



Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 08
 Colossians 2:6-15 : Topic 5.1
 "Making the Journey in Christ"

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Greek NT

6 Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε, 7 ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ.

8 Βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν· 9 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς, 10 καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας, 11 ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 12 συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν· 13 καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκός ὑμῶν, συνεζωποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ· χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα, 14 ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς

Gute Nachricht Bibel

6 Ihr habt Jesus Christus als den Herrn angenommen; darum lebt nun auch in der Gemeinschaft mit ihm und nach seiner Art! 7 Seid in ihm verwurzelt und baut euer Leben ganz auf ihn. Bleibt im Glauben fest und lasst euch nicht von dem abbringen, was euch gelehrt worden ist. Hört nicht auf zu danken für das, was Gott euch geschenkt hat.

8 Gebt Acht, dass euch niemand mit der leeren Vorspiegelung einfängt, euch die wahre Religion zu bringen. Das beruht doch alles auf Menschenlehren und hat nur mit den kosmischen Mächten zu tun, aber nicht mit Christus.

9 In Christus wohnt wirklich und wahrhaftig die Heilsmacht Gottes in ihrer ganzen Fülle, 10 und durch ihn wird euch die Fülle des Heils zuteil, nicht durch irgendwelche anderen Mächte. Denn Christus ist das Oberhaupt jeder Macht und Gewalt im ganzen Kosmos.

11 Durch Christus seid ihr auch beschnitten worden – nicht am Körper, sondern so, dass ihr den ganzen Körper, sofern er unter der Herrschaft der Sünde steht, abgelegt habt. Dies geschah in der Christus-Beschneidung, 12 der Taufe. Als ihr getauft wurdet, seid ihr mit Christus begraben worden, und durch die Taufe seid ihr auch mit ihm zusammen auferweckt worden. Denn als ihr euch taufen ließt, habt ihr euch ja im Glauben der Macht Gottes anvertraut, der Christus vom Tod auferweckt hat.

13 Einst wart ihr tot, denn

NRSV

6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set

NLT

6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. 7 Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done.

8 Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ. 9 For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, 10 and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe. 11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. It was a spiritual procedure -- the cutting away of your sinful nature. 12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. 13 You were dead because of your sins and because

δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ. 15 ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοῦς ἐν αὐτῷ.

ihr wart unbeschnitten, das heißt in ein Leben voller Schuld verstrickt. Aber Gott hat euch mit Christus zusammen lebendig gemacht. Er hat uns unsere ganze Schuld vergeben. 14 Den Schuldschein, der uns wegen der nicht befolgten Gesetzesvorschriften belastete, hat er für ungültig erklärt. Er hat ihn ans Kreuz genagelt und damit für immer beseitigt. 15 Die Mächte und Gewalten, die diesen Schuldschein gegen uns geltend machen wollten, hat er entwaffnet und vor aller Welt zur Schau gestellt, er hat sie in seinem Triumphzug mitgeführt – und das alles in und durch Christus.

this aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. 14 He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross. 15 In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

In this longer passage, the apostle Paul turns, for the first time, to admonitions to the Colossians to remain steadfast in the apostolic teaching of the gospel in rejection of the corrupting influences of false teaching about spiritual reality. Clearly the tone of these admonitions is milder than, for example, that in the letter to the Galatians where the apostle is deeply disturbed and upset with the Galatians.² Also, he becomes more specific in detailing the false teaching present at Colossae in this passage than is found any where else in the letter. Thus the passage, along with 2:16-19, 20-23, play a pivotal role in the efforts to identify the false teaching at Colossae that is attempting to corrupt the thinking of the believing community. As we explored in the previous study on 2:1-5, no historical identification is provided. Rather, the apostle treats the ideas being put forth, not the personalities behind them. One could be tempted to draw an application conclusion from this about how to approach false teachers by dealing with ideas and not individuals. But such conclusion would not stand up because of many other polemical texts in Paul and other New Testament writers where individuals are named either by personal name and/or by position, and severely criticized directly.³ To be sure, Paul tends to deal with ideas rather than personalities, but does so because it is appropriate to the specific situation being addressed. If “naming names” is necessary and attacking the individuals is called for,

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the ‘then’ meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the ‘now’ meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²Gal. 1:6-9 (NRSV): “6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — 7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!”

