Paul's Epistle to the Colossians

Chapter 2

The Mystery of Jesus Christ

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)
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I. Translation

(1) I want you to know what a great struggle I am engaging in on your behalf and on behalf of those in Laodicea and [on behalf of] as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, (2) [struggling] that your hearts may be encouraged, being instructed in love and [led] into the entire treasury of [spiritual] understanding, confidently believed, so as to [possess] the full-knowledge of the mystery of God the Father, [namely] Christ, (3) in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. (4) I say this so that no one may deceive you through persuasive talk. (5) For although I am not present there in the flesh, I am with you in my spirit, rejoicing as I watch your good order and the stability of your faith in Christ.

(6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving. (8) See to it that no one be taking [control of] you as [though you were] plunder through the [so-called] study of wisdom (lit., "philosophy") and deception [which is] devoid [of truth], [which] agrees with human tradition, [which] agrees with [speculation about] the material principles of the world, but [which does] not agree with Christ. (9) For in Him (i.e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the fullness of deity in bodily form. (10) And you have received your complete fulfillment in Him who is the Head of every ruler and [every] power. (11) In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done by hand, in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, (12) buried together with Him through the baptism [of the Holy Spirit], through which also you were resurrected [positionally] through faith in the power of God who raised Him from the dead. (13) And though you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcised state of your flesh, [God the Father] made you alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all your transgressions. (14) [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He has removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. (15) [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].

(16) So don't let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in the category of festival observances, be it of new moons or Sabbaths. (17) All these things are shadows of what was to come, but the reality has to do with Christ. (18) Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and

the adoration of angels, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, (19) yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.

(20) If you have died with Christ to these false [pagan] principles [belonging to] this world, why are you letting yourselves be [wrongly] indoctrinated as if your life were of this world? – (21) "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!", (22) even though [we know] that all these [are only] things [which] decay with use – in accordance with the commandments and teaching of [mere] men. (23) Such teachings have a [false] reputation for wisdom, but [only] in concocted religion, [false] humility, and [legalistic] harsh treatment of the body – they have no actual power to neutralize the [sinful] flesh (i.e., the sin nature is not to be controlled by these legalistic approaches).
Colossians 2:1-23

II. Summary and Paraphrase of Chapter Two

Jesus Christ is the true revelation of all of God's mysteries.

Even though I have never been to your city, nevertheless I have been committing myself to doing battle on your behalf in prayer. We may not have seen each other face to face, but I am doing all I can through intensive prayer to protect you from the dangerous heresies that are threatening to trip you up – and all the believers in Laodicea too. I pray for you to be enthusiastic about the actual truth and the proper motivation of loving the brethren. My desire is for you to embrace and to learn and to believe all of God's treasures of knowledge of the truth, to the end that you might fully understand the true mystery of God: Jesus Christ. For it is in Him that all the true treasure of wisdom and knowledge is to be found – and ***not*** in the false teachings of the Gnostics and Jewish mystics who are trying to subvert your faith with their lies. They may have persuasive arguments and titillating stories – but these are nothing but lies intended to deceive you. I may not be there with you in person, but in spirit I am walking with you hand in hand. I am joyful when you maintain your ranks as part of the Assembly of Jesus Christ, doing what He wants you to do, standing fast in your faith and trust and belief in Him – for everything depends on that.

The Christian way of life is no mystery. How did you become believers? By putting your faith in Jesus Christ. How now should you be living as believers? By learning the truth, believing it, and then doing what Christ wants you to do. Just as you believed the gospel so as to be saved, so now believe all the truth of the good news and put it into practice. That is how you should proceed, namely, by giving attention to scripture and not to false teaching. Jesus Christ is the olive tree into which you have been grafted; He is the foundation upon which you have been set – through your faith in Him. So continue in the faith – in the living Word through the written Word as you have been taught. And be thankful and grateful to the bottom of your hearts for the salvation from this world which you have received in Him. Part of that peace you should be experiencing comes from staying away from the bad even as you cleave to the good. Why would you even consider handing your free will over to deceitful dissemblers? They only wish to enslave and plunder you. They proclaim a depth of knowledge and wisdom, about the

supernatural, about the Law, but their "wisdom" is mere deception devoid of any actual truth, being merely satanic "secrets" that have everything in common with human traditions and speculation about the material principles of the world, but nothing in common with Jesus Christ and the genuinely spiritual truths that wisdom about Him contains. It is in Him, our dear Savior, that all the "fullness" of God dwells – and in bodily form! For He is God as well as a genuine human being. You will not find spiritual fulfillment anywhere else – certainly not in the Gnostic rites and Jewish rituals in which some of you are dangerously dabbling. It is only in your Savior that you are fulfilled – and in Him you have been fulfilled with true godly fulfillment (as opposed to the diabolical false promises of those who are trying to prey on you). For it is He, Jesus Christ alone, who is the Head of every ruler and of every power, seen or unseen, human or angelic, elect or fallen – and you should tell that to those among you who are being deceived by Gnosticism. And it is He, Jesus Christ alone, in whom you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision of the heart. That is how you have been given positional victory over this body of flesh – and you should tell that to those among you who are being deceived by Jewish, legalistic mysticism. By being in Christ, by being made one with Him through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you have come to share in His death which removed your sins, and it is through that same baptism of the Holy Spirit that you will share in His resurrection from the dead – as you do in fact share in it now in principle. We are only waiting for that glorious day. As Jesus was raised by the power of God, so shall we all be raised as well – all who stay faithful to Him. Before you were saved, you were spiritually dead, your sins and your sinful flesh testifying against you. But once you put your faith in Christ, the Father quickened you. He gave you eternal life, forgiving you all of your sins as those who belong to His beloved Son. Through the cross, God has erased every charge the Law leveled against us along with every count and every particular. Though sin blocked our path to life eternal, God the Father took that obstacle to salvation out of the way by nailing it to the cross of Jesus Christ. And in so doing, God has stripped the devil and all his subordinates, all his rulers and authorities, of all of their power and has in the bargain thus subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in Jesus Christ. For any of you to be tempted to engage in "legalistic mysticism" or "spiritual warfare" to do what God has already done with the cross is beyond foolish – and dangerous beyond imagination.

You are accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ – not to other people, especially not to those who are being taken in by the false teachers in your city – and most especially not to those purveyors of Satan's gnostic, mystic and legalistic lies. What you eat and drink has no spiritual import – unless you are deceived into falsely attributing spiritual importance to those necessary functions. Peddlers of Gnosticism may try to convince you that abstaining from or over-indulging in such things is a way to engage with the supernatural. It may well be – but only through contact with demons. Those who claim to teach the Law may likewise try to persuade you that only by returning to the slavery of things past can you be saved, but that too is the devil's lie. Christ has fulfilled all of the symbolism of the Law, all of which spoke of Him and His coming. But He has come! He has paid for our sins and has been resurrected! He has ascended to the Father and waits there for His enemies to be made "the footstool for His feet" – and we should be waiting for Him to return, not turning back to the shadows He has already fulfilled. By participating in the festivals and observances of the Law, you are saying in effect, that Jesus has not yet come – or that His coming had no effect. God forbid! Christ is the reality we have received. Don't slide back into those mere representations which only spoke of Him dimly. You have free will. You

exercise it for God through your faith. Don't hand your precious faith over to those charlatans. They only wish to enslave you. They may seem humble, but that is part of their act. Their humble appearance merely cloaks a colossal degree of arrogance underneath. They claim to be fighting in a secret, spiritual warfare on behalf of "good" angelic forces and against the "bad" ones. They claim to have seen and experienced the most amazing and mysterious things. Of course that sounds intriguing. The problem is that they are either lying, having made these tales up out of whole cloth . . . or what they have experienced is demonic contact with the forces of evil masquerading as angels of God. Either way, this is the energy of the sinful flesh and not true spiritually at all. These people have been completely divorced from any prior contact they may have had with Jesus Christ (if any ever believed in the first place). He is the true Head, the true Ruler of all things, seen and unseen. He is the One from whom we receive everything we need to fight the real fight believers are called upon to engage in here in the devil's world. And we do so by growing, progressing and helping others do the same, with every member of His Body helping each other according to the gifts and ministries God gives us. Only by responding to Christ and His truth can anyone ever receive any information about these matters which is godly and true. Obeying Him and His mandates for us is the only genuine way to be involved in spiritual warfare: following Jesus Christ – not the devil and his minions – is how we contribute to this fight. That is the virtuous cycle of growth that builds up the Church of Jesus Christ. We will be rewarded for such legitimate production, but casting in your lot with these frauds could cost you everything.

Haven't you died to this world by being made alive in Christ? Indeed you have. You turned your back on it when you were saved by accepting Him. You died to all of the lies which unbelievers hold dear and which lead them astray. So why are you now flirting with allowing yourself to be "re-educated" into something the Spirit and your spiritual common sense clearly tell you is wrong? They tell you "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!", as if material things had anything to do with spiritual matters. Everything material – this entire world – is destined to be destroyed. So why allow yourselves to be manipulated by what are mere human pronouncements? Isn't the truth of scripture more reliable than what these men claim to have seen but have clearly made up (inspired by demons)? They claim that their precepts and teaching embody wisdom when they are in fact worse than useless. Behind their self-effacement, behind their "mortification of the flesh", there is nothing spiritual at all. As anyone can plainly see by examining their behavior closely, they have not conquered sin. Indeed, they have become even more enslaved to it than ever – and now they seek to enslave you as well.

III. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verses One through Five

> (1) I want you to know what a great struggle I am engaging in on your behalf and on behalf of those in Laodicea and [on behalf of] as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, (2) [struggling] that your hearts may be encouraged, being instructed in love and [led] into the entire treasury of [spiritual] understanding, confidently believed, so as to [possess] the full-knowledge of the mystery of God the Father, [namely] Christ, (3) in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. (4) I say this so that no one

> may deceive you through persuasive talk. (5) For although I am not present there in the flesh, I am with you in my spirit, rejoicing as I watch your good order and the stability of your faith in Christ.
> Colossians 2:1-5

The Great Struggle:

> (15) But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. (16) For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."
> Acts 9:15-16 NKJV

> (14) Then he said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. (15) For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard."
> Acts 22:14-15 NKJV

> Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.
> Romans 1:1 NKJV

Paul took the charge he had been given by the Lord with the utmost seriousness. These words, "what a great struggle I am engaging in on your behalf", are not uttered casually. Paul meant it to the depths of his heart when he said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil.1:21 NKJV). Paul's life after his turn around on the road to Damascus was from that point onward ***all*** about Jesus Christ and, therefore, all about providing for His Body, His Bride, His Church.

