

Jesus Christ

The Image
of the
Invisible God

An Exegesis of the Epistle to the Colossians

Study 5 Not Philosophy but Christ (Colossians 2.1-10)

Philosophy" - this is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament - does not refer *here* to the study of basic questions concerning God, man, and the meaning of life. It refers to worldly "principles," the speculations and ideas of false teachers not rooted in divine revelation. These ideas had come down by merely human "tradition"

The general idea from the Greek words used in this passage is "**empty deception**"

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Salvation is categorically a conversion experience. When one comes to salvation it is only through a sincere expression of faith in Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. The false prophets at Colossae were teaching that salvation is by faith in Christ's death and resurrection **plus other things done by man**. John made it quite clear that anyone who strives to enter the kingdom of Heaven any other way is a thief and a robber (John 10.1).

It was this wretched, heretical "faith plus human works" teaching that Paul was combating in his letter to the Colossian believers.

"The one thing that is clear is that the false teachers wished the Colossians to accept what can only be called *additions to Christ*."

(Barclay, op cit)

Look at Colossians 2.1

The Lycus Valley was not evangelized by Paul himself; it is plain from Colossians 2:1 that he was not personally acquainted with the churches there;

"..... and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh"

"For I want you to know what great conflict I have for you and for those in Laodicea....."

Paul carried a very deep burden of concern for the believers in Colosse and in nearby Laodicea because of the activity of false teachers, and he laboured for them in prayer. He expresses his anxieties and deep concerns for his readers and their neighbour Christians using a metaphor from the field of athletic competition. His strivings (1:29) included specific struggles and conflicts for them.

Look at Colossians 2.2-3

In these two verses Paul continues his declaration and assertion of the preeminence of Christ as he states that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge can be found in Him alone. In wisdom and in knowledge, as in all else – Christ is supreme.

"That their hearts may be comforted"

The word "heart" appears twice in Proverbs 23.7. The first mention is translated from the Hebrew word "*nepesh*" which means "breath," and is equivalent to "mind;" the second mention is translated from the word "*leb*" which means "heart" or the seat of the emotions. When Paul then

speaks of the Christians at Colossae having their hearts comforted, he is speaking of the whole inner man, mind and heart, or maybe better, intellect and emotions.

The "**full assurance of understanding**" is the fixed persuasion that you comprehend the truth..... It is not merely the vivid belief, that what occupies the mind is the Divine verity, but that this verity is fully understood. The mind which has reached this elevation is confident that it does not misconceive the statements of the gospel, or attach to them a meaning which they do not bear."

(Eadie, J. 1957 *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*) Emphasis mine

The Christian's "wealth" is his or her thorough "understanding" of God's truth. The essence of God's revelation is "Christ *Himself*" (cf. 1:27). The better a Christian understands God's true revelation concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ, the better he or she will be able to recognize and refute false doctrine.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Knowledge is the apprehension of truth; wisdom is its application to life. Knowledge is prudent judgment and wisdom is prudent action. Both are found in Christ (cf. Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 12:8)

(Geisler, NL. 1999 Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*)

God has revealed in "Christ *Himself*" all that a person needs to know to establish a relationship with God. The mystery Paul is referring to here is not the Person of Christ, but the reality that relationship with God through Christ, or Christ in you implies that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are now internalised in you by virtue of the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ. This is an amazing gift of God to all believers and He has made His gifts irrevocable (Romans 11.29)

Look at Colossians 2.4-5

Paul's description of the Colossian church, "your good discipline" (or good order), pictures a company of well-disciplined soldiers standing at attention in straight lines. The Greek word *stereoma* means "stability," and occurs only here in the New Testament. So far, the believers were holding their position against the false teachers, but Paul feared that this condition might change. He did not want the false teachers to talk them into believing something false by deceptive arguments.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Look at Colossians 2.6-7

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord....."

This is the first part of the two aspects of Paul's exhortation in verse 6. You came to Christ completely empty handed with nothing to offer the Saviour and received at the foot of the cross the gift of faith.

“..... *So walk in Him*

This is the second part and is an exhortation to motivate your daily choices and the trajectory of your life which grows out of this inexpressible gift of faith.

In particular, Paul encouraged his readers to *continue* following Christ: in harmony with the sound teaching ("just as you were instructed") that had resulted in their conversion.