6 Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, 7 ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο· εἰ μὴ τινὲς εἰσὶν οἱ ταράσσοντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 8 ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐὰν ἡμεῖς ἢ ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ εὐαγγελίζηται ὑμῖν παρ’ ὃ εὐηγγελισάμεθα ὑμῖν, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω. 9 ὡς προειρήκαμεν, καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω, εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ’ ὃ παρελάβετε, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.

³For example, Bar-Jesus on Paphos (Acts 13:6-10); a ‘Jezebel’ at Thyatira (Rev. 2:20); Pharisees professing Christianity in Antioch and Jerusalem (Acts 15:1, 5), whom Paul labels as ‘false believers’ in Gal. 2:4; Diotrophes in 3 John 9-19; Jews from Asia in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27); the unnamed religious leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 23:1ff.); Annias, the high priest, and Tertullus, a lawyer, from Jerusalem in Caesarea Philippi (Acts 24:1-2); the chief priests and leaders of the Jews from Jerusalem in Caesarea Philippi (Acts 25:1-2); Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17).

then he is not hesitant to do so.⁴

Historical Context:

External History. Over the centuries of the copying of the Greek text of vv. 6-15 four variations in wording have surfaced in the existing manuscripts that merit consideration for Bible translation in the view of the editors of *The Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies, in the fourth revised edition. These variations are found in verses seven and thirteen.



In verse seven, the first variation surfaces with the wording τῇ πίστει, **in faith**.⁵ Several copyists sought to clarify this phrase in a couple of ways: ἐν πίστει or ἐν τῇ πίστει. Neither of these alters the meaning, but instead are stylistic changes. A small number of manuscripts read ἐν αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ πίστει, repeating ἐν αὐτῷ after ἐποικοδομούμενοι, but again no change of meaning occurs.⁶ The shorter reading of the text is to be preferred over the variations.

Also in verse seven, the reading ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, **with thanksgiving**, is altered by some copyists.⁷ The variations center on whether or not to add the prepositional phrase ἐν αὐτῇ or ἐν αὐτῷ.⁸ Again, no meaning change is present, and the variations are fundamentally stylistic in nature.

In verse thirteen, the issue of either the first (**we**) or second (**you**) person plural pronouns surfaces in two places. The first one comes after the verb συνεζωοποίησεν, **he made [you/us] alive together with...**⁹ The preferred reading is ὑμᾶς (**you**), rather than ἡμᾶς (**us**).¹⁰ If ἡμᾶς is adopted as the preferred reading, then a

⁴For more details I would refer you to my article, “Encountering Heresy: Insight from the Pastoral Epistles,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Spring 1980.

⁵{A} τῇ πίστει B D* H 075 0208 33 81 256 263 365 1241 1319* 1573 2127 1 596 it^{ar, b, d, f, mon*, o} vg Ambrosiaster Pelagius // ἐν πίστει A C I Ψ 0150 424* 1912 2464 Cyril // ἐν τῇ πίστει κ D² 6 104 424^c 436 459 1175 1319^c 1739 1852 1881 1962 2200 Byz [K L P] *Lect* eth Clement Gregory-Nyssa (or ἐν πίστει it^{monc} vg^{mss} arm Origen^{lat} Theodore^{lat}; Ambrose Jerome Augustine) // ἐν αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ πίστει 048^{vid} cop^{sa, bo}

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

⁶“The reading τῇ πίστει, which has strong manuscript support, best accounts for the rise of the other readings. The variants ἐν πίστει and ἐν τῇ πίστει are most likely variations in style only and do not change the meaning. Some interpreters consider ‘faith’ in this context to be that which is believed, the content of the teaching that the Christians had received. MacDonald (Colossians and Ephesians, p. 89), for example, states, “Faith here seems to refer more directly to the object or content of belief (as is further suggested by the reference to teaching) than to the act of believing.” Others consider it to be a living relationship, and translate as ‘become stronger in your faith’ (TEV). A few take τῇ πίστει as instrumental, that is, ‘by [means of] your faith’ (NEBfn).” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 414.]

