

# Colossians 2

## Warnings Against False Religion

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### **Introduction:**

Chapter 2 opens with Paul expressing the great inner conflict, or concern, he had for the believers in Colossae as well as for those in nearby Laodicea, that they would be fully assured of the truth of the gospel, firmly rooted and built up in the Faith (vv. 1-3). He then spends the rest of the chapter (vv. 4-23) giving various warnings and admonitions against those who would pollute the pure gospel message of Christ with religious systems of dos and don'ts.

### **Paul's Concern for the Colossian Believers (vv. 1-3):**

**(1) For I would that ye knew what great conflict<sup>{1}</sup> I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; (2) That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; (3) In whom<sup>{2}</sup> are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

<sup>{1}</sup> {margin: or, *fear*, or, *care*}

<sup>{2}</sup> {margin: or, *Wherein*}

*For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and ... them at Laodicea, and ... as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; (v. 1)*

The apostle Paul wants them to know the great “conflict” he had for the Colossian believers, as well as for them in Laodicea, and for as many others who had not met Paul in person. The word “conflict” is translated in most modern Bible versions as “struggle,” and is referring to the inner struggle Paul had for these new believers.

Note: Verse 1 of chapter 2, and in particular the phrase “and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,” is one of the verses used to suggest that Paul had never personally been to Colossae. While that interpretation is certainly possible, it’s far from conclusive. It could also be Paul’s way of expressing the great conflict he had for the believers in Colossae and Laodicea (whom he *had* seen in person), plus any others whom he *had not* seen in person. For further discussion on this subject, see the Introduction to Colossians.

Paul explains what this particular “struggle” was in verse 2:

“... that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ”

There’s a lot contained in that rather long phrase. Paul felt a great *inner struggle* for these believers in Colossae, hoping that:

- Their hearts would be comforted,
- This comforting would come from [Their hearts] being knit together in love,
- This knitting together of their hearts in love, and the ensuing comfort they would experience, would lead to “all riches of the full assurance of understanding,”
- This deeper understanding would lead to the “acknowledgment of the mystery of God” — both the Father, and Jesus Christ.

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Warren Wiersbe summarized verse 2 as the the *spiritual maturity* that Paul hoped for these believers in Colossae<sup>1</sup>:

- Encouragement “... that their hearts might be comforted,” Our English word *encourage* comes from French, and literally means “with heart.” To encourage people is to give them new heart.
- Endearment “... being knit together in love,” The mature Christian loves the brethren and seeks to be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. He is a part of spiritual unity in the church. An immature person is often selfish and causes division.
- Enrichment “... unto all riches ....” Too many Christians are living like paupers when they could be living like kings. Mature Christians do not complain about what they don’t have. Rather, they make use of the vast resources that they do have in Jesus Christ.
- Enlightenment “... of the full assurance of understanding,” The mature believer has assurance in his heart that he is a child of God.

Let’s break each of these items in verse 2 down, and examine them in more detail:

*That their hearts might be comforted, ... (v. 2a)*

Paul’s first concern for these Colossian believers was that they would be comforted. When going through particularly difficult times, it is an indescribable comfort to know that you are not going through it alone. In the context of this chapter, this “comforting” was to come from their being firmly established in the truth of the gospel. With all the various religious theories swirling around them, they could take comfort in the truth and steadfastness of the simple gospel message.

*... being knit together in love, ... (v. 2b)*

How exactly did Paul hope that they would be comforted? By having their hearts knit together in love. To illustrate the unity that he desires for them, Paul uses the metaphor of various individual strands of yarn being knit together into a single cohesive unit. Once a knitted sweater is complete, it’s no longer viewed as a dozen balls of yarn — it’s now a sweater, period. The same should go for those in the church body; we are no longer mere individuals, but part of a larger cohesive whole. What is it that binds us together like this? Love — the one irreplaceable characteristic of the Christian faith. As Christ himself said:

“A new commandment I give unto you, ‘That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.’ By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” [John 13:34-35] (cp. John 15:12, 17)

Or, as the Christian song paraphrases it:

“They’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
Yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersby; *The Bible Expedition Commentary — New Testament*, Volume II: Ephesians – Revelation; David C. Cook, publisher; 1989; p. 123.

... and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, ... (v. 2c)

Paul hoped that, by having their hearts knit together in love, and being thereby comforted, this would lead “unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding.” What does that mean? The words “full assurance” are translated from a Greek word [πληροφορίας (*plērophorias*)] that means “most certain confidence,” or “absolute certainty.” This same word is used twice by the writer of Hebrews, once to describe the “full assurance of hope” (*Hebrews 6:11*), and once to describe the “full assurance of faith” (*Hebrews 10:22*). We might call it “being 100% confident.” So this entire phrase could be rendered as, “the incredible reward that comes from being 100% confident in one’s understanding.” Confident in one’s understanding of what? In the Truth of Scripture. When the Holy Spirit leads a believer to a proper understanding of Scripture, and that believer is 100% confident in its unwavering truth, there is a priceless level of comfort that comes with that. No longer does that believer worry about the things they might see or hear in the world around them (e.g., Covid, the state of the nation) — their confidence is in the Lord, and that confidence is unshakable!

... to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ: (v. 2d)

And ultimately, all of this would lead to “the acknowledgment of the mystery of God.” The Greek reads literally, “the mystery the God and father and the Christ.” (See note below regarding manuscript variations and the modern Bible versions.) The Modern Literal Version (MLV) translates the phrase as, “the mystery of God and Father and of the Christ.” The World English Bible (WEB) renders it as, “the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.” What Paul is describing here is a truth about God Himself that was previously hidden, or not yet revealed, in Old Testament times, but which had now been revealed, and which he hoped their “full assurance of understanding” would lead them to acknowledge.

This “mystery” was the fact that JEHOVAH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, subsisted in more persons than just one — that the Godhead consisted of both God the Father, as well as Christ (plus, of course, the Holy Spirit, though not mentioned here). Although there were certainly hints of this Truth in the Old Testament (e.g., the plural word *elohiym*, “Let us make man in our image,” etc.), it was not something which was plainly revealed. In fact, Jewish scholars today continue to deny the Trinity — it is an absolutely alien concept to them.

