

This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Hearts United in Love **Study Scripture: Colossians 2:1-15**

Lesson 4, June 22, 2019

Key Verse

*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:
Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been
taught, abounding therein* with thanksgiving.
Col.2:6,7*

INTRODUCTION

This Study Scripture presents us with some fundamental issues and accordingly asks us very deep questions. The Text confronts us with whether or not we simply have a guiding principle that gives our life meaning and to which we dedicate our lives and aim everything we do, but more deeply whether we are “in Christ” and our life is shaped by “knowing Him”. This latter is much more than living by a principle. So we are confronted with the demand that we examine what gives meaning and purpose to our life, shape our choices, underlay our decisions, determine our priorities and our relationships that we establish.

The Apostle Paul has written the previous section of his letter to help the Colossian believers and modern day Christians understand who Jesus really is and to show them what is involved in following Him as they go about their daily business.

He then follows this by showing what their lives should look like if they are walking with the Creator of the universe, living with the full understanding that the truth about who Christ is, if this truth has transformed the deepest part of their being. Every aspect of their life should be profoundly shaped and affected by this and the changed life should be apparent.

Note therefore that Paul’s instruction is based on what had already happened to them, namely, that they had received truth from God, truth in the form of the gospel and had now lived in the full understanding that Jesus Christ was Lord.

We will therefore be called on to properly examine four separate metaphors used by the Apostle to show different aspects of what it means to walk in Christ, who according to the previously emphasized Christ Hymn in Chapter 1 is the Supreme Lord.

We must first however pay attention to the fact that the book of Colossians points not only to the truths of God about Christ and the treasures of wisdom that are in Him but emphasizes the influence of the truth of God on the everyday affairs of Christians.

We must remember it is amazing that the Apostle Paul is writing this epistle or letter while he is in a Roman prison cell handcuffed to a Roman guard. But it in this lonely prison cell away from the conflicts in which he had been engaged his mind and his heart were filled with the burdens of the Church of Jesus Christ, even though he had his own heavy burdens to carry.

So he struggled and wrestled about this conflict in his daily prayers. This kind of prayer in which he was engaged was not the kind of prayer that we often engage in because we hear other people telling us that if we can do nothing else at least we can pray. It appears that some think that is easy to pray but actually the hardest of every Christian work is to pray. This is not the kind of prayer you do when you get down at the side of your bed and say a few sentences. This is really prayer at work and it is something that is most often neglected by Christian believers. So Paul wrestled in prayer for the other brethren.

He wrestled in prayer in his prison cell because he wanted to see the balance between truth and love kept in balance in the Colossian believers. Remember that for him truth must be presented in Christian love, not in sentimentality, for Christian love must be completely compatible with a gentle and kindly rebuke.

So he spoke candidly about why he suffered for the sake of the Colossians, working hard and passionately, for he did so that they may know Christ.

So we should note that Paul focuses on his love for the brethren for he knew that the Scriptures never downplayed the importance of love among the brethren and those in the community of faith. Those in the congregation of God must care for each other. One writer explains a very interesting thing:

“Sometimes it's easier for us to love the world than to love each other. Here's why: we don't know the people in the world. The reality is that it's a lot easier to love someone before you really get to know them. You might think I'm an easy guy to love. But that's just because you don't know me that well. Once people get to know each other, there are all sorts of opportunities to hurt each other. We are competitive with each other; we try to feel better about ourselves by beating each other; we misunderstand each other; we snub each other; we jump to conclusions about intentions and motivations; we judge each other. The list goes on and on...

If we are ever trying to love the word as a way of escaping each other, then we need to be careful; to learn to forgive, share, and take turns. All The things most of us have such a hard time doing. This is what Paul wanted for the family of God in Colosse”.

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To get his point across Paul uses four images. He uses An **agricultural image** to show that we are to be rooted in **Christ** so we cannot be uprooted for they will have gone deeper and deeper in Christ. Like a deeply rooted plant, the stalk might be pulled but the root will remain and will make the plant grow back.

Then the Apostle uses an **architectural image** to show that walking around in Christ means we are continually being built up.

The next image the Apostle will use is the **legal image** where the word used is from the legal system to refer to the context of a legally binding document which transferred sale of property from one person to another. Believers are established, firm, secure, strong, unshakeable in their faith.

Then follows the **numerical image** where because of all that the believers in their Christian life overflow as they walk in Christ, and overflow not just “**abundantly**” but literally “**superabundantly**”.

The language used by the Apostle is powerful and is designed to show believers the full extent of the practical application of what happens when they walk with the Creator.

The person Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, has been raised from the dead, and He lives in the believer and their lives are constantly being changed by His amazing power. Paul wants believers to get back to the drawing boards, to remember the things they had been taught in the beginning, to stop being careless, to embrace completely the word of God and His promises.

