse (Col 2:8) is contrasted here with Christ in whom is **the whole fullness of deity**. The high Christology from earlier in his letter are brought to bear here (Col 1:19). Christ is the **preeminent** one (Col 1:18) because **in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell** (Col 1:19). The Greek word κατοικέω *katoikeō*, translated as **dwells**, is used in the present tense to reinforce the fact that the fullness of deity did not currently dwell in the false teaching of merit and tradition but exclusively and fully in Christ alone. Of note, is the fact that the fullness of deity dwells in Christ **bodily** (Gk, σωματικῶ *sōmatikōs*), a Greek word appearing only here in the New Testament. Christ is thus not a philosophical idea but the glorified, resurrected God-man. Paul thus undercuts more than general philosophy and human tradition but the idea that Jesus could be a mere manifestation of God. He affirmed in this one verse both the full, resurrected humanity and incarnate, deity of Christ, to the demise of every argument to the contrary.

### Colossians 2:10

Notice the building contrast Paul uses here. The false teachers brought nothing but **empty deceit** (Col 2:8) instead of **the whole fullness of deity** (Col 2:9) and even more importantly the Colossians were already full, having been **filled in him**, already. When Paul writes that they **have been filled**, he uses the Greek word πληρώω *plēroō*, in the perfect tense to emphasize a completed action in the past that was current and ongoing. In other words, the Colossians at a single point in the past had already been filled and were currently at the moment of writing still indeed filled. This filling happened when they received Christ (Col 2:6). Paul is making it plain that they should have no interest in the claims of false teachers. They did not need to become

spiritual through the empty philosophy of human traditions for they were already spiritual **in Christ**. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is instructive here. He did not pray for the Ephesians to gain the love of Christ but that they would **have strength to comprehend** (Eph 3:18) **and to know** (Eph 3:19) the full scope of what was theirs in Christ already. This, not the empty teaching of the false teachers, was the path to **be filled with all the fullness of God** (Eph 3:19). They, like the Colossians, already possessed it (Eph 1) and only needed to comprehend and know what was already theirs. This was his struggle for the Colossians (Col 2:1), that they would **reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ** (Col 2:2).

Paul kept the false teachers' illegitimacy in view by reminding them that Christ is also the true **head of all rule and authority**, bringing his point back to the high Christology from earlier (Col 1:16) and setting himself up for the central question of his epistle (Col 2:20-23).

### **Colossians 2:11**

Paul takes the covenant imagery of Jewish circumcision and spiritualizes it by showing its fulfillment in Christ (Gen 17:10-14). He did something similar in his letter to the Romans writing that **a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit** (Rom 2:29). It seems probable that his focus reflected at least some of the elements of false teaching coming into Colossae (*see below: The Nature of False Teaching in Colossae*). The extent and scope of Jewishness Paul has in mind is unclear but his teaching is not unique to the New Testament (Deut 30:6). The act of physical circumcision as an outward display of an inward commitment, makes it a perfect picture of the inward reality of **putting off the body of flesh**, making Paul's reference to **the circumcision of Christ**, more about the true spirituality of the Colossians than anything else. It is important to remember that the graphic picture of circumcision, the cutting away of the male foreskin, was meant to show that Man in his most intimate parts was depraved and in need of God's cleansing. It powerfully symbolized the very heart of Man and his need for total renewal (Deut 10:16), so that on the one hand, Abraham, who was circumcised as a sign of his inward faith was praised (Rom 4:11), while on the other hand, the Pharisees being circumcised in the flesh alone, were called hypocrites (Acts 7:51). Paul's powerful reference to their **circumcision made without hands**, likely created a stark contrast to the hypocrisy of the false teachers who did not have Christ (Col 2:8). The contrast was plain to see. The Colossians were **crucified** with Christ, and **no longer...enslaved to sin** (Rom 6:6), the false teachers were not.



