

## COLOSSIANS CHAPTER TWO VAIN DOCTRINES VS. THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST

*Paul's Ministry; (1:24—2:5)*

1. *Walk in Christ as you received Christ;*  
(2:6-7)
  
2. *Vain doctrines Opposed to Christ; (2:8-23)*
  - a. *Philosophy; 2:8-10*
    - (1) It makes spoil of you; 2:8a
    - (2) It is after the traditions of men; 2:8b
    - (3) Christ has the fulness of God-hood; 2:9
    - (4) Christ makes us complete; 2:10a
    - (5) Christ is head over all; 2:10b
  - b. *Judaism; 2:11-17*
    - (1) Christ gives us perfect circumcision; 2:11-12a
    - (2) Christ gives us perfect life; 2:12b-13a
    - (3) Christ gives forgiveness; 2:13b
    - (4) Christ has nailed the ordinances to the cross; 2:14
    - (5) Christ made a complete triumph; 2:15
    - (6) Let no man judge you over Judaistic ceremonies;  
2:16-17
      - (a) Ceremonies are a shadow
      - (b) Christ is the body
  - c. *Angel worship; 2:18-19*
    - (1) It robs you of your prize; 2:18a
    - (2) Its devotees are puffed up; 2:18b
    - (3) It does not hold fast the Head; 2:19
  - d. *Ordinances about self-denial (Asceticism); 2:20-23*
    - (1) You died with Christ from such ordinances;  
2:20-21
    - (2) The ordinances deal with perishing things; 2:22
    - (3) The ordinances have no value against fleshly in-  
dulgence; 2:23

**2:1. For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

2:1 (My striving against all the obstacles to the gospel concerns you Colossians in particular;) for I want you to know how great is the striving which I have (in my heart) for YOU, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face in the flesh.

### *Notes*

1. Paul wanted the Colossians to know how much intense striving he endured in his spirit for their sake. It is so easy to hurt those who love us, and often we do this simply because we do not sense how much they care about us. Paul hoped that they would hold fast their faith more zealously if they knew how much he cared about them.
2. Paul's strivings for the Colossians has been called "Love's struggle". "Strife" (Gr. *agon*; KJV, "conflict") means intense solicitude and anxiety.
3. The wording of 2:1 relates back to 1:29. In 1:29 Paul declared that he was striving (Gr. *agonizomenos*) according to God's working. In 2:1 he asserts that they should know what great strife (*agona*) he had for them.
4. Paul's struggle was for people he had never seen, for such as the Colossians, and the Laodiceans, and for all who had not seen his face in the flesh. The uncertainty about the actual condition of such people would add to Paul's anxiety over them.

In 1:28 Paul spoke of teaching and admonishing every man. He did this even for those he had not seen.

Concerning Laodicea, see Introductory Study C, *Facts about Colossae and the Lycus valley*. The Laodiceans appear to have been infected with the same heresy that disturbed the Colossians.

5. Paul's struggle was probably first of all a struggle in prayer. Fervent prayer is a struggle, as anyone who has tried it will know—a struggle with self, and sin, and Satan. Compare Col. 4:12. We can struggle in prayer as painfully as Jacob prayed and struggled with the angel. Hosea 12:4; Gen. 32:24-28.
6. Also Paul's struggle involved his own efforts to be holy and faithful and steadfast in his difficult circumstances. If he had

lost heart and compromised his life, he would have discouraged the brethren everywhere.

7. Paul's striving indicates that he considered the Colossian heresy to be dangerous, and was striving to do something about it. False doctrines are always dangerous.
8. Ministerial anguish; Col. 2:1-4.
  - (1) Intense; 2:1.
  - (2) Impartial; applies to all.
  - (3) Holy;
    - Desires their comfort;
    - Desires their unity;
    - Desires their comprehension of truth.
  - (4) Expressed in warnings; 2:4.

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**2. that their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ,**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

2. (I agonize) that their hearts may be comforted (and exhorted), being knit together in love, and (knit together in such a way that they will come) unto all the riches of full assurance in (their) understanding. (Yea, further I agonize that they may be so knit together that they come) unto a precise knowledge of the mystery of God, (which is, stated very simply,) Christ (alone).

### *Notes*

1. What were the goals which Paul sought in his striving? He sought: (1) that the Colossians might be comforted; (2) that they might be knit together in love; (3) that they might be knit together unto all riches of understanding, that is, knit together so they could come unto the full riches of understanding.
2. The verb *comfort* (*parakaleo*) has the double meaning of comfort and also to exhort, or urge. Our comfort in Christ should be an exhortation to us to serve Him better. Tychicus was sent to the Ephesians and the Colossians to comfort their hearts. Eph. 6:22; Col. 4:8.
3. The Colossians were to be *knit* together in love. The word *knit* means "to cause to coalesce, to join together, to put together, to unite." (Thayer). We think of broken bones being

knit back together until the pieces are one again. In this manner Christians should be knit together in love. Col. 2:19. Without love a church is not a true church.

4. The goal for which Christians are knit together is that they may come unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding.

Our pleasant association together as Christians is a marvelous teacher. Better than any words it reveals to us the riches of our faith and gives us assurance.

5. The expression "unto the riches of the full assurance of understanding" is a bit complicated.

Paul frequently used the word *riches* to describe the blessings of Christians. Eph. 1:18. The abundance of God's grace is also spoken of as the riches of his grace. Eph. 1:7. Compare Eph. 3:16.

The term *full assurance* (Gr. *plerophoria*) means fulness, abundance, most certain confidence. I Thess. 1:5: "Our gospel came unto you in much assurance." (Compare Luke 1:1 in Gr.)

"Understanding" (Gr. *sunesis*) refers to the mind insofar as it understands things. The term indicates an understanding of the bearing of things on one another.

Using the definitions of the words as given above, it appears that Paul desired that the understanding of the Colossians should develop until it was aware of the *great riches* that lie in full assurance.

When we reach the point where we have utterly no doubts about the truths of the Bible, no doubts about our salvation, and no hesitation in trusting God fully at all times, we feel good! We have riches!

6. Paul gives a summary or climax of his desires for the Colossians at the close of 2:2: "That they may know the mystery of God, (which is) Christ. John 17:3.
7. In 2:2 we again have a reference to God's mystery that is now revealed. That mystery, simply stated, is that Christ Jesus is now the unailing hope of all nations for glory from God. See notes on 1:26.
8. There is considerable variation in the ancient Greek manuscripts on the phrase "the mystery of God, *even* Christ." Even the King James text follows a slightly different reading than the American Standard. The King James use of Father after God

is obviously unnecessary. The reading of the American Standard version exactly translates the wording of the best current editions of the Greek N.T., those of Nestle-Aland (1956) and the United Bible Societies (1966).

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3. in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

3. (For) in him (that is, in Christ) are all the treasures of (divine) wisdom and knowledge hidden (though they are not hidden to any who seek them in Christ; they are wholly hidden from those who seek elsewhere.)

### *Notes*

1. We all desire to know the ultimate and unchangeable truths of the universe. We crave reliable information. We want to know the right way to live, the way that will really help us. In Christ all of these treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.
2. Col. 2:3 is a sharp dig at the Gnostics. Their very name indicates that they thought they were the knowing ones. In their self-assumed wisdom they shunted Christ to a lower place. Paul asserts that the true wisdom they were seeking is to be found in the one they thrust aside. (See Introductory study on *Gnosticism*.)

