

## Book of Colossians - Colossians 2:1-23

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### Colossians 2:1-23 <sup>2</sup>

#### Wisdom in Christ (Colossians [2:1-3](#))

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Col [2:1](#) For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and [for] as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

**conflict** - Gk. Agōna, from which we derive agonize. A word used to describe a place where people gathered to watch sports competitions. Paul was greatly concerned for the well-being of the Colossian church which he had not visited.

Col [2:2](#) that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and [attaining] to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father<sup>3</sup> and of Christ,

**full assurance** - plērophori'as, from plēro'ō (to be full) and phore'o (to bear constantly, as in armor). To cause a thing to be fully known. This assurance comes through understanding and involves knowledge. Without constant immersion in God's Word, we become "conformed to this world" rather than "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" (Rom. [12:2](#); Eph. [4:23](#)). Without assurance, we are like a soldier in a war who is unsure whose uniform he wears, or never knows if his gun is loaded - we are guaranteed to be ineffective and confused in our Christian walk!

A lack of **full assurance** on our part leads to undo suffering, an inability to realize what we have in Christ Jesus, and robs us of the certainty God wants us to have concerning our standing in Him.

**Jesus' four-step program** - Jesus told us how to attain to freedom with his "four step program": "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Joh [8:31-32](#)). (1) If we abide in His Word, then (2) we are His disciples, and (3) we shall know the truth, and (4) the truth shall make us free. What does it mean to abide in His Word? To know His will and to obey His commandments.

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2 New King James Bible. TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982.

3 Some Greek texts omit the phrase both of the Father and

**Both of the Father and of Christ** - some Greek texts (NU) omit both of the Father and . But in that case, the Greek text does not contain and but may be translated the mystery of God, **even Christ**,<sup>4</sup> or the mystery of God, **that is Christ**.<sup>5</sup>

**Col 2:3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

**In whom** - notice the parity between the Father and Christ. All treasures are hidden in them (not the Father alone). This is yet another statement of the deity of Christ.

**All the treasures** - all the true treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in the Father and Son. Paul is setting the stage for an upcoming contrast between popular counterfeits to true wisdom and knowledge: (1) philosophies of man (Col. [2:8](#)); (2) legalism (Col. [2:14-16](#), [20](#)); (3) worship of angels and mysteries (Col. [2:18](#)); (4) self-imposed religious ritual (Col. [2:23](#)).

**simplicity** - Men continue to cast away the simplicity to be found in Christ in favor of burdensome alternatives which feed the flesh in that they involve a contribution on the part of the practitioner toward the attainment of God, thus rewarding our vain pride. The primary reason for rejecting the simplicity of the way of salvation by Christ is the first sin

**pride, acronym:** P.R.I.D.E. = Please Remember I Deserve Exaltation.<sup>6</sup>

**pride obscures God:** "As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you [God]." <sup>7</sup>

**Spurgeon on pride** - "See Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty builder of Babylon, creeping on the earth, devouring grass like oxen, until his nails had grown like bird's claws, and his hair like eagles' feathers (Da [4:33](#)). **Pride made the boaster a beast, as once before it made an angel a devil. God hates high looks, and never fails to bring them down. All the arrows of God are aimed at proud hearts.**"<sup>8</sup>

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4 NET Bible

5 NASB

6 Lacy Couch/CO-101 Introduction to Biblical Counseling, Tyndale Theological Seminary <<http://www.tyndale.edu>>

7 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 108-11 cited by Normal Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2001). , p. 337.

8 C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, March 6, evening.

## Not Philosophy but Christ (Colossians [2:4-10](#))

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Col [2:4](#) Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

**Deceive** - the best deceivers are themselves deceived: **But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.** (2Ti [3:13](#)).

**lack of love for the truth** - Those who are deceived lack love for the truth and so reject it. Having rejected the truth (e.g., creation) deception fills the void (e.g., evolution). These people are in the class that are eventually 'given over' to their own thinking (Rom. [1:18-25](#), [28](#)) leaving an open door for deception (2Th. [2:9-12](#)).