### **The Nature of False Teaching in Colossae**

This verse strongly implies that some form of Jewish legalism akin to the Galatian heresy (Gal

5:2-4) is here in view. On the other hand, Paul later implicates an early form of gnosticism (Col 2:18-19). There seems to be three options at the outset: 1. there were two separate heresies coming into the Colossian church, 2. there was one specific heresy consisting of both a legalistic and proto-gnostic element coming into the Colossian church, or 3. Paul was speaking more broadly of heresy in general, addressing the kinds of false teaching they would encounter. Based on the evidence, option 3 seems most appealing. Unlike in his other letters where the specifics of the false teaching is spelled out (2 Cor 11:4-5, 13-15, 22-23; 12:11; Gal 1:8; 4:17; 6:12-13; Phil 3:2, 18-19; 1 Tim 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 6:3-5), in this letter the false teaching is left vague and nebulous. Perhaps because he wanted it to circulate to other churches (Col 4:16) he aimed for a more universal tone. Further, Paul does not describe the source of the false teaching, whether it is coming from outside or inside the church in Colossae and never addresses the scope of the false teaching, whether it is a unified opposition party or even a hypothetical threat. It seems likely that Paul was not so much addressing a specific organized heresy as he is addressing a general tendency or attitude potentially harmful to these churches (Col 4:16).

Having said all of this, some basic attributes of Paul's opposition are clear. It is a hollow philosophy depending on human tradition (Col 2:8). It is not dependent on Christ but on the elemental spiritual forces of the world (Col 2:8) and it took the form of ritual observances and ascetic traditions (Col 2:16, 18, 23). It had as its focus, not Christ, but angels, visions and ultimately self (Col 2:18). Far from being spiritual, it was worldly and worthless (Col 2:20-23).

### **Colossians 2:12**

Paul explains in what sense they **were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands** (Col 2:11), by bringing a new symbol into the picture, namely baptism. Paul clearly has immersion in view as he speaks of being **buried with him in baptism**. The immersion pictured in going under the water pictured the spiritual reality of a believer's identification with the death, burial (depicted in going under water), and resurrection of Christ. Paul gives a more complete picture of this in Romans 6 when he says:

**We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life** (Rom 6:4).

He goes on to explain that it is their identification with him in death that depicts their current unity with him in the resurrection life (Rom 6:5). Paul makes it clear that the ritual of baptism is a depiction of the spiritual reality of Christ's work in them. They were **raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God**, not the false teachers or empty philosophies of men.

Their baptism was thus, like Jewish circumcision, an outward act depicting an inward reality. The act was a visual reminder of their spiritual possession even as it served as a visual promise of the future. The same power of God that **raised him from the dead** had spiritually qualified them, raising them spiritually from the dead, guaranteeing them their own future resurrection.

### Colossians 2:13

The Colossians were not buried and raised with Christ because of anything they had done but solely because **God made them alive together with him, having forgiven them their trespasses**. Paul points out their inability telling them that they **were dead in their trespasses and the uncircumcision of their flesh**. He says it similarly to the Ephesian church (Eph 2:1), going on to spell out the scope of their lostness in the next two verses. Instead of following God they were **following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience** (Eph 2:2). If not for God's intervention they would have remained sons of disobedience **living out the passions of the flesh carrying out the desires of the body** remaining **children of wrath** by nature **like the rest of mankind** (Eph 2:3). The picture of salvation is not one of a sick person getting better but of a dead person being made alive solely because of the totally free grace of God (Jn 3:1-11). For what does the leper (Matt 8:2), the blind (Jn 9:39), the deaf (Mk 7:37), and the dead (Jn 11:14-43) have in common but their inability to save themselves? Paul's point is both profound and simple: salvation belongs to the Lord (Rev 7:10; 19:1). God's free, unmerited, grace undermined the entire position of the false teachers who focused on the efforts of Man in salvation (Col 2:16, 18, 20-23).