Yet the doctrine of the Trinity is an absolutely *foundational* tenet of Christianity. To deny the Trinity is to deny that Jesus is God. There is a well-known quote, usually attributed to Augustine of Hippo, that says,

“If you don’t believe in the Trinity, you will lose your soul. But if you try to understand it, you will lose your mind.”<sup>2</sup>

Adrian Rogers quoted it as,

“Try to define the Trinity and you’ll lose your *mind*. Deny it and you’ll lose your *soul*.” [Adrian Rogers; *Adrianisms: The Collective Wit and Wisdom of Adrian Rogers*; Innovo Publishing, 2015; p. 10]

Note: There is quite a bit of variation found in the Greek manuscripts at the end of verse 2. Almost all modern Bible versions go with the older Alexandria manuscripts (which, in my opinion, are demonstrably corrupt), and omit the words “and of the father.” They usually render the end of the verse as, “... the mystery of God, which is [or, namely] Christ”

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<sup>2</sup> Aurelius Augustinus, better known as Augustine of Hippo; *De Trinitate* (“*On the Trinity*”); published c. 400-428 AD. Augustine was a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century scholar in Hippo of Numidia [modern-day Annaba, Algeria in North Africa].

*In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (v. 3)*

Paul goes on in verse 3 to explain that “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Grammatically, the pronoun “whom” used at the beginning of verse 3 could be pointing either to God the Father, or to Jesus Christ, both of whom are directly mentioned at the end of verse 2. However, the immediate antecedent is Christ, and the context of the passage seems to favor this interpretation, as Christ is the One through whom these “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are revealed to us. What Paul is saying is that all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. Several passages in the Old Testament speak of wisdom and understanding being obtained through a healthy fear of the LORD:

**(10)** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.  
[Proverbs 9:10] (See also Proverbs 1:7, Psalm 111:10, which say basically the same thing.)

**(1)** My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; **(2)** So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, *and* apply thine heart to understanding; **(3)** Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding; **(4)** If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures; **(5)** Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. **(6)** For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. [Proverbs 2:1-6]

The LORD, and more specifically, Christ, is the only source for *true* wisdom and *true* understanding. In the passage cited above from Proverbs 2, Wisdom is personified, as if speaking to King Solomon, and states that he should pursue wisdom, understanding, and knowledge the way you would pursue silver, or a hidden treasure. Here in Colossians 2, Paul similarly describes *wisdom* and *knowledge* as “treasures” which are hidden in Christ. And just like Wisdom herself told King Solomon all those centuries ago, we should pursue these as if we were tracking down vast buried riches. Because, in reality, godly wisdom, godly understanding, and godly knowledge are infinitely more valuable than man-made money.

**Warnings Against False Teachings (vv. 4-23):****1st Warning (v. 4):**

**(4) And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.**

This is the first of four warnings or admonitions Paul gives in this chapter against various false teachings (see also: v. 8, vv. 16-17, vv. 18-19).

Why is Paul focusing so much on their spiritual maturity? Why does he have this great inner struggle, hoping that they would be 100% confident in their understanding of God? Because he was worried that someone might try to “beguile [them] with enticing words.” The word “beguile” [Greek: *παραλογίζηται* (*paralogizētai*)] literally means “to mis-reckon; to reckon wrongly, or miscount,” and, by extension, “to deceive or mislead.” Today, we might call it “swindling,” or “conning” someone. How would someone potentially deceive or mislead these believers in Colossae? Paul was worried that it would be through “enticing words” [*πιθανολογία* (*pithanologia*)], a compound word that literally means “persuasive language or speech.” The arguments of false teachers can often sound very logical and quite persuasive. Without a firm footing in the Word of God, a believer can very easily be led astray. How does one obtain this firm footing in God’s Word? Through continual, ongoing Bible study. As we discussed in the previous chapter (see notes at Colossians 1:28-29), Christ has established certain positions within the Church body for this very purpose: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (*Ephesians 4:11-16*).

**The Solution (vv. 5-7):**

**(5) For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.**

In the next 3 verses Paul writes them a *prescription* to help them guard against anyone “beguiling them with enticing words.” But before giving them their prescription, he first begins by commending them on their order, and on the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. He’s giving them some positive reinforcement first, before starts exhorting them. The word “order” [Greek: *τάξιν* (*táxin*)] means “a regular arrangement,” or “orderly condition.” It’s translated as “order” all 10 times it appears in the King James Bible. Paul is commending them on the orderly condition of their meetings and their worship. This stands in stark contrast to the Corinthian church, which Paul had to sharply rebuke for their disorderliness. The Corinthian church was in chaos, with people standing up and shouting out whatever “psalm,” “doctrine,” “tongue,” “revelation,” or “interpretation” they had, with no regard for orderliness (*1 Corinthians 14:26*). In contrast, Paul actually commends the Colossian church for their orderliness.

The second thing Paul commends them on is the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. The word “steadfastness” [Greek: *στερέωμα* (*steréōma*)] only appears here, and literally means “solidity,” as in something that has been “solidified.” It’s the noun form of the Greek verb *στερεόω* (*stereōō*), which means “to solidify” (e.g., the drying and setting of concrete), a verb used three times in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 3 it’s translated as “received strength” (v. 7), and “made strong” (v. 16), in reference to the lame man that Peter had healed; in Acts chapter 16 it’s translated as “were established” (v. 5), referring to the churches of Cilicia, Phrygia and Galatia as being “firmly solidified” in the Faith. Paul is commending the Colossian church for the fact that their faith in Christ was “firmly solidified.” The idea being conveyed with this particular noun is that their faith in Christ was no longer soft and malleable, but was rock-solid.

