



## A Commentary on the Book of Colossians

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### [Bibliography](#)

### Introduction

1. *Author* - The epistle claims to have been written by the apostle Paul (1:1,23,24). This is now accepted by most all conservative scholars. Some liberal critics disagree because of the advanced teaching and unique language of the letter. But this was apparently so because the doctrine that God was trying to convey needed such. The book of Colossians gives the clearest, most comprehensive teaching on Christology of all Paul's epistles. Evidence in favor of Pauline authorship is the many notable similarities to his other writings. For example, the description of the church in Colossians 2:19 is very similar to that of Romans 12:4,5 and I Corinthians 12:12-27. The teaching on the Cross in Colossians 2:14,15 parallels the teaching of II Corinthians 5:19-21 and Galatians 3:13. Colossians is also very similar in content to Ephesians and Philemon, with about one fourth of Colossians actually contained in the book of Ephesians. Most commentators are certain that Paul was indeed the author.

2. *Destination of the letter* - The epistle to the Colossians was written to the church at Colosse, probably between 60 and 63 AD. It was written from Rome during Paul's 'first' imprisonment, at which time he also wrote Ephesians and Philemon. According to Acts 28:30, Paul was in Rome during this time and in both Ephesians and Philemon he refers to himself as being a prisoner (Eph. 3:1,4:1, Phn. 1,9). These three epistles were carried by Tychicus and Onesimus also with further instruction for the churches. Timothy is seen as being with Paul during this time, as well as some others, but most notably is Epaphras, who apparently started their church (Col. 1:7), and seems to have been either there in prison with Paul or previously been imprisoned with him (Phn. 23). It is thought that Epaphras came to Rome and told Paul of the heresy there and this is why Paul wrote the letter. It appears that Paul never had visited Colosse, but we really can't know for sure (Col.1:7;2:1). We do know that he had been through the area twice, on his second and third missionary journeys (Galatia to Troas, Acts 16:4-8 / Galatia to Ephesus, Acts 18:23;19:1).

3. *The city of Colosse* - Colosse was located toward the midsouthern region of Asia Minor, which today is modern Turkey. The epistle itself mentions two neighboring cities: Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 2:1; 4:13-16). The city was on the Lycus River about 125 miles almost due east of the capital of Ephesus in the Lycus valley at the foot of Mount Cadmus. Under the Persian kings, it had been "a populous city, prosperous and great", but by the time of the writing it seems to have declined in importance in relation to its two neighbors. The inhabitants of Colosse were mostly Phrygians, with a strong influence of Greek culture. From this influence we see a tendency to mystical illusion, orgiastic excitement, and ascetic rigor, with the worship of Dionysus and Cybele. There was a large Jewish community in the area which had been deported from Mesopotamia by Antiochus the Great, but the Church there and the focus of the letter seems to have been predominantly Gentile. According to Eusebius, after a year or so of the writing of this epistle, a great earthquake destroyed Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. The modern day city of Chonas was built to take its place.

4. *Purpose for the letter* - The reason Paul wrote this epistle was to combat what was later called the 'Colossian Heresy'. This is probably why Epaphras came to Rome, to seek his help on this matter. The exact nature and origin of the heresy is difficult to ascertain, and even today there are still differences of opinion. But it appears to be a forerunner to the Gnosticism of the second century. This heresy may have been the teaching of a single individual, but he was evidently a person of eloquence and influence (ch. 2:4,8,23). Now although Paul saw the potential danger of such doctrine, it does not seem to have had a major effect on these people (ch. 1:2;2:4-8). The following is seen to be true about the doctrine:

- 1). It pretended to a philosophical character (ch. 2:8: comp. vers. 3, 4).
- 2). Its advocates were, in some sense, Judaists (ch. 2:11,14,16,17).
- 3). That they practiced the worship of angels (ch. 2:10,15,18,19;1:16).
- 4). That they inculcated ascetic rules, going beyond the Mosaic Law (ch. 2:20-23).
- 5). That their whole system tended to limit the greatness and authority of Christ and the sufficiency of his redemption (ch. 2:8-10,17,19;1:14-20).
- 6). That they still assumed the character of Christian teachers, and professed to be inviting Christians to a higher and more secure spiritual life (ch.1:23,28;2:3-10,16-18,23;3:1,14,15).[1](#)

5. *Outline of the epistle* - The epistle can be broken down into the following sections:

- 1). *Introduction* (1:1-14): a typical personal introduction by Paul that consists of a greeting, a thanksgiving, and a prayer.
- 2). *Body* (1:15-4:6): the substance or doctrinal content.
  - a). *The doctrine of Jesus Christ* (1:15-23): the nature of the lordship of Jesus.
  - b). *Paul as a minister of Jesus* (1:24-2:5): proclaiming the lordship of Jesus.
  - c). *False philosophy versus true faith* (2:6-3:4): the lordship of Jesus versus the false teaching at Colosse.
  - d). *Practical Christian living* (3:5-4:6) the lordship of Jesus in practical life.
- 3). *Conclusion* (4:7-18): a typical personal conclusion by Paul that mentions the messengers, sends greetings to and from various Christians, and closes with a farewell.