> He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."
> John 21:17 NKJV

The struggle Paul was engaged in was thus real on every level. He prayed night and day. He labored over correspondence with all of the many churches he had birthed and others like the churches at Colossae and Laodicea he only knew about by report. He spent time and effort receiving, training, guiding and dispatching others connected with his ministry in order to direct as best he could the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ for which he was presently "in chains" (Eph.6:20; Col.4:3). It is not too much to say that Paul's statement about his struggle was actually an understatement.

> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.
> 2nd Corinthians 11:28 ESV

Few of us can even reasonably aspire to be half as committed to our Lord and the tasks He has

given us individually and collectively as Paul was. But his is an excellent example to keep firmly in mind.

> Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
> 1st Corinthians 11:1 NIV

The Mystery of Christ:

> (25) It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. logos), (26) that is, [to make known] the ***mystery*** hidden from ages and from generations [past], but now revealed to His holy ones. (27) To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious ***mystery*** regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you.
> Colossians 1:25-26

We have explained the term *mystery* in our treatment of the passage above in the prior chapter. We saw there that Jesus Christ is ***the*** mystery now revealed. "Mystery" was a term of art in the ancient world used to describe secret rites and the mystery cults that practiced them. All such cults, like the Eleusian mysteries in particular, promised to provide their initiates with certain esoteric benefits of a spiritual nature. That is exactly the temptation which the Gnostic teachers and Jewish mystics were using to lure the Colossian believers into their webs. Paul returns to this method of referring to our Savior and to the blessed knowledge about Him revealed since His incarnation and victory on the cross (i.e., *mystery*), in order to assure his readers that what we have in Jesus Christ is in no way inferior to the titillating "secrets" these false teachers and others like them ever since were promising. Jesus is ***the*** Logos, the Word, the plan of God incarnate. God the Father's entire treasury of spiritual enlightenment is contained in Jesus Christ, along with all the knowledge we believers are blessed to be able to have through scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit about Him and His fulfillment of the plan of God. For in Jesus alone, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge [of God] are hidden" (Col.2:3). If we want to know the truth about all things spiritual, including about the unseen enemies we face and the actual spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, all we need to do is to look to Christ and His Word – and in fact it is very, very dangerous to look anywhere else (Paul's subtext here and his reason for bringing this subject up again in this particular way).

> And he said unto them, "Unto you it is given to know ***the mystery*** of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables."
> Mark 4:11 KJV

Rather than allowing themselves to be manipulated by deceivers who were holding out the false promise of secret doctrines, the Colossian believers should have appreciated that the gospel of the kingdom along with all the truth related thereunto was the most significant revelation of any mystery in world history. What our Lord began He left to His apostles to finish, namely, the complete unveiling of all of the blessed truths about Him, about our so great salvation, and about all of the wonders and delights that await us in eternity because of Jesus' victory on the cross in

removing the barrier of sin that we might be saved. Exchanging such truth for mere lies was indeed a horrendously bad bargain.

But before we are too hard on the Colossians, we should recognize that in our own day far too many members of the church-visible are engaging in new age, cultic and downright occult practices ostensibly in the name of Christ. Exorcisms, false prophesying, speaking in tongues, falling down "slain in the Spirit", practicing "quantum spirituality" and "holy laughter" are all the rage in many churches today – along with engaging in dubious other methods of "spiritual warfare" that bear a disturbing resemblance to the Gnostic and Jewish mystical operations of Paul's day which we have been studying. In time soon to come, this will be an even bigger issue – and an even bigger potential stumbling block. Antichrist's religion will revive and embrace the worst and the most excessive of all of these practices and many more as well. Only believers who are firmly grounded in the truth can have confidence in resisting the pressure to join in, especially in light of the penalties for refusal on the one hand and the seemingly affirming false miracles on the other.

> (11) Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. (12) It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. (13) And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. (14) Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth.
> Revelation 13:11-14a NIV

Paul's implicit warning to the Colossians may have hurt some feelings, just as calling out the false practices above may do as well. But as he told the recipients of this letter, his purpose was for them to be instructed . . . in love. True love tells the truth, even when the truth hurts.

Great Wealth:

> (6) Godliness is great gain – ***with contentment***. (7) We have brought nothing into this world – and are not able to take anything out of it. (8) So if we have daily sustenance and coverings for our bodies, we will be content with these. (9) Those who want to get rich fall into temptations, traps, and many senseless and harmful lusts – the kind which swamp men['s hearts] to their destruction and damnation. (10) For the love of money is a root [cause] of all evils – [and it is] in the pursuit of which [love of money that] some have wandered away from the faith (i.e., become apostates) and have pierced themselves through with many pains.
> 1st Timothy 6:6-10 [link]

The smallest reward from our Lord on the day we stand before Him, the smallest "Well done!", is worth more than all of the world's riches combined, more than the entire universe. Because while this world is not going to last (1Pet.3:4-11), any reward we receive from Him at our final evaluation will last forever. There is nothing in this life more valuable than the gospel which is God's power to save us from death (Rom.1:16); there is nothing in this life more valuable than

the truth: knowledge, full knowledge, about God. And all God's truth is to be found in Him who is the truth, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, "in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (Col.2:3). This knowledge is true wealth that yields riches which are lasting and enduring (Prov.3:13-15; 8:10-11). Believers should never forget this and never allow the tawdry and temporary things of this world or the false wisdom of its present ruler to cloud their spiritual vision.

> (44) "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. (45) Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. (46) When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."
> Matthew 13:44 NIV

> (3) If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, (4) they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions (5) and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.
> 1st Timothy 6:3-5 NIV

Let No One Deceive You:

> I say this so that no one may deceive you through persuasive talk.
> Colossians 2:4

This warning to beware of deception is good advice to any Christian at any time, and never more timely than for us on the threshold of the Tribulation. We have that from our Lord Himself.

> (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people."
> Matthew 24:3-5

> ". . . and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many."
> Matthew 24:11

> (24) "At that time if someone says to you 'Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!', or 'Here [He is]!', do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. (25) Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if they say to you, 'Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!', don't go out there, or 'Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town)!', don't believe [it]."
> Matthew 24:24-26 (cf. Mk.13:21-23)

As Paul mentions, we should not discount the possibility of susceptibility to deception inasmuch as it may very well be "persuasive" – so persuasive, in fact, that during the Tribulation there will arise many "false christs and false prophets" who will "perform great miracles and wonders" capable of deceiving "even the elect, if [that were] possible" (Matt.24:24). We are right to be confident that in our case, as the elect of God the Father in Jesus Christ, it will ***not*** be possible. But we also recognize that during the Great Apostasy a full third of weak believers will indeed be deceived and fall away from the faith. So we underestimate the evil one and his servants at our peril.

> Stay sober and wide awake. Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.
> 1st Peter 5:8

Paul introduces his warning here with the phrase "I say this so that . . .", meaning that his reason for sounding this alarm has entirely to do with his concern about the false teachers who were presently exploiting the Colossian church. So far, besides a few direct references, Paul has exposed the deceivers and their false doctrines by teaching the specific truths that refute and undermine all the heresies they were trying to promote. Later in this chapter, he will assault the lies of the Gnostic teachers and Jewish mystics directly. What is important to notice here is that being wary of false teachers, of deceit and deception aimed at our faith, is an important part of the Christian walk at ***all*** times.

> "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."
> Matthew 10:16 NIV

> (29) "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (30) Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. (31) ***So be on your guard***!"
> Acts 20:29-31a NIV

This threat to faith was real during apostolic times in spite of the greatest Bible teaching since our Lord's ascension and in spite of the miraculous, temporary spiritual gifts many believers possessed. It will be real during the Tribulation in spite of the wonders of God's judgments, the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, and the fulfillment of numerous biblical prophecies. And it is real enough today as well in spite of our possessing the entire Bible and the gift of the Holy Spirit. All these blessings we have from God must be properly utilized and appreciated to benefit us.

> (15) "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! (16) So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth."
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> Revelation 3:15-16 NIV

Wherever and whenever believers have been slothful about spiritual growth, progress and production, the evil one has been quick to deploy deceivers such as the Gnostics and mystics in Paul's day, the false christs and false prophets of antichrist's pseudo-Christianity during the Tribulation, and the multitude of new age deceivers present in our own day. Time would fail us attempting to catalog all of the religions and religious sects with which our present world is awash. There is no end even to the pseudo-Christian and putatively Christian groups and movements that are plaguing the church-visible today. No one can attain an encyclopedic knowledge of all of the cults and cult-like groups and pseudo-messianic leaders currently plying their wares in late day Laodicea. More than one individual has approached this ministry claiming to be Christ Himself.

> "For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many."
> Matthew 24:5 NIV

For all these reasons, this ministry has spent a great deal of time and effort over the years on the subject of identifying false teachers, false "Christian" groups and their false teachings. That is a key responsibility of any godly ministry.[1]

> "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."
> Acts 20:28 NIV

> (2) Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; (3) not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.
> 1st Peter 5:2-3 NIV

And how does a pastor-teacher accomplish this task of watching over and protecting his flock? By teaching them the truth so that they have the resources, the "ammunition", in their hearts to fight the good fight of faith and to resist the sorts of deceptive attacks the Colossians were facing.

> (13) Until I come, devote yourself to [public] reading [of the scriptures], to encouragement [through the Word], to the teaching [of the Word]. (14) Do not neglect the [spiritual] gift [of pastor-teacher] which belongs to you and which was given to you [by the Spirit], [and which was proclaimed] through prophecy [and recognized] by the laying on of the hands of the elders. (15) Be diligent in these things (i.e., studying and teaching the Word). Make them your primary concern so that your spiritual progress may be evident to all. (16) Apply them (i.e., the truths you learn) to yourself and to your teaching. Stick [faithfully] to them. For in so doing you will bring yourself and those who heed you safely home.
> 1st Timothy 4:13-16

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[1] See especially "Read Your Bible"; Peter #39: False Teachers, False Teaching, and False Organizations; and CT 4: "Characteristics of Antichrist's New Religion".

> Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!
> 2nd Timothy 4:2
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> Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."
> John 21:17b NKJV

This is precisely what Paul is doing, namely, not only warning the Colossians but also providing them with definite, positive teaching in order to be able to easily spot and reject what is false. Some turn away from the faith out of a deliberate and self-willed defiance of the Lord. Their condemnation is deserved. But there is ***no*** excuse for any of us to stumble because we were deceived.

