

Colossians Chapter Two

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**Col 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,
Col 2:2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,
Col 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
Col 2:4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.
Col 2:5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.**

The struggle of Paul here was in prayer for he was locked in his rented house and chained to a Roman soldier (Acts 28:30). The Greek word used that is translated “struggle” in verse 1 means an intense activity so he was not merely bowing his head in prayer. He was in an intense struggle against the powers of Satan and his demons and specifically with their disciples, the false teachers that still plague us today.

Eph 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

His prayerful struggles were here specifically for the Christians at Colossae and those at Laodicea. It seems that none of Christ’s disciples in those towns had personally met Paul and, since he could not be there to help them, he was fervently praying for them. His prayers were very specific and were on two topics. The **first** topic was that their hearts might be encouraged even though he was in prison. All Christians are united in Christ according to His prayer to the Father:

John 17:21 that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.

The heart was a symbol of the place of what we would call the soul as it is the center of personality, conscience, and self-identity. As a Christian we get our self-identity not just from ourselves but from our identity with God and His children. Our unity should help us be encouraged in our obedience and submission to God and particularly as we all learn more about God from His word as these people learned from the first letters from Paul. The **second** topic involved their attaining true knowledge of Christ. This true knowledge was to be based upon a full assurance of understanding of the Word of God. In other words, this true knowledge had to be properly understood and the assurance of that understanding of the true knowledge would be an answer to Paul’s prayers for them. This understanding of God results in great spiritual wealth as it reveals the greatest mystery of all time: the truth about Jesus Christ. This knowledge is hidden only in the sense that it is not readily available for all mankind. The only people who can

really understand the truth of God's revealed word are those who have been regenerated and given faith.

All treasures of spiritual wealth coming from that knowledge, and the wisdom based upon the utilization of that knowledge is only from Jesus Christ. Nobody can attain any spiritual wealth apart from Him. Paul then openly says that the reason for his statements of this only source of knowledge and wisdom is so that they will not be deceived by the false teachers. The false teachers may be greatly talented with speaking abilities but the truth of their statements must be judged only from the Bible. Millions of people are being deceived today by false teachers who are very charismatic as they peddle their lies. Such false teachers are so worldly successful because the people listening do not know the knowledge to which Paul refers and thus do not have the wisdom that comes from the application of that knowledge.

Paul tells them that he is with them spiritually and that he is rejoicing to see the result of the out-working of their faith. Discipline translates a military term that means an orderly group of soldiers. They are united because their faith is a gift of God that drives them to better understand Him and to be at one with other Christians. They are to be united in the truth of the Word of God and not on some ideas solely based upon human reasoning. Being true Christians, they also would have a stable faith since it comes from God and is perfected by Christ:

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Col 2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,
Col 2:7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.**

These two verses should be viewed as a summary of the preceding verses. He had presented the proper understanding of the person of Jesus and the purpose for the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection so they should now practice their walk in the world according to that knowledge. Knowledge without application is hypocritical so Paul is exhorting them to walk according to the teachings of Christ Jesus as their Lord. Saying that they had been firmly rooted means that their foundational understanding of Christology had been permanently received. The words "built up" are in the present tense, which means that the building up process is continual. The Greek word translated "established" above is sometimes translated "strengthened" and it also is in the present tense. Saying that they are established in "your" faith indicates that such is the faith given them by God (Rom 12:3) rather than meaning the doctrines and decrees of a teaching. Paul then adds "just as you were instructed" meaning the initial fundamental teaching they had received rather than any false teachings. "Overflowing with gratitude" is also present tense meaning that such an attitude should continue all of their lives. The picture of overflowing is of a river overflowing its banks so that their gratitude should be seen by others. The faith given by God to His children is like a seed in that it will grow and yield the fruit of the Spirit. That faith will grow as they practice what they know (2 Cor 10:15).

Col 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

In these verses Paul begins his frontal attack on the false teachers. I often write 2:8 in the front of my book as I want people to not be taken captive by the false teachings we hear so often today. He starts this section with “see to it”, which is a command. Taking captive is a term used in the military to mean taking prisoners away for imprisonment and Paul is warning them that these false teachers are meaning to take them into spiritual captivity so that they will be isolated from the truth of Christ. Although this is the only place in the NT where the word philosophy is used, Paul is not condemning philosophy in general for the word literally means “love of wisdom”. What he is condemning is the philosophy taught by these false teachers. This false philosophy is based upon false wisdom. He characterizes it by saying that it is empty, deceiving, according to the tradition of men, and the elementary principles of the world. Saying that it is empty, or hollow as some translations state, means that it has no substance. When Paul says that it is deceptive he means that it attempts to present a false ideology. Truth only comes from reality and reality is only present in God. So any teaching that is not based upon God’s principles is not from reality and hence is false. The tradition of men could mean some of the oral traditions of the Jews or, more likely, the pagan theories prevalent in this time period.