The promise is of being filled in Christ with a fullness that comes from the fact that all the fullness of Deity lives in Christ and those that believe in Him have been given fullness. So when believers are in Christ they are filled in Christ.

There is no other way to remove the emptiness that bedevils the souls in the world that wander in darkness, constantly seeking but never finding, being led astray by evil forces.

It is to be cautioned however, that the people of God live under constant attacks from the forces of darkness in all its varied and multi-faceted manifestations. The attacks are carried out to varying degrees of intensity on the individual Christian, on congregations and on the church as a whole.

One particularly insidious mode of attack is through false teachers and their specious doctrines. This is a tested and effective strategy of the Devil to lure the Christian away from the truths concerning salvation, the true faith and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. False teachers have been a historic problem in the church and one addressed by the Apostle Paul on many occasions.

Paul writes to a congregation in Colossae that he has never met, as well as people in subsequent ages, to encourage these believers to stay strong in the faith and to grow and mature, to enrich their lives, maintain vitality and a zest to life, and enable love to spread even more through the congregation.

Paul exhorted the Colossians to continue to believe and practise the truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ. He applauded their faith, love and growth but clearly recognized that it was

possible for believers to be led astray by the enticing, as one writer calls it, “**a new-and-improved brand of Christianity**”.

Paul dealt with such a case in the church at Colossae. Colossae was at the time of Paul a small town in the Lycos Valley in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). It was one hundred miles east of Ephesus and close to the larger towns of Hieropolis and Laodicea.

It appears false teachers peddling an attractive heresy posed a serious threat to believers in the Lycos Valley. News of the situation reached Paul through Epaphras, a Colossian who likely became a convert while the Apostle taught at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus; We are told

And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greek

(Acts 19:10). Epaphras appears to have been the founder of the Colossian church (1:7) and he apparently traveled to Rome to inform Paul of what was happening in Colossae, especially in light of the threat posed by false teachers.

The Apostle's response to the news was the Book of Colossians and his words to that congregation provide both the strategy and content on how to counter false teachings about Christ. The Devil has not changed his basic approach over the centuries and thankfully Paul's words are as relevant today as they were for that congregation at Colossae.

While the Apostle does not give a clear description of the heresy facing the Colossians, his emphases, references and polemics definitely point to a heresy that sought to diminish the person and work of Christ and the sufficiency of the salvation believers have in Him. It appears to have been an amalgam of Greek philosophical beliefs, warped elements of Judaism, eastern mysticism and local paganism.

False teachers invariably attack the full deity of Christ and His efficacious sacrifice to secure the salvation of believers. They call into question His sufficiency for every aspect and area of the Christian life, while promising their adherents some enticing 'fullness' which naturally has a strong appeal to the 'flesh'. Paul's response to this threat to the Colossian brethren was as one writer puts it: to

“present... the all-supremacy, the all-sufficiency, the uniqueness, and the fullness of the person and work of Jesus Christ as the God-man Savior, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and the total solution for man's needs both for time and eternity...”

A full and proper understanding of the person and work of Christ has always furnished an effective antidote to humanly devised schemes of salvation. Paul's focus on and exaltation of Christ in this short book has made it arguably the most Christ-centred book in the Bible. Consequently, this letter to a small group of believers, in an insignificant town becomes one of the most important letters of the canon of the New Testament, because of what it teaches us regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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In our Text Paul emphatically expounded the love and the sovereignty and supremacy of Jesus Christ over all creation, seen and unseen, physical and immaterial and His sufficiency for the believers salvation and every area and aspect of his life. Believers are **complete in Christ!** **The Apostle wants us all to walk in Christ not just for a simple walk but to walk until the believer actually fulfil and complete the new level of growth and achievement that all yearn for. That is the full measure that the believer is to walk for and toward.**

Let us study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to digest and appropriate these truths the Apostle so desired for the Colossians. Let us never forget that we are here speaking of true Christian love, not some mushy sentimental love which is afraid to help struggling believers to come to grips with the true doctrines of the faith, and to as well help straying believers back onto the path of righteousness.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. Paul spoke generally of his desire to see the Gentiles come to know and grow to maturity in Christ as a motivating force of his ministry in 1:28-29 but here he showed personal interest as he addressed those in Colossae, Laodicea and neighboring communities. The false teachers were evidently promoting their views in the entire region. The Apostle wished his readers could understand what he felt for them, the depth of his concern, and his love for them, as this might provide a measure of comfort and encouragement to them.

Note Paul was struggling energetically, putting much effort and toil on their behalf. He was chained to a Roman guard day and night a thousand miles away from Colossae but he was putting much effort to excite and strengthen them.

This powerful letter could not have been put together without much effort. Paul's writing in this case was particularly done and it dealt with the weighty doctrine of Jesus Christ's nature and person.