⁷{B} ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ κ* A C I^{vid} 075 0150 0208 33 81 263 424* 1175 1241 1739 1881 1912 1962 2464 1 596 vg^{ww, st} cop^{samss} eth geo1 slav // ἐν αὐτῇ P Ψ 048^{vid} // ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ B D² H 6 104 256 365 424^c 436 459 1319 (1573 1 593 *omit second ἐν*) 1852 2127 2200 Byz [K L] *Lect* it^(ar, mon, o) vg^{ms} syr^{p, h} cop^{sams, bo} geo² Chrysostom Theodoret; (Ambrosiaster) Augustine // ἐν αὐτῷ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ κ² D* it^(b, d, f) vg^{cl} syr^{hmg} Pelagius” [Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

⁸“The reading of the text, which has adequate manuscript support, appears to be the original reading. The reading ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ (in it [faith] with thanksgiving) has strong manuscript support, but it arose when a copyist changed the words to agree with those at the end of 4:2. The sense of this variant reading is that ‘the Colossians shall overflow in faith, which in turn should demonstrate itself in thanks’ (Barth and Blanke, Colossians, p. 306). The reading ἐν αὐτῷ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ (in him [= Christ] in thanksgiving) is a later modification made under the influence of the preceding phrase ἐν αὐτῷ (in him) in the first part of this verse. The reading ἐν αὐτῇ (in it) no doubt arose when a copyist accidentally omitted ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 414.]

⁹{B} ὑμᾶς κ* A C 0150 6 81 424* 436^c 1739 1881 2200 Byz^{pt} [K L] 1 147 1 156 1 593 1 617 1 1159 1 1441 1^{AD} vg^{mss} syr^{p, h} cop^{sa, bo} eth geo² slav^{mss} // ἡμᾶς P⁴⁶ B 33 *Lect* it^{mon, o} vg^{ms} syr^{pal} Marcion^{acc. to Tertullian} Origen^{acc. to 1739}; Hilary^{3/6} Priscillian Ambrose Jerome // *omit* κ² D F G Ψ 075 0208 104 256 263 365 424^c 436* 459 1175 1241 1319 1573 1852 1912 1962 2127 2464^{vid} Byz^{pt} [P] 1 596 it^{ar, b, d, f, g} vg arm geo¹ slav^{mss} Chrysostom Theodoret; Tertullian Ambrosiaster Hilary^{3/6} Pelagius Augustine.” [Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

¹⁰“The second person plural pronoun ὑμᾶς, referring to Gentile believers in Colossae, has adequate manuscript support. It was omitted in some manuscripts, probably because copyists considered it unnecessary. It was replaced in other manuscripts with the first person plural pronoun ἡμᾶς, probably out of a desire to make the pronoun agree with the following first person plural pronoun ἡμῖν (forgiving us all our trespasses). If the pronoun ἡμᾶς is accepted as original, then a new sentence will begin with the verb συνεφοσοποίησεν (Barth and Blanke, Colossians, p. 326). The variant reading may be translated, “12 and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him 13 and you from the dead,

new sentence must begin συνεζωποποίησεν, **he made us alive with him**. But stronger support for ὑμᾶς exists and thus is the preferred reading.

The second instance of the pronoun variation is after χαρισάμενος, **forgiving** (us, ἡμῖν /you, ὑμῖν).¹¹ The greater evidence favors the first person pronoun over the second person, making the expression inclusive of Paul and his readers.

In the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) text a number of additional variations surface as well.¹² With careful examination of each of these variations beyond those described above one discovers that these are again stylistic and thus efforts at clarity and updating of the language of the text.



Consequently, we can examine the wording of the Greek text in the confidence that we are studying the exact words that were originally written down by Timothy from Paul's dictation.

Internal History. The time / place markers in 2:6-15 are limited to very generalized references. In verses 6,11-13 there are references to the conversion of the Colossian believers sometime in the past. A very vague allusion to the presence of a false teacher(s) taking the Colossians **“captive through philosophy and empty deceit”** is found in verse eight. Finally a reference to the cross of Christ surfaces in verses 14-15. But all of

who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. God made us alive together with him.”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament : An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 415.]

¹¹“In later Greek the vowels η and υ came to be pronounced alike. Here the weight of the evidence strongly supports ἡμῖν over the variant reading ὑμῖν (to you [plural]). In this context, the pronoun ‘us’ refers to Paul, along with other Jewish Christians, as well as the Gentile Christian readers.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament : An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 415.]