Also Paul's remark about all wisdom being hidden in Christ would be contrary to those who loved the human philosophy, mentioned in 2:8.

3. Wisdom is *hidden* in Christ. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state simply that it is found only in Christ. The wisdom in Christ is not hidden from anyone, except those who are too proud to seek it in Christ. Those who seek it in him find it readily.

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4. This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech.

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

4. I speak this (way about my agony of soul for you) so that no one may deceive you by persuasiveness of speech. (I hope my extreme emotion over you will stir you to be on your guard.)

*Notes*

1. Paul was deeply concerned that the Colossians not be deluded by the persuasive speaking of false teachers. There are glib tongues advocating every imaginable religious idea. Many people are easily misled by eloquent speech. See Eph. 4:14.
2. Paul hoped that by telling the Colossians about the striving in his soul that he could put them on their guard against false teaching, against any teaching which differed from that which he had received by revelation from God and taught to them. Eph. 3:3-5.

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**5. For though I am 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.**

*Translation and Paraphrase*

5. (Please do not think that my absence from you makes me indifferent about your Christian life,) for (even) if I am absent from you in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, rejoicing (in your faith and love), and beholding your (good) order (in organization, worship and association together), and the firmness of your faith toward Christ.

*Notes*

1. When the Colossians were confronted with persuasive speaking by someone with "new light" on religion, they could very wisely in their imaginations picture Paul as being in their midst, perhaps shaking his head in disapproval at the doctrines that downgraded Christ and upgraded human knowledge.
2. Paul though physically absent from the Colossians, was always with them in spirit—in desire and in remembrance. The truth of his teachings was always with them.
3. When Paul imagined himself as being with the Colossians, he found himself rejoicing, and visualizing in his mind their good order and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ.
4. A good church needs order—order in organization, in their public meetings, and other dealings together. There is no inflexible pattern in the New Testament that constitutes good order for all the churches. What is good in one church might

not work in another. "Let all things be done decently and in order." I Cor. 14:40. Order in a church is as necessary as order in an army. A good church needs soldierly discipline.

5. Unpretended stedfast faith in Christ is one of the grand goals of our labors for Christ. I Tim. 1:5.
6. Features of a faithful church:
  - (1) Comforted, courageous hearts; (2:2)
  - (2) Unity (knit together).
  - (3) Love.
  - (4) Full assurance.
  - (5) Understanding.
  - (6) Power to resist alluring teaching; (2:4)
  - (7) Good order; (2:5)
  - (8) Stedfast faith; (2:5-6)
  - (9) Thanksgiving; (2:7)

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### Study and Review

#### Questions Over Colossians 1:24—2:5

1. What attitude did Paul have in his sufferings? (1:24)
2. For whom did Paul Suffer?
3. What did Paul seek to fill up?
4. Does Paul say in 1:24 that he was trying to suffer as much as Christ suffered? If not, what does he mean by "fill up . . . that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh"?
5. What does the "whereof" in 1:25 refer back to?
6. According to what was Paul made a minister: (1:25)
7. What was it that was given to Paul? (1:25)
8. Define the word *dispensation*. What word is a synonym for it?
9. For what purpose was the dispensation given to Paul?
10. The "word of God" in 1:25 is identified in 1:26 as being what?
11. Define the term mystery. (1:26)
12. When had the mystery been hidden?
13. How did God feel about making the mystery manifest? (1:27)
14. Among what people is the mystery made known?
15. What is the mystery said to be? (1:27)
16. What hope does the mystery bring?
18. Who is the *whom* referred to at the beginning of 1:28?
19. Paul says that his proclaiming was accompanied by two types of speaking. What are they? (1:28)

20. In what way did Paul teach every man?
21. What was the goal of Paul's teaching?
22. To what does the *whereunto* of 1:29 refer?
23. According to what did Paul strive? (1:29)
24. What worked within Paul?
25. From information given in 1:29, where would you say Paul obtained the ability to do the great labors he did?
26. What did Paul want the Colossians to know about his work? (2:1)
27. How could Paul strive for the Colossians when he was nowhere near them?
28. For people in what places besides Colossae did Paul strive?
29. Had Paul seen the Colossians face to face? How do you know?
30. What did Paul desire about the hearts of those he had not seen personally? (2:2)
31. In what were these people to be knit together?
32. Explain the term *knit*.
33. Unto what were these brethren to be knit together?
34. What does 2:2 indicate about the value of a full understanding?
35. What did Paul want these brethren to know?
36. What does 2:2 say the mystery of God is? (Please use American Standard version wording here.)
37. Who is referred to by the *whom* in 2:3?
38. What is hid in Christ?
39. How did 2:3 specially apply to the Gnostics?
40. Why did Paul speak to these people as he did about his strivings? (2:4)
41. What may delude us?
42. What connection can you make between 2:4 and 2:5?
43. In what way was Paul with them? (1:5)
44. What were Paul's feelings as he imagined himself being with the Colossians?
45. What two things about the Colossians did Paul behold with joy?
46. In what respects (possibly) did the Colossians have order?

## Outline of 2:6-23

- D. CHRIST—The antidote for false doctrine; 2:6-23
1. Walk in Christ as you received him; 2:6-7
    - a. Rooted and builded up.
    - b. Established in your faith.
    - c. Abounding in thanksgiving.
  2. Reasons to beware of men's traditions and hold to Christ; 2:8-15
    - a. Philosophy is vain; 2:8
      - (1) After the traditions of men.
      - (2) After the rudiments of the world.
    - b. Christ has perfect God-hood; 2:9
    - c. Christ gives perfect completeness; 2:10a
    - d. Christ has perfect authority; 2:10b
    - e. Christ gives perfect circumcision; 2:11-12
      - (1) A circumcision not done by hands; 2:11
      - (2) Done in baptism; 2:12
    - f. Christ gives perfect life; 2:13-14
      - (1) Done in forgiving our trespasses; 2:13
      - (2) Done by blotting out the written ordinances; 2:14
    - g. Christ has perfectly triumphed; 2:15
  3. Things to let no one do to you; 2:16-19
    - a. Judge you concerning rituals; 2:16-17
      - (1) Rituals are shadows.
      - (2) The body is Christ's.
    - b. Rob you of your prize; 2:18-19
      - (1) By voluntary humility and angel-worship; 2:18
      - (2) By not holding to Christ the Head; 2:19
  4. Reasons for rejecting ordinances of men; 2:20-23
    - a. Ye died with Christ from worldly rudiments; 2:20
    - b. All ordinances are to perish; 2:21-22
    - c. Ordinances have no value against fleshly indulgences; 2:23

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6. As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.  
 7. rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

*Translation and Paraphrase*

6. In the same manner as you (pl.) received Christ Jesus (as) the Lord, be (thus) walking in him,

7. (being) rooted (like a tree), and (constantly being) builded up in him (as a building under construction), and (being) made (more and more) firm in the faith (of Christ), just as you were taught; and (be) overflowing in thanksgiving.