Col [2:5](#) For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your [good] order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Col [2:6](#) As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

Col [2:7](#) rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

**As you... received... as you have been taught** - Our primary problem is our ignorance and disdain for God's Word (2Ti. [3:13-17](#)). If we "do what we believe" as some have noted, then many Christians believe God's Word is neither reliable nor sufficient. Even when we begin in simplicity, how often we discard it for something elaborate and not of Christ (Gal. [3:1-3](#); Rev. [2:4](#))?

**walk** - The OT/Judaism concept of Halakah, to go, walk. An ongoing action which characterizes our lives.

**Built up** - ep[i]-oiko-domeo (upon - house - building/residence). Related to oikodome (edify). We are "body builders" building both our own spiritual body (Jude [20-21](#)) and that of other believers (Rom. [14:19](#); 1Th. [5:11](#)). Our "gym" and "spinach" is the Word of God.

Col [2:8](#) Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

**Philosophy** - from phileō + sophia, love of wisdom. Love of wisdom on its own is not sufficient. The kind of wisdom pursued is key. Most pursue the wisdom of the world which does not lead to God (1Co [1:21-24](#)).

**Luther says**, "I believe I owe this duty to the Lord, of crying out against philosophy and turning men to Holy Scripture. For perhaps were anyone else to do it ... he would be afraid, or would not be believed. But I who have already wasted many years on such things, and have encountered and hear of many like myself, see that it is a vain pursuit, doomed to perdition.... It is high time now to be carried away from other studies and to learn Christ and him crucified."<sup>9</sup>

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9 W.A., LVI, 371, 17 and 26 cited by Bernard M. G. Reardon, Religious Thought in the Reformation

**Empty deceit** - Deceit because the truth is not in it. Empty because it fails to deliver either in understanding or release from bondage. These are the key characteristics of the work of Satan: first deceit, then followed by failure to deliver on the promise (Gen. 3:5). Like a Pepsi-cola on a hot summer day, empty deceit tastes sweet initially, but fails to satisfy in the end.

Examples of empty deceit: **Christian psychology** - clothing secular, godless theories of psychology in "Christian-speak." **The Goodness of Man** - the idea that man is inherently good and is "ascending" toward something better. **Self esteem** - that my dysfunction is rooted in a lack of pride for myself. **Evolution** - that random events can create evidence of intelligence.

according to... the world, and not... Christ - All of these concepts are opposed to the teaching of scripture because they are according to the world. They are the world's thinking, even if too often they are packaged in a thin Christian wrapper.

**Col 2:9** For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

**all the fullness** - See the previous sessions where we discussed the deity of Christ in great detail.

**Col 2:10** and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

**Complete** - The Greek reads literally: And you are in Him completed ones. The phrase completed ones is a perfect, passive, participle. Perfect - completed action in time past with results extending to the present.<sup>10</sup> Passive - to be made full or complete (by an external agent).

**In Him** - not in our knowledge, not in our wisdom, not in our works, not in our service. We are complete in Him and the work which He accomplished on our behalf. This is why Christianity is for "children" (Ps. 8:2). **At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from [the] wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. (Mt 11:25).** Simplicity! Simplicity! Simplicity!!!! Don't lose sight of how you were saved (Gal. 3:1-3)!

**principality and power** - often refers to ranks of angels. See previous sessions where we discussed this.

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(London, England: Longman Group Ltd., 1995, 1981), p. 62.

10 ' The perfect is used less frequently... when it is used, there is usually a deliberate choice on the part of the writer. The force of the perfect tense is that it describes an event that, completed in the past (we are speaking of the perfect indicative here), has results existing in the present time (i.e., in relation to the time of the speaker). ... the perfect tense is used for 'indicating not the past action as such but the present state of affairs resulting from the past action.' Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), pp. 572-574.