"conflict" (agona-Gk) means to struggle, strive, agonize, and was an athletic term often used of a track contest as in ([Heb12:1](#)). It was also associated with a wrestling match, which here could easily be a figure of speech that paints a graphic picture of wrestling with the Lord in prayer for others.

...have not seen my face... this is a clear indication that Paul was not the founder of the Colossian church or other churches in the Lycus Valley. The mention of Laodicea (4:16) indicates they were also under threat, though the heresy was probably centered in Colossae.

Verse 2 - 3. Here Paul begins to identify some specific qualities he desired for his readers and these would be particularly helpful in their present circumstances. One of his aim was to have them come to a full understanding and knowledge of the mystery of God and of the Father, namely, of Christ "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". Another of his aims was also to have them have full assurance, which means that they would come to a high level of certainty such as understanding would give them and they

would be sure of the truth to which they had been exposed. So he would give them loving instruction to strengthen them.

...hearts might be comforted... the term ‘heart’ in the scriptures encompasses all of the ‘inner man’ and specifically refers to the mind, (See Proverbs 4:23); 22:5; 23:19; Deut.4:9; Psalm 139:23-24; Matt. 15:19).

‘*Comforted*’ or encouraged (parakaleo, Gk) always carries with it the idea of comfort, courage, and strength, (Eph.6:22; 2Thess.2:17). The idea is for the Colossians to have strong hearts, meaning to have a firm mind, a mind that has courage, conviction, and principle. The Colossians were not distressed or under persecutions at this time but they were under the threat of being led astray by the false teachers. Thus strengthening the minds of his readers was Paul’s aim.

...knit together in love... is the means to achieve the firm mind **so** necessary to rebuff heresy and error.

Christian love among brethren is certainly to be desired and will itself help to buttress both individuals and the community at large, against the onslaught of errors.

Doctrine is practical and here Paul touches on the natural outworking of the great revelations about Christ. When believers have an intellectual grasp of the truth and act it out in deeds of love, they experience a tremendous sense of confidence and assurance. This is so because they are not only hearing and seeing Christianity intellectually, they are watching it operate and that builds confidence. Paul desired his readers to have a thorough, gratifying, insight into spiritual truth. This entails living life in a loving way so that one will become solidly entrenched in the knowledge of truth, confident and having *the full assurance of understanding*.

Note, along with expressing the idea of unity, the phrase also means to instruct, to teach and also seems fitting here as Paul’s concern was not only the issue of unity but that his readers be enlightened in their faith and knowledge of Christ, in the face of heretical teachings and practices.

Instructions in the sphere of Christian love would encompass many areas of the spiritual life, especially knowledge of the person and work of Christ. The acquired understanding then gives assurance and confidence. Unfortunately, a lot of Christians are not confident and mentally secure. They are *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Eph. 4:14).

Riches... One writer notes in part: **the greatest wealth a person can possess is the knowledge of Christ and the assurance it gives regarding eternal life and how to live in the power of His exchanged life. Wealth, abundance is ploutos, “wealth, abundance, riches” implying not only abundance, but great value. ... wisdom and knowledge... Paul says are hidden in Christ, hidden not in the sense that they are kept concealed, but that they are stored up in one place only, and that is in Christ. So the apostle calls upon the Colossians and us to look to Jesus Christ as the one and only place where we can find wisdom and knowledge.**

Note that our understanding, our settled assurance and our confidence comes from God through prayer, through the word, and through our behavior. Paul’s expressed desire was that the believer

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had God's revealed truth in his mind, that this truth be lovingly manifested in his conduct, which would result in a settled, solid position of confident assurance in the truth. Then he will be able to enjoy the riches that are his.

Of course the *treasures of wisdom and knowledge* are hidden, from everyone who is not a Christian. Those treasures are readily available to those of us who are Christians, (2Tim.2:15; Col.3:16). Note that true understanding belongs only to Christians. "*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God...and he cannot understand them...*" 1 Cor.2:14 (NASB). Ephesians 4:18 says that the pagans have their "*understanding darkened.*" Romans 1:31 says that men are "*without understanding.*" And Romans 3:11 says, "*There is none that understandeth....*" Paul would have the Colossians and ourselves have a settled understanding. *Wherefore, be ye not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is,* (Eph. 5:17).

The Colossians were receiving a revelation of Christ and God's plan of redemption that was not previously available say to Old Testament saints and in that sense it was a 'mystery'. *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory,* (Tim.3:16).

...*wisdom and knowledge*... 'knowledge' is genuine understanding and 'wisdom genuine truth (1:9). 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 (Rom.11:33; 1 Cor.12:8).

Verse 4. "*This I say...*" refers to what the apostle has just stated regarding the person of Christ and his desire that his readers have the abundant assurance that comes from a clear understanding in the knowledge of Christ. Paul explained that the purpose of his previous statements was so that the Colossians would not be deceived through arguments that only sounded reasonable and persuasive. Clearly the arguments of the false teachers had some appeal.