The “elementary principles” of the world can either mean the basic principles taught in schools or the principles from the elementary spirits who were the supernatural spirits thought by many to direct the stars and the meanings of the arrangement of stars (what we might call today astrology). It is likely Paul means the second possibility for, in 2:18, we will see that the false teachings involved angel worship. Paul then compares this false philosophy with the principles revealed by Jesus Christ. All philosophies and other teachings must be compared with the truth that God has revealed to us in His Son.

**Col 2:9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form,
Col 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;**

Every word in verses 9 is very important. Paul begins with “for”, which tells us that what he is about to say is based upon what he has said in 2:8. He continues with “in Him”, meaning “in Christ Jesus”, and this emphatic statement infers that it is only in Him that the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form. The fulness of Deity means all aspects of God. Of course this fulness dwelt in the Son before the incarnation, but it also continued after the incarnation. Dwelling means a permanent inhabitation. Saying that this fulness of Deity was in His bodily form argues against the Gnostic belief that all matter was evil. “In Him” or “in Christ” is often used by Paul because it is such an important concept in Christianity. We are no longer just “in us” but after redemption we are “in Him” so that we share somewhat His fulness. This “oneness” is a quality that will be enhanced as we proceed in our sanctification, but it means that there is no aspect of spirituality that is not available to us. Being made complete does not mean that we are perfect in our present human form, but it does mean that there is nothing else that we need! We do not have to obey all the Mosaic commands. We do not need to worship angels. We are complete

when we are “in Christ”! What a relief! What a joy! Paul then goes on to add that Jesus is the head over all rule and authority. Note that this is a different headship than His being head of the church (His body). Here Paul is saying that there are no visible or invisible beings or forces in the universe that are not under His authority. When the false teachers were lifting up the spirit beings they did not know that Jesus was over all of them also. Jesus Christ is the source of life and the sovereign Lord over all rule and authority.

**Col 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;
Col 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**

Paul now begins to list three aspects of the sufficiency of Christ. He lists spiritual circumcision, forgiveness of sins (13, 14), and victory over the forces of evil (15). Mosaic circumcision was a type or shadow of the fulness to come as it was physical whereas the permanent circumcision is spiritual. The definition of our spiritual circumcision is the removal of the body of flesh and it is removed by the circumcision of Christ. The image of this removal is of putting aside some filthy garment. This body of flesh is the whole of our carnal nature and it is removed when we are first regenerated for evil cannot coexist with good. But we have to spend the rest of our lives working out this removal in our everyday actions and thoughts – our sanctification. Paul elsewhere describes this work of sanctification as working out our salvation:

Phil 2:12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Paul explains this spiritual circumcision, which is the cutting out of our inward evil being, elsewhere in Scripture:

Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

Phil 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Paul then tells us that the outward sign of our internal spiritual circumcision is believers’ baptism. We can show to the world what has happened to us inwardly by an immersion ceremony that beautifully symbolizes our death to our sin nature (buried with Him in baptism) and our walk as a new person created through the faith given us by God, who also raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This burying and raising is our outward demonstration that we have had our sin nature removed and we are putting on the new nature having had our sins imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to us. Faith is the cause of the effects of trust and belief and, without that imparted faith, any baptism is meaningless.

Col 2:13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Not only has God done this marvelous, graceful work in us; He did it while we were still dead in our sin and in our evil sin nature. Paul elaborated on this wonder in his letter to the Ephesians:
Eph 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
Eph 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,
Eph 2:7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;
Eph 2:9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

A dead person can do nothing. We were spiritually dead and enemies with God when He acted to remove our body of flesh and to impart a new nature within us. All of our transgressions were put on the Cross and, before Him, we are now blameless in Christ. It is critical to understand that we are alive with Jesus and not separate. We are “in Christ” and He supplies all of our spiritual needs. All we have to do is trust and obey as we participate in the sanctification process. All of this process was actually completed in the mind of God before the foundation of the world:

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,
Eph 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love

Here we should go outside and shout for joy!

Col 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
Col 2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

This certificate of debt is the Mosaic Law that could not be obeyed. Every aspect of this Law proclaimed our sin nature and our inability to obey it. Therefore it was certainly hostile to us for we would stand before it condemned forever because of our inability to obey it. But God has cancelled this certificate of our debt meaning that it no longer is present in His court of justice. This huge certificate of debt was put on Christ at the Cross so that He paid the penalty for our total inability to obey the Law. This law had a valid claim against us and, without the action of Jesus on the Cross; we would be forever judged as debtors before God and sentenced to an eternity of judgment. This Mosaic Law bond has been cancelled out for us by the work of Jesus Christ so that it will never condemn us again. Halleluia! The nailing of it to the cross illustrated the custom at the time of putting the reason for execution above the head of the person being punished or killed. Thus the reason for the death of Jesus was our sin! Verse 15 has been disputed by theologians but it seems to be a follow-up of the previous verses. The Cross was

viewed by the world as the disgrace and defeat of a man who dared to challenge the religious leaders of the day. However the reality is that the Cross was a time of great victory. Satan and his followers were defeated on that day in a public display that can only be properly seen by God and His children. God triumphed over the evil forces of the world through the faithful work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Col 2:16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--

Col 2:17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Of course the “therefore” is there to point back to what Paul has previously said in this letter. The fulness of time has come and the Son has come to fulfill the Law and all it entails.