### Notes

1. Col. 2:6-7 is a bridge which leads us from the discussion of Paul's ministry into the discussion of false doctrines that are opposed to Christ. These verses may be construed either as a close to the preceding discussion of Paul's ministry, or as the opening words of the discussion of Christ vs. false doctrines. In our outline we treat them as the opening words of the new section.
2. As children of God we all once received Christ as our Lord and savior. This is necessary and glorious. But having done this, we must then walk in Christ in the same sincere obedient manner as we once received Christ. A faithful walk is as necessary as a good beginning. Eph. 4:17.
3. Christ Jesus is LORD. If he is not the Lord of our lives, he is probably not the savior of our souls.
4. The walk, or daily conduct, of the Christian must be deep-rooted and builded up. Eph. 3:17. Trees grow well only when they have a good root system. Transplanted pine trees with their close-trimmed roots do not thrive until a new root system has developed. How deeply is your life rooted in Christ? How much do you love him and think about him? How much have you studied the gospels to learn about Christ's words and deeds? These are necessary things if we are to be rooted in Christ.

Being built up (Gr. *epoikodomeo*) describes us as if we were buildings. A big building has piles driven deeply in the ground beneath it, or strong footings. It rises solidly with strong walls. Our Christian walk is grounded upon unchanging principles in God's word, and is built up by solid deeds of goodness, that never have to be removed as undesirable stones. Jude 20; Eph. 2-20-22.

5. "Rooted" is a perfect participle, indicating a past action with present effects. "Build up" and "established" (or "stablished") are present participles, indicating continuous action.

6. We are built up not *upon* Christ, but *in* Christ. It is not a physical act of building, but a spiritual development. We are established (or made firm) *in our faith* (or *by* our faith.)
7. The increasing firmness that we should gain as we are established in the faith, must match up with the way we were *taught* at the beginning of our Christian experience. We dare not abandon the basic truths by which we were saved as we increase in knowledge. Too many in our generation have left their earlier child-like faith when they went to some seminary or university for advanced learning. This is a curse to a man's soul. We cannot outgrow the true faith; we may, however, be deceived into departing from it.
8. One mark of a faithful church is that it is abounding in thanksgiving. To *abound* is to have overmuch, to overflow, to have excess. Does your thanksgiving overflow?
9. All of these thoughts about walking *in Christ* and being rooted *in him* are a necessary consideration as we go into the discussion about false doctrines that immediately follows. If we do not have the solid foundation of Christ to stand on, we have no criterion for judging false doctrine, nor any alternative to it.

**8. Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ:**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

8. Watch (carefully) lest anyone (deceive you and) be carrying you off like (conquerors carry off) spoils (of war), through (their) propagandizing of (human philosophy and) wisdom, and (their) vain (fruitless) deceit, (all of which is) according to the traditions of men, (and) according to the rudimentary principles of (this) world, and not according to Christ.

### *Notes*

1. In 2:6-7 Paul laid down a true positive foundation for life. Now in 2:8 he begins to speak of the negative, undesirable, worldly, false doctrines that are opposed to Christ.
2. As we read Col. 2:8ff, we are confronted with many allusions to the heresy at Colossae. Many of the allusions are obscure to us, but to the Colossians Paul's words struck home plainly.

The Colossian heresy was basically a group of additions to Christ. They wanted to add philosophy (2:8), perhaps also circumcision (2:11), rules about Jewish ceremonies (2:16), worship of angels (2:17), and rules about self-denial of the body (2:20).

3. Paul warned, "Take heed lest anyone be carrying you off, like conquerors carry off the spoil of war." All of the additions to Christ were endangering the Colossians. By these human ideas, men were about to deceive the Colossians, and when that happened it would be just as if some conqueror made spoil of them.

As we think of *spoil*, we think of captives of war being carried away, and paraded before crowds in victory processions. The conquered peoples were treated as spoils of war and led away into slavery.

The teachers of human philosophy and human religious ideas around Colossae would boast whenever they made a convert and deceived someone into accepting their ideas, like conquering generals gloried over their vanquished opponents.

4. The *philosophy* which Paul warned against is not exactly what we ordinarily mean by philosophy. The word *philosophy* literally means "love of wisdom." It was used by the Greek writers for either zeal for or skill in any art or science, or any branch of knowledge. (Thayer). Philosophy refers to any moral system. We could speak of the philosophy of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Greeks, etc. Here in Colossians *philosophy* seems to refer to the theology (or theosophy) which concerned itself with Jewish rituals, and honoring angels, and rules about self-denial of the body. Paul calls all of these things vain deceit (or empty, fruitless deceit). Eph. 5:6.
5. Paul describes the vain deceit and philosophy of men in three ways:
  - (1) It is after the tradition of men.
  - (2) It is after the rudiments of the world.
  - (3) It is not after Christ.
6. *Traditions* are ideas or teachings handed down from one generation to another. They may be good traditions (II Thess. 2:15; 3:6), or undesirable traditions originated by men alone (Mark 7:8-9; Matt. 15:2).

7. By *rudiments* Paul refers to the basic, first, primary, simple elements of anything. The letters of the alphabet are the rudiments of writing. The elements are the rudiments of the material universe. II Pet. 3:10. Numbers are the rudiments of mathematics.

Paul here refers to the philosophy and vain deceit of men as being rudiments. Compared to the boundless, profound, unsearchable wisdom in God's word, men's ideas are like A-B-C's. They are but the rudiments of truth. Philosophy, though it is usually thought of as very profound, is rudimentary because it is only the teachings and traditions of men.

8. In Gal. 4:3 Paul also refers to the *rudiments* of the world. The reference there is obviously to the law of Moses. It was called *rudiments*, not because it was not given by God, but because it was an imperfect, incomplete, temporary system, given "to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24).

It is very possible that the rudiments Paul refers to in Col. 2:8 may be the same as, or similar to, those in Gal. 4:3, the reference being to the law of Moses in both places. The reference in Colossians does seem to apply to other things as well, however.

9. Many interpreters have understood the rudiments referred to in Colossians to be the stars and planets and signs of the zodiac. They feel that the Colossian heresy included astrological ideas, perhaps even a worship of the heavenly bodies. The Revised Standard version sets forth this idea in its translation: "the elemental spirits of the universe."

Certainly Christians should shun astrology as a guide for their lives. The Old Testament prophets thundered the message that God's children should not worship the host of heaven nor seek guidance from them. (Jer. 8:2; Zeph. 1:5; II Chron. 33:3, 5). Why should we seek the heavenly bodies rather than the God who made them? Usually the people who follow the Bible the least are the people who look to things like astrology for guidance the most. When men reject the word of God, they turn to superstition.

As true as all of this is, there is no real indication that Paul was referring to the heavenly bodies by his references to *rudiments*. Even those who think that Paul was referring to

heavenly bodies differ widely in unfolding the meaning of this passage.

10. How tragic that men's ideas are "not after Christ." But that is utterly true. No man has ever thought up out of his own intellect and knowledge the truth about God, His will, and promises. These things are things which we have either learned from God's revelation of Himself, or we do not know them. I Cor. 2:9-12.

**9. for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, 10. and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power:**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

9. (It is essential that you follow Christ only,) because in him dwells all the fullness of God-hood in a bodily manner. (It dwelt in his body on earth, and is now in his present glorious heavenly body.)

10. (Also) in him (Christ) you are made complete in every particular; (this is possible only in Christ, the one) who is head over every rule and authority (in heaven and on earth).