> (15) "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (16) By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (17) Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."
> Matthew 7:15-20 NIV

As important as this warning and the perspective it engenders in those who take it to heart was in Paul's day and has been ever since, it is all the more vital for us "on whom the end of the ages has come" (1Cor.10:11 ESV). We cannot anticipate fully ahead of time just how critical it will be for us all to have learned this lesson ahead of time once the Tribulation begins. One thing we can say for certain is that on that day we will not regret a single ounce of effort prudently devoted to spiritual preparation.

> The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.
> 1st Timothy 4:1
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> (1) So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. (2) For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, (3) implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, (4) betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away. (6) Of this sort are those who [even in our own day] worm their way into households and take captive the [spiritually] weak who are loaded down with sins, leading them astray with various lusts, (7) [victims who consequently,] though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. (8) In the same way that [Pharaoh's court magicians] Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. (9) But they will not keep on striding forward forever. Their folly

will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those two.
2nd Timothy 3:1-9

(3) For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. (4) They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.
2nd Timothy 4:3-4 NIV

(10) For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. (11) They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach – and that for the sake of dishonest gain.
Titus 1:10-11 NIV

(13b) Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith (14) and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. (15) To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. (16) They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.
Titus 1:13b-16 NIV

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.
Titus 3:9 NIV

Absent in the Flesh:

But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you?"
2nd Kings 5:26a NIV

Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.
Amos 3:7 NIV

(4) In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, (5) deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
1st Corinthians 5:4-5 NKJV

(5) For although I am not present there in the flesh, I am with you in my spirit, rejoicing as I watch your good order and the stability of your faith in Christ.
Colossians 2:5

It is true that Paul's remark in our context about not being physically present but attendant "in spirit" can be taken metaphorically – for he certainly was thinking about them, praying for them, and eager for their spiritual success. However, based on the other verses above (and very many other passages in scripture where God reveals things otherwise unknown to His prophets and apostles), it would be a mistake not to take this literally as well. How often, to what degree and in precisely what manner Paul was given to "see things" at a distance we cannot say. But we can say that it did happen. God gave him this ability in order to carry out his apostolic oversight of Christ's Church. This is a related and corollary gift to that of prophesy of every sort, well documented throughout the Bible. Telling the Colossians this was both encouraging and sobering, a double prod for them to do what was right in the knowledge that their actions were not unobserved. We all know that God sees everything, but given that this knowledge is often not as motivating as realizing we are being watched by others, especially for the spiritually immature, Paul provides this extra incentive for them to eschew dangerous Gnosticism and mysticism while getting back to spiritual growth through the truth. After all, the phenomenon represented by this special apostolic gift was not unprecedented.

> (47) When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." (48) "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." (49) Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." (50) Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." (51) He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man." John 1:47-51 NIV

Verses Six through Fifteen

> (6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving. (8) See to it that no one be taking [control of] you as [though you were] plunder through the [so-called] study of wisdom (lit., "philosophy") and deception [which is] devoid [of truth], [which] agrees with human tradition, [which] agrees with [speculation about] the material principles of the world, but [which does] not agree with Christ. (9) For in Him (i.e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the fullness of deity in bodily form. (10) And you have received your complete fulfillment in Him who is the Head of every ruler and [every] power. (11) In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done by hand, in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, (12) buried together with Him through the baptism [of the Holy Spirit], through which also you were resurrected [positionally] through faith in the power of God who raised Him from the dead. (13) And though you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcised state of your flesh, [God the Father] made you alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all your transgressions. (14) [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He has removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. (15) [For by means of the cross, God]

has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:6-15

As You Received Christ:

So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way].
Colossians 2:6

This seems an obvious thing, does it not? We received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior by putting our faith in Him (Eph.2:8-9), by believing in Him and His work for us in dying for all of our sins on the cross (Jn.3:16-18). We may not have had a deep understanding of the hypostatic union or the atoning effect of the blood of Christ when we did so, but we knew something about Him and the Spirit made that truth real to us . . . ***and we believed***. This is why the Bible calls Christians "believers", after all, "ones believing in Christ" (Matt.18:6; Mk.9:23; Jn.1:12; 3:18; 3:36; 6:35; 6:47; 7:38; 11:25; 12:24; 14:12; Rom.3:22; 4:11; 4:24; 1Cor.1:21; 14:22; Gal.3:22; Eph.1:19; 1Thes.1:7; 2:10; 2:13; 2Thes.1:10; 1Tim.4:23; 1Pet.2:7; 1Jn.5:13). How is it, then, that in our era of Laodicea so few seem to understand that just as we were saved by believing so also we need to be growing and "walking" (i.e., progressing, applying the truth we have learned and believed to the life situations and testing we receive) "***in the same way***".

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:16

We grow by learning the truth. If we are not learning the truth, then we have no way of growing, since we will have no truth in our hearts to apply when the testing that produces growth comes our way. Failure to understand this basic principle of the Christian life and to act on it accordingly is what is behind the endemic spiritual immaturity in the church-visible today.

(4) For everyone who has been born from God overcomes the [devil's] world. And this is the victory that has overcome the [devil's] world: ***our faith [in Jesus Christ]!*** (5) For who is the one who overcomes the [devil's] world except ***the one who believes*** that Jesus is the Son of God.
1st John 5:4-5

Our faith is everything because without our faith we are not believers and only believers are even saved (Jn.3:18), let alone capable of growth, progress and production, all of which is predicated on the truth ***which we believe***.

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power whereby God may save everyone who believes (whether the Jew first, or the Greek). (17) Because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from [saving] faith (belief) to [mature] faith (belief), as it is written, "[it is he who is] righteous on account of his faith (belief) [who] shall live [on account of his faith (belief)]".

Romans 1:16-17

Rooted and Built up in Christ and Established in Faith:

> (6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.
> Colossians 2:6-7

These three participles are all expressing essentially the same thing, namely, being in a state of spiritual maturity based upon prior growth and spiritual progress in having our faith tested and refined, a principle well documented in scripture:

> Not only this, but let us also boast in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation develops endurance, and endurance results in proven reliability, and that such reliability brings with it hope [of eternal reward].
> Romans 5:3-4

> (2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful. (3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.
> James 1:2-4

> (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.
> 1st Peter 1:6-7

The three participles here, "rooted", "built up", and "established" express the same concept through three different teaching analogies. "Rooted" relates our faith to a plant, as in the parable of the sower (Matt.13:1-9; 13:18-23; Mk.4:1-9; 4:13-20; Lk.8:4-8; 8:11-15), or to a tree, such as a mustard tree (Matt.13:31; Mk.4:31; Lk.13:19), which is solidly set in the ground, "grounded", so as not to be easily moved because of its good prior growth.[2] "Established" relates our faith to a building, as in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt.7:24-29; Lk.6:47-49), which is firmly established because of its solid foundation (Matt.21:42; Mk.12:10; Lk.20:17).[3] Both of these first two participles are directly connected to our position in Christ respectively, "rooted and built up ***in Him***", because He is the Vine of which we are the branches and in whom we must

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[2] See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.2.B, "The Plant Analogy".

[3] See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.2.C, "The Building Analogy".

remain to bear spiritual fruit (Jn.15:1-17), and because He is the Foundation upon whom we are collectively being built into a spiritual house which contributes to its own collective growth (1Pet.2:5-6; Eph.4:16). In both analogies, we can do nothing apart from each other and apart from our position in Christ.

> "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."
> John 15:5 NKJV

> For no one can lay [any] other foundation (i.e., for salvation, spiritual growth and production) [other] than the One which has [already] been laid, namely, Jesus Christ.
> 1st Corinthians 3:11

The participle translated "established" is connected to "in the faith" to complete this classic tricolon by embracing the first two analogies. The Greek verb means, etymologically, "to have taken a firm stand so as to be secure in that stance". As described by here, we "have gotten" to the place where we are standing in a position of spiritually mature through believing and applying the truth of the Word of God – and that is how we stand firm now as well – by holding fast in solid faith, believing what we have been taught and learned, and applying that truth aggressively in that same faith in all the trials, tribulations and testing we face.

> "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."
> Isaiah 7:9b NIV

As You were Taught, Overflowing with Thanksgiving:

The phrase, "overflowing with" or "abounding in" thanksgiving does occur in the Greek after "as you were taught". So while we cannot and should not divorce "taught" from the "rooted", "built up", and "established" which precede – paying attention to the teaching of the truth is, after all, how we grow – the positioning here serves to call special attention to our need to give God thanks. We owe Him absolutely everything and so much so that if we spent every waking moment in giving Him thanks for the so great salvation which is ours in Jesus Christ it could never be sufficient. That said, it is probably true of most of us that we could certainly afford to be more grateful to Him not only in our expression of that gratitude in prayer and praise but also in the way we think about things in our daily walk. Life is busy and distracting, and there are plenty of things we have to do, things that command all of our attention. But if we try to make a point of being grateful in good times and in bad, we will find that this contributes very positively to our efforts to draw close to the Father we love and the Son who is our all in all.

> Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!
> For His mercy endures forever.
> 1st Chronicles 16:34 NKJV

> Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness,

> And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
> Psalm 107:8 NKJV
>
> Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!
> 2nd Corinthians 9:15 NIV
>
> Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
> Ephesians 5:20 NIV
>
> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
> Colossians 3:17 NIV
>
> Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
> 1st Thessalonians 5:18 NIV

Always remember to be thankful. That is our proper perspective on the past as well as the present, looking forward to the glorious future we have on account of what our dear Savior did for us.

Philosophy, Deception and Human Tradition:

> See to it that no one be taking [control of] you as [though you were] plunder through the [so-called] study of wisdom (lit., "philosophy") and deception [which is] devoid [of truth], [which] agrees with human tradition, [which] agrees with [speculation about] the material principles of the world, but [which does] not agree with Christ.
> Colossians 2:8

Philosophy, the putative "study of wisdom" (in terms of its literal etymology) and "empty deception", that is, fraud which, while it may seem substantive, is actually devoid of all truth, are the means by which the Gnostic and mystic "teachers" at Colossae were "plundering" weak believers who were foolish enough to let themselves be ensnared. By combining the two as essentially one thing, Paul emphatically states in the Spirit that all such "philosophy" is nothing but lies, mere deception. As we have discussed many times before, the lie employed to oppose God's truth is at the very heart of Satan's cosmic world system, the overarching strategy of deceit the devil employs to bend humanity to his will.[4]

> "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

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[4] See especially SR 4: Satan's World System, section IV, "Satan's Tactical Doctrine"; Peter #39: False Teachers, False Teaching, and False Organizations, section 2, "False Teaching"; BB 2A: Angelology, section II.7, "Satan's World System"; and CT 3A, section II.3.c.1, "The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching".