**(6) As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: (7) Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.**

So what is this *prescription* that Paul wrote for them to help them combat “enticing words”? The words “as ye have therefore received” harken back to the time when they first heard the gospel message. Before he begins, he first reminds them of the time when they were first taught about Christ. He then tells them that, just like they had initially been taught, “so walk ye in Him.” The first part of Paul’s prescription was to walk “in Christ.” In other words, walk in sync with Him, in complete harmony with Him — His thoughts, His desires, His agenda — and in constant communication with Him. Paul says elsewhere that if we “walk in the Spirit,” we will not fulfill the lusts of our flesh (*Galatians 5:16*). This same principle can also be applied here — walking “in Christ” (synonymous with walking “in the Spirit”) inoculates us against being “beguiled with enticing words.”

Paul goes on to explain how they should be “rooted and built up in [Christ]”, and “stablished” in the Faith,” just like they had been initially taught. The second part of Paul’s prescription for fighting off the *disease* of being “beguiled with enticing words,” is to be “rooted,” “built up,” and “stablished in the Faith.” These three words, *rooted* (literally, to take root), *built up* (to build upon), and *stablished* (to make stable) all paint a picture of a plant, such as a tree, initially taking root as a young sapling, growing up from those roots, and eventually becoming firmly established in the earth. As Christians, we build upon the foundations that were taught to us after we first came to Christ. We all begin our Christian walk as young *saplings*; it is up to us to make sure our faith takes firm root, then build upon that faith as we grow in Christ, eventually becoming solidly established in the Faith like a giant oak tree.

Note: The verb “stablished” used here in verse 7 [Greek: *βεβαιούμενοι* (*bebaiómenoi*)] is a different word than that translated as “steadfastness” in verse 5. This particular word means “made stable,” or “stabilized.” It comes from the adjective *βέβαιος* (*bébaios*), which means “stable,” which in turn is derived from the noun *βάσις* (*básis*), which refers to a “base” or “footing” (we get our English words “base” and “basis” from this Greek word). Paul wants these believers in Colossae to be *stabilized* in their faith.

Finally, Paul wants them to “abound therein [i.e., in their faith] with thanksgiving.” We are to do everything with Thanksgiving (*Colossians 3:17; Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 13:15*).

**2nd Warning (v. 8):**

**(8) Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments<sup>{3}</sup> of the world, and not after Christ.**

<sup>{3}</sup> {margin: or, *elements*}

Paul uses somewhat stronger language in verse 8, and tells them to “beware,” lest anyone spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit. The word “beware” [*Greek: βλέπετε (blépete)*] literally means “look at,” the way you might tell someone, “Look at that!” Many of the modern Bible versions render it as “See to it.” We might translate it today as, “Look out!” Paul is telling them to be on the *lookout* against these people.

The two particular things Paul mentions in this verse that could potentially “spoil” them are “philosophy” and “vain deceit.” These two terms are joined in one thought, as there is only a single preposition [*διὰ (diá = through)*] preceding them in the original Greek, and only a single definite article for both expressions. The word “philosophy” [*Greek: φιλοσοφίας (philosophías); φίλος (philos) + σοφός (sophós)*] literally means “love of wisdom.” This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament, and it is used specifically of a particular Jewish sect of the day that spent its time in useless speculative musings. Thayer’s Lexicon had this to say about the word:

“Used either of zeal for or skill in any art or science, any branch of knowledge. Used once in the NT of the theology, or rather theosophy [*a teaching involving mystical insights into the nature of God*], of certain Jewish Christian ascetics, which busied itself with refined and speculative enquiries into the nature and classes of angels, into the ritual of the Mosaic law and the regulations of Jewish tradition respecting practical life.”  
[Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D.; *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Complete and Unabridged* (italicized words mine); entry for Strong’s G5385]

Here, Paul is obviously using the word in a negative sense, and could well be referring to this Jewish mysticism sect. But in broader terms, you could apply Paul’s warning here to any system of philosophy which either directly goes against God’s Word, or seeks to add to it. Christian apologist Norm Geisler put it this way:

“Although the context of Col 2:8 probably has reference to a proto-gnostic type of philosophy at Colosse that had a disastrous mix of legalism, asceticism, and mysticism with Christianity, the implications of Paul’s exhortation to ‘beware of philosophy’ are appropriately applied to other alien systems of thought that have invaded Christianity down through the centuries since then. ...

“... We cannot properly *beware* of philosophy unless we *be aware* of philosophy.”  
[Norman L. Geisler; “Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars”; *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42:1 (March 1999); pp. 3, 18]

J. Vernon McGee once said on his radio program:

“Now false philosophy today is like a blind man looking in a dark room for a black cat that isn’t there; that is the hunt of philosophy today.” [J. Vernon McGee; *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 5 volumes; 5:350]

A similar problem today is that of “Christian Psychology.” Psychology is a system of study which attempts to explain the inner workings of man — i.e., his soul and spirit — without reference to the Bible. As Paul says here in verse 8, these teachings are based on “the traditions of men,” and “the rudiments of the world,” and are not based on Christ. These false teachers were basing their so-called philosophy on the traditions of men, and not on the teachings of Christ. The word “rudiments” in the expression “the rudiments of the world,”

[*Greek: στοιχεῖα (stoicheia)*] is referring to the basic building blocks of something — either of the material world (as used in 2 Peter 3:10, 12), or of a system of teaching or philosophy (like the ABCs are to language). This second sense of the word is the way it’s being used here. This is also how the word is used in Galatians, where it’s rendered as “elements” (*Galatians 4:1*) or as beggarly elements (*Galatians 4:9*), as well as in the book of Hebrews, where it’s translated as “first principles” (*Hebrews 5:12*). Paul uses the same word again later in this same chapter (2:20). What Paul seems to be referring to are the basic, foundational teachings, or first principles, of worldly philosophy. These *rudiments*, or basic teachings of philosophy, had already been around for centuries by the time Paul began writing in the first century AD. Both Aristotle and Socrates (4<sup>th</sup> century BC) were students of Plato, who taught in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. So this worldly system of philosophy — based on the foundational teachings of these ancient philosophers, and handed down through the traditions of men — was nothing new to the apostle Paul.