(House, HW. 1994 *The Christian Life according to Colossians. Bibliotheca Sacra*)

"Christ Jesus the Lord," a phrase that Paul used nowhere else, counteracts three false conceptions of the Saviour. These are: His deity ("Christ"), that Judaism denied; His humanity ("Jesus"), that Docetists denied; and His sovereignty ("Lord"), that many varieties of false teaching denied.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Advocates of "Lordship Salvation" get into trouble when they go beyond this statement. Their position is that unless a person consistently obeys - they never specify how consistent one must be - he or she never truly accepted Christ.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

"Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2.7)

Rooted	deeply, firmly established or embedded. Implies a fixed state. Likeness to a tree rooted deeply in the earth
Built up	progressively, unceasingly and increasingly stable in the faith, erected upon an unmoveable foundation. (I Cor 3.10-14, Eph 2.20, I Pet 2.2)
Established	to be made firm
Established in the faith	a moral conviction, especially reliance upon Christ
As you have been taught	(Gk <i>didaktos</i>) systematic, prolonged teaching
Abounding in it (faith) with thanksgiving	Overflowing with gratitude, the inevitable outcome of living a Christ-centred life

Counting blessings is the greatest mathematics exercise in the universe; it helps Christians understand that the sum total of every good and perfect gift comes from above.

As in Rom. 1:16-17 and Gal. 1:11-12, these two verses provide a brief summary sentence of the main point to be made in the body of the letter, to serve as a heading to what follows:

"Walk worthy of the Lord" (1:10)	"Walk in Him" (2:6)
• Bearing fruit (1:10)	• Firmly rooted (2:7)
• Growing like a tree (1:10)	• Being built up like a building (2:7)
• Gaining strength (1:11)	• Established (2:7)
• Giving thanks (1:12)	• Giving thanks (2:7)

Look at Colossians 2.8-10

There have been four deceptions Satan has used against the church across all the ages and in this section Paul rebuffs all four. These four categories are as follows:

Philosophy

If by philosophy we mean the search for clarity and understanding regarding the whole of reality, then the Christian must in a sense philosophize. He must think clearly, and he must strive for a self-consistent view of life. In his quest, however, he must always submit to the guidance, limitation, and criticism of the light of divine revelation. On the other hand, if by philosophy we mean human speculation regarding man's basic questions without due respect for the revelation of God, then the Christian, no doubt, will accord this philosophy a greatly diminished relevance to his life.

I seriously question the view that Paul, as Tertullian after him, is to be understood as condemning all study of philosophy [cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-58; Acts 17:22-30] I take the word, then, to be limited by the context; the Colossian philosophy is in mind, as well as any other, of course, which is not in harmony with divine revelation

(Mosher, DL. 1970 St. Paul and Philosophy)

Empty deception

This empty deception describes philosophy, at least in the context of the philosophy which was running rampant in the church at Colossae.

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

(Geisler op cit)

The tradition of men

This phrase describes the Judaizers who were trying to add the traditions of Judaism to Christ as being necessary for salvation

The basic (elementary) principles of this world

The "elementary principles (Gr. *stoicheia*) of the world" probably refers to the religious practices the false teachers were promoting, which were simply external and physical (v. 20; cf. Gal. 4:3, 9).

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

Paul rebuffs all four of these errors with a very forthright and definitive statement regarding the identity of Christ. He boldly asserts that believers have all they need in Christ "*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him*" (Col 2.9-10)

"For" introduces another reason for abandoning the false teaching. What his readers had *in Christ* was completely adequate. He is the very essence of "Deity"—in whom this "fullness" permanently resides (cf. 1:19). The Greek word translated "Deity" (*theotetos*) refers to the unique essence of God (cf. John 1:1). This "fullness of Deity (the Godhead, KJV)" was present in Christ's bodily form during His earthly ministry. He did not give up His Deity when He became a man. It continues in His resurrected bodily form. He did not surrender His deity at His incarnation, and He did not give up His humanity at His resurrection. As those in Christ we, too, partake of His "fullness," having "been made complete," but not His Deity. We have no essential need that He does not supply.

(Constable TL. *Notes on Colossians*)

(Johnson op cit)

(Gromacki RG. 1984 *Stand Perfect in Wisdom*)

(Hendriksen op cit)

Summary Statement

As believers in Christ, we have no essential need that
He does not supply