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."
John 8: NIV

The particular type of deception being employed by both of these heretical groups in Colossae is said to be according "to human tradition" and agreeing with "[speculation about] the material principles of the world". The latter element of the two here is the Greek *stoicheia* which we have had occasion to explain before (cf. Gal.4:3; 4:9; Col.2:8; 2:20; Heb.5:12; 2Pet.3:10; 3:12).[5] This word refers to the celestial bodies created by God, and to their predictable motions useful for delineating the "times and seasons" (Gen.1:14). Recognizing the power and the existence of God through what He created is part of natural revelation (Rom.1:20; cf. Job 36:24-25; Ps.19:1-6; 89:5; 97:6; Is.40:25-26); venerating these phenomena as gods or demigods as the false teachers of Colossae were attempting to get those snared in their nets to do, has always been a problem for the human race and continues to be so today (i.e., through the likes of astrology, new age teachings, wrongly named "spiritual warfare" as practiced in pseudo-Christianity and the like).

"And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars – all the heavenly array – do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven."
Deuteronomy 4:19 NIV

(26) "If I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, (27) so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, (28) then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high."
Job 31:26-28 NIV

Mature believers can appreciate the glory of God as it is reflected in this amazing creation of His, but it is typical of the devil, his system of lies, and his agents to pervert all that is good into grist for his mill of deception. Those who wisely listen to the Spirit will take care to avoid all such traps.

Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."
1st Corinthians 15:33 NKJV

The Fullness of Deity:

(15) [Jesus Christ] is ***the exact image*** of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and ***everything subsists in Him***. (18) And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. (19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for ***the fulfillment*** [of His plan] to reside

[5] See especially Hebrews Chapter 5, section I, "Introduction".

> entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.
> Colossians 1:15-20

In our discussion of this paragraph in chapter one, we had occasion to treat various aspects of the doctrine of the hypostatic union[6], the teaching which explains that Jesus Christ, since the incarnation, is both God and man, a genuine human being in addition to being truly divine. In the person of Christ, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, took on a genuine human nature in addition to His deity, welding and wedding the two natures irreversible into one person so as to become the unique God-man upon whose victory at the cross the entirety of the plan of God depended. Jesus is for that reason named "the Logos", the Word become flesh, the incarnate plan of God Himself. Self-limited in His humanity from benefitting from His deity during the first advent (in order to be qualified to bear our sins on the cross)[7], now resurrected, ascended to the Father and seated at His right hand in glory, no such temporary division any longer exists. But Jesus has always been God, in His deity before time began, and in His humanity as well from the instant He was born.

> (1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe (i.e., time-space). (3) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who [in His deity] sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins [in His humanity], He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
> Hebrews 1:1-3

In our context of false teachers seeking to diminish Christ's status on the one hand, claiming that He was somehow less than God Himself, and on the other hand denying that He was genuinely human, Paul again is led by the Spirit to emphatically rebut these heretical, anti-Trinitarian teachings. And he does so in a very simple, straightforward and unmistakable way. Yes, Jesus Christ is a human being: He has a real, human body. And yes, Jesus Christ is fully divine. Undiminished deity dwells in His human body as God and man are one in Him. He is undiminished deity and true humanity in one unique person forever, ever since the moment of the virgin birth.

> (1) The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. (4) In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. (5) The Light

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[6] See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.e, "The Hypostatic Union and *Kenosis*".

[7] See Hebrews Chapter 5, "*Kenosis* and the Blood of Christ".

shone in the darkness, but the darkness [chose] not [to] comprehend it.
John 1:1-5

And the Word became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14

(1) What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ]. (2) And this life appeared, and we have seen [it], and we bear witness [to it], and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was in the presence of the Father and [then] appeared to us.
1st John 1:1-2

No one can read Paul's words at Colossians 1:9, "for in Him dwells all of the fullness of deity in bodily form", and have any doubt whatsoever about Christ's deity and genuine humanity – not if they believe the Bible.

Complete Fulfillment:

(9) For in Him (i.e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the ***fullness*** of deity in bodily form. (10) And you have received your complete ***fulfillment*** in Him who is the Head of every ruler and [every] power.
Colossians 2:9-10

Paul continues his positive rebuttal of Gnosticism and mysticism here by echoing Christ's "fullness" with our "fulfillment" in Christ. Both words are deliberately playing off of the Greek noun *pleroma*, the key catchphrase of the heretical doctrines of these false teachers. In contrast to false fullness and false fulfillment, Christ really is absolute deity as well as a genuine human being; in contrast to false promises of fulfillment through secret knowledge and esoteric rituals, believers really are "made full" in every blessed way as those who are "in Christ", part of His assembly, His Body, His Church, His Bride forever; and we have the opportunity here and now to experience that fullness more and more through spiritual growth, if we are willing to do so and not turn aside to what is false. That is the way to truly experience the blessed fullness and completeness God has for us all, experientially in this life and eternally in the next.

And don't get drunk with wine which is dissipating, but instead be made [spiritually] ***full*** through the [Holy] Spirit.
Ephesians 5:18

Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a ***full*** (i.e., complete) ***reward***.
2nd John 1:8

Christ the Head:

(22) And [the Father] subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.
Ephesians 1:22-23

In our discussion of Colossians 1:18 we examined Christ's status as our Head in the analogy of the Church as His Body (cf. 1Cor.11:3; Eph.4:15; 5:23), and will do so later on in this chapter again (Col.2:19).[8] In our present context, however, the aspect of Christ's absolute primacy in all things being considered is His complete sovereignty over all human and angelic powers.

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of [all human] kings and Lord of [all angelic] lords.
Revelation 19:16 ESV

Christ is the Head of ***genuine*** human and angelic authorities, those that actually exist – as opposed to the fancies of the mystics and Gnostic teachers. In our context of Paul's refutation of these false teachings, therefore, while "rulers" and "powers" do not exclude human potentates, these words are clearly chosen to call attention to Christ's supremacy over all angelic kind, the very truth that was being undermined in Colossae. "Rulers" (*archai*) are generally archangels when referring to elect angels (1Cor.15:24; Eph.1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col.1:16; 2:10; 2:15; 1Pet.3:22)[9], while "powers/authorities" (*exousiai*) are the next order of rank below them.[10] These are not the highest ranking elect angels (the cherubs and elders rank higher), but they are the preeminent angels of God who are actively involved in ***real*** angelic combat and spiritual warfare in the world today.[11] Christ is the Head over them all, a fact which puts the lie to the heretical Gnostic and mystic fantasies of a diminished Son of God who is merely somewhat higher than these angels and somehow "needs our help".

But when He brings back the Firstborn into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him! (Ps.97:7b)"
Hebrews 1:6

Circumcised:

In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not done by hand, in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

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[8] See Colossians Chapter 1, under "The Head of the Body"; see also BB 4A: Christology, section I.4.b.9, "Head of the Body, the Church".

[9] See BB 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.3, "Archangels".

[10] See BB 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.4, "Authorities".

[11] Satan's system also uses these ranks for his lieutenants; see BB 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.6, "The organization of fallen angels".

Colossians 1:11

This issue was of no interest to the Gnostics, but to the Jewish teachers who were spinning fantasies, everything ostensibly went back to the Law, so that engaging in as many of the rituals and regulations therein as possible was *de rigueur*.

> (12) As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. (13) For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.
> Galatians 6:13 NKJV

Such legalism, especially when coupled with false teaching actually having no relation whatsoever to scripture, was exceedingly dangerous. Paul warns the Colossians off of such legalistic thinking by reminding them that the true circumcision God is looking for is of the heart and not the body (Deut.10:16; 30:6; Jer.4:4; 9:25-26; Lev.26:41; Ezek.44:7; 44:9). That is the vein in which Paul makes this statement: in Christ, we believers have had our hearts opened up to the truth – circumcised, so to speak – so as to be able to respond to Him in the Spirit without being prevented from doing so by the sin nature.

> (28) For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; (29) but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.
> Romans 2:28-29 NKJV

> Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
> Romans 6:11 NKJV

Buried:

> . . . buried together with Him through the baptism [of the Holy Spirit], through which also you were resurrected [positionally] through faith in the power of God who raised Him from the dead.
> Colossians 2:12

As we saw in our study of the first chapter, we believers become one with Jesus Christ when we are saved (Col.1:27).[12] Often referred to as "union with Christ", this blessed teaching refers to the fact that we are positionally "in Christ", becoming His in every way, when we put our faith in Him and are thus born again. As those who belong to Him absolutely. He is "in us" (Jn.14:20; Rom.8:10; 2Cor.13:5; Eph.3:17; Col.1:27), and we are "in Him" (Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 1Pet.5:14). As a result of this blessed union of the Bride to

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[12] See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.2.b.1, "The Spirit's Baptism of Believers into Christ".

her Husband, we believers share positionally everything that our Lord has won and done. So, for example, while we may not have gained complete experiential victory over sin, by virtue of being in Christ, we have died to sin. Paul makes this same point at greater length in Romans.

> (1) What shall we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace [which abounded in Christ's sacrifice for our sin] may abound [all the more]? (2) May it never be! We [are they] who have [in Christ] died to sin. How then shall we yet live [our lives] in it? (3) Or do you not realize that as many of us as have been baptized [by the Spirit] into Christ have been baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through this baptism [of the Spirit] into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the Glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been joined together with Him in respect to the likeness of His death [– and we have by being spiritually baptized into Him –], then we certainly will be [joined together with Him in the likeness] of His resurrection also. (6) Recognize that our "old man" (i.e., our sinful nature) has been "crucified" together [with Jesus], so that this body of sin of ours might be rendered lifeless in order that we might not serve this sin [in our flesh] as slaves. (7) For he who has died has been justified out of sin['s control]. (8) Now if we have died with Christ, [and we have] (i.e., by being "in Him" through the Spirit's baptism, vv.1-4), we believe that we shall live [eternally] together with Him, (9) knowing that Christ, now that He has been raised from the dead, is no longer mortal; death no longer has any power over Him. (10) For what He died, He died to sin, once and for all, and what He lives, He lives to God. (11) In the same way [that Christ did], consider yourselves as well to be [positionally] dead to sin, but [spiritually] alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord!
> Romans 6:1-11 [index]

Being "buried with Christ", being dead to the world, is a liberating thing – for all believers who make a point of remembering and applying this fundamental truth.

> (15) "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."
> John 17:15-16 NIV

The world and its present ruler no longer have any hold over us because death is no longer something we should fear, being already dead and buried "in Christ".