## **Commentary**

### ***Introduction***

**1:1** *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*] This is a typical salutation of the times. Today, we wait until the end of the letter to identify the writer, but in the first century they would put it in the beginning. This book begins by identifying Paul as the author. This is almost universally accepted now (see *Author* in intro.). This word apostle, means ‘messenger.’ Paul was not claiming to be one of ‘the twelve’ (I Cor. 15:5), but was claiming an authority and ministry like theirs. Paul was not chosen by the will of any man, but was chosen and a ‘messenger’ of Jesus Christ himself (Gal. 1:1,15,16).

*and Timothy our brother*] Although Timothy is seen here with Paul as he so often was, he is not to be understood as taking part in the actual composition of the epistle. He may have been the scribe who penned it, and why Paul includes him in the salutation.

**1:2** *To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse*:] *Saints* literally means separated, sanctified ones, or holy ones, and seems to have referred to those who professed to be a believer, whether or not they actually lived up to it, much like the term *Christian* is used today. This term is also used of people in the Old Testament, and not exclusively of the church. Paul calls the brothers here *faithful* which is from the same word which is used for *faith*, throughout our New Testament. Those called *faithful* would be those whose lives were characterized by faith.

*Grace to you and peace*] Here Paul combines both the Greek (*charein*, hail or here *charis*, grace) and Hebrew (*shalom*, peace) salutations of this time, so as to include both Jewish and Gentile readers.

*from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*] This entire greeting is found in every one of Paul's epistles, but in this one, *and the Lord Jesus Christ* is omitted by many manuscripts, several versions, and some of the apostolic fathers and is why modern translations do not contain it.

**1:3** *We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*] We; Timothy and I (1:1). Inasmuch as Jesus was fully human, God was both his God and Father. As Abraham was looked to as the head of all believers in the Old Testament, it rightly calls God "the God of Abraham", whereas in the New Testament we look to Jesus as the head of the believers, and it refers to God as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So as much as Jesus is distinguished from the Father in this passage, he is distinguished from being God altogether. If we consistently approach other distinctions in scripture with this same understanding, then we will quickly see that any preconceived idea of multiple persons within the Godhead will soon fall apart. The distinction is always deity and humanity, spirit and flesh, Father and Son, never God and God.

*praying always for you,*] Paul goes on to encourage the Colossians that he is continually praying for them. We see that Paul begins his prayer with giving thanks, moves on to his petition in this and following verses, and then ends with thanksgiving again in verse twelve. We see a similar pattern in the Lord's prayer, where Jesus begins and ends his prayer with praise. We should never approach God asking him for things, but first take time to count our blessings and acknowledge who he is.

**1:4** *since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;*] This seems to indicate that Paul had not visited this church in person (see intro, dest. and 2:1). This verse is very similar to Eph. 1:15 and may indicate similar situations. Now Paul commends the Colossians for their faith and love here. He routinely addresses faith, love, and hope when writing to the various churches. He would commend them for the areas in which they were strong and then spend much of the letter trying to improve on their weaknesses. These are seen to be the three fundamentals of Christian life, (see I Cor. 13:13).

**1:5** *because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven,*] Paul goes on to commend the church for their hope, thus signifying that they were a mature church and he then addresses other issues than these three. The 'hope laid up in heaven' here is eternal life; thus he is actually referring to the object of the hope itself.

So in this letter we notice that Paul goes beyond just mentioning faith, love, and hope but continues to explain what the direction of each of these three virtues should be. We need to have faith *in Christ Jesus*, love *for all the saints* (as well as others), and hope for eternal life.

*of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,*] Before, or originally, they had been taught the truth of the Gospel. Now there is a heresy being taught here which is the occasion of this epistle (see intro, purpose).

**1:6** *which has come to you, as it has also in all the world,*] The world in view in that day was the Roman empire. Still though, this is an obvious use of hyperbole as in verse 23 (also Rom. 1:8). I think though that the point of the passage is that the gospel came to the church in Colosse just "as" it had come to all the other churches. They had no excuse for accepting the Colossian Heresy.

*and is bringing forth fruit,*] This is the nature of the gospel, it is the seed of the kingdom. Both the critical text and the majority text add *and growing*, which is demonstrated in verse 10.

*as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;*] Paul is stating that the work there was not in vain, but that this church was fruitful. He is also reiterating that what they heard and knew originally was truth, as opposed to the false doctrine that was now being taught.

**1:7** *as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,*] Epaphras started the church here, and it is thought in Laodicea and Hierapolis also. He appears to have been the bishop over the area here, and why he himself went to Paul in regards to this heresy.

**1:8** *who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.*] Epaphras gave him a good report concerning the church in Colosse, but he was concerned of the potential of the heresy there.

**1:9** *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you,*] Paul gives their love in the Spirit

as another reason that they were praying for them. Apparently this must be different from the *love to all the saints* he mentioned earlier.

*and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*] In 1:4 I mentioned the three fundamentals Paul addresses in each epistle (see 1:4). Now these three (*knowledge, wisdom, and understanding*) are what Paul always says that he is praying for each of the churches. If faith, hope and love are the areas in which we are expected to grow in spirit, then knowledge, wisdom and understanding are the areas of truth that we need to mature in. Jesus said that those who would worship God must worship him in both spirit and truth (John 4:24). A healthy balance of both is vital to the Christian walk.