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The entire field of study known today as “Christian Psychology” attempts to do just that, filling in the “gaps” where God’s Word is supposedly inadequate (see Note below). The apostle Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, tells us that God’s Word had given us everything we need for life and godliness [i.e., everything we need for living life and being godly followers of Christ]:

**(1)** Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: **(2)** Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, **(3)** According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: **(4)** Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. [2 Peter 1:1-4]

So, how does Peter say we are to obtain these “things pertaining unto life and godliness”? In his words, “through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” — in other words, through the knowledge of God and Christ. Or, as it says elsewhere in Scripture:

**(9)** Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. **(10)** For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. **(11)** For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. **(12)** O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee. [Psalm 84:9-12]

**(31)** What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? **(32)** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? [Romans 8:31-32]

What Christian psychology attempts to do is substitute itself in place of God’s Word, Christian fellowship, and prayer — the only three things a believer in Christ needs in order to get through whatever difficulties this life throws at us. Anything else that someone attempts to add to these three things is, by definition, and insinuation that these three things are insufficient in themselves. The word “psychology” itself means “the study of the soul,” and completely leaves out the most important aspect of humanity — the eternal spirit. Psychology attempts to explain the root causes of our problems apart from the Word of God, with virtually no discussion of the sin nature, our problem with disobedience, or the ramifications of these two things.

Note: The term “Christian Psychology” itself is a deceptive misnomer; there is nothing overtly Christian about it. The entire field of study is based on the teachings of anti-God philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Ivan Pavlov, and Alfred Adler, men who based their philosophies on the teachings of Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, none of whom were godly men. None of these philosophers, even the so-called Christian ones, had a very high view of the inspiration of Scripture. They were all looking for the answers to the problems of life. But the answer, of course, is Christ. All “Christian Psychology” does is take those same teachings (which they have to teach to be accredited), and add some “Christian” lipstick to them. For example, in Christian psychology, a troubled believer is told that they need to learn to love themselves first before they can properly love others (self-esteem is of paramount importance) — a teaching which is based on the teachings of these “founding fathers” of psychology, and which goes directly against the Word of God (which says to “deny yourself”). And there are many, many other similar examples. In fact, psychology is not even a science, in the strictest sense of the word — there’s no way to experimentally test your theories under controlled conditions, and the predictions of psychologists are in no way guaranteed (e.g., most people born to dysfunctional or abusive households do not end up as psychopaths or serial killers, and not all people who grew up with an abusive or neglectful mothers end up with Mommy issues).

The next thing Paul warns is about is “vain deceit” [Greek: *κενή ἀπάτης* (*kenēs apátēs*)], which translates quite literally to “empty deceit,” or “empty deception.” In the context here, it is probably referring to the philosophies that the apostle Paul is warning against, philosophies which are often presented with good-sounding arguments, but those arguments are actually nothing but empty deception.

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In both of these things — philosophy, and vain deceit — Paul’s warning is that someone might “spoil” them. When we hear the word “spoil” today, we usually think of something going bad, such as fruit that is left out too long, or food that has grown mold. But the word used here [*Greek: συλλαγωῶν (sulagōgōn)*] is referring to “spoiling” in the sense of plundering or looting, as in “the *spoils* of war.” The word is used specifically of invading armies carrying off everything of value from a conquered country. Paul is warning them that they might be *robbed* or *plundered* by these false teachers. What was it that Paul was worried about them potentially losing? The text doesn’t explicitly say, but it’s possible Paul is referring them being robbed of their faith (*Solus Christus* — in Christ alone<sup>3</sup>) and their hope (by convincing them to add their own efforts to salvation). Anytime you add man’s efforts to the gospel message, you are denying the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement — your faith is now in Christ *plus* your own efforts, which is not really faith at all. And once you add your own works to the gospel, your “hope” is no longer in Christ’s promises, but in the efficacy of your own efforts. By potentially convincing them to add the works of the law to the gospel message, they would be robbing them of true faith and true hope.

### **The Solution (vv. 9-15):**

#### **(9) For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.**

The pronoun “him” is referring to the word “Christ” at the end of verse 8, as do all of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronouns (him, whom, he, etc.) from here through verse 15. All the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ. What does that mean? We discussed this Greek word [*Greek: πλήρωμα (plērōma)*] in chapter 1, where Paul had stated, in verse 19, “For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell.” The word refers to the state of being “replete,” “totally filled up,” or “completely full.” The word translated “Godhead” [*Greek: θεότητος (theótētos)*] means “deity or divinity; the state of being God” — what we might call today “Godhood.” What Paul is saying here in chapter 2 is that *full Godhood* dwells in Christ in bodily form. Or, to put it another way, Christ is the totality of God represented in bodily form. Jesus Christ was fully God in every way, and He is the physical manifestation of the full Godhead.

#### **(10) And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:**

The word “complete” used here [*Greek: πεπληρωμένοι (peplērōmémoi)*] is the verb form of the noun “fulness” used in the previous verse, and means “to fill up, to make replete.” After explaining that Christ is the “fulness” of God in bodily form, Paul now explains that we, as Christians, are “filled up,” or “made full,” in Him. We are “filled up” in Christ. We are filled up *with* Christ, and He makes us complete.

In the second part of this verse, Paul reiterates the fact that Christ is “the head of all principality and power.” The word “principality” [*Greek: ἀρχῆς (archēs)*] literally means “a beginning,” or “a first thing.” Of the 58 times this word appears in Scripture, it is most often translated as “beginning,” “beginnings,” or “first.” But it also gets translated as “principality” or “principalities” eight times, this being one of them. Here, it is referring to “first things,” or “chief things,” anything which might be viewed as *first, foremost, or of chief importance*. Most modern Bible versions render this word as either “rule” or “ruler.”

The second word, “power” [*Greek: ἐξουσίας (exousias)*], properly refers to the “power of choice,” the freedom and authority to make decisions. It is translated once as “liberty,” referring to the *liberty* we have in Christ (*1 Corinthians 8:9*). It is most often, however, translated as “power,” or “authority.” As he used here, it is referring to those who have the *authority* to make decisions, the religious and political leaders. Most modern Bible versions render this word as “authority.”

Paul’s point here is that Christ is the head over anyone else who might be a ruler or authority figure. Regardless of how important these human leaders are here on earth, they are ultimately *under* Christ, and His supreme authority.