### Colossians 2:14

Paul gets specific as to how **God made the Colossians alive together with him, having forgiven them all their trespasses** (Col 2:13). God not only took their sins to the cross (1 Pet 2:24) but he cancelled **the record of debt that stood against them with its legal demands, nailing them to the cross**. The term **record** (Gk, χειρόγραφον *cheirographon*) **of debt**, literally has in view something written by hand listing their indebtedness. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is helpful here. He tells them that this record is not so much a list of their specific sins but **the law of commandments expressed in ordinances** (Eph 2:15). The Greek word ἐξαλείφω *exaleiphō*, translated as **canceling**, brings to view a picture of wiping off the ink from the law that condemned them. The imagery Paul paints of a courthouse where even though the evidence of their sin was stacked against them, they were totally set free. They were delivered, not only from the consequences of their sin acts, but also from the power of the Law that condemned their sin in the first place (Rom 7:6; 6:14). In other words, God did not merely remove the law from their record, he removed the record itself. The idea that they would still submit to a Law that had

already been wiped away is immediately absurd (Col 2:16, 18, 20-23).

### **Colossians 2:15**

Whereas the cross has a negative connotation in the previous verse (Col 2:14), it here takes on a note of triumph. While verses 13 and 14 paint vivid pictures of the removal of sin and judgment (Col 2:13-14), verse 15 invokes the image of God's victory over **rulers and authorities**. The author of Hebrews adds a bit of clarity to this verse regarding the identity of the rulers and authorities, when he writes:

**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery** (Heb 2:14-15).

The one who was triumphed over in this case is non other than the devil. Though Paul does not come out so explicitly, there remains a solid connection to this idea when one turns to Ephesians, where he calls the devil **the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience** (Eph 2:2) and refers to angelic beings as **rulers and authorities in the heavenly places** (Eph 3:10). Paul frequently speaks of demonic beings as being part of this group. He calls them **angels, principalities and powers** in his letter to the Romans (Rom 8:37-39), and in Ephesians he makes it plain that:

**we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places** (Eph 6:12).

Clearly demonic, fallen angels are in view. To worship such defeated foes would be the height of foolishness. Paul is arguing that the cross effectively became the symbol that neuters any false insistence that a believer should worship angelic beings (Col 2:18).

### ■ Dig Deeper

According to Marvin R. Vincent:

*The doctrine of angelic mediators in the creation and government of the world is offset by the truth of the Eternal Son, begotten before the creation, by whom all things were created and are maintained, and who is also the only and absolute head of the Church (1:15–18). For a succession of angelic emanations, each less divine than its predecessor, is substituted the Son of*

*God, in whom dwells the sum-total of the divine powers and attributes (1:19; 2:9). An angel or spirit, who is neither God nor man, cannot reconcile God and man.*

[https://accordance.bible/link/read/Vincent-Word\\_Studies#12235](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Vincent-Word_Studies#12235))

### **Colossians 2:16**

Paul's argument flows from the logic of his previous point. The Colossians were made spiritual by Christ (Col 2:11), and his work on the cross (Col 2:12). They were made alive (Col 2:13), having their debts cancelled by his cross (Col 2:14). They were made victorious having demonic forces put to open shame upon the cross (Col 2:15). **Therefore** they were to **let no one pass judgment** on them in ritual, custom and obligation. He specifically mentions **questions about food and drink, festivals, a new moon and a Sabbath**, suggestive of a decidedly Jewish (2 Chron 31:3; Neh 10:32-33) flavor of opposition (Gal 2:4-21). His reference to worship of angels and visions two verses later (Col 2:18) make the identity of his opponent's harder to pin down however. It is best to see the broader point he is making and its application to multiple situations and opponents regardless of the specifics. In short the cross means liberty not legalism.

### **Colossians 2:17**

The reason the Colossians were not to let anyone **pass judgment** on them **in questions of food and drink, or with regard to festival or a new moon or Sabbath** (Col 2:16), was because they were merely **a shadow of the things to come**, not the things themselves. Whereas these things were merely a shadow, **the substance belongs to Christ**. The word **substance** (Gk, σῶμα *sōma*), could also be translated as **body**, showing Christ, not merely as the Platonic ideal, but as the literal, bodily, fulfillment of these symbols. The author of Hebrews makes a similar argument when he writes that **the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities** (Heb 10:1). The true form (Heb 10:1) and substance (Col 2:19) are parallel ideas both pointing to Christ, not merely as an idea but as a material reality. Christ is not only the Heavenly picture (Heb 9:24) of OT practices but the earthly and eschatological fulfillment of them in his incarnation. Again, the Jewishness of Paul's argument suggests his opponents have some ties to OT practices.