¹²**Kolosser 2,7**

* εν π. A C I Ψ 2464 pc (τῆ πίστει is replaced by one of the following variations below)

| εν τη π. κ D² P 0278. 1739. 1881 M; C1

| txt B D* H 075. 0208. 33. 81. 326. 365. 1241^s pc lat

* εν αυτη εν ευχ. B D² Hc 0278 m (ar) m sy sams bo; (Ambst) Aug (ἐν εὐχαριστία is replaced by one of these alternatives)

| εν αυτη P Ψ 048^{vid}

| εν αυτω εν ευχ. κ² D* (b) f vg^{cl} sy^{hmg}

| txt κ* A C H* I^{vid} 075. 0208. 33. 81. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc vg^{st.ww} sa^{mss}

Kolosser 2,8

* κ A D 81. 1881 pc; (Tert) Clpt (the sequence of ὑμᾶς ἔσται is reversed by these manuscripts)

Kolosser 2,10

* ὄ P⁴⁶ B D F G; Hilpt (ὄς is replaced by ὄ)

* txt κ A C Ψ 075. 0208. 0278. 33. 1739. 1881 m lat; Ambst

Kolosser 2,11

* των αμαρτιων κ² D¹ Ψ 075. (^{lc} 0278) m (b) sy; Epiph Aug^{pl} (τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν is added after σώματος and before τῆς σαρκός)

| txt P⁴⁶ κ* A B C D* F G P 6. 33. 81. 365. 629. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc lat co; C1

Kolosser 2,12

* † -τισματι κ* A C D² Ψ 33 M; Tert (The alternative spelling βαπτισματε is used)

| txt P46 κ² B D* F G 075. 0278. 6. 365. 1739. 1881 pc latt

* των B D F G 0278. 6. 33. 323. 326. 629 pm (The article τῶν is inserted before νεκρῶν)

| txt P⁴⁶ κ A C K L P Ψ 075. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241^s. 1505. 1739. 1881. 2464 pm

Kolosser 2,13

* † κ* B L Ψ 075. 0278. 33. 81. 365. 1175. 1241s. 1881. 2464 pm b vg^{mss}; Or^{1739mg} Ambr (ἐν is omitted by these mss)

| txt P⁴⁶ κ¹ A C D F G K P 048. 104. 326. 630. 1505. 1739 pm lat

* εν D* F G vg^{mss} (ἐν is added before τῆ ἀκροβυστία)

* ημας P⁴⁶ B 33. 323 al m vgms; Or^{1739mg} Ambr (ὑμᾶς is either omitted or replaced by ἡμᾶς)

| - κ² D F G Ψ 075. 0208. 0278 M lat; Tert

| txt κ* A C K L 6. 81. 326. 1739. 1881 al vg^{mss}

* υμιν κ² K* L P 6. 323. 326 al f vg sa^{mss}; Tert (ἡμῖν is replaced by ὑμῖν)

Kolosser 2,14

* 1881 [P. Schmiedel cj] (τοῖς δόγμασιν is omitted)

Kolosser 2,15

* και P⁴⁶ B vg^{ms} (καὶ is inserted before ἐδειγμάτισεν)

[* αὐ- comm] (αὐτῷ is spelled αὐτῶ)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 526-27.]

these markers of time and place are generalized, and thus precise historical identification does not play a significant role in the interpretation of the text.

Literary Aspects:

As is the case always, the literary aspects of the text are important to the interpretive process. Thus due consideration will be given to them in understanding this passage.

Literary Form. Again, we clearly are in the letter body of Colossians at this point. Thus the 'occasional' nature of the letter points to the motivation of Paul for the writing of this letter, and perhaps this motivation is pinpointed here in this passage. At least many commentators are so convinced. Were we better able to identify the historical circumstances of the influence of the false teaching referenced here, we could determine with much greater certainty just how much a factor this issue at Colossae prompted the writing of the letter. But without that information we are left to drawing very tentative conclusions about whether the presence of false teaching played the dominant role in prompting the writing of the letter, or was just one of several factors behind the writing of the letter. Consequently, differing conclusions will be drawn by different scholars. My understanding of this is that it did play a role, but that other motives were also involved. This is based largely upon the rather 'mild' treatment of the false teaching here in comparison to the more vigorous opposition addressed by Paul in polemical texts in several other letters of his, especially in Galatians and Second Corinthians.

The **genre** of vv. 6-15 is a distinctive Pauline expression of *paraenesis*.¹³ For the first time in the letter, we encounter the imperative form of the Greek verb, in vv. 6 and 8. This signals a shift in emphasis in the letter. Col. 2:5-16 stands as general *paraenesis*, or, as David Aune calls it, 'paraenetic style.'¹⁴ That is, moral admonition permeates the letter body rather than being confined to a distinct section, usually toward the end of the letter as with Romans 12-15.