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<sup>3</sup> The “Five Solae” are: (1) Sola Scriptura, (2) Sola Fide, (3) Sola Gratia, (4) Solus Christus, and (5) Soli Deo gloria.

**(11) In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:**

Again, the pronoun “whom” is still referring to the word “Christ” at the end of verse 8. Paul explains that we are *circumcised* in Christ, with a *circumcision* not made with human hands.

In order to properly understand this verse, it is necessary to fully understand the rite of circumcision from the Old Testament. Circumcision was a sign, or outward token, of the covenant between Abraham and God, known as the Abrahamic Covenant, which was based on Abraham’s faith and trust in God. We first see it in Genesis chapter 17:

**(7)** And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. **(8)** And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. **(9)** And God said unto Abraham, “Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. **(10)** This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. **(11)** And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. **(12)** And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which *is* not of thy seed. **(13)** He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. **(14)** And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.” [*Genesis 17:7-14*]

The Old Testament, all the way back in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, clearly stated what circumcision really represented:

**(40)** If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; **(41)** And *that* I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: **(42)** Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. [*Leviticus 26:40-42*]

**(16)** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. [*Deuteronomy 10:16 (See also Deuteronomy 30:6)*]

**(3)** For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. **(4)** Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench *it*, because of the evil of your doings.” [*Jeremiah 4:3-4*]

**(10)** To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. [*Jeremiah 6:10*]

**(25)** Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all *them which are* circumcised with the uncircumcised; **(26)** Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all *that are* in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all *these nations are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart. [*Jeremiah 9:25-26*] hello

**(6)** And thou shalt say to the rebellious, *even* to the house of Israel, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, **(7)** In that ye have brought *into my sanctuary* strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, *even* my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.” [*Ezekiel 44:6-7*]

( ↓ Continued ↓ )

The prophet Ezekiel also spoke of the LORD giving the people a new heart, and taking away their “stony heart,” and giving them “an heart of flesh” (*Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26*). Paul explains this more than once in the New Testament:

**(28)** For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

**(29)** But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God. [*Romans 2:28-29*]

**(3)** For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. [*Philippians 3:3*]

So, here in Colossians 2:11, Paul is explaining that as born-again believers, we have been “circumcised in Christ,” referring to the new heart that was given us at the moment of salvation. The rite of circumcision represented a “putting off” of the flesh. The *physical* act of circumcision only “put off” *a small portion* of the flesh; but in the case of *spiritual* circumcision, our old natures — “the body of the sins of the flesh” (*as it’s called here in Colossians 2:11*), the whole “body of sin” (*as Paul calls it in Romans 6:6*) — are similarly “put off.”

**(12) Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.**

Paul now turns from the picture of circumcision to the picture of baptism. As Paul explains here, we have been “buried with him in baptism,” wherein (i.e., in the same ceremony of baptism) we “also ... are risen with him.” Our being “risen with him” is pointing to the *new birth*, whereby a brand new, *sinless* nature is born within a new believer at the moment of salvation. You could consider the new birth as the *first installment* in our eventual *full resurrection* and glorification. The new birth is our *spiritual* resurrection, whereas our future glorification at the Rapture is our *physical* resurrection.

Paul states at the end of this verse that our being “risen with him” is accomplished “through the faith of the operation of God,” or, in simpler terms, our “trust in the workings of God.” God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and it’s our faith and trust in Him — and that He is able to do the same for us — that saves us.

In the ordinance of baptism, our submersion under the water represents us being “buried with Him” [i.e., with Christ], and our rising up from the water represents our resurrection with Him. The symbolic “resurrection” pictured in baptism is not signifying our *future* resurrection and glorification at the Rapture of the Church, but to our *spiritual* resurrection — a resurrection that occurs at the moment of salvation. It’s this *spiritual* resurrection that enables us to “walk in newness of life” (*Romans 6:4*). The best explanation of the picture being portrayed by water baptism is found in *Romans* chapter 6:

- (1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? (3) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (4) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (7) For he that is dead is freed {Greek: *δεδικαίωται* (*dedikaiōtai*) = *justified, declared innocent*} from sin. (8) Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (9) Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. (10) For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. (11) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (12) Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. [*Romans 6:1-12*]

The water baptism ceremony itself doesn’t bestow anything new upon the new believer — it doesn’t give them the Holy Spirit (something they’ve had since the moment of salvation), it doesn’t give them a “second blessing.” Water baptism is merely an outward, *symbolic* portrayal of something which has *already* occurred within the new believer: their old natures having been “buried with Christ,” and having been spiritually born again, to “walk in newness of life.” As Paul explained in the passage cited above, when our old sinful natures were buried with Christ, we were thereby “freed from sin” (v. 7) — we were freed from the *power* that sin formally had over us, a power which had kept us hopelessly enslaved to sin. Being born again, we are now free to live a new life in Christ.

**(13) And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; (14) Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;**

Paul builds upon the baptism analogy by explaining that, prior to their salvation, they were formally “dead in [their] sins and the uncircumcision of [their] flesh.” Paul uses a *present participle* verb here (“being dead”) to indicate that they were already dead. In other words, prior to our coming to Christ, we were already dead, and just didn’t know it yet. However, as born-again believers, we have now been “quickened [i.e., made alive] together with [Christ],” and God has “forgiven [us] all trespasses.” As we discussed in the previous verse, our “rising up” from the water symbolically pictures our being born again spiritually.

Notice also that the verb “having forgiven” is a *past participle*<sup>4</sup> — something that has already been done. Notice also that this forgiveness that has already been done is for “all trespasses” — we’ve *already* been forgiven for every single sin we have ever committed, and for every sin we *will* ever commit.

Paul continues in verse 14, referring to the Old Testament Law of Moses as “the handwriting of ordinances,” that was both “against us,” and “contrary to us” (literally: our opponent, or adversary). God’s Law — whether it was the Law of Moses for the Jews, or God’s moral law written on each person’s heart — His Law was our adversary, constantly working against us. The word “ordinances” [*Greek: δόγμασιν (dómasin); plural of δόγμα (dóγμα)*] only occurs twice in Scripture, once here in Colossians 2:14, and once in the parallel passage in Ephesians 2:

**(14)** For he is our peace, who hath made both one [referring to Jews and Gentiles], and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; **(15)** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so making peace*; **(16)** And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: [*Ephesians 2:14-16*]

This Greek word is where we get our English word “dogma,” a word used most often today in Roman Catholic teachings, to refer to those tenets of Roman Catholicism which are supposedly “undeniable.” In addition to these two occurrences, a verbal form of this same root word [*Greek: δογματίζεσθε (dogmatízesthe)*] appears once, later in this same chapter (v. 20), translated as “subject to ordinances.”