### *Notes*

1. Col. 2:9-10 continues a list of reasons why we should beware of men's traditions and hold only to Christ. (See outline.) The reasons given here are that Christ has perfect God-hood (2:9); Christ gives perfect completeness; Christ has perfect authority. Why should we turn away from Christ or add anything to what he has said when his nature and works are so perfect? All things that are necessary for life and godliness have been given in Christ. II Peter 1:3.
2. Christ has perfect Godhead, or God-hood. The Greek word (*theotes*) translated Godhead refers to essential God-quality. A similar word (*theiotes*) is used in Romans 1:20; it refers to divinity as reflected in various ways. All the fulness—the abundance, the full measure—of God-hood dwells in Christ. The verb *dwelt* here is from the Gr. *katoikeo*, meaning to settle or dwell, as opposed to *paroikeo*, to sojourn or dwell temporarily. God-hood is a permanent quality in Christ.
3. God-hood dwells in Christ bodily, that is, in a bodily manner. Col. 1:19. This reference to a bodily manner probably refers

both to Christ's body that he had while on earth, and his present exalted and spiritual body in heaven, visible only to the inhabitants of heaven. John 1:14.

No matter what body is referred to, the teaching of Paul that divine fulness dwelt in a *body* specially struck at the Gnostic doctrines. They did not think that spiritual and material things could be in contact.

This idea is not some remote historical curiosity. Some scholars today are arguing that we can hold to spiritual truths from Christ, while we at the same time deny the reality of the historical Jesus who is portrayed in the gospel. This is nothing but a modern version of Gnosticism.

4. There is no more glorious declaration in all the Bible than the statement that "in him ye are made full (or complete)."

This is an echo of John 1:16: "And of his fullness have we all received."

We all long for a full life. We want to be a complete person with nothing lacking that is of real worth. Contrary to the feelings of most of us fullness of life comes altogether from our association with Christ, and not from any *things* we may acquire. Luke 12:15.

5. Christ has perfect authority. He the head over all principality and power. The terms *principality* (Gr. *arche*, beginning or rule) and *power* (Gr. *exousia*, authority) apparently refer to high ranking angelic beings, both good and bad. Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:21-22; 3:10; 6:12. The terms may also include all authority among both angels and men.

The Gnostics emphasized angels; but Christ is head over all angelic forces. Heb. 1:4-8; Col. 2:18.

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11. in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; 12. having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

11. And (to show you why we must hold only to Christ and reject the traditions of men,) in him you were circumcised by a circumcision not done by hands, (but brought about) by putting off

the (deeds of your sinful) body of flesh; (and all this made possible for you) by (your participation in) the circumcision of Christ.

12. (Your putting off the body of flesh, and participating in the circumcision of Christ took place in your) being buried with him by baptism, in which (act) you also were raised up (to a newness of life) through (the means of your) faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

### Notes

1. Col. 2:11-12 teaches us that Christ gives us perfect circumcision, and that this is accomplished in baptism.
2. The rather unexpected reference here to circumcision suggests that among the Colossians circumcision had been discussed, if not absolutely demanded.
3. Among the Jews there had always been two conflicting views of circumcision: (1) Circumcision by itself made a man good; (2) Circumcision was a sign of the good already in a man. When circumcision was first introduced among the Hebrews, it was a sign of the righteousness a man possessed before the circumcision was done. Thus Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people, was first declared righteous (Gen. 15:6), and much later circumcised (Gen. 17:10-11) as a token of God's covenant with him. (Rom. 4:9-11).

However, after the time of Abraham Jewish infants were circumcised when eight days old. Therefore their circumcision could not have been a sign of their righteousness prior to circumcision, but only of their relationship to God through Abraham. Nonetheless if these circumcised individuals did not live righteously as they grew up, their circumcision alone did not make them acceptable to God. The Old Testament and the New alike speak of uncircumcised hearts, and ears and lips: hearts, ears, and lips that were not acceptable to God, even though the individual was circumcised. (Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:25, 29; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4.)

To sum this up, we observe that circumcision was an essential act to be in covenant relationship with God, but the act was rendered worthless if the person's life was ungodly.

4. The Jewish-Gnostic-pagan-Christian heretics at Colossae were saying, "You must be circumcised." Paul says that in Christ we already have this honor. We are circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands.

As circumcision in former times marked a child as being in covenant relationship with God through Abraham, in a like manner Christians are circumcised and marked as being in covenant relation with God through Christ.

5. The question that comes to our minds as we think about this circumcision not made with hands is this: How can we obtain this wonderful circumcision? Three answers are given by Paul to this question:

(1) *By putting off the body of the flesh.* (Rom. 6:6). This seems to refer to our putting away the sinful deeds done by our bodies. (This is a figure of speech in which the body doing the sinful acts stands for the acts themselves.) We must repent of our sins done in the body. Paul in Romans 8:4-7 warns us that we cannot do the sins of the flesh and please God. So also in Gal. 5:17, 19, 23.

(2) *In the circumcision of Christ.* When Christians enter into their union with Christ, His death becomes their death; His resurrection becomes their resurrection; His circumcision becomes their circumcision; His righteousness becomes our righteousness. We are circumcised in that He was circumcised. (Luke 2:21).

(3) *By baptism.* Baptism is the third factor that causes us to experience the circumcision not made with hands. (I Pet. 3:21).

As a result of these three things, Christians become the true circumcision, the people who are in covenant with God. See notes on Philipians 3:2-3.

6. The expression at the start of 2:12 "buried with him in baptism," refers back to "circumcision" in 2:11. Baptism takes the place of circumcision for us. Circumcision could be said to be a type of baptism. (By *type* we refer to some Old Testament person, event, or thing which foreshadowed some similar New Testament person, event or thing. The N.T. thing which was foreshadowed is called the *antitype*.)
7. The comparison between circumcision and baptism follows the same pattern as the comparisons between all the O.T. types and their N.T. counterparts: in some respects the types are like the antitypes, and in some other respects they differed.

The failure to recognize the differences between baptism and circumcision as well as their similarities has led to a grievous error: many interpreters argue that as infants were

circumcised, so infants should now be baptized. As infants were brought into God's covenant by circumcision, so now infants are brought into God's covenant by baptism. This argument is used by almost every advocate of infant baptism. (For an example of it see Wm. Hendrickson's commentary on *Colossians and Philemon* p. 116, footnote.)

This argument cannot be true. Note the plain statement in Col. 2:12 that in baptism we are raised with Christ through FAITH in the working of God. Obviously then those who are baptized (and thereby circumcised) are those who have faith. This eliminates infants.

Also Col. 1:11 says that we are circumcised by the putting off of the body of flesh. No eight-day old infant is capable of fleshly sins, nor of repenting and putting off the body of flesh.

We wonder why those who insist that baptism is for infants because circumcision was for infants, do not insist that baptism be done on the eighth day of a child's life, since circumcision was to be done on that day. Even Wm. Barclay affirms that baptism in New Testament times was for adults only. (Wm. Barclay, *Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, pp. 167-168.)

8. CIRCUMCISION	(Col. 2:11-13)	BAPTISM
1. For the O.T. age.		1. For the N.T. age.
2. Related men to Abraham and God's covenant; Gen. 17:9-10.		2. Relates us to Abraham and God's promise; Gal. 3:27, 29.
3. A physical putting away of flesh.		3. A putting away of sinful deeds of the flesh.
4. A sign (token) of God's covenant; Gen. 17:11.		4. Not called a sign of anything. It is not "an outward sign of an inward grace."
5. Righteousness required of those circumcised; Deut 10:16.		5. Righteousness required of those baptized; Romans 6:4, 6.
6. For infants; Gen. 17:11.		6. For those who have faith; Col. 2:12.
7. For males; Gen. 17:12.		7. For all; Gal. 3:27-28.
8. Essential; Gen. 17:14.		8. Essential; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4.