## Not Legalism but Christ (Colossians [2:11-17](#))

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Col [2:11](#) In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

**circumcision without hands** - what circumcision is in view? Circumcision of the heart which cannot be made by human hands (De [10:16](#); De [30:6](#); Jer [4:4](#); Jer [9:26](#); Eze [36:26](#); Eze [44:7](#); Ac [7:51](#); Ro [2:25-29](#); Eph [2:11](#); Php [3:3](#); Col [2:11](#)).

**of Christ** - This genitive (tou Christou) indicates the agent performing the circumcision, Christ.

**Human will vs. God's will** - the phrase without hands carries forward an idea found throughout scripture: that man's works defile the work of God by imposing his sinful will upon God's work (Ge [22:18](#); Ex [3:5](#); Ex [20:25](#); Nu [7:9](#); Nu [19:2](#); De [27:5](#); Jos [5:15](#); Jos [8:30-31](#); 1Sa [6:7](#); 1Sa [10:1](#); 1Sa [16:1](#); Da [2:34](#); Da [2:45](#); Da [8:25](#); Mr [11:2](#); Mr [14:58](#); Lu [19:30](#); 2Co [5:1](#); Col [2:11](#); Heb [9:11](#)).

This is one reason why man is instructed to remove his sandals when standing on Holy ground. Sandals are made by man, the soles of man's feet are made by God.

Col [2:12](#) buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with [Him] through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

**Baptism** - We are baptized by the Holy Spirit "into Christ Jesus" (Rom. [6:3](#)) when placed into the body of Christ (1Cor. [12:13](#)) by faith. Later, we undergo water baptism in response to the work of faith which has already taken place. Baptism should be by immersion and indicates an identification of the believer with the death, burial (immersion), and resurrection (arising from the water) of our Lord (Rom. [6:3-6](#)).

Col [2:13](#) And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

**being dead... made alive** - In this passage Paul is emphasizing a transition from our previous way of living to a new and living way. We acknowledge being 'born again,' but often exhibit the stinkin' thinkin' of our previous way of life. It as if our spiritual body has been regenerated, but our mind and obedience lag behind.

**Dead in position** - We were enemies of God and subject to His wrath. We had no peace with God.

**Dead spiritually** - hence the need to be born again (Eze [37:9](#); Lu [15:24](#); Lu [15:32](#); Joh [3:3](#); Joh [3:7](#); Ga [6:15](#); 1Pe [1:3](#); 1Pe [1:23](#); 1Jo [2:29](#); 1Jo [3:9](#); 1Jo [5:1](#); 1Jo [5:18](#)). "If you are born once, you will die twice; if you are born twice, you will die only once."<sup>11</sup>

**He has made** - God is the author of our salvation (John [1:12-13](#); Php. [1:6](#); Heb. [13:20-21](#)).

**together with Him** - we are united with Christ, fully identified with Him (Joh [14:20](#); Ro [6:1-4](#);

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11 Israel My Glory (Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry) <<http://www.foi.org>>, July/August 2001, p. 23.

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1Co [12:13](#); Ga [3:27](#); Eph [1:13](#); Eph [4:4](#)).

**forgiven all trespasses** - When Christ died on the cross, everyone reading this had yet to be born. He died for all our sins. Since he died before we were born, there is no sin yet-future which Christ was unaware of when He bore our sin. Every sin we ever committed was yet future from the perspective of the cross.

**Col [2:14](#) having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.**

**Handwriting of requirements** - the written law, primarily the Law of Moses

**against us... contrary to us** - Our inability to keep the Law meant that the law was a curse to us (Gal. [3:9-14](#)).

**ten plus** - Most of us think of the Ten Commandments as the "law," but the rabbis have identified a total of 613 commands (mitzvot) from the Mosaic Law. If most of us can't even name the ten most prominent, how likely are we to have kept all 613? Even then, Jesus raised the bar to impossible levels by illustrating the true intent of the law which applies to motives and not just actions (Mtt. [5](#)).