Matt 5:17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

Heb 10:1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.

Christians have liberty from the former slavery of the Law:

Gal 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

In verses 14 and 15 Paul has already told them of their freedom from the Law. The reference to eating and drinking could refer to the Jewish dietary rules in the Mosaic Law concerning what foods are clean. It could also refer to some of the ascetic tendencies of the Colossian heresy. Certainly the reference to a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath day relates to the various holy days of the Jewish calendar that occurred weekly, monthly, and annually. In Gal 4:9-11 Paul also told them that they should not be chained to such observances. The reason that no one can judge us in regard to those events is that the antitype has come. The fulfillments of the OT types or shadows are called the antitypes. The Greek word translated “substance” above is sometimes translated “reality” and that belongs to Jesus Christ. People who are still legalistic about the Sabbath are called Sabbatarians and some still function today. Christians worship collectively on the Lord’s Day and it should not be called the Sabbath. For the Jew, the weekly Sabbath was not a day of worship but a day of rest and they were not to leave their house.

Col 2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

Col 2:19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

How can someone defraud us of our prize from God? Our salvation is assured by the work of Jesus Christ, but there will be a judging of our works:

1Cor 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1Cor 3:12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1Cor 3:13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

1Cor 3:14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.

1Cor 3:15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

If someone then detracts us from our course of work based upon the foundation then we will be deprived of some of our good works and so anyone who takes us away from that path is defrauding us of our prize. These false teachers were doing this to the Christians at Colossae. The false teachers were teaching a false humility (self-abasement) and a worship of angels. To these false teachers these spirit beings filled the universe and perhaps part of their false humility was to say that they did not deserve to worship God so they worshiped the angels. Of course the Bible forbids such worship (Matt 4:10; Rev 19:10). These false teachers were also taking their stand (had as a basis of justification of their teachings) on visions they said that they had. They were personally inflated by their fleshly mind and this is a mind that has no spiritual enlightenment.

Paul then states that since they are informed only by their fleshly mind they have no connection with the head, Jesus Christ. In 1:18 Paul has already told them that Christ is the Head of the church and people without a spiritual connection to God have no access to Him and thus all of their teachings are without merit and foundation. The church is viewed as a vine connected to Christ and it receives its growth from Him as Paul said in verse 19:

John 15:4-6 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Col 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

Col 2:21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

Col 2:22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Col 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Asceticism is the imposition of man-made rules as a means of gaining favor with God. These false teachers were ascetics as they see the body as evil and they devised many rules like Paul

mentions above. To the Christian, all the rules of asceticism are anachronistic since any legal and ascetic rules are severed. The use of the word “if” is not to question their dying to Christ but it is more like a “since” you have died with Christ. He is being sarcastic. We no longer live according to the rules of man but of God. We are no longer citizens of the earth but citizens of heaven. Since we are in Christ we are delivered out of any obedience to the basic principles of the world. This discussion is tied to 2:14 and so we have no obligation to obey the elementary principles of the world since we are beyond that authority. We are not teaching antinomianism for we still are bound to live according to the character of God. But these people were being taught worldly philosophies and ascetic principles that the non-Christian trying to achieve some worthiness before God might be tempted to try. All the ordinances of these false teachers were in regard to those concepts and things which will one day perish from existence. The orders to not touch and not taste have to do with the dietary restrictions these false teachers were saying would lead to holiness. The order of “do nots” is in descending order: handle, taste, touch. They may have been perturbations of the Mosaic Law or of the ascetic pagan teachings. Christ has made all foods clean:

Mark 7:18 And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him;

Mark 7:19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated? "(Thus He declared all foods clean.)

Paul then summarizes by saying that these ascetic rules may have the appearance of wisdom to the mind of man but they have no value for taming the fleshly desires of man. If someone is just trying to achieve purity by these man-made rules, he will have no success regarding his original sin nature that can only be cleansed by the application of the work of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not a religion like the ascetics were trying to achieve by their rules and regulations. The beating of the body to attempt to make it conform to the character of God will not achieve that purpose. Christianity is being “in Christ” and that only happens by the power of God to cause our regeneration and then by the giving of faith so that we can trust and obey. Christians then want to walk in the world according to the character of God and the Holy Spirit will aid us in our sanctification process without any application of such ascetic principles.