9. Col. 2:12 tells us that we are *buried* with Christ and *raised* with him by baptism. This thought is discussed at length in Romans 6:1-11. This thought seems to be introduced here in Colossians as an explanation of how we share the circumcision of Christ. In 2:11 Paul said that we are circumcised . . . in the circumcision of Christ. Then in 2:12 he indicates that this is brought about by our having been buried and raised with Christ in baptism. In being raised with Christ we share all the triumphs of the risen Christ, including the privileges that came in the O.T. age to those circumcised. These included all the promises to Abraham concerning how his seed would bless the world. (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17-18).
10. The allusion to *burial* by baptism recalls to our minds that in the primitive church baptism was done by the act of immersion, or completely dipping the body of the one baptized under water for an instant. We are buried in the water as he was buried in the tomb. Many old baptistries designed for immersion still remain in the Holy Land and surrounding countries; examples can be seen in Capernaum, Nazareth, and dozens of other places.

However, the burial Paul alludes to in Col. 2:12 is a spiritual burial. Our old man, our old nature, is buried, done away with, and disposed of as we are united with Christ. His death and burial becomes our death and burial. We are released from sins by death. (Rom. 7:7).

11. Baptism alone has no magic, no power. It **MUST** be accompanied and preceded by faith in the working of God. Note that it is not enough to believe that God exists. We must believe that he works, and works for us. (Phil. 2:13). Do you believe that God works in our world and in your life? God has always required faith of his people, faith that he will work for them and save them. The great failure of the Israelites in the desert under Moses was that their knowledge of God was not accompanied by faith that God would use His power for them. (Heb. 4:2).
12. Paul reminds us that God raised Christ from the dead. We must believe this fact to be saved. (Rom. 10:9). Christ's resurrection is a historical fact, but it is also a part of our experience. When we receive Christ, his resurrection becomes

our resurrection unto a new life. Note that Col. 2:12 refers to two resurrections: Christ's and ours. The same God accomplished both resurrections.

13. In summary, Col. 2:11-12 teaches us that Christ gives us perfect circumcision, and that this is accomplished in baptism, in which we are both buried and raised with Christ, if we have faith in God's working.

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**13. And you; being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses;**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

13. And (to make clear what I refer to by your being raised up by baptism,) when you were (spiritually) dead because of the trespasses (you had once) and (because of) the uncircumcision of your flesh (you being outside of the covenant), he (God) made you alive together with him (Christ; and this he did by) graciously forgiving you all your misdeeds.

### *Notes*

1. Col. 2:13 gives us a word picture of Christ making dead people alive. It grows out of the remarks in 2:12 about our being raised with Christ. The resurrection Paul speaks of is not the resurrection of the body from the grave, although it is plainly taught in numerous places in the scripture. The resurrection under discussion is the new life we live following our baptism.
2. Two things are mentioned by Paul as having caused us to be dead spiritually:
  - (1) Our trespasses (or sins, or misdeeds); Eph. 2:1, 5.
  - (2) The uncircumcision of our flesh. In O.T. times uncircumcised people were cut off from God's covenant with Abraham. (Gen. 17:14). Thus the Gentiles, who were uncircumcised, were outside of God's covenant, and in this sense DEAD. Death in the scripture never implies an end to existence, or unconsciousness, or annihilation. To be cut off from God, who is life, is to be dead, whether we are in sin in this world, or in the lake of fire to come. (Rev. 20:14-15.)
3. Paul identifies our being made alive with Christ as being caused by, or synonymous with, or simultaneous to, God's having for-

given us our trespasses. Too few people sense the DEAD-liness of sin, or the resurrection-reality in salvation. Compare notes on Col. 1:11.

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14. having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross;

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

14. (Christ could make us alive as a result of his) having obliterated the handwriting consisting of decrees (meaning the law of Moses!), which was against us (because it condemned us without providing a way of justification), (and) which was contrary to us (not being of such nature that it could help us); and he took it away from (our) midst when he nailed it to the cross.

### *Notes*

1. Col. 2:13-14 discusses how Christ gives us perfect life when once we were dead. This He did by: (1) forgiving us our trespasses, and by (2) blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us.
2. To *blot out* (Gr. *exaleipho*) means to obliterate, erase, wipe out, blot out. God delights in wiping dirty slates clean.
3. What was it that Christ blotted out? Admittedly He blots out our sins (Acts 3:19). But the reference here is to something else. It is called the "handwriting of ordinances." This cannot refer to the later pagan Gnostic ordinances that the Colossians were observing (2:20-21). The ordinances that Christ blotted out were blotted out when he died on the cross. Obviously the thing blotted out was the law of Moses. It was handwriting on stones, and consisted of ordinances. (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 12:1; II Cor. 3:7; Eph. 2:15).
4. The law of Moses, handwritten and composed of ordinances, was against us, because it listed very many acts that were sinful, and then pronounced judgment on all who disobeyed it, while offering no certain way of escape from this condemnation. See Gal. 3:10-12.

The law was also contrary to us. Its nature was such as to condemn us rather than help us. It promised no Holy Spirit to all believers. It set the standard high, as high as God's

holiness. We sinners could not live up to it. The apostle Peter declared that the law was a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear. (Acts 15:10). Paul in Romans the seventh chapter gives an agonized monologue of how he found himself unable to live up to the law. (Rom. 7:14-24).

5. Because of careless study of the Bible, and the grip of habit in our thinking, many well-intentioned people have never grasped that we do not live under the law and covenant given through Moses, but live under the new covenant enacted by Christ. The old Mosaic covenant is done away. Large portions of the books of Romans, Galatians, II Corinthians, and Hebrews are devoted to expounding the fact that we are not under the law. Note Romans 6:14; II Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:19, 24-25; Heb. 8:6-7, 13; 9:15; 10:1; etc.

Certainly the Bible teaches that the law was holy (Rom. 7:12), and that it was given by God. But it was only designed to be in force until Christ came, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. See Gal. 3:19, 24.

6. The statement that Christ nailed it (the law) to the cross adds a new dimension to Christ's statement upon the cross: "It is finished." (John 19:30). Many things were finished: his sufferings, our sins, the Old Testament predictions concerning him; and (as we learn here in Colossians) the handwritten ordinances of the law of Moses. (Rom. 7:4).
7. The point Paul makes here in Colossians by referring to the blotting out of the written ordinances of the law of Moses, is that Christ made us alive by doing this. The law condemned us without really helping us. Christ took the law out of the way. We are thereby released from condemnation, and given needed help. In that sense we are made alive. (I Peter 2:2<sup>4</sup>)

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15. **having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

15. (And then) having (wholly defeated, disarmed, and) despoiled those beings in first rank and the authorities (those Satanic and angelic powers that oppose us), he exhibited them openly (every spiritual being in the universe perceiving His victory), having triumphed over them by it (that is, by the cross).

## Notes

1. Col. 2:15 is a difficult verse, probably because we know almost nothing about the events to which Paul alludes. Also it is hard to decide exactly what the participle "having spoiled" at the beginning of the verse refers back to. It can refer to Christ's having made us alive (2:13), and thus be another explanation as to how Christ made us alive. Certainly Christ could not have made us alive unless He had triumphed over Satan and his principalities and powers; for these held rule over our souls. See Mark 3:27.

The "having spoiled" at the start of 2:15 may refer clear back to 2:8, to the warning to beware of men's traditions. In our outline we have treated it as so referring. (The verse fits well either way, and may well apply to both points.)