Two distinct forms of paraenesis surface here. Verses 6-7 contain a single sentence encouraging the Colossians to continue living in their Christian way of life that began with their conversion. But the long second sentence in vv. 8-15 begins with a warning to avoid being falsely influenced into an alternative way of living. The warning is based upon Paul's awareness of alternative teaching being presented to the Colossian believers by an unnamed individual or group of individuals. But these patterns are not sufficiently distinct in form in order to be classified into a sub-group of paraenesis, of which there are quite a large number in ancient literature.¹⁵

¹³*Paraenesis* in the ancient world was the label for moral admonition, that is, the appeal of philosophers to an audience to continue living in a certain lifestyle. Sometimes it was distinguished from *protrepsis* which sought to convert an audience to a new way of living. For a helpful introductory study see "Protrepsis and paraenesis," Wikipedia online. New Testament scholarship has called attention to the variety of forms found in Paul's letters. In particular, David Aune distinguishes between letters that have a paraenetic style, such as Colossians, and epistolary paraenesis in the concluding sections of some of his letters, such as Col. 3:1-4:6; sometimes both forms surface in the same letter as is the case in Colossians.

One should also note the various ways of spelling the Greek word παραίνεσις in English: paraenesis, parenesis, and parane-sis.

¹⁴Cf. David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*. Vol. in the Library of Early Christianity, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 191.

¹⁵The importance of identification of the genre form of passages of scripture has several angles. Most importantly, it helps the

Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2
Superscriptio: 1:1
Adscriptio: 1:2a
Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12
Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20
Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul's Ministry 1: 1:24-29

Paul's Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15

Christian Living 2: 2:16-19

Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4

Christian Behavior: 3:5-11

Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1

Husband/Wife: 3:18-19

Father/Children: 3:20-21

Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9

Greetings: 4:10-17

Closing: 4:18

Letter Validation: 4:18a

Prayer Request: 4:18b

Benedictio: 4:19c

Literary Setting. Modern scholarship is divided in its assessment of where the letter body begins, as we have already considered in previous studies. Some take the first sentence in verses 6-7 as the beginning of the letter body. This is largely based on the seeming axiomatic nature of this statement, that is perceived as the theological foundation for 2:8-4:6.¹⁶ Although appealing in some ways, this assessment overlooks patterns signaling the letter body in the previous texts and the ‘chaining’ pattern of the apostle in linking these texts together in a gradual forward progression in his thinking. Much better is to see 2:6-15 as a major theme of the letter body.¹⁷ Much of this emphasis is the more detailed expression of some of the expansion elements in the letter Proem of 1:3-8, and 1:9-20, in a manner consistent with Paul’s letter writing style to anticipate latter detailed discussion with brief allusion in the Praescriptio and Proem sections of his letters.

One of the implications of placing undue emphasis upon 2:6-15, or 2:6-23, as the centerpiece of the letter is to draw a wrong conclusion about the seriousness of the false teaching at Colossae. The milder tone of Paul’s treatment of this here argues against seeing this text as central to the entire letter. It, to be sure, is an important theme and did play some role in motivating the writing of the letter. But the letter does not revolve around the single issue of false teaching at Colossae. Thus the letter is no polemic in nature; rather it is encouraging to its readers.

Literary Structure. The internal flow of ideas can be seen more visually in the block diagram of the underlying Greek text. The English language diagram below is a highly literalistic translation of the Greek in order to preserve the sentence structure and flow of the Greek text.

2.6 Therefore
 as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord
 in Him
 13 **continue walking**
 2.7 being rooted
 and
 being built up
 in Him
 and
 being grounded
 in faith
 just as you were taught
 abounding
 in thanksgiving.

14 2.8 **Beware**
 lest someone will be the one taking you captive
 through philosophy
 and
 empty deceit
 according to the tradition of men,
 according to the elements of the world

reader identify similar patterns and idea expressions found elsewhere in the pages of the Bible. This is very significant for gaining insight in the particular author’s perspective in comparison to other writers in the rest of the Bible. Because most of the forms in the New Testament also existed in the surrounding literary world, such identification helps link these passages to similar forms in the non Christian literature of the ancient world. This is very important for determining a distinctive Christian viewpoint(s) on a particular topic in comparison to alternative understandings in the rest of the first century world. Finally, careful analysis of how individual forms were used to express ideas in ancient Greek and Latin often help avoid false conclusions about the presentation of ideas. Figurative language and idiomatic expression are often integral aspects of specific genre forms.