> (14) Therefore since "these children" (i.e., believers given to Christ by the Father: v.13) are flesh and blood, [Christ] took on the same [flesh and blood] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile [to God] those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death.
> Hebrews 2:14-15

And being "buried with Him", we now look forward to the ultimate outcome of His death on our behalf: the resurrection which we also share positionally now and will experience in full when

He returns for us.[13]

> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.
> 1st John 3:2 NIV

Through the Baptism:

> (4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord, one faith, ***one baptism***; (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
> Ephesians 4:4-6 NKJV

There is only "one baptism" for the Church of Jesus Christ: the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism, water-baptism, as we have seen many times in the past, was a ritual of preparation for the coming of the Messiah and His revelation to Israel. Now that Jesus has not only come but also sacrificed Himself for all of our sins, now that He has been resurrected, ascended to the Father and been glorified, now that the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all believers (Acts 2:1ff.; Rom.8:9), water-baptism is no longer authorized.[14] More to the point for our context, water-baptism was a ritual which accomplished nothing of a supernatural nature, but the baptism of the Spirit which all believers receive upon salvation is what places us into union with Christ and gives us the blessings that come from belonging to Him.

> "I baptize you with water (i.e., physically) for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."
> Matthew 3:11 NIV

> (4) And gathering them together [Jesus] commanded [the disciples] not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father (i.e., the Holy Spirit) "which you heard about from Me. (5) For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit not many days from now".
> Acts 1:4-5

> "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth".
> Acts 1:8

The baptism "of" the Holy Spirit has two aspects: baptism "by" the Spirit, whereby we are

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[13] See Peter #20, "The Resurrection"; and CT 5, section V, "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride".

[14] See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section II.C.3.b, "Water-baptism".

entered into union with Christ and are henceforth "in Christ" (e.g., Matt.28:19 [Greek]), and baptism "with" the Spirit, whereby we henceforth have the Spirit dwelling in us (e.g., 1Cor.12:13).[15] It is the former aspect of the Holy Spirit's baptism with which we have to do in our context, since it is the Spirit who places us "into Christ" and thereby share in His death and burial . . . and in His resurrection, giving us the sure and certain hope of our own resurrection to come (Acts 24:15; 1Cor.15:51-58; 1Pet.1:3).[16]

> For if we have been joined together with Him in respect to the likeness of His death [– and we have by being spiritually baptized into Him –], then we certainly will be [joined together with Him in the likeness] of His resurrection also.
> Romans 6:5

> (15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.
> 1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

Made you Alive:

> And though you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcised state of your flesh, [God the Father] made you alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all your transgressions.
> Colossians 2:13

One thing that it is good for every believer to do is to count our blessings.[17] When we do, it is important to remember the bad things we have been delivered from as well as the good things we have received. That is essentially what Paul is doing here for the Colossians. After listing out some tremendous, positive blessing that all believers share – "complete fulfillment in Him", "the removal of this body of flesh", "burial together with Him", "the baptism of the Holy Spirit", and "positional resurrection" (vv.10-12), Paul now reminds his readers of what they have been delivered ***from***. Before we are saved, in common with the entire human race since the fall, we are born in sin (Ps.51:5; i.e., possessing a sin nature), we commit sin (1Jn.1:8-10), and, absent God the Father's intervention with the gift of Jesus Christ, we would all be facing the inevitable result of the spiritual death to which our sins testify: judgment and resultant condemnation. For

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[15] See BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.2.b, "Baptism".

[16] See Peter #20: Resurrection; and CT 5, section V, "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride".

[17] See BB 4B: Soteriology, section III, "it Means to be Saved".

"it is ordained for mankind to die once (i.e., the first, "physical" death), and after this [face] judgment" (Heb.9:27), a final judgment that no one could endure, standing on their own merits. Only in Jesus Christ, as those who belong to Him, those whom He has saved by dying in our place, is there deliverance from judgment and death.

> "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death ***into life***."
> John 5:24 NKJV

The death mentioned in our context verse, "dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcised state of your flesh", is the spiritual state of alienation from God which the entire human race shares before being saved, "spiritual death" (as opposed to physical death which puts an end to any opportunity for reconciliation to Him), the ultimate result of which is "the second death", the final state of all who refuse to be reconciled to Him in this life. Believers, when we recognized our need for a Savior from sin and death, turned to God the Father for deliverance through embracing the truth of the gospel: salvation through faith in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever anyone does so, as the verse quoted above explains, we "pass from death into life". We are "reborn" spiritually, made alive to God and given life eternal which is ours in principle now and will be ours forever in resurrection through the grace of our dear Savior.[18]

> Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he is not able to see the kingdom of God".
> John 3:3

> For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.
> 1st Corinthians 15:22

> (1) If therefore you have been resurrected with Christ, seek the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Seek the things above, not the things on earth. (3) For you have died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, your life, appears, then you too will appear with Him in glory.
> Colossians 3:1-4

Being alive to God rather than dead to Him, looking forward in anticipation to life eternal instead of to death, darkness, the grave and judgment, are incomparable blessings. "Why", Paul says in effect to the Colossians, "are you forgetting what you have been given in Jesus Christ so as to run after false teachings and false teachers instead?" That is as good a question now as it was two thousand years ago, one which we should all be ready to pose to ourselves whenever we find ourselves failing to appreciate all we have been given as believers in Jesus Christ.

Having Forgiven You All Your Transgressions:

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[18] See BB 4B: Soteriology, section III.1.a, "Born Again"; and Peter #19, "Spiritual Rebirth".

> And though you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcised state of your flesh, [God the Father] made you alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all your transgressions.
> Colossians 2:13

The Greek word translated "forgiven" here is actually *charizo*, the verbal form of the word *charis*, "grace". God has "graciously" removed every debt against our account. He has, "in grace" not held our sins against us. He has "freely" and without charge – to us – annulled our ledger of sins, any one of which would have been sufficient to plunge us into the lake of fire forever. "Freely", that is, for us. God the Father Himself paid our entire tab . . . by judging His beloved Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, in our stead.[19]

> For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
> 2nd Corinthians 5:21 NKJV

Erased:

> [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He has removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross.
> Colossians 2:14

What a great blessing it is to know that Christ has already paid for all of our sins! As a result, our heavenly Father has expunged the entire bond which otherwise would have spelled our doom, since we were unable to pay it ourselves. The words are technical ones having to do with secular law but clearly also referring to the Mosaic Law. The bond or charge is the Greek *cheirographon* (literally, "hand-written [thing]"), while the particulars are, literally, "decrees" or ordinances (cf. Lk.2:1; Eph.2:15).

> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.
> Romans 3:20 NIV

The Law as a whole proclaims everyone sinful (Rom.3:9; 3:19-20; 3:23; 5:12; 5:19-20; 7:7; 7:13; 11:32; Gal.2:22-24). And the Law in its particulars heaps up the condemnation as it identifies us as sinners wherever we transgress (Rom.7:7).

> (8) If we say that we do not possess sin (i.e., a sin nature which is producing personal sins), we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just so as to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say, that we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His Word is not

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[19] See BB 4A: Christology, sections II.4, "The Blood of Christ"; and II.5, "The Spiritual Death of Christ".

in us.
1st John 1:8-10

Sinners that we are, we are unable to pay the debt which the Law convicted us of owing. But our dear heavenly Father wiped away our individual debts, every particular, along with the bond itself, the Law which no sinful human being could ever keep completely. He removed that obstacle which kept us from Him, kept us from being saved, by "nailing it to the cross". Sin is now no longer an impediment to salvation, because Jesus Christ died for every single sin committed by every single human being from the beginning of our race until the end of the Millennium. Therefore the impossible standard along with all of the debts we incurred under it has been taken out of the way by our dear Lord and Savior's sacrifice on our behalf.

> (1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death. (3) For what the Law could not accomplish (i.e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, (4) so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i.e., believers).
> Romans 8:2-4

All believers need never to forget the cross and what our Savior did for us. We have a right not to fall into guilt about the past, because all of our sins which otherwise would have kept us separated from God have been forgiven. We have been "bought" at an inestimable price (1Cor.6:20); redeemed by Jesus' precious blood (Eph.1:7).[20]

> "I have ***wiped away*** your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like vapor. Return to Me, for I have ***redeemed*** you (i.e., from your sins)!"
> Isaiah 44:22

And if we do stumble, Jesus is our Advocate (Rom.8:34; 1Jn.2:1-2), and everything we confess is forgiven anew for restoration of fellowship with Him and with our Father in the Holy Spirit (Ps.32:5; 1Jn.1:9). The proper response to such amazing grace is for us to be deeply grateful and to do what Paul describes as normal behavior in the passage above, namely, to "walk ***not*** according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom.8:4). To do otherwise, to fall back into sinful practices of the past, to give ourselves over to false teachers and false teaching for the sake of some supposedly "secret knowledge", is to forget the cross and to return to the vanity of this temporary life (2Pet.1:9), a false path that is often not far removed from falling away from the Lord entirely.

> (17) But these [false teachers] are waterless springs, mists driven by the storm, for whom,

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[20] See BB 4A: Christology, section II.7, "Redemption"; Hebrews Chapter 9, "Redemption"; and Colossians Chapter 1, "Ransom and Forgiveness".

> [the same] gloomy darkness has been reserved (i.e., the lake of fire). (18) For by pouring forth [statements] of outrageous folly, [by appealing to] fleshly lusts, and by making use of every [sort of] sensuality, [these false teachers] entice those who [previously] had truly escaped from those who live [such] lives of deception (i.e., the false teachers). (19) [These false teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. (20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".
> 2nd Peter 2:17-22

As those who say we love our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ more than life itself, it behooves us all to ever be remembering His cross and what it stands for, namely, His payment in full for all of our sins by being judged in our place (i.e., "the blood of Christ").