At the end of verse 14, Paul explains that these ordinances that were against us and contrary to us, God has taken out of the way, “nailing [them] to His cross” [i.e., the cross of Christ]. The picture Paul is painting here is that of religious laws, or any other legalistic system of dos and don’ts, all having been nailed to the cross of Christ, and His death, burial, and resurrection *having fulfilled* them all for every person who comes to Christ in faith.

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<sup>4</sup> The underlying Greek verb [*χαρισάμενος (charisámenos)*] is actually an *aorist participle*. The *aorist* tense is a Greek verb tense in which verbal actions which occurred in the past are mentioned without regard to how long they took to complete, whether they were or were not thoroughly completed, or whether the results of the action are still in effect. Although there is no direct equivalent for this tense in English, these verbs are normally rendered in the *past tense*. In this particular case, all English translations render it as an action which was completed in the past, with most versions rendering it as a past participle (“having forgiven”), and a few (BSB, CSB, NIV, NLT) as simple past tense (“he forgave”).

**(15) And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it<sup>{5}</sup>.**

<sup>{5}</sup> {margin: or, *in himself*}

Paul continues by explaining that, through Christ's death on the cross, he "spoiled principalities and powers." The word "spoiled" [*Greek: ἀπεκδυσάμενος (apekdusómenos)*] literally means "removed from," or "stripped off of," and is often used in extra-Biblical writings of the removal of one's clothing, or the disarming of enemy opponents. This particular Greek word appears only three times in Scripture, all of them in Colossians: twice as a verb (*here, and in 3:9*), and once as a noun (*2:11*). In Colossians 3:9, it is translated as a verb in the phrase "seeing that ye have put off the old man," while in verse 11 earlier in this chapter it was translated as a noun, referring to the "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh." Here in verse 15, Paul is referring to Christ having *removed [something] from* these principalities and powers — *stripping off of them* all of their power, authority, and control.

Paul then explains the Christ "made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." In other words, Christ took these "principalities and powers," and showed them, clearly and openly, how He had defeated them at the cross. Or, you could say that the victory Christ accomplished over these "principalities and powers" was shown openly — clearly revealed for everyone to see. These "principalities and powers" are the same ones Paul referred to in chapter 1, where he explained how Christ had created everything, even these angelic beings.

It's not totally clear whether the phrase "made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them" means that Christ literally paraded these *principalities and powers* around for everyone to witness their defeat, or if it was *their defeat* that Christ showed openly. Either way, the end result is the same; these principalities and powers have been defeated at the cross of Christ.

There is some degree of ambiguity regarding the Greek pronoun *αὐτῷ (autō)* at the end of verse 15, translated "it" in the KJV. Some scholars take it as referring to *Christ*, the "he" of verse 15, rendering it is either *Christ*, or *Him*, while others see it as referring to *the cross*, mentioned at the end of verse 14. The modern Bible versions are fairly evenly split, with about half translating it as either "it," or "the cross," and the other half translating it as "Christ," or "Him." Early King James Bibles included a margin note here indicating an alternate translation of the end of the verse as "in himself." However, I believe the original translation is correct here, with the pronoun "it" referring to "the cross" at the end of verse 14, and the victory Christ accomplished on it.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Warning (vv. 16-17):**

**(16) Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink<sup>[6]</sup>, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: (17) Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.**

<sup>[6]</sup> {margin: or, *for eating and drinking*}

Paul now addresses some specific false teachings that were making the rounds in Colossae. First he deals with the false idea, probably put forth by Jews, that the kind of food you eat, or what you drink, or which holy days you do or do not observe, or whether or not you observe the Sabbath, can somehow bring you closer to God. This, of course, was Jewish legalism, and had somehow made its way into the church at Colossae. These Jewish teachers were insisting that the Mosaic Law was binding on them as well. The term “holy days” is referring to the various religious feasts and festivals prescribed in the Law of Moses. There were seven religious feasts officially prescribed in the law of Moses. These feasts are listed below, with their prophetic significance:

- |                            |  |  |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Passover .....          | 1/14 .....   | Christ’s death                           |
| 2. Unleavened Bread .....  | 1/15–21 .....  | Christ’s burial                          |
| 3. Firstfruits .....       | 1/??? (1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday within Unleavened Bread) ..... | Christ’s resurrection                    |
| 4. Weeks (Pentecost) ..... | 3/??? (7 Sundays after Firstfruits) .....                    | Giving of the Holy Spirit                |
| 5. Trumpets .....          | 7/1 .....  | Rapture of the Church                    |
| 6. Day of Atonement .....  | 7/10 .....   | Christ’s return (2 <sup>nd</sup> Coming) |
| 7. Tabernacles .....       | 7/15–22 .....  | Millennial Kingdom                       |

As Paul explains in verse 7, these religious feasts and festivals, and even the Sabbath, were mere “shadows” of things to come.” They were a glimpse into the future, so to speak, albeit a rather vague one. These feasts and festivals, such as Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits, were pictures of something which would happen, from the perspective of the Old Testament Jews, in the far distant future.

From our vantage point today, Christ fulfilled the first 3 Feasts — Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits — in a very real, literal way at His 1<sup>st</sup> Advent. He was slain as our Passover Lamb on Passover, was buried, and He rose again on Firstfruits, as the “firstfruits of them that slept” (*1 Corinthians 15:20*). Then, seven weeks later, the Holy Spirit was given to the believers on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost, by the way, also known as the Feast of Weeks, was also, according to Jewish tradition, the day when the Law was given by God from Mt. Sinai.