¹⁶For a detailed treatment, see James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 136: “The main thrust of the letter, forming the letter’s body, extends from 2:6 to 4:6. It is thematically stated in 2:6–7, a passage which indicates clearly the integration of faith and praxis and which suggests that the main threat to the Colossians was failure both to recognize all that was already theirs in the faith they had accepted and expressed in the beginning and to translate their faith into an appropriate pattern of living. This explains the structure and character of the following sections, which cannot be simply analyzed into doctrinal and practical parts.”

¹⁷The mistake of some older commentators is to divide out 2:6-23 as ‘doctrinal’ and 3:1-4:6 as ‘practical’ in the pattern of Romans and a few of the other letters of Paul. Romans becomes the model assumed for most all of Paul’s letters, but this is a mistake that forces the letters into a rigid, unified pattern. Paul was enormously more creative than this in his letters. More recent scholarship has tended to correct this with allowances for stylistic variations in the writings of Paul.

by four participle phrases defining the nature of the Christian ‘walk.’

Especially prominent not only in this first sentence, but in the second one as well, is the repeated phrase ‘in Him’ (ἐν αὐτῷ). Repeated three times, along with three other similar expressions, the dominant thrust of this text is the implications of being ‘in Christ.’ In their conversion, the Colossians moved into spiritual union with the resurrected Christ, and in this absolutely everything needed to live appropriately before God was granted to them by God.

The second sentence (#s 14-17 in verse 8-15) is much longer and more involved. It begins with a warning to the Colossians (#14 in verse 8) to avoid the influence of false teaching, which has the potential to take one captive as a prisoner. Thus individuals freed from their sinfulness would be enslaved to a false version of the gospel message. Such would be a step backward, not forward in their spiritual pilgrimage.

A lengthy rationale is then given in the ‘because...’ ὅτι-clause that follows in verses 9-12. This centers on the ‘fullness’ of God in Christ, that the Colossians already possessed from their conversion. Thus the false teaching could not possibly add anything that was necessary to a proper Christian walk. In the subsequent texts of 2:16-19 and 2:20-23, Paul will address some of these falsely claimed ‘necessary additions’ to their Christian faith. But here the apostle focuses attention on Christ and His completeness of providing salvation at Calvary for the Colossian believers. Although not likely grammatically, verses 13-15 (statements 15-17) could be taken as three additional reasons added to the first two given in the causal clause in vv. 9-12. The work of Christ in benefit of the Colossian believers clearly is the focus of these three statements. The ancient Roman military triumph forms the background to the final declaration in statement 17, thus adding dramatic flare to Paul’s declarations, especially in contrast to the earlier danger of being taken prisoner by the false teaching.

Exegesis of the Text:

Admonition to continue walking, vv. 6-7:

“6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

ὁ ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε, 7 ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ.

Clearly this first admonition sets forth a basic Christian principle of a life style that is consistent with one’s Christian commitment made at conversion. The image painted by these words is of one who has started on a journey and now continues that journey in a manner consistent with the way it was begun. But this is a spiritual journey from a Christian viewpoint. The starting point is ‘having received Christ Jesus as Lord.’ The continuation is ‘walking.’



One should note that the connecting link of this sentence to what precedes is stated as ‘therefore’ (οὖν). Paul sees this declaration of walking as implicit in what he has just said in 2:1-5. Paul’s delight and confidence in the faith commitment of the Colossians¹⁸ carries with it the implication of this following Christian principle. Thus his admonition is not to someone who is wavering or superficial in their commitment to Christ. Instead it is to a group of believers already firmly committed to Christ and already living by the principles of Christ.

Whether one should see vv. 6-7 as foundational to 2:8-4:6 or not is not clear. But the principle is basic to Christian experience. One cannot properly understand the Christian life apart from this fundamental principle.

Important implications are contained in this statement of Paul in verses 6-7.