We should beware of men's traditions and hold to Christ, because Christ has perfectly triumphed over the principalities and powers.

2. "Spoiled" (or "despoiled") here means (as it did in 1:8) "to lead away captive, to parade in triumph as a conqueror exhibiting victims and spoils of war, to lead captives into slavery, to disarm."
3. We are told that Christ despoiled the principalities and powers. These beings (as stated in the notes on 2:10) are angelic rulers and authorities, evidently strictly evil ones in the reference here. We are told that Christ made a show (or exhibit) of them openly, and "led them as captives in his triumphal procession." (New English Bible).

We are further told that Christ made this triumphal exhibit of them in it (that is, in the cross.) This could also be translated "by it."

4. We believe everything this verse says although we do not understand it all. We do not know when, where (or if) Christ made any open spectacle of defeated angelic opponents. Any such exhibition would of necessity have followed his crucifixion, burial, and ascension. See Luke 11:22.
5. In view of the fact that Christ made his triumphal exhibition over enemies *in it* (the cross), and in view of the fact that a Julius Caesar-type victory parade exhibiting conquered captives seems to us out-of-character for our savior, we prefer to think

that the triumphal show of Christ was limited to the implications of his triumphal death on the cross.

By that death Satan and his angels were deprived of all claim upon the souls of sinners. By that death men who once were loyal to Satan, were touched and reconciled to God. (Col. 1:21). By that death Christ attracts all men to him. (John 12:32). Christ's death threw consternation into the camp of the devil. He knows he is defeated, and his angels know it too, though in their wrath they are yet determined to drag as many with them into the everlasting fire as possible. (Rev. 12:12; Matt. 25:41).

We therefore prefer to think that Christ organized no victory parade in heaven, but that his triumph consisted in his spiritual victory on the cross, a victory that was clearly perceived by Satan and his principalities and powers, and by every other spiritual being in the universe.

6. Since Christ has triumphed over the most powerful spiritual beings in the universe, we should hold fast to Him, and beware lest anyone lead us away captive by his philosophy and deceitful traditions.

Those who lead us to accept science, or philosophy, or socialism, or communism, or evolution, or government regulations, or decrees of church councils, or psychology, or riot and revolution, or any other thing, as being more important than Christ—these have triumphed and made spoil of us.

Christ has totally triumphed. Why should we let men triumph over us by taking us from him? (Col. 2:8, 15).

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**16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day: 17. which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's.**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

16. Therefore (because Christ is triumphant) let no one judge (and condemn) you concerning (religious laws about) food and drink, or in regard to a feast day, or (the feast of the) new moon, or a sabbath day (a day of rest).

17. (Let no one judge you about your observance or non-observance of these Jewish rituals,) which are (only) a shadow of

things (that are) coming, but the (solid) body (that casts the shadow before it appeared itself) is Christ's. (He is the fulfillment of all of these Old Testament ceremonies.)

### Notes

1. Col. 2:16-17 are the first verses in a new section, which gives practical applications of the truths in the foregoing paragraph. In the preceding section (2:8-15) we saw reason after reason why Christ is the perfect antidote to false doctrine. Now, beginning at 2:16, there are practical applications made of that fact. The first is: Let no one judge you concerning Jewish rituals.
  2. Let no one judge you (and condemn you) on the basis of the food you eat (or don't eat), or about drink, or in regard to a feast day, or any such thing.
  3. The word *meat* (Gr. *brasis*) refers to food generally, and not to meat or flesh specifically, although meat is included. The law of Moses gave extensive regulations about food. See Lev. 11. Most religions have some sort of dietary laws: kosher regulations; abstinence from meats on Fridays and during Lent; strict vegetarian rules; etc.
- Nothing is more plainly taught in the N.T. than that all dietary restrictions are abolished by Christ. Mark 7:19; Romans 14:2-3, 17; I Cor. 6:13; 8:8; I Tim. 4:1-5; Heb. 9:10. Of course, however, our liberty to eat does not do away with instructions against gluttony, intemperance, waste, or causing others to stumble.
4. With regard to *drink* this verse teaches us that we are to let no one judge us. All things are lawful for us to use (I Cor. 6:12). Nonetheless we must beware lest we be brought under the power of anything, and we must beware lest our liberty be a stumbling-block to others (I Cor. 6:12; 8:9). Strong drink is particularly likely to get us under its power, and its use is particularly liable to cause others to stumble into drunkenness. Drunkenness will keep us out of the kingdom of God. (I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21). It would surely be right and wise for us to apply Paul's words about eating meats to strong drink also: "If food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall." (I Cor. 8:13; RSV).

5. Christians are liberated from bondage to a set of rules. No man can judge us about non-observance or observance of a feast day. Leviticus 23 lists numerous feasts, such as the Passover, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles.
6. The New Moon was an observance of the first day of each month as calculated on a lunar basis. The Hebrews celebrated the start of each new month by blowing trumpets and extra sacrifices. See Numbers 10:10; 28:11; I Chron. 23:31; II Chron. 31:3; Neh. 10:33.
7. The sabbath day was the seventh day of the week, or Saturday. It was a day of rest kept by the Hebrews in remembrance of God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Ex. 20:11), and also because God delivered them from bondage in Egypt (Deut. 5:15).

In the primitive church some Jewish Christians continued for a time to meet on the sabbath days, and to observe Jewish hours of prayer. Gentile Christians met together on the first day of the week, and this day was called the Lord's Day. (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). This was done under the oversight and evidently with the approval of the inspired apostles. However it is significant that no New Testament scripture commands us to honor or observe Sunday as a greater day than any other, or as the only acceptable day for group worship. One day is not greater than another day. In Christianity the whole universe is God's temple, and every day is a holy day.

8. In our times there are urgent radio broadcasts crying out that we must be keeping the Sabbath day, the feast of tabernacles, and other such rituals to please God. Paul says that no man has the right to judge us about such things.

This is in harmony with his teachings in Romans 14:5ff. If we regard a day as being worthy of honor, we regard it unto the Lord. If we regard it not, we do this also unto the Lord. Let us not judge our brother, or set at nought our brother on the basis of these things. (Rom. 14:10).

9. Paul's teachings about not judging one another concerning ordinances runs contrary to the ideas of some, that anything that is added to the explicit teachings of the scripture is automatically bad and damning. These may be perfectly harm-

less and only become bad when we try to force everyone else to adopt our ways of doing things.

10. Many professed Christians of our day fix attention on legalistic taboos and lists of do's and don't's, that will supposedly guarantee that we shall make it into glory, even if barely so. But Christians do not live under a system of law, but under grace. The handwritten ordinances have been blotted out and nailed to the cross. (Col. 2:14).
11. Many, if not all, of the O.T. ceremonies were types of spiritual realities in our present Christian age. (For the meaning of *type*, see notes on Col. 2:11-12.)

Christ is our Passover. (I Cor. 5:7). The Sabbath was a type of our eternal heavenly rest. (Heb. 4:9). The feast of tabernacles reminds us that we also are pilgrims and sojourners upon earth. (Lev. 23:42-43; I Peter 2:11).

The O.T. ceremonies were like shadows in the evening. They stretched out far ahead of the body that cast the shadows, revealing that the body was near or approaching, and revealing its general shape. The body that cast its shadow in the Old Testament ceremonies was Christ. He is the reality of which they were but foreshadowings.