The purpose of Satan and his false teachers are to have believers miss the target, which is the truth of Christ. Turning people aside is the favourite tactic of Satan. He counterfeits and makes truth and error look almost alike. His deception means to have a person think they know that something is right, though it is really wrong.

Beguile literally means "to reason aside," "to defraud, delude, distort." This word is used in Genesis 29:25 of Jacob's complaint to Laban because Laban had tricked him with Leah rather than Rachael. The false teachers at Colossae sounded reasonable and this suggests they were probably promoting some of the tenets of biblical Christianity, however there were clear deviations from the truth, which made their teaching plain heresy. One writer notes: **Regardless of what they were saying, these false teachers were failing to hold fast to Christ as the supreme head from whom the body of Christ must draw her life and all her resources (2:18-19).**

This is not exactly a recent trend, but the term "Influencers" is starting to gain acceptance by many people. Where individuals guide the decisions that people make by using their status to endorse a concept, product, or movement. It is just another aspect of people

seeming to prefer the imitation rather than the real thing, at any costs. Imitations are limited and when people begin to regard imitations as real they are automatically in trouble. Christians should in a similar manner not be “influenced” by anything other than the Word of God, which holds up to what it say, and will always stand to the tests put on it. This matter of persuasive words used to turn believers out of the way is critically important. One writer illustrates the danger in the wrong kind of words.

“The churches are filled with people who are being misled in this very way. On this past New Year’s Eve there was a movement to gather all Christians across this country into churches to chant a meditation for a world-wide shift in consciousness from war to peace in 1987. That sounds admirable, and many thousands participated. What was not known, however, was that the words to be chanted included such as,

“I begin with me. I am a living soul and the Spirit of God dwells in me, as me. I and the Father are one. All that the Father has is mine. In truth, I am the Christ of God.” Do you see how misleading that is? It sounds right at the outset, referring as it does to “the Spirit of God dwelling in me”. Then the two words are added “as me”. That is, I myself am the Spirit of God.

And finally, there comes the not particularly original blasphemy, “In truth, I am the Christ of God”.

Such prayers seem good on the surface. They appear to offer freedom- they may deliver for awhile- but soon there comes decreasing pleasure, increasing bondage and, ultimately, disaster and death. This is the progress of evil.

That is the story of drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality and gambling. They seem to offer something new and exciting, but when practised they invariably destroy, leaving one at last bored, empty, and despairing.”

Note, false systems invariably deny the deity of Christ or His sufficiency to save. All false systems revolve around the denial of one or both of these two truths and that is where all cults are brought to the bar of God and condemned. Any system of religion that reduces Christ to less than deity or adds anything to His saving efficacy belongs to the beguiling activity of Satan. Paul desired the Colossians, and all Christians, to resist the seductive teachings of Satan and that can only be accomplished by having settled convictions and sound confidence in the revealed truths concerning Jesus Christ.

Verse 5. Paul was pleased that the Colossians had remained firm and even though he could not be physically present with them, he was supportive of them in his spirit. He was thrilled with their spiritual stability and to know that they were holding their ground. He had a happy confidence based on Epaphras report about their ‘*order*’ and ‘*steadfastness*.’ Both of those words are military terms.

...*order*... means ‘rank,’ and refers to a single file line of soldiers. In other words, they were still holding rank. Paul was saying to the Colossians: You may be under attacked, but nobody has broken rank. Everybody is still in single file, and nobody has gone down yet. Note it is a lot easier to stray from the ‘narrow way’ than to get back on once one has strayed.

“...*steadfastness*...”speaks of a solid front of soldiers, ready to stand the shock of attack. Not only were their ranks unbroken, but they were standing firm and ready to repel attacks.

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Verse 6 – 7. Paul desired the church to be firmly committed, united in love, settled in their understanding and progressing to maturity.

These verses speak to protection against all false teaching and that is ‘living or walking’ in Christ. This broad category, ‘walk’ rest on four footings: (1) rooted and (2) built up in Him, (3) firm in the faith, and (4) overflowing thanksgiving. It pictures a steady forward progress.

Therefore is consequent of verses four and five. Paul follows logically; since you have received Christ as Lord and declared Him as Lord, and since you have a settled, confident assurance, keep walking in Him. Do not waver!

walk... refers to the daily life-style and conduct. We are to keep walking in Him. The thrust of the statement is: do not change in your view of Christ. Do not let your belief in Him flounder.