*Knowledge*, here means to fully perceive, recognize, or know. *Wisdom*, is the insight into the true nature of things, or wisdom. *Understanding*, literally means to put together, or to understand. This is here modified by the word *spiritual*, so the understanding in mind is that of spiritual things.

It is interesting to note that Paul here held knowledge, wisdom and understanding in high regard, even though the Colossian Heresy appealed to such things. He warns later against the philosophy of man (2:8), and had earlier mentioned the importance of truth (1:6). So the potential danger in seeking wisdom is no reason to avoid it.

**1:10** *that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work*] The entire purpose of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is to be able to better please the Lord and to walk right. The end of all this enlightenment is to affect your conduct, and not for head knowledge only.

*and increasing in the knowledge of God;*] The knowledge of God is one of the results of growing in the knowledge of his will, mentioned in the preceding verse. In order to better know God, you must first know his will and then walk according to it. The better you know his character, the better you will know him.

**1:11** *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power,*] The only way that any of this is possible is by strength from God. He gives us the ability to do his will (Ppns. 2:13).

*for all patience and longsuffering with joy;*] Spiritual strength produces three characteristics:

1. *Patience*: endurance, or patience that conquers obstacles.
2. *Longsuffering*: patience especially with people.
3. *Joyfulness*: rejoicing, especially in times of tribulation.

**1:12** *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*] Before we deserved only death. But now as the sons of God we are equally qualified to receive the inheritance with Christ himself.

**1:13** *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*] Before the power of darkness dominated our lives, but now we are free from that power in the kingdom of Jesus.

**1:14** *in whom we have redemption through His blood,*] This shows salvation as somewhat of a rescue by a sovereign power. At the present our soul and spirit have been redeemed, but we still await the redemption of the body (I Cor. 6:20; Rom. 8:19-23; Eph. 1:13,14). Both the critical text and the majority text omit *through His blood* here, but it is undisputed in verse 20 and in the parallel passage of Ephesians 1:7, and is also taught in I Peter 1:18-19.

*the forgiveness of sins.*] This is also accomplished through his blood. *Forgiveness*, here literally means 'to take away', and is this same word also translated *remission* throughout the New Testament.

### ***The Doctrine of Jesus Christ***

**1:15** *He is the image of the invisible God,*] Some translations render who instead of he here. Either way, it is still talking about the same person, Jesus Christ. Image here is translated from *eikon*, which we get our word icon from. Now this may be misleading because in our language icon means only a mere representation of something and not the

actual substance. But Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is "the express image of his person" (person, - substance). Vine explains:

'the image of the invisible God' gives the additional thought suggested by the word 'invisible,' that Christ is the visible representation and manifestation of God to created beings

*the firstborn over all creation.*] *Firstborn* here does not suggest that Jesus was born before anyone else in creation. He was born at least 4,000 years after the first man. This is referring more to his priority to and preeminence over all creation. Barclay explains:

In Hebrew and Greek thought the word firstborn (*prototokos*) has only very indirectly a time significance . . . . Firstborn is very commonly a title of honour.

**1:16** *For by Him all things were created*] *By* (, literally 'in') This is a plain statement of fact. Jesus Christ created the universe. Now this does not mean that he did it as the Son, or that he even did it as Jesus. Rather it means that the one who later became the Son created the universe. Prior to the incarnation he existed throughout eternity as Jehovah God himself. But because he was not Son, or even Jesus at that time does not mean that we cannot now say that the Son or Jesus created the worlds. Just as you may say that President Clinton was born in Oklahoma. It's obvious that he was not the president when he was born.

*that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible,*] Not only the visible world, but also the invisible and supernatural beings, which the Colossians apparently worshipped in that day, were all created by this same Jesus.

*whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*] *Thrones, etc.* is in reference to some sort of a hierarchy of authority in the angelic realm, whether fallen or heavenly angels (comp. Eph. 6:12). Now this *through Him* (, through or by means of) may seem to some to make Jesus an intermediate agent used by God to create the worlds. But Hebrews 2:10 uses this same word in reference to God, the Father in saying "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things."

**1:17** *And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*] He is now presently before all things because God presently dwells in the past, present, and future. All things consist in him because he is everywhere and more. Not only does God fill space, but space exists within him.

**1:18** *And He is the head of the body, the church,*] *Head*, can be taken to mean either origin or authority. Either way, the church is his body and he is its head.

*who is the beginning,*] Since he is the creator of all things, he literally is the beginning (see 1:16).

*the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*] Now here firstborn is seen in both its senses. He not only was the first to be born into the resurrection, but he also has the preeminence of the firstborn (see *prototokos*, 1:15).

**1:19** *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,*] The fullness in view here is the fullness of the Godhead, or deity (2:9). *Fullness* here comes from (to fill) and is used to signify completeness or fullness. Now the *fullness* is of the Godhead, not of him. This is not saying that he was full of God, but that he had the completeness of what God is dwelling within himself. *Dwell* denotes a permanent state as opposed to a temporary one.

**1:20** *and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself,*] "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," (II Cor. 5:19). Because of sin, man was separated from God. So God had to reverse the effects of sin and reconcile us back to him.