Based on the fulfillment of the first 3 Holy Feasts, we can fully expect Him to complete the final 3 Feasts in a similarly real, literal way at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent. Most likely, the feast of trumpets represents the rapture of the church, signaling the beginning of the end times. The Day of Atonement corresponds to Christ’s Second Coming, when all Israel shall be saved, and Jesus sits in judgment upon the nations of the earth. Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles corresponds to the Millennial Kingdom, when God will very literally “tabernacle” with men, in the person of Jesus Christ, for 1,000 years.

Believe it or not, this same Jewish legalism is slowly making inroads into the Church today as well. As is typical with Satanic intrusions into Church doctrine, the error starts off small and seemingly innocent enough. One such innocent-sounding fad that has begun to take hold in churches across America today is the *Hebrew Roots* movement. This movement actually began in the mid 1960s with the teachings of William Dankenbring, and then later with Dean and Susan Wheelock in the early 1980s. The Wheelocks actually applied for and received a patent for the term “Hebrew Roots” in 1994, and since then the movement has started to really take off, and has now made significant inroads into the mainstream of Christianity.

The basic tenets of this movement involve an adherence to the Torah, not for salvation, per se, but for rewards and blessings in one’s Christian life. One particular teaching of this movement that is significant is the belief that the New Testament, or New Covenant, did not supersede or eliminate the Old Covenant. Instead, they teach that Christ did not come to do away with the Law of Moses, but merely to clarify that the *Oral Law* did not come from God, and that the Old Covenant is still in effect. The followers of this movement believe that sin is the breaking of the Torah, and since the Jewish dietary laws and prescribed feasts are part of the Torah, they too are observed. They also believe that Christianity has diverged from its Hebrew roots, and they seek to return to those Hebrew origins. While it’s understandable to want to explore the Jewish background of early Christianity, and even commendable to study the Law of Moses and the Jewish feasts, the danger of this movement cannot be overstated. Many people dabble in this teaching out of curiosity or innocent naïveté, not realizing the potential danger.

**4<sup>th</sup> Warning (vv. 18-19):**

**(18) Let no man beguile you<sup>{8}</sup> of your reward in a voluntary humility<sup>{9}</sup> and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, (19) And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.**

<sup>{8}</sup> {margin: or, *judge against you*}

<sup>{9}</sup> {Greek: *being a voluntary in humility*}

Here in the 4<sup>th</sup> warning of the chapter, Paul tells the Colossian believers not to allow anyone to “beguile” them of their reward. The word “beguile” [*Greek: καταβραβεύετω (katabrabeuētō)*] only occurs this once in Scripture, and, according to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, means “to decide as umpire against someone,” or figuratively “to defraud or beguile of one’s prize,” or metaphorically “to deprive of salvation.” This is a word which was used in connection with the Olympic Games, and meant to give the prize that a contestant won to another, or to deprive someone of their due reward. Most modern Bible versions render it as either *defraud*, *cheat*, *disqualify* or *condemn*. What *reward* is Paul referring to here? It must be referring to the crowns we are given as rewards for faithful service. Although some might see this as a loss of once salvation, I think this interpretation is tenuous at best. For one thing, salvation is never referred to in Scripture as a “reward,” as that would be something *earned*, and Scripture is very clear that salvation is not earned.

Paul mentions to specific tactics what’s the false teachers might use in their attempt to defraud them of their reward:

1. A voluntary humility
2. The worshipping of angels

Let’s look at each of these:

1. A voluntary humility:

The expression “voluntary humility” [*Greek: θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνη (thélōn ἐn tapeinophrosúnē)*], translates verbatim as “choosing in humility of mind,” and refers to willingly having a low opinion of oneself. In particular, what Paul is addressing here is a form of religious asceticism, whereby people would deprive their bodies of food, and even abuse their bodies, for the purpose of gaining favor with God, or having a “closer experience” with Him. Paul addresses some of the specific teachings of these ascetics in verses 20-23 below. This practice is still seen today among many Roman Catholics around the world, with some even whipping themselves, or hanging themselves on crosses in order to have a “divine experience.” The Roman Catholic clergy, for centuries, have denied themselves the companionship and intimacy of a wife, which has led to countless shameful episodes with young boys.

2. The worshipping of angels:

Scripture is pretty clear that men are not to worship angels. In fact when we encounter men falling prostrate before angels, they are immediately told to get up, and not to worship them, often explaining that they are also fellow servants of the LORD (*e.g., Revelation 19:10, 22:8-9*). The only exceptions are when the angel is the Angel of the Lord — very likely a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity (*e.g., Joshua 5:13-15, et. al.*). The worship of angels is also prevalent today. One commentator even suggested that a possible reason why angels remain invisible is that, if they were visible, men would worship them [Don Stewart; “Should People Worship Angels?”; [Blue Letter Bible FAQ](#);].

( ↓ Continued ↓ )



One particular commentator wrote about the asceticism and mysticism that was going around in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD:

“Precedent for this approach to spirituality in Judaism [that Paul was countering in this epistle] is seen in a movement that came to be known as ‘Merkabah mysticism.’ The Merkabah refers to Ezekiel 1 and the throne chariot of God that Ezekiel saw. This teaching spoke of days of fasting to prepare for a journey to the heavens to see God and have a vision of Him and His angelic host in worship (Philo, *Die Somniis* 1.33-37; *De Vita Mosis* 2.67-70; 1QH 6:13; 1 Enoch 14:8-25; 2 Baruch 21:7-10; Apocalypse of Abraham 9:1-10; 19:1-9; Ascension of Isaiah 7:37; 8:17; 9:28, 31, 33). One could withdraw and eventually go directly into God’s presence. Thus this false teaching emphasized the humility of ascetic practice, visions, the rigors of devotion, treating the body harshly, and rules about what should not be eaten or what days should be observed (2:16-23). All this activity was aimed to help prepare individuals for the experience that took them beyond what Jesus had already provided, so they could see God and His angels in heaven.” [Darrell L. Bock, “A Theology of Paul’s Prison Epistles,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 305.]