Walking in Christ however means more than just going from day to day believing something. It also means living in union with Christ, following Jesus, and obeying His commands. One writer notes :
...the Colossians had received the apostolic gospel centring on the Person of Christ... Faith had laid hold, not merely of tradition, but on a Person. It was the Christ, the only begotten Son of God, whom they had received. The order of the title here underscores the constant emphasis of the Epistle on the divine nature of the Son. He is first *Christ*; but faith saw in Him *Jesus* the Saviour, the One who stooped to man’s need by Himself becoming man, and bearing the guilt of man’s sins. And faith, in obedience, had acknowledged that this Saviour must be Lord.

The Colossians were and we are not only to maintain continuing faith in Him, and an ongoing, settled conviction, but we are also to maintain a continuing life-style patterned after Him. Paul is saying walk as He walked! *He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked*
1John 2:6.

How did Jesus walk? He walked in love, in wisdom, in truth, in the Spirit, and in holiness. All of those characteristics that describe the walk of the Christian in Ephesians four and five were characteristic of Christ. Christians are to pattern their lives after Jesus.

Verse 7 informs us as to the imperatives of the Christian ‘walk’ and Paul employs the metaphor of a deep rooted tree.

rooted... literally means, ‘having been rooted.’ Paul has in mind something which took place in the past, but continues to have its influence in the present. In other words, since we have already been rooted in Him, we ought to walk in Him. Like a tree with deep roots in rich soil drawing its nourishment, so the Christian is deep-rooted in Christ. He is the source of life, nourishment, growth and fruit.

...built up... the tense literally translates to ‘**being built up**’. The tense is present and describes an ongoing process of the steady growth of the spiritual structure of the believer’s life. In other words, we have been rooted in Him, and are being built up as we walk in Him. When we are in lock-step with Christ, when we obey Him then we grow. On the other hand whenever we indulge our ‘flesh’, we tear ourselves down.

Note, the source of being built up, increased growth and maturity is the Word of God. "*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up..*", Acts 20:32". How do you build yourself up? By knowing the word of God and thus the will of God, and responding with obedience will result in us being *established in the faith*.

...established in the faith... is in the present tense and describes the continuous establishment or strengthening that God gives when there is a Christ centered walk.

- By this Paul is saying: 'walk in Christ because you are rooted in Him'.
- As you walk in Him, He will be building you up and establishing you solidly in the things that you have been taught'.
- God wants established Christians, solid, deep- rooted and strong who do not fall to every wind of doctrine.

...abounding with thanksgiving... should be the life attitude of every Christian, thanksgiving! We should be constantly saying thanks to God for the riches that we are enjoying, for the life that we are living, and for the walk that we are walking. The tense is present (stressing continual action), but active rather than passive and stresses our responsibility to actively engage with thankful hearts.

Abounding (overflowing) means "to be over and above, to abound, to be present in abundance."

Note, no matter the circumstances of life, there is the need for an overflow of thankfulness because of what Christ brings into the equation where "*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Note that being "in Christ" means for it speaks of a location where the believers exist. Note also that there is a family in this location.

Note also you view things as Christ views them. So as you walk around daily, you see every situation through the lens of Christ, and so life events have a different sense to it. Christ surrounds you, in church, at home, at work, as you drive or take the bus or the train, as you shop.

In addition, when you meet someone you could very well be meeting Christ, for He might also be in that person. There are others in Christ in a different part of the world, but in a mysterious way they are in the same place as you, whether or not you have ever met them. So your thoughts and action should be predicated on that basis.

So the Christ who is your Lord is your "everything". One writer reminds us:

"He defines our reality. He surrounds us. He connects us to each other. And others see Him when they encounter us. As you have received Christ Jesus as lord, walk in Him".

You might never have thought of this, but once you do you are in a radically different environment. We pray that you will consider these ideas very carefully for they are most

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important. You never want to hear the chilling words from Jesus on the Day of Judgment to the effect that He was hungry and you did not feed Him, or was in prison and you did not visit Him, that you preferred to interact with and help your own family, social class, friends and business partners, or tribal group and exclude others for it suited you personal, materialistic, selfish, carnal interest.

Verse 8. Here Paul gives another pointed warning against the false teachers and their philosophies. The city of Colossae had its philosophers as does every society and the little assembly of believers was in danger of being duped by these thinkers. This reminds us that the church, in every city, culture, country, and century will have to fight to maintain its hold on doctrinal purity.

A dictionary definition of philosophy is: 'the rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct'.

- *Philosophy* today often refers to academic argumentation about thought and logic.
- In Paul's time, it referred more broadly to the wisdom of various thinkers who sought to find the way to a good life.
- The ancient philosophers did indeed make some true observations, but the reality of the unseen God lay beyond their powers of observation.

Note that Paul knew what it was like to bump up against philosophers (Acts 17:16-34).