*by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven,*] The effects of sin effected the whole world. Not just man alone, but the actual earth, even the dirt was cursed (Gen. 3:17-19). The things in heaven would seem to mean those who had died and gone to paradise. They were never reconciled under the old covenant, so their reconciliation would have to take place at this same time. It would seem illogical for this to refer to any one else. We see no suggestion that angels, or that heaven itself were cursed.

*having made peace through the blood of His cross.] His blood is the way in which this reconciliation took place. "Without shedding of blood is no remission," (Heb. 9:22).*

**1:21** *And you, who once were alienated]* In times past, we were alienated from God, without hope and in the world (Eph. 2:12).

*and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled]* The mind is what kept us from God. When we sin, our conscience tells us that is wrong and convicts us. The only way to continue in sin is to block God from our minds (Rom. 1:28). Your mind will not allow you to sin and still have communion with God.

**1:22** *in the body of His flesh through death,]* By the incarnation of God and his death we can be reconciled.

*to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight;]* Jesus will present the church to himself without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). This is due to justification by faith where we are imputed the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:23-25).

**1:23** *if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,]* We can be secure of our salvation (II Peter 1:10), but this is not an unconditional security. Many times the Bible gives the understanding of being saved if you continue (Rom. 11:22; I Cor. 15:2). Now this does not mean that our own effort keeps us saved, it is only the power of God which keeps us (I Peter 1:5). But genuine faith will produce works (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:14-18).

*which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.]* Once again we see the use of hyperbole (see verse 6), but the focus is that the gospel is universal. Paul claims to be a minister of the same gospel that is preached everywhere else.

### ***Paul as a Minister of Jesus***

**1:24** *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you,]* Paul had learned to be content in whatever state he was in and to take pleasure in sufferings (Ppns. 4:11; II Cor. 12:10).

*and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ,]* Now what Paul cannot have in view here is that somehow Jesus did not suffer enough to save us and that he must now finish the part. It seems more reasonable to think the sufferings he refers to are for the building up of the body of Christ. In this sense he left much work and suffering to be done. So the 'remainder' of the suffering of Christ at any time is that which is lacking for the full establishment of his kingdom.

In Romans 8:17, Paul states that if we suffer with Christ then we will also be glorified together with him. Union with Christ means taking part in who he is and what he does. The Old Testament foretold of both a suffering messiah and a glorious messiah. So if we choose to be united with him then we are partakers of both. You can't pick and choose which part you want. But it is because of this union that we are able to be called joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). The only thing that qualifies us to inherit eternal life is our connection with him. As the only begotten Son of God, that is his inheritance. And since we are united with him, it will be ours too.

*for the sake of His body, which is the church,]* Of course, one purpose for this affliction was so that the church could grow and the gospel could be propagated.

**1:25** *of which I became a minister]* Having received special commission from God (see 1:1).

*according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you,]* Stewardship, is rendered *dispensation* in the KJV. The idea is the management of a household. A period of time is definitely not what is in view here, "but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs."[5](#)

*to fulfill the word of God,]* Fulfill comes from the word which is related to (*fullness*, 1:19), and hence signifies complement or fulfillment. This is the word used throughout the gospels for the fulfillment of prophecy. Paul was fulfilling the word of God in giving them the dispensation of grace. He goes on to say that it was a mystery which was

hid before, so he could not be fulfilling prophecy if the prophets didn't see the church (see 1:26). He must have been fulfilling the command given to him by God himself (see 1:1).

**1:26** *the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.]* The mystery of the church was not seen in the Old Testament (see also Eph. 3:1-7). The prophets did prophecy of Gentiles being saved, but through the redeemed nation of Israel, not on equal terms with the Gentiles (see 3:11, also Gal. 3:28). Furthermore, this gap between Jesus suffering and his reigning was not seen of them either. God had not revealed this mystery to anyone before, but he has now revealed it to his saints.

**1:27** *To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles:]* God revealed this to them because it was his will and he works all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

*which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.]* The mystery also included Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost (which is Christ in you). This is the reason that we have hope of eternal life (Rom. 8:11).

**1:28** *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.]* Once again, wisdom is seen as being necessary in the processes of growing in Christ (see verse 9). Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are vital in going anywhere in Jesus.

**1:29** *To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.]* Paul says that he labors for this perfection, but that what he does is the grace of God working through him (I Cor. 15:10; Eph. 2:8-10).

**2:1** *For I want you to know what a great conflict I have]* This conflict (English 'agony') seems to have been in his spirit and is reflected in his prayers. This is shown of Epaphras also in 4:12. Paul expounds on the reasons for his conflict in the following verse.

*for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,]* This seems to indicate that Paul had not been to Colosse as mentioned before. See *Destination*.

**2:2** *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, ]* Here the purpose of his conflict is seen that they may: 1. be encouraged 2. be in unity 3. have complete understanding-which leads to the knowledge of the mystery.

*to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,]* To understand the Oneness of God, namely that of the Father and of Christ is the mystery that Paul desired for them to understand. To know God as our Father, or Creator as the Jews did is not enough, but we must also know him as the one who came and died for us. This is the same mystery mentioned in I Tim 3:16, that of the incarnation.