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18. Let no man rob you of your prize, by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19. and not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

18. Let no one pass judgment against you (as if he were an umpire), or deprive you of your prize, (while he himself is) delighting in (an outward show of pretended humility (and self-abasement)), and in a worship of angels, involving himself in things which he (claims he) has seen, proudly puffed up in his fleshly mind without just cause,

19. and not holding fast unto (Christ) the Head, from whom the entire body (the church), being supplied (with its essential nourishment) and coalesced together through the joints and ligaments (as its individual members have close contact with one another), is growing the growth of God (the growth which God intends).

## Notes

1. A second thing we are to let no one do to us, is to let no one rob us of our prize. *Rob* here (Gr. *katabrabeuo*) means to deprive of a prize; or give adverse judgment; or disqualify us as an umpire might disqualify a victory or point in athletic competition. This is somewhat similar to the statement in 2:16: "Let no man judge you."
2. We are disqualified and robbed of our prize from Christ when we let men talk us into making ourselves "humble" and into falling down to worship angels.  
 A "voluntary humility" is a self-willed humility, a humility that is shown by outward acts of self-denial to the body. It is a false humility that covers overbearing inward pride. Col. 2:23. True humility can neither be voluntarily put on nor put off.
3. Those who insist on outward exhibitions of humility and worshipping of angels are usually those who say a great deal about what they have seen, about their visions. They dwell on these things, investigating them, entering into the study of them, and going into details in narrating them.
4. Those who insist on outward exhibitions of humility and worshipping of angels are usually those who are vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds. *Vainly* means "without just cause." They have no real basis for pride. Their minds are fleshly, being concerned only with themselves and their fleshly desires for honor.
5. There are some variations in the ancient manuscripts as to whether Col. 2:18 says "what he hath *not* seen" (as in KJV), or "which he hath seen" (ASV). The explanation probably is that the person who tells about his visions really thinks he has seen them, but is probably deluded. Thus ancient copyists of Paul's letters found it easy to insert *not* in the clause "He hath seen." Probably the visionaries had not really seen what they claimed, but they thought they had. The ASV reading without the *not* is better supported by manuscript evidence than the other.
6. Those who insist on outward exhibitions of humility do not hold fast to Christ the Head. (Eph. 1:22). They imagine that they have seen visions, and this makes Christ less important to them.

The theme of the whole book of Colossians is that Christ is supreme. He is everything to the child of God. False teachers do not hold fast the Head.

7. To emphasize the importance of Christ as Head, Paul says that from the head (Christ) all the body (the church) increases with the increase of God (literally, "is growing the growth of God"). In other words if we do not hold on to Christ as head, we cut ourselves off from the marvelous growth that God can cause us to achieve. (Eph. 4:15-16).
8. In order for the church to grow Christ causes the church to be supplied and knit together through its joints and bands. This is a rather complicated description of the growth process of the church, as compared to a human body.

The church is *supplied* by Christ with all the essential food and gifts and help it needs, just as a body is supplied by wholesome food. The church owes its entire growth to Christ. There is no other source of strength and nourishment.

The church is *knit* together, that is, closely joined and coalesced together. Its members, though coming from many backgrounds, are harmoniously joined together in one body, until their relationship is as solid as two pieces of a broken bone that have knit back together.

This process of knitting men together in one body is done "through the joints and bands," that is, through the joints and ligaments. Any nutrition that passes to our feet to cause them to grow along with the rest of our body, has to go through the knee joint and ligaments. Similarly any growth that one member of the church makes comes about through his contact with other members. Each member has to function in the measure that is due for the whole body to grow. (Eph. 4:16).

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20. If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, 21. Handle not, nor taste, nor touch 22. (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

20. If you died with Christ (as indeed you did when you were baptized, and were thus made free) from (bondage to) the rudimentary things of the world, (then) why, as if (you were still)

living in the world, do you subject yourselves to (this world's religious) ordinances?

21. (I refer to such ordinances as): "Touch not," and "Taste not," and "Handle not"—(ordinances commanding celibacy and abstinence from food and drink).

22. (These ordinances of) which (I speak) are all (leading people) unto corruption (and eternal misery) by (their) misuse according to the precepts and teachings of men. (Conceivably they might have some use, but as they are being used, they are an abuse.)

(Note—See two alternate paraphrases of this verse in the following notes, section 11.)

### Notes

1. Col. 2:20-22 contains Paul's warning against asceticism. (Asceticism is the voluntary self-denial or abuse of the body for religious reasons.)
2. The reason for which we should disregard all rules about self-denial of the body is that all of these are man-made, and we Christians have died to all the rudiments of this world. We hold only to the things Christ has commanded. (Isaiah 29:13; Matt. 15:9).
3. We died to sin and to men's ordinances when we repented and were baptized. See notes on Col. 2:12.
4. Once again here in Col. 2:20 (as in 2:8) all the religious ordinances in the world (excepting, of course, those given through Christ, and in harmony with Christ) are called *rudiments*. No matter how wise, mystical, and benevolent these ordinances may sound, they are like the A.B.C.'s, mere rudimentary concepts, when compared to the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8).
5. The ordinances Paul refers to in 2:20 are the ordinances like those listed in 2:21: "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch." Paul is not here referring to the ordinances of the law of Moses, as he was back in Col. 2:14.
6. Some people have quoted Col. 2:21 without referring to the verses before and after it. Such a use of the verse might make it sound like we were indeed to "Touch not; taste not; handle not." But Paul meant that these were the type of ordinances which we were to shun. We have no laws that forbid us to handle, taste, nor touch wholesome normal things.

7. The command "Handle not" (KJV, "Touch not;" Gr. *hupto*) may refer to sexual relationships and marriage. It is from the same word as "touch" in I Cor. 7:1, which obviously refers to this. Sex within marriage is approved of God, necessary, and desirable. (I Cor. 7:1-5; Prov. 5:18-20; I Peter 3:7). Any religion that forbids marriage and normal sex relations is a doctrine of devils. (I Tim. 4:1-3).
8. The difference between *handle* and *touch* in Col. 2:21 is not great. *Handle* (*hupto*) is the stronger term, indicating to lay hold of or hold fast. *Touch* (*thiggano*) is a more delicate term, signifying to touch, particularly as a means of knowledge, or for some purpose.
9. Col. 2:22 is a difficult verse, and has been variously interpreted. The difficulty lies in the fact that we are not sure what the "all which" at the start of the verse refers back to—to the ordinances, or to the food and drink involved in the ordinances?  
Also we cannot be certain whether 2:22 is a continuation of the quotation of the false teachers, started in 2:21, or whether it is all Paul's parenthetical observation concerning the ordinances referred to in 2:21.
10. We must observe here that the word *using* in 2:22 (both in KJV and ASV) comes from the Gr. *apochresis*, which actually means "abuse" or "misuse." The translation "using" represents an interpretation (maybe a legitimate one) of the text, rather than a precise translation.  
Also the term *perish* is from the Gr. noun *phthora*, which is usually translated *corruption*, and refers variously to: (1) decay and decomposition of material things (as in I Cor. 15:42); (2) to moral decay and corruption (II Pet. 1:4); or (3) to the loss of salvation and to eternal misery (Gal. 6:8; Col 2:22).
11. Our own interpretation of Col. 2:22 may be seen in the translation and paraphrase given above. To us it appears that it is the ordinances of men that are leading people into corruption and misery, because of the abuse of them after the teachings of men.