Practically, if this word can even be associated with philosophy, **it is the effort of man to determine the ultimate causes in the earth and the universe. Throughout the history of the world, man has pursued an understanding of what caused what is, why it is what it is, where it is going, and what its intent and purpose is. Man has sought to explain the reasons for existence, the purpose of living and all of the phenomena of the universe.**

Most philosophers deny the existence of God. Those philosophers who do allow for the existence of God, usually allow for His existence only as a general cause. In other words, somewhere, someplace, and at some time, God made everything happen. But most of them deny His existence, and they try to explain everything in the universe in terms of their own rational thinking patterns. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 informs us: "...*Eye hath not seen [You can't discover truth by empiricism], nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man [You can't discover truth by rationalism], the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*" Science is empiricism; philosophy is rationalism. According to 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, neither of them will ever discover ultimate truth.

The Apostle does not clearly define the heresy or error but we can still identify at least four of its elements namely: philosophy (humanism; vv. 8-15), legalism (vv.16-17), mysticism (vv. 18-19) and asceticism (vv. 20-23). Apparently the deceivers claimed to have a superior knowledge; a claim they hold to this day. They had a higher knowledge, a higher revelation, and a higher apprehension of God's truth.

Paul's strategy in dealing with the heresy is very instructive. His approach was not a matter of bitter denunciation of the heresy or a detailed discussion of the false teaching. It was not a fiery blast at the error but rather it was a positive affirmation of the truth. The Apostle eloquently dwelt on the

Deity of Christ and the dignity and completeness of believers. The point is obvious, if you know the truth, any system of error is going to collapse in the face of the truth.

Beware...he begins with a call to vigilance. This is a present tense, continual awareness and constant watchfulness not to be led astray. The church must always be on guard as it is always under siege by false teachers or more subtle forms of infiltration. (See Matt.7:15; 16:6; Acts 20:29-31; Phil.3:2; 2Pet.3:17). Satan uses many deceptive devices through his world system of ideas and false teachers who, though often appearing as angels of light, are agents of darkness.

...lest any man spoil you... 'spoil' is the translation of the Greek combination word 'ago' which means 'to carry away,' and 'sule' which means 'booty', the loot or plunder which is taken in a robbery or in a war. It was used in later non-biblical Greek writing to speak of kidnapping, plundering a house, or raping a maiden. Thus Paul's warning is 'do not let anyone kidnap you, plunder your treasury of truth, or rape you with their false teachings'.

Philosophy equals vain deceit and is the means by which the Colossians were to be lulled into heresy. One historian informs us of the times of Paul: "**Everything that had to do with theories about God and the world and the meaning of human life was called 'philosophy' at that time, not only in the pagan schools but also in the Jewish schools of the Greek cities.**"

Josephus, the historian of that day, has shown that any elaborate system of thought and moral discipline was called a philosophy. He says, "**For there are three forms of philosophies among the Jews. The followers of the first school are called Pharisees, of the second Sadducees, and of the third Essenes**"

The philosophy of the false teachers was a plain old lie that Paul called "*vain deceit*." The word 'vain' means empty and 'deceit' means concealment or distortion of the truth for the purpose of misleading; duplicity; fraud. It will not deliver what it promises, it is like a fish hook, in that what a fish gets is not what it expects. Truth is found in revelation, and God has spoken finally and clearly in Jesus Christ. There is no value in speculative human philosophy.

The Apostle pin-points two sources of philosophy; *the tradition of men* and *the rudiments of the world*. Tradition is "a handing down or over" and is used of teachings, commandments, and narratives. As with philosophy, there are biblical or divine traditions that have their source in God's special revelation, and also human traditions, those that come from man's own ideas and theories. Human traditions may be neutral and harmless as in the order of church worship, special events and ceremonial procedures, or policies in the conducting of human affairs. The concern however and this was the case in Colossae, is when tradition nullify the teachings and commands of Scripture (Mark 7:1-13).

Tradition often perpetuates inadequate, depraved human thinking patterns. Just because it was believed by another generation and handed down does not make it true. If there was error to start with and it is handed down, it is still error. So Paul is saying, "philosophy follows after the tradition of men."

...rudiments of the world... is not an easy term to determine because there are several possibilities. Basically the term refers to the basic elements of learning, like learning ABC's. It literally mean

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‘things in a column, or ‘things in a row’ (i.e., 1, 2, 3, or a, b, c). Paul says that those are the rudimentary principles of instruction for childhood and not adequate for mature adults.

He is warning that to return to philosophy would be to discard the mature teaching of the Bible for the infantile, shallow opinions of an immature religion, drawing its tenets from this world and not from God. The same phraseology is used in Galatians 4:3, *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world*, (The elementary teaching of human religion). Human religion teaches ‘salvation is by works.

The phrase ‘*rudiments of the world*’ could also refer to belief in local spirits or deities thought to have authority over an area.

Paul’s approach is not to argue their existence or nonexistence. Certainly, he would affirm with the rest of the Bible that the unseen world of the spirit has many spirit beings, some angelic and some demonic.

But none of these have an authority that remotely compare with that of Christ.