**2:3** *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.]* Once again we see that Paul has emphasized knowledge, wisdom and understanding (see 1:9). But he points to Jesus Christ as being the source, not human philosophy (verse 8). This is also a statement to Jesus' omniscience.

**2:4** *Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. ]* If the believer is grounded in the true knowledge, wisdom and understanding which comes from Christ then he will not be deceived when false doctrine comes. There's a whole lot more we need to learn than just Acts 2:38. That's why these epistles were written. Note also that Paul once said that he did not come to preach the gospel with enticing words, but with demonstration of the Spirit and power (I Cor. 2:4).

**2:5** *For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit,]* Now this may either be a metaphor or a reference to one of the gifts of the Spirit.



*rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.*] He affirms here that the church is doing well. Verse 4 warned them against the heresy, but verse 5 indicates that Paul had confidence in them.

### ***False Philosophy versus True Faith***

**2:6** *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,*] First off, this is another admonition for the believers to continue in what they had originally received. Second, this portrays the Christian experience as somewhat of a journey. Salvation was not something that transpired only in the past, but is something we are continually progressing in. Thirdly, Paul is telling the Colossians to become what they are, or to live out experientially what they already are positionally. They were saved, born again, received Jesus - now walk in him. They have been officially adopted as sons of God, now act like it. As was indicated earlier, in order to walk in him one must grow in spirit and in truth (see 1:9-10).

**2:7** *rooted and built up in Him*] Once again, this shows both the origin and progression of the saving process. *Rooted* is in the perfect tense. *Built up* is in the present tense.

*and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving*] Here we see yet another reference to holding on to what they were originally taught. This is a strong theme throughout the epistles. The apostles were continually warning the churches not to be deceived by "another gospel" or "false doctrine" or "man's philosophy." No wonder there are so many different churches today, all teaching different things. People were starting to stray from the original truth while the apostles were still living. We must also strive to abide in the truth that was originally taught by the apostles and not stray away as so many others have done.

**2:8** *Beware lest anyone cheat you*] *Beware* (- to see, watch, take heed) indicates that this is something that you need to watch out for. What we can be "cheated of" is explained in verse 18 as being our salvation. From here through verse 23, Paul will be listing certain things that we are to **beware** of, lest we lose our salvation by them.

*through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.* ] Here Paul lists some things that have the potential of cheating us out of our salvation:

1. *philosophy*, in this context signifies false, human philosophy as opposed to the wisdom of God.
2. *empty deceit*, or vain, useless deception. *Philosophy* and *empty deceit* both share one article in the Greek, thus signifying that they both refer to the same thing. The NIV combines the two as "*hollow and deceptive philosophy*."
3. *the tradition of men*, was referred to by Jesus as vain worship when it is taught as doctrine (Mark 7:7).
4. *the basic principles of the world*, is a reference to the law of Moses (as seen in Gal. 4:3-5,9). *Basic principles* is translated from the word *arche* and "signifies any first things from which others in a series, or a composite whole, take their rise; the word denotes 'an element, first principle'; it was used of the letters of the alphabet, as elements of speech."<sup>6</sup> Thus the law was the *first principle* that was only intended to lead us to Christ, but now that we have him it is no longer needed (Gal. 3:24-25). It was what we might call the ABC's of life. But now we are expected to have matured past the ABC's stage and to act as adults would.

**2:9** *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;*] see also 1:19. The completeness of deity continues to dwell *bodily* in Jesus Christ; not only in his spirit but deity dwelt and still dwells in his body. This is in opposition to the idea that God "robed himself in flesh" which I have heard so many times. Jesus Christ is not God with skin on. God did not "put on" Jesus the way that you put on a jacket. But the word, (which was God), *became* flesh (John 1:1,14). This is why the blood shed on Calvary is referred to as God's blood by the holy scripture (Acts 20:28). This is why Jehovah was able to say, "*they will look on Me whom they pierced*" (*Zech. 12:10*). This was emphasized to combat the early forms of docetism that existed here which paved the way for the full blown gnosticism of the second century.

**2:10** *and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*] *In him* is the completeness of deity, so when we are *in him*, we also are complete. All of these other things that he is warning against are just not necessary when you have Jesus. They are in fact void and empty. The main theme of Colossians is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, it has demonstrated his authority, his preeminence, his omniscience, his omnipotence and his deity - he is the fullness!



**2:11** *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,*] This is a reference to water baptism as explained in the next verse. It is at baptism that our sins are *put off* or "washed away," (Acts 22:16). Scripture also tells us that baptism remits (, to send away) our sins (Acts 2:38).

**2:12** *buried with Him in baptism,*] also Romans 6:3. He says we are buried with *Him*, not *Them*. The readers of this letter would not have associated baptism so exclusively with Jesus had they routinely used the phrase "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

*in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*] Here Paul states that we identify with Christ in his burial and resurrection at water baptism. In Romans 6:3&4, he makes the connection with his death and burial. This would defeat the idea that some have taught that repentance = death, baptism = burial, and the Holy Ghost = resurrection. It is at baptism that we are identified with the person of Christ which includes his death, his burial, and his resurrection. It is here that we take on his name which represents himself and would include all that he is.