> "This is ***My blood*** of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins concerning many people."
> Matthew 26:28

> Christ ***bought us free*** (i.e., "redeemed " us) from the Law's curse, having become a curse on our behalf. For it is written: "Cursed is everyone [who is] hanged upon a tree " (Deut.21:23).
> Galatians 3:13

> (18) For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ***ransomed*** from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, (19) but [you were redeemed] with ***precious blood***, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ.
> 1st Peter 1:18-19

> To the One who loves us and has ***released*** us from our sins by His ***blood*** – and He has made us a kingdom, priests of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever! Amen!
> Revelation 1:5b-6

Stripped Rulers and Authorities:

> [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
> Colossians 2:15

This is welcome news for all believers, especially for any and all who are, for whatever reason, unduly afraid of demonic forces. Along with their leader, fallen angels have always ever only been operating in this world through God's consent and acquiescence. Violation of God's ground rules has been the reason for incarceration in the Abyss of untold numbers of demons (e.g., Lk.8:31; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev.9:1-21). We believers have the Holy Spirit in us, and as God He is obviously far more powerful than all of Satan's legions put together (1Jn.4:4). We also have God's holy angels looking out for us and helping us (Gen.32:1; 2Ki.6:16-17; Ps.91:11-12; Dan.6:22; Matt.4:11; 18:10-11; Lk.16:22; Act 12:15; Heb.1:14). But it is also very reassuring to know that whatever power these enemies of God did possess in the past has been positionally taken from them by our Savior through His victory on the cross. The great conflict has been won, finally and definitively. In military terms, God is currently making use of us – Christ's Church – to exploit our Lord's decisively victorious triumph (Jn.12:31; 1Cor.15:24-25; Eph.1:20-22; 3:10; 6:12; Heb.2:14; 10:12-13).

> "And I tell you that you are Peter [the little rock] (*petros*), and upon this [mighty] Rock (*petra*, i.e., upon Christ Himself; cf. 1Cor.3:11) I shall build My Church (cf. Dan.2:44-45), and the gates (i.e., the fortified defenses) of Hades (i.e., the devil's kingdom) will not [be able to] resist it."
> Matthew 16:18

This is the time of greatest opportunity in world history. Believers today have the chance to win the entire panoply of rewards – the three crowns (Phil.4:1; 1Thes.2:19; 2Tim.4:8; Jas.1:12; 1Pet.5:4; Rev.2:10) – and have the means to do so as never before.[21] Never before has the truth of the Word of God, the essential "ammunition" we require to fight this fight, been so readily available in such quantity and in such depth. Doing what our Lord has called us to do, growing, progressing and producing for Him, will result in us sharing in the unimaginably wonderful spoils of His momentous victory (Ps.111:5; Lk.11:21-22; 20:16; Eph.4:7-10).

> Then (i.e., at the 2nd Advent) an abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder.
> Isaiah 33:23b NIV

> Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.
> Isaiah 53:12

And for those Colossian or contemporary believers who were and are foolish enough to buy into the claims of false teachers, whether Gnostic or mystic, those who arrogantly assert the possession of some special power in spiritual warfare accessed through their secret doctrines and esoteric rituals, our passage would be good to take to heart. Jesus has already ***won***. Assuming that He needs our help in this conflict where He has already decisively triumphed denigrates what

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[21] See CT 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

He did for us on the cross and is thus arrogant and foolish beyond all measure.

Triumph:

> [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
> Colossians 2:15

Make no mistake. Demons are still active in this world and they still retain their powers . . . temporarily. But Christ's victory on the cross makes the final disposition of all of God's enemies a mere matter of time.

> The Lord said to my Lord,
> "Sit at My right hand,
> Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."
> Psalm 110:1 NKJV

Our Lord's return is imminent and has been since His ascension and session at the Father's right hand. When Jesus does return, at that return, all fallen angels, including their leader the devil, will be cast into the Abyss for the duration of the Messiah's reign. The Spirit allows Paul to anticipate that consummation of Christ's victory in our context verse by comparing it to the contemporary custom familiar to the Colossians, namely, the Roman triumph. In the triumphal procession given to a conquering general, surviving enemy captives, and especially their leaders, would march stripped and in chains in front of the victor's chariot. They were jeered and pelted by the crowd until at the end of the procession they were put to death. We believers on earth today are still in the middle of a furious fight, but we can take heart in the sure and certain knowledge that the end is coming and the result is not in doubt. In time soon to come, "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom.16:20 NIV).

> And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."
> Luke 10:18 NIV

How do we fight this battle in the meantime? We do so by following our Lord's marching orders to grow spiritually, to continue to progress through whatever testing we are called on to endure, and to help our brothers and sisters do likewise through the ministries and ministrations we are given to provide. We do ***not*** fight it by seeking after secret new age knowledge or involving ourselves in biblically unauthorized behaviors and activities – as many of the Colossian believers were doing.

> For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms.
> Ephesians 6:12

We believers are, positionally speaking, part of our Lord's triumphal procession. We will join

with Him and with each other at the second advent in expelling the forces of Satan from the Messiah's incipient millennial kingdom. On that day, we, the Church, the one-for-one replacements for the fallen angels in the eternal family of God, will indeed engage in victorious combat with our adversaries after we rise in resurrection to meet the Lord (1Cor.6:3; Zech.14:5; Rev.19:19).[22] But until then, "our battle" is not a physical one but an entirely spiritual one, fought out not in direct contact with the forces of evil (where they have all the advantages) but on the battlefield of our hearts, where we learn, believe, and wield against them the mightiest weapon of all weapons, the truth of the Word of God.

> For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful for God, for the destruction of strongholds, destroying sophistries and every presumption that raises itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought prisoner so as to obey Christ.
> 2nd Corinthians 10:4-5

> And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.
> Ephesians 6:17

> For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience empowered by the Spirit) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.
> Hebrews 4:12

Verses Sixteen through Nineteen

> (16) So don't let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in the category of festival observances, be it of new moons or Sabbaths. (17) All these things are shadows of what was to come, but the reality has to do with Christ. (18) Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and the adoration of angels, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, (19) yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.
> Colossians 2:16-19

Verses 16-19 constitute a series of pointed rebukes to the Jewish legalists/mystics (vv.16-17) and to the Gnostic false teachers (vv.18-19). Paul now moves past insinuation, past comparison with the truth, and on to direct censure of some of the most outrageous and dangerous teachings and practices of these two groups, tailoring these four verses to the legalists and Gnostics respectively, before launching a broader attack in verses 20-23 which will apply to both.

Food and Drink:

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[22] See CT 6: Last Things, section I.4, "The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons".

> (10) You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! (11) I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.
> Galatians 4:10-11 NIV

The problems facing the Galatian churches was similar to that in Colossae, except that in the former case it was almost entirely an issue of teachers of the Law leading the believers into legalism and salvation by works. We can tell from our context that this was a problem in Colossae as well, except that it was mixed up with mystical teaching too and with the added danger of Gnostic infiltration that had nothing to do with the actual Law of Moses.

> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.
> Romans 14:4 NIV

> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.
> Romans 14:13 NIV

When Paul says "let no one judge you", he is telling these believers that they are to prefer the truth to any insinuation or blame coming from others who are not, in fact, following the truth. The situation described in Romans chapter 14 was similar in that some believers were wrongly judging their brothers and sisters in Christ for an application of the truth that did not align with their own. In Colossae, the pressure was coming from unbelieving "teachers" (and from believers who were foolish enough to follow them). Paul's "let no one judge you" is a clarion call to all believers since, one we all need to hold fast to. If we are following Jesus Christ, we need to find out what He wants us to do and determine to do things His way, regardless of what anyone else thinks.

> But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."
> Acts 5:29 NKJV

Many readers of this ministry have experienced censure from other Christians for preferring to follow Christ's mandates to grow, progress and produce to the traditional local church-bound approach wherein very little if any substance is being taught (which makes such growth virtually impossible). Such disapproval is often difficult to take on an emotional level, especially since it is so decidedly unfair. If anyone should be rebuked, it is those who are not only refusing to accomplish God's will for their lives but who are also finding fault with and thus discouraging those who are.

> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."
> Matthew 23:13 NIV

During the Tribulation, when antichrist co-opts organized religion worldwide, it will be doubly important for believers who are following Jesus Christ as they should to have this issue straight in their hearts. *Vox populi, vox dei*, said the Romans: "The voice of the people is the voice of god". But believers should know better. Indeed, the word "Laodicea", which church characterizes our present era of lukewarmness, means essentially the same thing: "the self-justifying crowd". Believers who put Jesus Christ first understand that it is His opinion and only His opinion which counts – even if every single church-going acquaintance says differently.

> Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.
> Exodus 23:2a NIV

> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
> Matthew 5:11-12 NIV

> "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets."
> Luke 6:22-23 NIV

> Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.
> Romans 14:4 NKJV

> (9) A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, (10) they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."
> Revelation 14:9-11 NIV

Shadows:

> All these things are shadows of what was to come, but the reality has to do with Christ.
> Colossians 2:17

"These things" refers both to that part of the Law which has to do with ritual prohibitions guiding individual behavior ("food and drink") and to that part of the Law which has to do with mandatory and collective ritual observances ("festival observances" and "new moons and Sabbaths"). There are of course plenty of other commands and regulations in the Law of Moses which might not seem to fit neatly into this double description, but Paul is using these as

shorthand to describe every part of the Law that has the purpose of symbolizing holiness on the one hand ("food and drink") and the greater principles of truth on the other having to do with the coming kingdom and the coming King ("festival observances" and "new moons and Sabbaths"). Paul is not calling for the annulment of the ten commandments or any other part of the Law which has to do with moral and ethical prohibitions and commands. These have always been and always will be valid (e.g., Rom.15:4; 1Tim.1:8), although it is true of course that even these parts of the Law have to be understood in light of the cross and the revelation of the Son of God. The Law taught God's truths symbolically, through "shadows" rather than through direct and explicit pronouncements. That can be seen most perspicuously in the transformation of the fourth commandment from a literal day-observance to the spiritual and moment-by-moment observance required of believers after the cross.[23]

> (10) Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, (11) trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. (12) It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.
> 1st Peter 1:10-12 NIV

The Law looked forward to the great revelations of the New Testament, revelations which would have to follow the incarnation of Christ, His sacrifice for us, and His glorification after the cross. For Jesus Christ is ***the*** reality which the entire Old Testament anticipated and which the entire New Testament illuminates. Everything depends on Jesus Christ; everything is about Jesus Christ.

> Everything came into being through Him, (i.e., “The Word”, Jesus Christ), and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being.
> John 1:3

> But for us there is [but] one God, the Father from whom all things [have come into being] (i.e., the Father as architect of creation), and we [now live] for Him, and there is [but] one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things [have come into being] (i.e., the Son as agent of creation), and we [now live] through Him.
> 1st Corinthians 8:6

> For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.
> Romans 11:36 NIV

> (15) [Jesus Christ] is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as

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[23] See Hebrews Chapter Four, Verses Eight through Ten, "The New Sabbath".

> well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. (18) And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. (19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.
> Colossians 1:15-20

> For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ].
> Hebrews 2:10

Jesus Christ is ***real***. The best the Law could do was to foreshadow the reality of Him. But going ***back*** to the Law when that is no longer authorized by God obviates even the good that the Law can still do in illustrating the truths we now see clearly through the Spirit.