So Paul could mean that the philosophy of the false teachers was a system instigated by the elemental spirits or demons. The second meaning has some currency as we know from 2:18 that the Colossian heresy made much of the “worship of angels.

...and not after Christ... is the final and most telling indictment against this particular heresy and all vain philosophies, since they seek to bypass Christ. To ignore Christ is to turn ones back on truth and be consigned to eternal damnation.

Verse 9. *...dwelleth...* is continuous present tense meaning ‘in Him still dwells’. Jesus Christ is still the fullness of the Godhead.

Godhead... is the word for the essence of deity. Colossians 1:19, *"For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell."* This verse may be the greatest statement of the deity of Jesus Christ in any of the epistles.

bodily... Paul’s point here is, do not even bother to look anywhere else for the ultimate, the Godhead is in Christ ***bodily***.

Here Paul disposes of the theory that Jesus had no human body (Docetism) as well as the error that there was a separation between the man Jesus and the aeon Christ (Cerinthian). He asserts plainly the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ in corporeal form

Verse 10. It appears the charlatans in Colossae were offering some kind of spiritual completeness and Paul assures his readers they were complete in Christ.

complete... Matthew 9:22, *"Jesus turned about and when he saw her he said," Daughter be of good comfort thy faith hath made thee whole, and the woman was **made whole** from that hour."*

Matthew 12:13, *"Then saith he to the man, stretch forth thine hand and he stretched it forth and it was restored whole like the other."*

Matthew 15:28, *"Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great in thy faith, be it unto thee then as thou wilt, and her daughter was **made whole** from that very hour."*

Paul is saying: when you received Christ, **you were made whole.**

A healthy man doesn't need anymore medicine.
You don't need human philosophy,
You don't need Jewish legalism,
You don't need strange pagan mysticism,
You don't need abstaining aestheticism,
You don't need anything when you receive Christ and His salvation.
You were made whole, and that's his point.

2 Peter 1:3, *According as his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him.*

When do you come to know Christ? At salvation.

Then when do you get all things pertaining to life and godliness? The moment you believe in Christ.

head of all principality and power... Jesus rules all principality and power, that is all other beings, all created authorities, all created rulers, particularly referring here to the angelic ones. He rules them all.

They have nothing to add to His work.

You don't need to get to God through a series of intermediary aons or angels.

- Good angels cannot help make you complete
- Bad angels cannot harm you once you are complete.

In verses 11-15 Paul shows three aspects to our completeness. #1, complete salvation, verses 11 & 12; #2, complete forgiveness, verses 13 & 14; and #3, complete victory, verse 15.

Verse 11. *circumcised...* it appears the false teachers was also laying the need for Judaism circumcision on the congregation as well but Paul will show that Jesus has achieved a greater circumcision for them!

Our spiritual circumcision (v.11) took place when God regenerated us (Gal.5:24). This new kind of circumcision is not the removal of a piece of flesh, as is "ordinary" circumcision. Rather, it is the removal of sin, pictured as a piece of flesh. Christ removes the guilt of sin, granting us forgiveness, and

He removes the power of sin as His power enables us to overcome the rebellious thoughts and actions that otherwise dominate our lives. This is a circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29) which involves Christ figuratively cutting off the domination of our sinful nature (flesh).

The Old Testament constantly emphasizes that an inward change was the real issue, (Jeremiah 4:4, Ezekiel 44:7; Deuteronomy 30:6).

Verse 12. *baptism...* because the baptized person (immersed) is taken under the water and then brought out of it, the action resembles both Christ's burial and resurrection from the dead. So baptism pictures the believer's union with Christ's death and resurrection, as God applies the power and benefits of the cross to believers. Baptism also signals death to the old life of rebellion against God and resurrection to the new life of submission to Christ.

- it also carries the image of cleansing (Titus 3:5; Romans 6:4)

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The baptismal water has no magical properties. Baptism follows conversation and is a public testimony to something that has already happened. The mark of identification in ancient Israel was circumcision. In the Christian era, baptism is one mark of identification of a repentant follower of Jesus Christ. But submitting to baptism as a mere outward ritual is without value. The goal of those who are identified with Christ is to become more and more like Him.

Note, it is through faith in Jesus Christ that God accomplishes our complete salvation. (Rom.10:9-10) *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus in Lord and believe in thine heart that God hath. what, "raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

Verse 13. Here Paul turns to the related complete forgiveness that Christ gives His people (Ephesians 2:1, 5).

dead... note that the Bible consistently associates death with sin; from God's first warning to Adam (Genesis 2:17) through Revelation's warning about the "second death" (Revelation 21:8).

It is clear that death is more than the tragedy of one's physical demise; it is the ongoing guilt, alienation from God, and disharmony that we experience because of disobedience to God. This is the experience of being *dead in our sins*.