### **Colossians 2:18**

Paul already warned the Colossians two verses earlier to: **let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath** (Col 2:16). He now expands on his earlier warning here telling them to **let no one disqualify** (Gk, καταβραβεύω *katabrabeuō*), them. The word **disqualify** is similar to the word **judgment** (Gk, κρίνω *krinō*) used earlier (Col 2:16), but possibly with more force. Regardless, it is clear that Paul is warning them against mysticism of some sort. He refers to those who insist on

**asceticism and the worship of angels**, bringing to mind early forms of Gnosticism or perhaps a type of Jewish mysticism (Gal 1:8). In either case, the broad outlines of a pursuit of deeper and higher religious experiences seem to be what Paul is confronting. These mystical gurus were **going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by a sensuous mind**. They, like all false teachers, were focused on themselves and their glory. Their super spirituality was basic unspirituality no matter how they dressed it up. It was self focused not God focused (Col 3:1).

### Do Not Worship of Angels

The word **angel** (Gk, ἄγγελος *angelos*) is also the word used for **messenger** in the Bible (Phil 2:25; Jam 2:25). As messengers of God, angels might have seemed to be mediators between God and Man but they were not. Paul made this clear to Timothy, writing that **there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus** (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus confronted Satan with the truth that God alone, not angels, was to be worshipped (Matt 4:10). John fell down in worship to an angel twice in Revelation and he was rebuked and firmly told by an angel: **You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God** (Rev 19:10; 22:9). This was consistent in the OT as well (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Zeph 1:5). The worship of angels has always been, and always will be, justly condemned by God who will not share his glory (Is 42:8; 48:11).

### **Colossians 2:19**

These false teachers were not merely mystical gurus trying to get the Colossian Christians to leave their faith. They were mystical gurus pretending to be Christians. Paul's indictment would make no sense otherwise. That they were claiming to be a part of the church is evident when Paul accuses them of **not holding fast to the Head**. The implication is that at some point they had claimed to be connected to **the Head**, being part of the **body**. To **not hold fast** (Gk, οὐ κρατέω *hou krateō*) is to let go of something previously held. In this case it is easy to imagine that these had at one point claimed to be a part of the body, but had abandoned their allegiance to it. When Paul warned the Ephesian elders before his departure he spoke of the **fierce wolves** that would **come in among you, not sparing the flock**, and that **from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them** (Eph 20:28-30). When he wrote the the Ephesians church directly he spoke of the pastoral goal of **mature manhood** (Eph 4:12-14):

**Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.** (Eph 5:15-16)



Paul, in making such a similar case here, shows broadly that the easiest way to spot an imposter is not to become an expert in their ways but to be an expert in the truth (Col 2:1-7). When someone abandons or twists the faith it will be obvious.

#### ■ Dig Deeper

Robertson is helpful here. In his commentary on Acts 20:30, referring to the false teachers rising among them he writes:

*From among your own selves (ex humōn autōn). In sheep's clothing just as Jesus had foretold. The outcome fully justified Paul's apprehensions as we see in Colossians, Ephesians, I and II Timothy, Revelation. False philosophy, immorality, asceticism will lead some astray (Col. 2:8, 18; Eph. 4:14; 5:6). John will picture "antichrists" who went out from us because they were not of us (1 John 2:18f.).*

([https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word\\_Pictures#3180](https://accordance.bible/link/read/Word_Pictures#3180))

#### Colossians 2:20

Paul's points regarding the supremacy of Christ (Col 1:15-20), the Colossians possession of, and relationship to, Christ (Col 1:21-2:7), and the bankruptcy of false teaching (Col 2:8-19), have been begging the question he now asks directly. He begins with the Greek, first-class conditional clause, εἰ *ei*, translated as **if** or even **since** being that it refers to a situation assumed to be true. In other words, Paul is asking a rhetorical question to show the ridiculousness of listening to the false teachers. He has already established that they had died to the elemental spirits of the world through their faith in Christ (2:8-15). So why then would they pretend to be **alive in the world**, and **submit to regulations**? The Colossians were no different than Paul, who wrote to the Galatians that:

**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)**

Paul used the Greek word δογματίζω *dogmatizō*, translated as **regulations**, to ask why they would come under the official *dogma* of the world. The issue ultimately came down to which paradigm they were living, Christ's or the world's.