**2:13** *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,* ] In the past 11 verses there have been 10 references to someone or something either being *in Christ* or *with Him*. This union with Christ is a strong theme of the New Testament. Since we have seen in the preceding verses that this union is made when we are baptized into Jesus Christ (also Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), it is essential that we teach baptism as part of the normal Christian experience, not as just a nice, optional extra. It is also restated here that it is when we are united with him that our sins are forgiven. He contrasts our former *being dead* with now being *made alive*. This is why it is called the new birth.

**2:14** *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*] This explains how he has forgiven us. He fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law as well as the penalty for breaking it. It was contrary to us because it continually condemned us (II Cor. 3:9), and also because it aroused in us a desire to disobey it (Rom. 7). The language in this verse is also very clear as to the complete termination of the law of Moses.

**2:15** *Having disarmed principalities and powers,*] By taking away the law, Jesus disarmed the devil or took away his grounds for condemning us. There is now no condemnation for the accuser of the brethren to use against us, (Rom. 8:1; Rev. 12:10).

*He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*] We also notice that in doing this, he made an open spectacle of them. He laughed in the devil's face and mocked him publicly. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

**2:16** *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,*] The requirement to do these things has been done away with so there is no more obligation to keep them. Because of this, we are at liberty to seek out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and not to be judged by others. Notice that he doesn't mention things like lying, stealing, murder and adultery. Although these things were forbidden in the law of Moses, they are also against God's holy character and are forbidden in every dispensation.

**2:17** *which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*] As Paul explains in Galatians 3:24-25, the reason for these things was to point to Christ. They have served their purpose.

**2:18** *Let no one cheat you of your reward,*] Paul is explaining that you can lose your salvation over these things.

*taking delight in false humility and worship of angels,*] Paul lists false humility and angel worship along with the things we are to beware of in verse 8.

*intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,*] Fake humility goes hand-in-hand with someone who is puffed up and speaks of what he doesn't know. This is most likely referring to the teacher of this heresy and the singular pronoun "he" may indicate that it was the work of a single individual.

**2:19** *and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.*] This is the whole problem in a nutshell. Jesus is what will keep us together. We are complete in him (verse 10). Over and over again Paul has emphasized the all sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

**2:20** *Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations*] It is now obvious that Paul is indeed referring to the law when he speaks of the *basic principles of the world* (see verse 8). Since Jesus removed these principles there is no need to be subject to them. We died with him from them. But there seemed to be some strong desire of the Jews to keep going back under the law. The phrase *as though living in the world* is a hint of our heavenly citizenship (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 11:16).

**2:21** *"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"*] This is a description of asceticism, the idea of abstaining from everything. This could also refer to different aspects of the law.

**2:22** *which all concern things which perish with the using*] These things are material (*of the world*) and will all pass away eventually.

*according to the commandments and doctrines of men?*] Once Jesus nailed the law to the cross, any attempt to enforce it, (or any other law system), is only the commandments of men, which we have already noted is vain worship (verse 8; Mark 7:7).

**2:23** *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom*] These things really do sound good to someone with an ascetic mindset - torment the body into subjection.

*in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*] Although these do have an appearance of wisdom, the scripture calls it neglect and says that it has no value against lust. That battle is only won by being led of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17).

**3:1** *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above,*] So in opposition to the ideas of asceticism, the way to overcome the flesh is not by constantly fighting against it, but to focus on things above instead. So he is not saying that since the law is over you can just go ahead and sin, but he is saying that we need to give our attention to spiritual things.

*where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*] The *right hand of God* is a metaphor representing the power and authority of God. The right arm was a symbol of strength to the Jews. This in no way suggests a spatial location. If it did, where would the right hand of an omnipresent spirit be? *At the right hand* is somewhat similar to our modern saying of "my right hand man." No one would understand that to refer to a literal right hand, and neither should we interpret this passage that way.

**3:2** *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*] As stated in Romans 8:6, *"to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."* Since we have been raised with Christ as stated in the previous verse, we are no longer of this world but are citizens of a heavenly city (2:20; Eph 2:19; Heb. 11:16). Because of this we should not give our attention to the cares of this world.

**3:3** *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*] He reiterates that to this world we are dead, and our life is now with Christ.

**3:4** *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*] Notice the connection between

our lives and his. He died, we died. He lives, we live. He will appear in glory, and we will appear with him. He will reign on this earth and we will reign with him. What a loving savior to include us in all that he does! What a blessed thing to have union with Christ!

### ***Practical Christian Living***

**3:5** *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth:*] Paul had just got done talking about our being dead and now he tells us to put to death our members. This is the idea of becoming what you are discussed in 2:6. Officially we are dead to sin, dead to the world. But we must constantly kill the desires of the flesh in our everyday lives.

*fornication,*] - illicit sexual intercourse

*uncleanness,*] - literally, uncleanness or impurity

*passion,*] - an affection or feeling which the mind suffers; passionate desire

*evil desire,*] - strong desire of any kind, here modified by the word evil

*and covetousness,*] - literally, a desire to have more; greed

*which is idolatry.*] Greed is in effect idolatry. One is serving his fleshly desires as if they were his priority instead of God.

**3:6** *Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,*] Very simply, it is because of sin that God's wrath comes upon the sinner. *Is coming* is in the present tense, so this signifies wrath now coming upon them, which will continue until it is poured out without mixture in the tribulation (Rev. 14:10).