The reception of Christ implies a pattern of living that is to flow out of this commitment to Him as Lord. Thus conversion is far more than a spiritual deliverance in a momentary decision. It contains a commitment to live a distinctive Christian lifestyle. This way of living then becomes a reflection of whether or not the initial commitment to Christ was genuine or not, as James 2:14 makes dramatically clear:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Such faith can’t save you, can it?¹⁹

For faith to be ‘saving faith,’ it must also be ‘working faith.’ Without the latter, it isn’t the former. Both Paul and

¹⁸Col. 2:5 (NRSV): “For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.”

¹⁹Τί ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγη τις ἔχειν ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχει; μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν;

James were of one mind on this point. And this principle is just as valid today as it was in the first century when Jesus and the apostles first taught it.

To the Colossians, Paul underscored that their initial reception of Jesus was as Lord. Christian commitment means a surrender of self to the absolute authority of Christ over one's life. Then coming out of this is a life that is lived 'in Him' (ἐν αὐτῷ). That is, their Christian life was to be lived out in spiritual union with Christ in control.

The language of Paul here, παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, carries the idea deeper than just their conversion faith commitment. The term for 'received', παρελάβετε, has technical and formal aspects beyond just an act of welcoming Christ into their life.²⁰ In their initial commitment to Christ they received intensive instruction about Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives. This instruction was intended to be the basis of their understanding of the Christian life and how to live it. From the beginning of their Christian experience they had made a commitment to live by this fundamental principle of faith. The admonition here does not imply uncertainty about the Colossians carrying out this commitment. His confidence in the Colossians is strong and has been expressed repeatedly in 1:4-6, 21-23, 2:5, leading up to this admonition.

The image of 'walking,' περιπατεῖτε, is an expression of lifestyle.²¹ This is at the core of the figurative meaning of its 94 uses in the New Testament.²² It touches upon behavior and morality, but is more



²⁰It is significant, then, that this summarizing and summary statement is expressed in the term παραλαμβάνω. For, as is generally recognized, this word is more or less a technical term for the receiving of tradition, and it is most often used by Paul in this sense (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal. 1:9, 12; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thes. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thes. 3:6). As such it is twin with παραδίδωμι ("hand over"), as again used by Paul (1 Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:3). Such "handing on" and "receiving" was crucially important in the ancient world, when the continuation of so much received wisdom and knowledge depended on oral transmission. Indeed, this was a principal function of teaching, the teacher handing on and the next generation receiving what the community or school valued as its formative tradition (Plato, *Theaetetus* 198B; Philo, *De cherubim* 68; see further BAGD s.v. παραδίδωμι 3; G. Delling, *TDNT* 4:11–12; A. Kretzer, *EDNT* 3.29–30). Precisely the same balance is struck by the Hebrew terms *qibbel* and *masar*; with the same emphasis on the importance of passing on and receiving tradition (as in Mishnah *Aboth* 1:1; see, e.g., O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* 105)." [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 137].

A note here. James Dunn is grossly mistaken in saying, "In other words, the thought is not of the reception of Christ's Lordship in baptism (Wegenast 126–29; cf. Ernst, *Philipper, Philemon, Kolosser, Epheser* 192), far less the thought of receiving Christ into their lives (cf. 1:27), for which παραλαμβάνω is never used by Paul (see my *Baptism* 95) and for which (προσ)δέχομαι (as, e.g., in Gal. 4:14 and Rom. 16:2) would have been more suitable." The point of Paul is no false dichotomy of faith as commitment and faith as belief values. Faith commitment flows into faith values! Dunn reflects the later falsification of the biblical teaching of faith that is commonly found in modern Christianity today.

²¹ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε. With this summons, 'continue to live in him,' the apostle moves from the indicative to the imperative. For Paul there is no hiatus between believing and behaving. As Lohse (93) puts it: 'Christology and ethics are intimately conjoined.' The metaphor of walking (cf. the comments on 1:10) is frequently employed by Paul, deriving ultimately from an OT and Jewish background, to characterize the Christian's life and behavior (see Gal 5:16; Rom 14:15; 2 Cor 4:2, etc). He has already interceded for his readers (1:10) that they might live (περιπατήσαι) in a manner worthy of the one whom they confess as Lord, by pleasing him in all things. Having prayed to that end he now exhorts them along similar lines. His pastoral activity of praying did not obviate the necessity for exhortation. Indeed, the latter may well have been one of the means used by God to bring about the answers to Paul's petitions." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 106.]