Un-circumcision... unbelievers are sinners by nature (un-circumcision of your flesh, i.e., sinful nature), and practice ("trespass, i.e., violations of God's standards). They were outside the covenant community, separated from God's people, and are God's enemy. This is the reality of the old life. God's answer to this hopeless alienation and estrangement of the unbeliever is Jesus Christ.

made alive... Jesus grants new life in His resurrection from the dead. Circumcision (spiritual) removes of sin and this results in the giving of life. God forgives totally; in every way that we have violated His will and commandments He forgives.

Nowhere else is such forgiveness offered or even possible. The sacrificial system given to Israel by God himself, could not give full and final forgiveness, since sacrifices had to be offered over and over (Hebrews 10:1-4). Only Christ provides absolute release from sin's condemnation; whether it is for the Jew that violated the Law of Moses (special revelation) or Gentiles who violated the law of God written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14-15). All sins are forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 14. *handwriting of requirements...* the basic sense of the phrase speaks to the Old Testament Law of Moses and or a figurative list of the sinner's violations of the law. The idea would be as a sort of debt or IOU that the sinner could not possibly repay. Sin was an unassailable barrier between God and those with and without the law. Jesus' death removed and cleared away all accusations against believers.

Figuratively our crime sheet was nailed to the cross with Christ and taken away with His death. Typically criminals had their crimes posted above their heads in their crucifixion. Pilate literally nailed the proclamation "King of the Jews" on Jesus' cross (John 19:19), as His indictment of Jesus for sedition. One writer notes: "**Christ really died as our substitute under the charge of the broken Mosaic Law, not under the supposed charge that He falsely claimed to be the King of the Jews**".

Verse 15. Here Paul makes mention of believers complete victory in Christ over all evil forces, the ‘flesh’, ‘the world’ Satan and his minions, as well as the banishment of our condemnation. He pictures our triumph and the end of our condemnation as a great military victory.

principalities and powers are, as in verse ten, all created authorities and rulers, particularly referring to angelic or demonic beings. They appear as defeated enemies; disarmed, shackled and publicly displayed as the spoils of war by a victorious general in a procession through the city.

Paul’s point to the Colossians is that by His death and resurrection, Christ has defeated every power that opposes Him and his followers reap the benefits of His victory, (2 Cor. 2:14; Matt.16:22-23; Luke 22:53,).

CONCLUSION

Christians must be constantly reminded that there are world rulers of darkness. These malignant, malevolent beings are clever, and they keep pushing into human thinking dangerous teachings, wrong ideas, and wrong attitudes hostile to God and His will. They do not know anything about LOVE. They only know hate and what they have to do to destroy human beings by dragging men down with them into the Lake of Fire, their appointed destiny.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that the One that is in us is greater than the one in the world, and so there is no need to allow evil teaching or evil temptations to overcome us. So we separate ourselves from Satan and those that follow him by making Jesus Christ less than He is, by showing our love for the brethren for our hearts are shown to be united in Love. Satan will certainly throw things at us. That is what the Apostle Paul teaches us. But he also encouraged the Colossian believers as well as ourselves to see that there is really no need to believe in the doctrines, the teachings and the errors that Satan has created to turn us away from the truth.

We need to understand who we are in Christ and what we have in Him. There are many enticing doctrines which are not based in Scripture. They play to our pride, or lust for power, our constant drive for status and superiority over others. Paul affirms that the essence of God's revelation is Christ (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.

A summary of Paul’s response to the Colossian heresy provides very useful instruction for believers today. He warned against being taken captive by philosophy (2:8); he presented the superiority of Christ, that is, His person, His saving work, and His complete sovereignty over *principalities and powers*. In Christ all the fullness of the deity dwells bodily and by faith, we are joined to all the fullness of God and His blessing (2:9-10). To walk with Christ means increasing knowledge of God, fruit bearing, joy and overflowing thankfulness. Paul’s message is: if you have Christ, you have everything! He warns, do not add anything else, lest you distort, diminish, or denigrate the superiority of Christ, His gospel, or the Christian life.

Despite the presence of false teachers and their clever, deceitful and attractive doctrines, we read that the little Colossian church remained steadfast in Christ. We also read of their faith, hope and love of the brethren. This is a wonderful testimony and may we strive to have such a reputation for the glory of Christ.

So as you are a believer know as one writer reminds you:

1. **You have been given fullness in Christ.**
2. **You are in Him.**
3. **He has promised to keep you in him despite your many missteps.**
4. **You are not unwanted.**
5. **Why? He has chosen you.**
6. **You are not unworthy.**
7. **Why? He has forgiven you.**
8. **You are not unable.**
9. **Why? He has given you His very life.**

So be encouraged. Do not be taken captive for you already have “fullness”. There is no reason for you to allow the many slick misleaders to fool you. Just live in that fullness. Live in Christ.