**3:7** *in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*] Paul is reminding them that they once did these things and are in fact no better than the sons of disobedience without God's grace.

**3:8** *But now you yourselves are to put off all these:*] Now that you have been born again, these are the things you must get rid of. He uses the word picture of *put off* as one would put off a coat or something. This demonstrates that this is something we must actively get rid of. Now this in no way nullifies God's grace in our lives, but it demonstrated that when you allow him to, his grace will work in you, "*to will and to do for his good pleasure*" (Ppns. 2:13).

*anger,*] - anger, indignation, a constant steady anger

*wrath,*] - angry heat, or anger that boils up and settles quickly; fury

*malice,*] - malignity, malice, ill-will, desire to injure

*blasphemy,*] - slander, detraction, speech injurious to another's good name

*filthy language out of your mouth.*] - foul speaking; low and obscene speech

**3:9** *Do not lie to one another,*] Quit lying!

*since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*] There is one sense in which this has already been done. When we died with Christ, our old man died. But now we must live out practically what has taken place spiritually. Become what you are. In Romans 6:2, Paul states that we are dead to sin, and in verse 11 he tells us to, "*reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin.*" Acknowledge what has already taken place and apply it.

**3:10** *and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge*] The *new man* is one who has been *renewed in knowledge*. Knowledge is necessary if a change is going to occur. (see 1:9)

*according to the image of Him who created him,*] God created the *new man* to be conformed to his image. Originally, man was created in God's image. But after the fall that image was marred, and it is only by being born again that it is restored. Of course the final restoration, (that of our bodies), will not take place until the resurrection (Rom. 8:23).

**3:11** *where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free,*] Simply stated, God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He does not favor someone because of their nationality or their social status. This does not mean that ethnic distinctions magically disappear when one is born again. Paul still called Peter a Jew after his conversion (Gal. 2:14), and claimed to be a Hebrew himself (Ppns. 3:5). But what this does mean is that this is not what is important in God's eyes.

*but Christ is all and in all.*] Once again, Jesus is everything we need, which is why we are complete in him (2:10).

**3:12** *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on*] As he listed the things that we are to put off, he now tells us what to put on. *Elect* means chosen ones. As Jesus said in John 15:16, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.*"

*tender mercies,*] Literally, bowels of mercies, as in the KJV. From- intestines, and - pity, compassion for the ills of others. The bowels, the heart, the belly were all symbolic of the inner man or the seat of emotions to the Jews. Hence the ASV's rendering, "*a heart of compassion.*"

*kindness,*] - goodness of heart; kindness

*humility,*] - literally, lowliness of mind

*meekness,*] - gentleness, mildness, meekness

*longsuffering;*] - literally, long-tempered; patience, forbearance, endurance

**3:13** *bearing with one another,*] To *bear with* can either signify "to put up with", or "to hold up." The remainder of the verse seems to indicate that it is the former which is in view here.

*and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*] Jesus was our example of forgiveness and told us that, "*if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (Mat. 6:14-15).

**3:14** *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*] We see here the preeminence of love. Jesus called it the first commandment (Mark 12:30). Paul called it the greatest of the three principle virtues (I Cor. 13:13). Peter listed it as the final thing to add after a list of virtues (II Peter 1:7). John made the statement that, "*God is love*" (I John 4:8). And here it is referred to as the *bond of perfection*. Love is the final outgrowth of our Christian walk, or the "*end of the commandment*" (I Tim. 1:5). It is "*that which is perfect*" (I Cor 13:10).

**3:15** *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts,*] Christians are to let the *peace of God* rule us instead of the desires of our carnal nature. Anything that has power over us, or rules us besides God is sinful (I Cor. 6:12).

*to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.*] In order to function together as one body without any schism (I Cor. 12:25), we must have peace. We're in this thing together and need have peace with one another and *bear with one another* (verse 13). He also exhorts us to be thankful.

**3:16** *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,*] The life of a Christian should be based upon the word of God. David told the Lord, "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You*" (Psalms 119:11). Application of God's word to our lives is true wisdom.

*teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*] Firstly, this shows us that we can teach and admonish one another in our singing. The songs that we sing in church should not only be doctrinally correct, but they should also be informative. Secondly, a closer look at the word *psalms* will refute the teaching of some that we should not have music in church. A *psalm* is a song set to music.

**3:17** *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,* ] *In the name of the Lord Jesus* does not always mean verbalizing his name as it does in water baptism. Rather it signifies, "according to his purpose." As Christians, we should our lives with his purpose in mind.

*giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* ] This demonstrates the mediatory role of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "*No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). He also told us to pray to the Father in his name (John 16:23). This is not denying that he is indeed God the Father manifest in flesh (I Tim. 3:16; I John 3:1,5), but only recognizing that as a genuine human being he was distinct from Father God. "*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*" (I Tim. 2:5). (see 1:3)

**3:18** *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.* ]

**3:19** *Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.* ] Now this was something completely foreign to the people of that day. Wives were expected to submit to their husbands without question, but husbands were never told to love their wives. As we shall see, Paul not only endorses what was already commonly taught on these issues during that time, but he gives the flip side for each of them. The book of Ephesians expounds a little more on this topic and demonstrates that a husbands love for his wife is symbolic of Christ's love for the church. (see Eph. 5:21-33)

**3:20** *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.* ] The obedience called for here is an absolute obedience (- to listen, hearken). Of course when the two conflict, we are to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29), and there is no indication in scripture that adults are required to obey their parents, although we are always expected to honor our parents (Eph. 6:2).