**nailed to the cross** - This is the reason all other paths to God are a dead end because the requirements of the law are only wiped out by the cross. All paths which reject the cross necessarily result in judgment according to the law (Rev. [20:12](#)).

**taken out of the way** - Never forget that the law has been taken away! No sooner will we agree than legalism will raise its ugly head (in just a few verses, Col. [1:26](#), [21](#)). See the companion document [Christians and the Law of Moses](#).

**Luther** - "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."<sup>12</sup>

**Col [2:15](#) Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.**

**Disarmed** - Satan and the powers of darkness have been disarmed by the work of Christ who reconciled us to the Father. Satan, diabolos (from dia meaning "through" or "against" and ballō meaning "to throw") accuses believers before God (Job [1:10](#); [2:4](#); Rev. [12:10](#)). Our judge is now our advocate (Rom. [8:33-34](#)) and we have His imputed righteousness.

**Col [2:16](#) So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,**

**Sabbaths** - many Christian ministers are guilty of judging the sheep in regard to the so-called

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in Martin Luther: Three Treatises (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 277. See 1Co. 9:19; Rom. [13:8](#)

"Christian Sabbath" (Sunday).<sup>13</sup> It is common for Christian teachers to focus on a particular hobby-horse commandment from the Law of Moses, bypass the clear teaching that believers are not under the Mosaic Law, and attempt to make one particular law or section of the Mosaic Law binding to believers today. Christians are to walk by the law of the Spirit, the law of Christ (Ro [8:2](#); 1Co [9:21](#); Ga [6:2](#); Jas [1:25](#); Jas [2:12](#)) and thereby fulfill the law by love (Mt [7:12](#); Mt [22:39](#); Ro [13:10](#); Ga [5:14](#)).

**Col [2:17](#) which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.**

**Shadow... substance** - the rules and regulations of the Old Testament were intended as a shadow of the greater reality in Heaven (Heb. [8:5](#); [9:8](#), [23](#); [10:1](#)).

**of Christ** - legalism and other distractions attempt to serve as substitutes to true righteousness which is only found in Christ. As believers, our focus is Christ, Christ, and Christ. He is our righteousness, we study His life, His will, His commands.

## **Not Religion but Christ (Colossians [2:18-23](#))**

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**Col [2:18](#) Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in [false] humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,**

**cheat you** - A reference to the "empty deceit" Paul previously mentioned (Col. [2:8](#)).

**[false] humility... vainly puffed up** - A form of humility which evidences pride. Also translated "self-abasement" (NASB). These reject the revelation of God in favor of their own vain imagination concerning things they have not seen.

**Fleshly mind** - thinking himself to be spiritual, he is actually controlled by the flesh (sarkos).

**worship of angels** - expressly prohibited by Scripture (Ex. [20:4-5](#) cited by Jesus in regard to worshiping Satan in Mtt. [4:10](#); Rev. [19:10](#); [22:8-9](#)). Those who reject God will worship the creature rather than the creator (Rom. [1:25](#)). This includes the worship of angels which are created beings. The modern fascination with angels is unbiblical. There is, however, one very special angel, the Angel of YHWH, who speaks in the first person for God and receives worship - a key indicator of His divinity (Ge [16:7-14](#); Ge [22:15](#); Ge [31:11-13](#); Ge [32:28-30](#); Ho [12:4-5](#); Ex [3:2-5](#); Ex [23:20-23](#); Jg [6:11-24](#); Jg [13:21-23](#); Ho [12:4-5](#); Ge [32:28](#); Ge [32:30](#); Ac [7:30-33](#)).<sup>14</sup>

13 The Sabbath has always been and will always be Saturday. The appropriation of the term "Sabbath" to apply to Sunday is one sign of the confusion among Christians regarding the believer's relation to the Laws of Moses. Were all 613 nailed to the cross or not? If they were, why do pastors seek to place believers under bondage to the fourth commandment?