Paul continues to rebuke these false teachings in the second half of verse 18, pointing out that people who practice these things are “intruding into those things which [they] have not seen,” and are “vainly puffed up by [their] fleshly minds” (v. 18b). Or, to put it another way, “they are sticking their noses into things they know nothing about, thereby stroking their own egos.”

In verse 19, Paul gets to the real problem with this type of false worship: it does not hold up Christ as the Head. God has been very clear, throughout Scripture, that He alone is to be worshiped:

**(3)** Thou shalt have no other gods before me. **(4)** Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: **(5)** Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; **(6)** And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. [*Exodus 20:3-6*]

**(2)** Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. [*Psalms 29:2*]

**(3)** From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD’s name *is* to be praised. **(4)** The LORD *is* high above all nations, *and his glory above the heavens.* **(5)** Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, [*Psalms 113:3-5*]

God alone is worthy of worship, and, as Jesus explained, that those who wish to worship Him must do so “in spirit and in truth” (*John 4:24*). Verse 19 is almost word for word the same as what Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 15b–16:

**(14)** That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and cunning craftiness*, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; **(15)** But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: **(16)** From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [*Ephesians 4:14-16*]

The problem with these false worshipers is that they were not holding up Christ as their one true Head. By worshiping angels, they were giving to them something which rightfully belonged to Christ alone.

As Paul explains at the end of verse 19, it is Christ alone, as the Head of His Church, from Whom the church body “increaseth with the increase of God.” Many of the modern translations render the last part of verse 19 as “... grows with a growth that is from God.” In other words, any growth—either numerically, or spiritually—that is to happen in Christ’s Church must come from Him. Christ is the One who “knits together” and “nourishes” the various parts which make up His Church. The expression “joints and bands” is referring to the *joints* and *ligaments* of the human body. Paul quite often uses physiological metaphors, equating the human body with the body of Christ.

**The Solution (vv. 20-23):**

**(20) Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments<sup>{10}</sup> of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (21) (Touch not; taste not; handle not; (22) Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? (23) Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting<sup>{11}</sup> of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.**

<sup>{10}</sup> {margin: or, *elements*}

<sup>{11}</sup> {margin: or, *punishing*, or, *not sparing*}

Paul now gently rebukes the Colossian believers, asking them, “If you are dead with Christ from these *rudiments* of the world, why are you subjecting yourselves to these ridiculous ordinances, as though you were still living in the world?” The word “rudiments” [*Greek: στοιχείων (stoicheiōn)*] comes from a root verb [*στέιχω (steichō)*] that means “to arrange in order,” and refers to “elementary things,” or “the basics,” the way the “ABCs” and “phonics” are the *basics* of reading and writing, or the way addition and multiplication are the *basics* of mathematics. We might call them “the fundamentals.” What Paul is referring to here are the “fundamentals” of *the world* — i.e., the fundamentals according to the world. The same word is used in Hebrews 5:12 to refer to the “first principles” of Christianity, and Paul uses it in Galatians 4:3 to describe how, prior to salvation, we were like children, “in bondage under ‘the elements’ of the world.”

Then, in verse 21, Paul names some of these ridiculous *rudiments* that they were being taught by these ascetic mystics:

- Don’t touch certain things,
- Don’t eat certain things, and
- Don’t handle certain things (i.e., don’t come in contact with them).

All of these things, Paul explains in verse 22, “are to perish with the using” — in other words, these things are all temporary, not meant to last forever.

Jesus explains in the Gospel of Mark that is not what you eat or drink that makes you either holy or defiled:

**(15) There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.** [Mark 7:15] (See also Matthew 15:11, Luke 11:38-41.)

Paul gets into this subject of artificial asceticism quite often in his epistles:

**(14)** I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. **(15)** But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably {i.e., *lovingly*}. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. **(16)** Let not then your good be evil spoken of: **(17)** For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. **(18)** For he that in these things serveth Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men. **(19)** Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. **(20)** For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. **(21)** *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. [Romans 14:14-21]

**(1)** Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; **(2)** Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; **(3)** Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. **(4)** For every creature {or, creation} of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: **(5)** For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. [1 Timothy 4:1-5]

( ↓ Continued ↓ )

**(10)** For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: **(11)** Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. **(12)** One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, "The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies" {apparently quoting Epimenides, one of the 'seven wise men of Greece,' best known for the famous 'Epimenides paradox'}. **(13)** This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; **(14)** Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. **(15)** Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. **(16)** They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. [Titus 1:10-16]

The writer of Hebrews also discusses it to some extent:

**(9)** Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. [Hebrews 13:9]

Paul continues, at the end of verse 22, calling these errant teachings "the commandments and doctrines of men." These teachings did not come from God! Just like the 613 commandments of the Jewish Talmud and Mishnah, these were made up by men. Paul really gets to the heart of the issue in verse 23, where he points out that these false teachings have a "show of wisdom." They give the teachers the *appearance* of being religious and wise. As Paul mentioned back in verse 18, these teachers were "vainly puffed up by [their] fleshly minds," stroking their own puffed up egos.

The three specific errant religious trends that Paul condemns in verse 23 are:

- Will worship ..... [Greek: ἐθελοθρησκεία (*ethelothrēskeía*)] ..... arbitrary, unwarranted piety; (i.e., sanctimony)
- Humility ..... [Greek: ταπεινοφροσύνη (*tapeinophrosýnē*)] ..... humiliation of mind; (i.e. modesty, humility)
- Neglecting ..... [Greek: ἀφειδία σώματος (*apheidía sōmatos*)] ..... literally: "not sparing the body"; asceticism; (willfully neglecting or abusing one's body)

The phrase "will worship" could well be rendered in modern vernacular as "sanctimoniousness" — giving an *outward appearance* of being pious and holy, when in fact that's not the case, often done for personal advantage.

A key aspect of Paul's condemnation of these practices is found at the very beginning of verse 23, where Paul states that these practices "have indeed a shew of wisdom" — i.e., they have the *outward appearance* of being godly wisdom. But, as Paul explains at the end of verse 23, these practices in fact have "not ... any honor," and what's more, they do nothing "to the satisfying of the flesh" — i.e., nothing of any benefit to one's body. Or, to paraphrase, they are not honorable, and they're of no benefit whatsoever.