We give here two alternative paraphrases of Col. 2:22, and leave the matter to the reader to consider which seems to him to be correct. Undoubtedly the Colossians, who had heard the false teachers give their speeches, knew exactly what Paul referred to in Col. 2:22. To us it is somewhat indefinite.

Alternate Paraphrase A: "(These ordinances deal only with physical things like food and drink) which are all (soon digested) unto destruction by the (normal) using (of them. And furthermore these ordinances are only) according to the commandments and teachings of men."

(This interpretation is similar to the idea expressed in Matt. 15:7; I Cor. 6:13.)

Alternate Paraphrase B: (Paul speaking: "To quote the false teachers, they say,) "Touch not (food or women), Taste not, Handle not; (for these things which you touch and taste and handle are things) which are (doomed) unto corruption by (their) abuse (and you cannot use them without it being an abuse).'" (With reference to all of this, I say it is only) according to the commandments and teachings of men."

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**23. Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.**

### *Translation and Paraphrase*

23. (The ordinances of) which (I spoke do indeed) have a speakable appearance of wisdom in (the respects of) self-chosen worship, and (apparent) humility, and (in impressive demonstrations of) severity to the body; (but they are) not of value for the satisfying of the flesh (and restraining indulgence).

### *Notes*

1. Paul concludes his warnings against human ordinances and asceticism by saying that the way that some people carry out such ordinances makes an impressive show, but that the ordinances are of no value when it comes to satisfying the basic desires of the flesh, and giving us contentment.
2. Paul concedes that the human ordinances named in 2:21 indeed have an appearance (or show, or matter, or word; Gr. *logos*) of wisdom in *will-worship*. It takes a lot of will power to live up to them. *Will-worship* is voluntary, arbitrary worship, worship which one devises and prescribes for himself.

Also these ordinances make those who observe them very humble-appearing. The humility, however, is outward, and not genuine. Compare 2:18. Some religious people wear dark-colored, peculiar-looking, uncomfortable clothing. Such an act does not make the person really humble.

Also the ordinances make quite a show of severity to, or neglecting the body. Any man who lives without meat, or fasts for days, or wears odd uncomfortable clothing, or takes a vow to remain unmarried, or sleeps on spikes, or walks on hot coals, or crawls on hands and knees for great distances in acts of worship—such people are looked upon as especially holy by multitudes of unthinking people. They really are not.

3. In spite of these outward appearances Paul says that the ordinances of men have no value against the indulgence of the flesh (KJV, "to the satisfying of the flesh"). A monk in a monastery living on bread and water may make an impressive show of self-denial, but he still oftentimes may experience discontent with his lot, and crave a more normal life.
4. The word *indulgence* (KJV, *satisfying*; Gr. *plesmone*) refers to the state or quality of being full and satisfied; satiety. Christ satisfies.
5. The Christian life is not a life primarily based on the denial of the body. We may freely enjoy food, and drink, and marriage, and a home, as long as these things do not rule our lives and desires, or injure us, or cause other to stumble. We may choose to deny ourselves of something, so that we can make a sacrificial gift. This too is excellent, but we cannot demand that others do as we do in these actions.

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### Study and Review

#### Questions on Colossians 2:6-23

1. What is the topic of Col. 2:6-23 in the outline?
2. How are we to walk in Christ? (2:6)
3. By what title is Christ Jesus called in 2:6?
4. What does *walk* mean in 2:6?
5. To what do the expressions *rooted* and *built up* compare Christians? (2:7)
6. Explain established (or *stablished*) in the phrase *established in your faith*.

## CHAPTER TWO

7. In what are we to abound?
8. What are we to take heed to prevent? (2:8)
9. Explain the verb *spoil* in 2:8.
10. What does *vain* mean in *vain deceit*?
11. Philosophy and vain deceit are said to be *after* two things. What are they?
12. To what does the word *rudiments* in 2:8 refer?
13. What does Godhead mean in 2:9?
14. In what manner does the fullness of the Godhead dwell in Christ? (2:10)
15. How does 2:9 specially apply to Gnostic doctrines?
16. Where are we made full (or complete)?
17. Of what is Christ head (besides the church)? (2:10)
18. What (or who) is "all principality and power"?
19. Wherein are Christians circumcised? (2:11)
20. What sort of circumcision do Christians have?
21. What must Christians put off to be truly circumcised?
22. How does Christ's circumcision relate to us?
23. In what act is our "circumcision" done? (2:12)
24. What two experiences of Christ do we share when we are baptized?
25. What is accomplished through our faith when we are baptized?
26. What are we to have faith in? (2:12)
27. What two things caused us to be dead? (2:13)
28. Why would the uncircumcision of our flesh cause us to be spiritually dead?
29. What act of God is associated with his making us alive in Christ? (2:13)
30. What has Christ blotted out? (2:14)
31. What is the handwriting (or bond) of ordinances?
32. In what way (or ways) were the ordinances against us and contrary to us?
33. When (or where) did Christ take the ordinances out of the way?
34. Explain the term *spoiled* (or *despoiled*) in 2:15.
35. What did Christ despoil? What are these things (or beings) which Christ despoiled?
36. When (if we can tell) did Christ make an open show of those he spoiled?

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37. What is the *it* in which Christ triumphed over the principalities and powers?
38. About what are we to let no man judge us? (2:16)
39. What religion emphasized such ordinances as those named in 2:16?
40. Does 2:16 indicate that all types of drinking are acceptable? Give a reason for your answer.
41. What is the *new moon*? Compare Numbers 10:10; 28:11; I Chron. 23:31; II Chron. 31:3; Neh. 10:33.
42. What day of the week is the Sabbath? (Compare Ex. 20:10)
43. What does 2:17 mean by saying that the ordinances were a *shadow* of things to come?
44. Explain "the body is Christ's." (2:17)
45. Of what are we to let no man rob (or beguile) us? (2:18)
46. What is "voluntary humility"? (2:18)
47. How could a worshipping of angels rob us of our prize?
48. In 2:18 the Amer. Standard version says "dwelling in the things which he *hath seen*," and the King James version says "things he hath *not seen*." Suggest a reason to account for this variation.
49. Explain the phrase "dwelling in the things which he hath seen."
50. What is the mental condition of those who do such things as angel worship? (2:18)
51. What (or whom) do the angel-worshippers not hold fast? (2:19)
52. What does the Head do for the body? (2:19)
53. What is the subject of 2:19, and what is the verb?
54. What sort of increase should the body (the church) make?
55. When did we die with Christ? (2:20)
56. From what did we die? (2:20)
57. What are the rudiments of the world which Paul refers to? (2:20; Cf. 2:8)
58. What were the Colossians submitting themselves to? What did this make them look like they were living in?
59. Are the commands stated in 2:21 approved or disapproved?
60. What specifically do the commands in 2:21 forbid?
61. To what may the "all which" at the beginning of 2:22 refer back?
62. What is to be the end or fate of things associated with human ordinances?
63. Where did the ordinances originate? (2:22)

## CHAPTER TWO

64. What do the ordinances have a show (or appearance) of? (2:23)
  65. In what three respects may ordinances make a show of wisdom?
  66. What is will-worship?
  67. Does severity to (or neglecting of) the body have any value? Does it have any appearance of value?
  68. Do the ordinances of men have any value (or honor) against the indulgence (or satisfying) of the flesh?
  69. Suggest a title or topic of your own for Col. 2:6-23 (Col. chapter 2).
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