> In mentioning a "New [Covenant]", [God] has rendered the Old one obsolete. And that which is obsolete and antiquated is close to disappearing.
> Hebrews 8:13

Adoration of Angels:

> Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and the adoration of angels, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts.
> Colossians 2:18

False teachers always have selfish motives. They seek to dominate others for personal advantage. And while there are many different systems of false teaching in the world, they all share this common core and a similar methodology. Their first and most deadly tool is the lie. And no wonder, since their leader is the father of lies (Jn.8:44). False teachers always strive to make their listeners into followers and their followers into slaves. They do this by convincing those foolish enough to give them heed that all potential blessings they may receive in this life as well as any possibility of deliverance from death and judgment is entirely in the hands of the false teacher and the secret information he is dispensing. Once this prime lie is accepted, the next step is to transform this fundamental dependence in principle into absolute dependence in practice. It is a small step from running small decisions by the leader (e.g., "Should I date this person or not?"), to handing big decisions over to him (e.g., "Should I marry this person or not?"), to accepting him as the master who tells you what to do in all things (e.g., "You must marry/divorce this person!"),

> For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.
> 2nd Timothy 4:3 NIV

People have also been fascinated by angels (and the like). All one needs to do is to consider the vast corpus of extra-biblical "information" about them down through the ages to see that this is so. There are, of course, angels in the Bible, but as we have pointed out in the past, scripture tells us far less than we would like to know about these spiritual beings. Only two of them are ever even named ***in the Bible***.[24] Any sort of "information" people would like to know, anything that makes their "ears itch", is a wedge false teachers can use. It is a facet of our corrupt human nature not to want to be "left out" of any secret. Claiming, falsely, as the individuals in our context do, that they have had special visions about something everyone desires to hear about is a good way for any false teacher to "hook" foolish individuals of every stripe, even on occasion, sad to say, believers who ought to know better. If it is not in the Bible, then we don't need to know it . . . yet. In time, we will know everything.

> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
> 1st Corinthians 13:12 NIV

In the Bible, we have "the perfect" and complete Word of God, everything our Savior who is the Word of God incarnate wants us to know (1Cor.2:16; 13:10). Therefore we may be sure that everything someone claims to have seen which does not line up with scripture is a bald-faced lie. Just because the person appears to be godly, just because he acts humbly, just because he promises to reveal amazing mysteries, does not make what he says true. These are classic cult-leader techniques which we have studied in detail before.[25] Rather than let curiosity get the better of them, wise believers, mature believers, will always give claims of extra-biblical and supernatural revelations a very wide berth. We already have the Bible. We already have the Holy Spirit. Those who want "more" are, if they are not careful, likely to get it: more trouble than they had bargained for. That is the rocky shoal for which many of the Colossian believers were headed in the past; and we believers today will soon experience similar but far more compelling temptations in the near future.

> (24) "For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (25) See, I have told you ahead of time."
> Matthew 24:24-25 ESV

Worshiping angels – essentially what the Colossian believers were being led into, whether they realized it at first or not – is most definitely a Gnostic practice, regardless of how holy or humble

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[24] See BB 2A: Angelology.

[25] See "Read your Bible!"; and Peter #39: "False Teachers, False Teaching, and False Organizations".

or legitimate the false teachers appeared or how persuasive the visions they claimed to have seen seemed.

> (25) "I have heard what the prophets who prophesy a lie in my name have said: 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' (26) How long will this continue in the minds of the prophets prophesying lies, prophets of the deceit of their own minds? (27) Through their dreams that they tell one another, they plan to cause my people to forget my name as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. (28) The prophet who has only a dream should recount the dream, but the one who has my word should speak my word truthfully, for what is straw compared to grain? " – this is the Lord's declaration.
> Jeremiah 25:23-28 CSB

> (6) "They saw false visions and their divinations were a lie. They claimed, 'This is the Lord's declaration,' when the Lord did not send them, yet they wait for the fulfillment of their message. (7) Didn't you see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you proclaimed, 'This is the Lord's declaration,' even though I had not spoken? (8) Therefore, this is what the Lord God says: You have spoken falsely and had lying visions; that's why you discover that I am against you. This is the declaration of the Lord God. (9) My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and speak lying divinations. They will not be present in the council of my people or be recorded in the register of the house of Israel, and they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord God."
> Ezekiel 13:6-9 CSB

If a person has had visions of angels, perhaps they have been instructed in the ways of spiritual warfare; perhaps they know about various demigods and daemons and how to aid the good ones and combat the bad ones; perhaps they understand how that the demiurge is not the same as or equal to God. God forbid! Elect angels are not presently revealing themselves to believers and fallen angels are not allowed to do so. Furthermore, everything we know of angels from scripture refutes any such notion of the false hierarchies of Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism and of any ability on the part of human beings to interfere for good or for ill (cf. Dan.10:12; Jude 1:9; Rev.12:7-9). Therefore anyone who claims that he or she has seen such things is a liar. All lies are dangerous, but these sorts of lies are doubly deadly, emanating from the prince of darkness himself.

> (13) For men of this sort are false apostles, workers of guile, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (14) And it is no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.
> 2nd Corinthians 11:13-14

> "Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, I will not impose any other burden on you."
> Revelation 2:24 NIV

Anyone who claims to be communicating with angels should be avoided at all costs, not admired. Anyone who claims to be able to exorcize demons is lying: only our Lord and His apostles could

perform that feat and they are not presently on earth. Anyone who claims to have special access to enticing, secret knowledge to which the rest of us are not privy, is deceiving us . . . or attempting to do so.

> (19) When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? (20) To the Law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.
> Isaiah 8:19-20 NIV

The Head:

> . . . yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.
> Colossians 2:19

In our context, it is the false teachers who are "not embracing the Head", Jesus Christ. That is the fundamental proof that they are unbelievers and not just misguided brethren. For He is "the source" of all truth. If anyone rejects His authority they prove by so doing that they are not part of His Body. Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church. All legitimate direction, growth and support come from Him who is the Word of God incarnate and from the written Word He has given us – and from no other source. Through His victory for us on the cross, He won for us the right to have the Holy Spirit through whom we learn the truth and by whom we have been sealed as those belonging to Him (2Cor.1:21-22; 5:5; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30). Unbelievers do not have the Spirit, but all believers do.

> Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.
> Romans 8:9 NKJV

Through their feigned humility, fine speaking and fantastic stories, these false teachers may have appeared to be spiritual (Rom.16:18; Eph.5:6), but in fact the only spirit with which they were communing was "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Eph.2:2 NIV).

> And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
> 1st John 4:3 NKJV

True spiritual growth requires discipline and consistency in allegiance to the truth of scripture. It may not be exciting as the hoopla of false exorcisms, spiritual warfare, and wild ritual behavior often appears to be. But doing things the right way, the Lord's way, is the only way to be safe and to accomplish what our Master wants us to do, namely, to grow up, to grow together as one Church, "supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews" of His Body of which we are

all important parts, and thus "to produce the growth" that God has given and intends to truly glorify Jesus Christ.

The Body: What better analogy could scripture use to express our close connection to Christ than Head and Body? The two are inseparable where life is present. Without the head, the body is nothing; without the body, the head is incomplete. We, the Body of Christ, are as close to Him as a Bride is to her Husband.

> (30) For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (31) "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (32) This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
> Ephesians 5:30-32 NKJV

Everything good we have as the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, the special, elect assembly of Christ (i.e., the *ekklesia,* the Church), we have from Jesus. But if we separate ourselves from our Husband, if we abandon Him who is the Head, if we distance ourselves from His select assembly, we have nothing.

> (11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.
> Ephesians 4:11-16

As the passage above demonstrates, the Body, the Bride, the assembly can only grow properly by responding to its One legitimate Authority . . . and to the delegated authority that Jesus Christ has set in place to bring His Church to full maturity so as to produce the fruit He intends it to produce. We all have a role in this process. We all have spiritual gifts. And, as we grow, the Lord will assign each of us specific ministries to aid the collective growth of the Body of Christ (1Cor.12:4-7).

> (21) The eye is not able to say to the hand, "I have no need of you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you!" (22) On the contrary, those parts of the [physical] body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (23) and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, (24) while our presentable parts have no special need. But God has

> composed the human body in such a way as to give greater honor to the parts that are short supply (analogous to teaching gifts).
> 1st Corinthians 12:21-24

Detaching oneself from this proper procedure and chain of command deprives the individual member of the possibility of growth, progress and production . . . and can lead to falling away from Christ entirely. To do Christ's will, the Body has to respond to the true authority He has delegated, exactly the opposite of what these Colossian believers were doing in giving their allegiance to false teachers. For that, there were – and still are – consequences.

> (11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.
> 2nd Timothy 2:11-13

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, He is the Husband to the collective Bride which we believers are. He is the Last Adam who came into this world to sacrifice Himself for His Eve (1Cor.15:45). He gave up everything to cast His lot with us (Phil.2:6-7). We owe Him everything, certainly obedience. Turning away from Him, turning away from His words of truth to the false teaching of others, is nothing but spiritual adultery.

> You adulterously unfaithful people! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.
> James 4:4

Verses Twenty through Twenty-Three

> (20) If you have died with Christ to these false [pagan] principles [belonging to] this world, why are you letting yourselves be [wrongly] indoctrinated as if your life were of this world? – (21) "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!", (22) even though [we know] that all these [are only] things [which] decay with use – in accordance with the commandments and teaching of [mere] men. (23) Such teachings have a [false] reputation for wisdom, but [only] in concocted religion, [false] humility, and [legalistic] harsh treatment of the body – they have no actual power to neutralize the [sinful] flesh (i.e., the sin nature is not to be controlled by these legalistic approaches).
> Colossians 2:20-23

Beginning with the Epicureans, it has always been a commonplace in various philosophies and religions to promise freedom from earthly desires and consequent deliverance from suffering tied up with focusing on the world; but as the verses above demonstrate decisively, that is a false promise. In this final section of chapter two, Paul concentrates on this specific sort of false teaching in order to move the conversation from the theoretical to the absolutely practical. In doing so, instead of discussing licentious behavior and demonic involvement, the more promiscuous and obviously sinful parts of Jewish mysticism and Gnosticism, Paul focuses on the

legalistic and ascetic side of these systems of false teaching. The reason seems obvious. Any believer who is involving him or herself in the more outrageous aspects of those false approaches was probably already beyond reach – at least in terms of likeliness to respond to an epistle written from a distance. However, those being enticed by the sham humility of these false teachers and their claims to promote "holiness" and give "victory" over sin through their secret doctrines were clearly rationalizing their behavior as believers allowing themselves to be deceived by putatively good people ostensibly working on God's behalf. Just because the latter approach is apparently more seemly than the former does not make it any less the road to perdition. Paul is "making every punch count" in this epistle (1Cor.9:26b), and thus addresses these pointed comments to the believers being deceived by legalistic and ascetic teaching as those who were not as far gone (even though ultimately headed the same way if not turned around), and potentially willing to respond to his godly rebukes.