**3:21** *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.* ] So that Fathers will not abuse the command for children to obey their parents, they are told not to provoke their children. Once again, he balances the already established command with the flip side.

**3:22** *Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.* ] Once again he calls for absolute obedience, using the same word as in 3:20. This was already an accepted rule, but Paul is letting the converted slaves know that as slaves they were still expected to be obedient to their masters. It's possible that with all of the zeal about their new liberty that they would try to throw off their obligation to their masters. Paul was confirming that their obligation was still binding.

**3:23** *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,* ] When realize that we are doing these things as unto the Lord instead of as unto men then these things don't seem so bad. Everything that we do should be looked at from this perspective.

**3:24** *knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* ] Jesus honors our obedience when we do it as unto him and will reward us for our obedience. The *reward of the inheritance* he speaks of here is eternal life. In Romans, Paul calls us joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). God is naturally going to leave his inheritance to his Son, and by our identification with him, we receive the same inheritance that he does. (see also 1:24)

**3:25** *But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.* ] Just as there is reward for those who obey, there is damnation for those who disobey. God is an impartial, just judge who reward every man for what he has done (John 5:29). But the problem is that, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). It is only by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ that anyone can be counted worthy of eternal life.

**4:1** *Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.* ] Now he

returns to the master-slave relationship and admonishes masters to do unto others as they would have done unto them (Matt. 7:12). Just because they were slave owners did not mean that they could be unjust and unfair, but were to treat their slaves as brothers in the Lord. This theme is seen in the book of Philemon who is thought to have been a member of this church (see verse 9). It is interesting that Paul does not just do away with slavery and tell them that *these things ought not so to be*. But instead, he works with the prevailing culture and sets up guidelines within it as God did with polygamy in the Old Testament.

**4:2** *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;*] Here Paul admonishes the saints to *continue earnestly in prayer*. In other places he says things like *pray without ceasing* (I Thes. 5:17). Prayer is something that we as Christians should engage in regularly. It is expected to be a lifestyle for the believer. He also states that thanksgiving should be included in our prayer.

**4:3** *meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ,*] He asks them to pray that God would open the door of opportunity for him to minister. The *mystery of Christ* would seem to be that same mystery mentioned in 2:2, and also in I Tim. 3:16, which is that of the incarnation. Paul wanted to tell them about God manifest in the flesh who came and died to take away their sins.

*for which I am also in chains,*] This is an indication that Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this epistle. (see, *Destination*)

**4:4** *that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.*] That he might make that mystery known to the world so that they might believe on Jesus and be saved.

**4:5** *Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside,*] We should use wisdom in how we conduct ourselves around unbelievers. As he says elsewhere, we should not give them an occasion to speak evil of us as Christians (Rom. 14:16; I Tim. 5:14). Although certain practices may not be sinful, it may be unwise to practice them around unbelievers.

*redeeming the time.*] Make use of the short amount of time that God has allotted you on this earth and use it wisely.

**4:6** *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*] First of all, Paul is endorsing apologetics. This endorsement is given in other places in the New Testament as well (I Peter 3:15; Jude 3). Secondly, he is explaining how to apply the wisdom he spoke of in the preceding verse. We need to answer each one according to their unique understanding and situation. We are not to have a generic, one-for-all answer. But we are to respond with wisdom to each person individually.

### ***Conclusion***

**4:7** *Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.*] Tychicus was one of Paul's seven companions on his trip from Greece to Jerusalem on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). This verse seems to indicate that he was the primary carrier of this epistle, as he probably was also of the epistles to the Ephesians and to Philemon. These two verses are very similar to Ephesians 6:21 & 22 where Tychicus is also mentioned. Evidently he had more to tell the church than what Paul had written, or Paul did not want to take up space in the letter for his personal problems.

**4:8** *I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts,*] He was to tell them news about Paul that would comfort them, probably of his perseverance during this time of trial. That fact that Tychicus was also supposed to find out about their circumstances may indicate that he was expected to report back.

**4:9** *with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.*] It is here pointed out that Onesimus was from Colosse and as we know from the book of Philemon he was returning to his master who was a believer and was probably also one of them.

**4:10** *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you,*] This could mean that Aristarchus there with Paul in prison, but may not because he uses the same words of Epaphras in Philemon 23 even though he had recently traveled to Rome to visit Paul. This may have meant that they had been imprisoned with Paul at some other time. Aristarchus is seen with Paul during some of his voyages in Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2.

*with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),*] This is a reference to John Mark who had accompanied Paul and Barnabas earlier but then deserted them (Acts 13:5,13) and also the one who wrote the Gospel of Mark. It seems by this and Paul's statement in I Timothy 4:11 that Mark had proven himself to be valuable to Paul by this time.

**4:11** *and Jesus who is called Justus.*] Apparently he probably did not feel worthy to be called by the same name as Jesus Christ. This is all we know of him.

*These are my on*