14 "Stephen's sermon refers at least three times to the Old Testament angel of the Lord, usually regarded as the preincarnate Christ (Ac [7:30](#), Ac [7:35](#), Ac [7:38](#)). In Ac [7:30-31](#), Stephen ascribes to the angel at the burning bush 'the voice of the Lord' (cf. Ac [7:35](#), Ac [7:37-38](#)) and applies the Old Testament 'angel of the

Col **2:19** and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase [that is] from God.

**Holding fast** - kratwn, present, active, participle - while continuing to hold fast

**nourished** - present, passive, participle - while being nourished. The nourishment and increase comes from God. If we disconnect from the head, we are cut off from the vine and we will not bear fruit (John **15:4**).

Col **2:20** Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as [though] living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations--

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

Col **2:22** which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

**Died from the basic principles of the world** - We profess to know Christ and worship Him, but do we deny Him by our worldly thinking and deeds? If our thinking is driven by 'business ethics' or other standards of the world (surveying 'customers', counting numbers, secular psychology), is this not evidence that perhaps we have not yet died with Christ?

**Regulations** - this is the world's view of religion. Our flesh loves religion, based on regulations, where we can attain a measure of pride by our flawed perception that we are pleasing God by our actions.

**Perish with the using** - Paul is once again telling the Colossians to focus on eternal things. We get all caught up with the shadows and miss the substance which reflects the eternal value.

Col **2:23** These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, [false] humility, and neglect of the body, [but are] of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

**Appearance of wisdom** - this is the deceptive aspect of false belief. It appears as wisdom, but is actually a construction of man which has no real substance in the eyes of God.

**False humility** - The key dividing line between all these and the simplicity of reconciliation through the death of Christ is pride. The former allow for our pride, the latter does not

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we mention Calvin, Hengstenberg, Keil, Ebrard, Lange, and Stier], this is no less a person than the Son of God Himself, the Word... who appeared later in Christ." Erich Sauer, *The Dawn Of World Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's Publishing Company, c1964, 1951), p. 103.

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(offense - rock of Isa [8:14](#); Mt [11:6](#); Lu [7:23](#); Ro [9:32](#); 1Co [1:23](#)).

**neglect of the body** - It is self-imposed and involves ascetic actions which often neglect or even abuse the body. Gurus, religious quests, pilgrimages, and all such similar are simply distractions from knowing God. Consider Luther's experience: "As a faithful son of the church, he dutifully crawled up the Scala Sancta (Pilate's Staircase) at Saint John's in the Lateran, repeating the Lord's Prayer on each step and kissing each in turn. However, his diligent efforts... brought no ringing affirmation of faith... but doubt. His own sense of sin was not alleviated. Instead, Luther, like Isaiah, discovered himself to be a sinner in the midst of sinners."<sup>15</sup> Concerning early monastic movements: "The prolonged loneliness and the shortage of food and sleep fostered hallucinations as well as growth in spiritual awareness of God. Conflicts with demons were frequent... Some hermits went to unnatural extremes, such as living at the top of pillars... Simeon Stylites gained fame for endurance, spending the last part of his life on top of a pillar."<sup>16</sup>

**No value** - These activities still take place today (e.g., Muslims who drag/crawl around religious shrines, Christians who flagellate themselves). But they are of no value because: 1) man has no righteousness to offer God; and 2) they deny Christ's redemptive work. He has done it all and we bring nothing of value.

**Indulgence of the flesh** - Asceticism actually panders to the flesh in that it feeds man's pride. True victory over fleshly temptation comes by way of the indwelling Holy Spirit and it is not available to those who are not born-again. "For denying the body its desires merely arouses them, as is well known by many who have tried to lose weight by sticking to rigid diets. Neglecting the body, Paul argued, does not nourish the spirit."<sup>17</sup>

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15 William R. Estep, *Renaissance & Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 115.

16 Tim Dowley, *Introduction To The History Of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1977), 213-214.

17 Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures, Col [2:22](#)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.