False Principles:

> If you have died with Christ to these false [pagan] principles (*stoicheia*) [belonging to] this world, why are you letting yourselves be [wrongly] indoctrinated as if your life were of this world?
> Colossians 2:20

We reviewed Paul's use of the Greek word *stoicheia*, "principles", in our treatment of verse eight above.[26]

> See to it that no one be taking [control of] you as [though you were] plunder through the [so-called] study of wisdom (lit., "philosophy") and deception [which is] devoid [of truth], [which] agrees with human tradition, [which] agrees with [speculation about] the material principles (*stoicheia*) of the world, but [which does] not agree with Christ.
> Colossians 2:8

These basic "elementary principles of the world" as scripture calls them (Col.2:8 NASB20; Gr., *ta stoicheia*; cf. Gal.4:3; 4:9; Col.2:20; 2Pet.3:10; 3:12; cf. Heb.5:12), the celestial bodies and their predictable motions useful for delineating the "times and seasons" (Gen.1:14), have long been subject to exploitation by the evil one and his disciples, misused and divorced from those originally good and godly purposes (e.g., including that of evangelism in proclaiming the existence and goodness of God: Rom.1:20; cf. Job 36:24-25; Ps.19:1-6; 89:5; 97:6; Is.40:25-26). In his world system of religion which includes every conceivable cultic and new age manifestation, all of which are designed to lead the human race astray, Satan has made great use of the celestial bodies which have always been by their very nature fascinating to the human race.

> (26) "If I have observed the sun when it shines,
> Or the moon moving in brightness,
> (27) So that my heart has been secretly enticed,
> And my mouth has kissed my hand;

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[26] See especially Hebrews Chapter 5, section I, "Introduction".

(28) This also would be an iniquity deserving of judgment,
For I would have denied God who is above."
Job 31:26-28 NKJV

Analogously to pagan religion where false gods and false images are meant by the devil to direct worship towards himself and his followers and away from the one true God, so these false teachers in Colossae were attempting to direct the attention of the believers there to celestial phenomenon and link them up with Gnostic and mystic fantasies whose only reality was the demonic presence behind them. Fascination with angels, stars, astrology, or spiritual entities of any sort is a powerful wedge used by the adversary then and now to ply believers away from the genuine truth of the Word of God and trap them instead in a theosophical black hole from which extrication will be difficult if not impossible. For once the truth is firmly rejected for lies of this sort, repentance and restoration become the exception rather than the rule.

(19) [These false teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. (20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".
2nd Peter 2:19-22

Of This World:

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."
John 15:19 NKJV

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."
John 16:33 NKJV

(14) "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (16) They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."
John 17:14-16 NKJV

You adulterously unfaithful people! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.

James 4:4

> (15) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. (17) And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.
> 1st John 2:15-17 NKJV

The "basic principles" of the cosmos, the planets, stars, constellations and the universe as a whole, created by God for our benefit, are entirely physical and not at all spiritual, To falsely endow these principles with spiritual power is the definition of "worldliness", reversing and overturning the truth which the cosmos is designed to teach, namely, the omnipotence of the Creator deduced from His creation. That reversal, inducing the foolish to worship the creature over the Creator, is a false teaching which "the ruler of this world" is eager for all of humanity to embrace (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11), but to do so is to follow him to hell.

> (18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25) [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served ***the creature*** [Satan] in place of ***the Creator*** who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen.
> Romans 1:18-25

By identifying these "basic principles" as material and worldly, Paul exposes mystic and Gnostic teaching for what it really is: a false system claiming to be able to manipulate this present, physical world and, by definition, impugning God by insinuating that He and His subordinates as well as His adversaries are all material beings, subject to the physical universe we see and not really spiritual at all (Rom.3:8b). Those foolish enough to buy into these false systems, then and now, have, in their quest for deeper, secret spiritual insights, merely divorced themselves from true spirituality and truth altogether.

> "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."
> John 4:24 KJV

Only those who are living in this world as if this world were the only reality would ever think to "exchange the glory of the incorruptible God" for the corruptible things of this world (Rom.1:23). But as Paul reminds the Colossians in the beginning of his question to them, they have already "died with Christ to these false principles"; so why were they continuing to allow themselves to be indoctrinated into such lies "as if your life were of this world (Col.2:20)?" We believers are dead to the world and the world is dead to us. We are only here temporarily – for Jesus Christ and not for ourselves.[27]

> I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.
> Galatians 2:20a NKJV

> But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
> Galatians 6:14 NKJV

> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
> Colossians 3:3

Decay:

> (21) "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!", (22) even though [we know] that all these [are only] things [which] decay with use – in accordance with the commandments and teaching of [mere] men.
> Colossians 2:21-22

Only tangible and material things can be handled, tasted and touched. And everything material in this world along with the world itself is ultimately destined for destruction. So whether the particular false teaching or false teacher is commanding indulgence or abstinence, such commands have to do only with material things and not with spiritual matters.

> (7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., that "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] ought we to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we await with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God? For on that day the heavens will burst into

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[27] See SR 4: Satan's World System, section I, "Strangers in the Devil's Realm".

> flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.
> 2nd Peter 3:7-13 [index reverse we ought plus ?]

Excessive concern for material purity and abstemious asceticism regarding physical defilement may seem a holier approach than libertine indulgence. But for that very reason, namely, its false patina of spirituality, it can be just as or even more spiritually dangerous. The fact that Paul here emphasizes the problems with the former indicates that more believers at Colossae were being tricked by this seemingly sanctified modality, no doubt because it was less overtly and obviously sinful than gross licentiousness. But the ascetic approach shares with its opposite twin that the reference point and the place of involvement is the human body – ***not*** the human spirit. No spiritual progress, no true spirituality, will ever be achieved through material means. It is only through spiritual growth that we gain the proper perspective on abstaining from sin in erring on either side of this equation, whether from engaging in things we ought to avoid or wrongly attributing spiritual significance to material things that truly lack them. In other words, these false teachers have put things precisely backwards – exactly as we should expect from those who are not actually servants of Jesus Christ but of the devil instead.

> (13) For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (15) It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.
> 2nd Corinthians 11:13-15 NIV

> Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.)
> 2nd Corinthians 11:23 NIV

The Bible is our touchstone. The Colossian believers might have had some small basis for excusing themselves since in their day the entire Bible was not yet available. We believers today, however, have no such excuse. Regardless of the persuasiveness of what we are hearing, regardless of how many friends, family and even genuine believers follow after, if we can clearly see that the "teaching" we are receiving is not in the Bible, then we can have no doubt that it is merely "the teaching of men" – behind whom stand the evil one and his demons.

> And the Lord said, "Because this people approaches [Me only] with their mouths, and honors Me [only] with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and because their fear of Me [consists only in] the commandment[s] of men taught [by tradition], therefore, behold, I am about to deal awesomely with this people in a most awesome way, so that the wisdom of the wise will perish, and the discernment of the discerning will be hidden [from them]".
> Isaiah 29:13-14 (cf. Matt.15:9; Mk.7:7)

> (13b) Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith (14) and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

Titus 1:13b-14 NIV

A Reputation for Wisdom:

> Such teachings have a [false] reputation for wisdom, but [only] in concocted religion, [false] humility, and [legalistic] harsh treatment of the body – they have no actual power to neutralize the [sinful] flesh (i.e., the sin nature is not to be controlled by these legalistic approaches).
> Colossians 2:23

It is the essence of human nature to respect the common opinion, even when that common opinion is terribly wrong-headed. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Scripture is replete with examples of single individuals being in the right when everyone else was in the wrong, with trust in God being the great dividing line.

> Then the Lord said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation."
> Genesis 7:1 NKJV

> (11) And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, "This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears." (12) Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard."
> Jeremiah 26:11-12 NKJV

> . . . and [God] rescued righteous Lot who was tormented by the depraved lifestyle of those lawless men.
> 2nd Peter 2:7

The appearance of wisdom is not wisdom. To fear the Lord, that is true wisdom (Job 28:28; Ps.111:10; Prov.1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Is.33:6; Eccl.12:13).

> (19) For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." (20) Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.
> 1st Corinthians 1:19-21 NIV

> But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.
> 2nd Corinthians 10:12b NKJV

Following the crowd may seem safe, but in truth it is usually the swiftest route to perdition.

> (13) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (14) But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."
> Matthew 7:13-14 NIV

It is better to listen to the Spirit as He illuminates scripture in our hearts, truth we have believed and proved and know to be right, than to foolishly follow after what is novel and exciting as the crowd are always prone to do.

> The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.
> Ecclesiastes 9:17 NIV

> Professing to be wise, they became fools.
> Romans 1:22 NKJV

> (6) We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. (7) No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. (8) None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
> 1st Corinthians 2:6-8 NKJV

No Power: This is the "bottom line" for any and all who find themselves drawn to give their allegiance to such teachings and to such teachers in hopes of escaping whatever temptation is proving hard to resist. Such systems have "no power" whatsoever to neutralize or control the sin nature. The false humility and ascetic presentation of Gnostic and legalistic mystics (and of all such "religious" individuals) is merely a front put on to deceive. Such individuals have not mastered sin – they have been mastered ***by*** sin in the cause of the evil one (2Pet.2:19-22).

> Such teachings have a [false] reputation for wisdom, but [only] in concocted religion, [false] humility, and [legalistic] harsh treatment of the body – they have no actual power to neutralize the [sinful] flesh (i.e., the sin nature is not to be controlled by these legalistic approaches).
> Colossians 2:23

Neither abusing the body nor indulging the body has any genuine affect on the sin nature that dwells within it (Rom.7:17-20). But God has given believers the means to fight that fight. He has given us His Holy Spirit. May it not be said of any of us that we traded that precious gift for the lies and pottage of new age charlatans of this sort.

> But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.
> Romans 8:9 NKJV

> (16) But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for.

(17) For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; (21) drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, uprightness, faith, (23) humility, self-control. Against such things, there is no Law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its weaknesses and its lusts. (25) If we live because of the Spirit, let us also walk by means of the Spirit.
Galatians 5:16-25