### ■ Dig Deeper

According to Webster's Dictionary a dogma is a, *formally stated and authoritatively settled doctrine; a definite, established, and authoritative tenet.*

(<https://accordance.bible/link/read/Webster#71169>)

### Colossians 2:21

Paul is likely quoting three negative and well known regulations having to do with with purity (**do not handle...do not touch**) and food (**do not eat**) to illustrate his point in the previous verse (Col 2:20) defining what kinds of **regulations** (Gk, δογματίζω *dogmatizo*) he is speaking of. Though it is tempting to see OT purity laws here, Paul is using these rituals to illustrate **the elemental spirits of the world** (Col 2:20), associated with the **philosophy and empty deceit of human tradition** (Col 2:8). He is likely addressing in general, using the common ritual wisdom of the day, the bankruptcy of a meritorious righteousness of do's and don'ts. The Colossians, who had already died to these (Col 2:20) and who were already related to Christ (Col 1:20-23, 27; 2:1-2, 6-7, 19) had no business embracing a ritual approach to God.

### ■ Dig Deeper

To the idea that Paul is quoting famous phrases here look to his answer to the Corinthians, where he is also likely quoting a famous regulation practiced in that day when he says: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman" (1 Cor 7:1). He does it again later in the same letter when he writes: "**All things are lawful,**" and then qualifies it saying **but not all things are helpful**, and **not all things build up** (1 Cor 10:23).

### ■ Dig Deeper

Calvin understood the general sense of these regulatory phrases, and brought them into the modern day calling them what he termed *popery*: (<https://accordance.bible/link/read/Calvin#90680>)

### Colossians 2:22

Paul is making a parenthetical statement here to show the transitory, **perishable**, nature of materialistic rituals (Col 2:21) to bolster his basic assertion regarding their human, rather than Divine, origin. He is not saying something unique or previously unheard of but traces the basic argument recorded by Christ himself in both **Matthew** and **Mark** (Matt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23). At the most basic level the point is that food goes to the stomach not the heart (Mk 7:18). The one choosing to not **handle**, **taste**, or **touch** (Col 2:21), misses the point of the OT Law which was to reveal Man's sin nature (Rom 3:1-20). Paul makes this plain in Romans when he says:

**I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.** (Rom 14:14)

The problem was not food but the heart. Any **precept and teaching** saying otherwise was false.

■ Dig Deeper

The prophet Isaiah makes a similar point regarding outward religion when he says:

**And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men** (Isa 29:13)

■ Dig Deeper

Christ used the sermon on the mount to make the case that the Law was meant to reveal one's sin nature even as it revealed one's only true savior. The Law both pointed to Christ as the fulfillment (Matt 5:17) and Man as the one in need of righteousness. In other words, hate is not the same as murder but it is coming from the same heart (Matt 5:21-26). Lust is not the same as adultery but it is coming from the same heart (Matt 5:27-30). The Law itself was no hope then but it revealed hope in pointing to Christ.

**Colossians 2:23**

Paul acknowledges the visible attractiveness of false teaching by recognizing that it **indeed** has **the appearance** (Gk, λόγος *logos*) **of wisdom** but is really **promoting self-made**, not Divine, **religion**. Paul's use of the Greek word λόγος *logos*, translated as **appearance** here, contrasts directly with the Greek word λόγος *logos*, translated **Word**, to speak of Christ in John 1 (Jn 1:1-18). This corresponds perfectly with Paul's beginning remarks here in Colossians, which present Christ as the ultimate rebuttal to false religion (Col 1:15-2:5). In describing the visual attractiveness of this **self-made religion**, he uses the example of **asceticism and severity to the body**, bringing to mind the true self-righteous motivation behind every meritorious approach to God (Phil 3:1-16). It may appear to be valuable but it is **of no actual value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh**. In other words, the entire thing is a charade, adding no value on the true path to sanctification in Christ.