²²περιπατέω impf. περιεπάτου; fut. περιπατήσω; 1 aor. περιεπάτησα and ἐπεριπάτησα ApcEsd r. 1a; plpf. 3 sg. περι(ε)πεπατήκει **Ac 14:8** v.l. (on augm. in the plpf. s. B-D-F §66, 1; Mlt.-H. 190f) (Aristoph., X., Pla.+)

1. to go here and there in walking, go about, walk around

a. w. an indication of the place where one walks about (Demosth. 54, 7 ἐν ἀγορᾷ; ApcEsd r. 6:12 p. 31, 17 Tdf. ἐν τῷ ὄρει; Jos., C. Ar. 2, 117 ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; Just., D. 1, 1 ἐν τοῖς τοῦ ξυστοῦ περιπάτοις 'on the walkways of the Xystos') ἐν τριβόλοις γυμνοῖς ποσὶ περιπατεῖν *walk among thistles barefoot* Hs 9, 20, 3. ἐν τῇ γῇ ταύτῃ GJs 6:1. In several places one might translate *stay, spend some time, be*, though without the idea of remaining on the same spot (Chion, Ep. 13, 1 ἐν τῷ Ὠιδείῳ; 2 Km 11:2; Da 3:92 of the men in the fiery furnace; 4:29; En 17:6; Jos., Ant. 7, 130): ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ (Cebeus 1, 1.—Diog. L. 4, 24 refers to Crantor walking about in the temple of Asclepius) **Mk 11:27; J 10:23**; Ox 840, 9. ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ J 7:1a; cp. vs. 1b. ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἐπτὰ λυχνιῶν **Rv 2:1**. π. ἐν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις *appear among the Judeans* J 11:54.

b. go about w. indication of the way one is clothed ἐν στολαῖς **Mk 12:38; Lk 20:46**. ἐν λευκοῖς *clothed in white* **Rv 3:4** (Epict. 3, 22, 10 ἐν κοκκίνοις περιπ.; Tat. 2:1 ἐν πορφυρίδι περιπατῶν). ἐν δέρμασιν αἰγείους 1 Cl 17:1.

inclusive of a style of living than with just the ethical aspects. This broad sweep of meaning made it a useful term for referring to a Christian way of living. The present tense imperative verb form also stresses ongoing responsibility, rather than a momentary or sporadic obligation. Thus Paul's call was for the Colossians to continue living consistently in a way that was appropriate to their spiritual union with Christ.

For individuals to come along saying that something else is required before one can please God stands contradictory to this early instruction. It implies something deficient either in Christ, and/or in the commitment of the Colossians. Thus Paul begins with this reminder and call to the Colossians to reaffirm their initial commitment and to stand by it in rejection of any other teaching.

So much of modern Christianity has missed Paul's point to the Colossians. This failure takes on several aspects. Some have so stressed the conversion commitment as to neglect the obligation to a Christian lifestyle. And in so doing, the conversion commitment is twisted to little more than an outward formal expression of faith without profound inner transformation of life. Faith is emotional, or just feeling. Others have twisted the idea of faith into mental acceptance of a set of teachings about Jesus without serious commitment to the person of Christ. Faith is intellectual. Both distortions entirely miss the point of Paul. Still others focus on living a Christian life without an initial faith commitment to Christ. Just do Christian things and you will please God. Such heresy is spiritual suicide as Jesus makes abundantly clear in Matt. 7:22-23.²³ A biblical

c. gener. walk, go π. διὰ τοῦ φωτός *walk in the light* **Rv 21:24**. π. εἰς τὸν ἀγρόν (go for a) *walk in the country* Hs 2:1. ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης (ἐπὶ 1a and cp. Job 9:8.—GBertram, *Le chemin sur les eaux: Congr. d'Hist. du Christ.* I 1928, 137–66) **Mt 14:26; Mk 6:48f; J 6:19**. AcPl Ha 7, 27 and 34. ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν **Mt 14:25; J 6:19** P75. ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα **Mt 14:29** (ἐπὶ 4bβ). παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν **4:18** (παρὰ C1a). π. μετὰ τινος *go about w. someone* **J 6:66; walk with someone** Hs 9, 6, 2a; 9, 10, 1. π. περὶ τι *walk around* *someh.* Hs 9, 12, 7; also κύκλω τινός Hs 9, 6, 2b. μετὰ τινος κύκλω τινός π. *walk with someone around* *someh.* Hs 9, 11, 5. π. ἐπάνω *walk over* **Lk 11:44** (ἐπάνω 1a). More closely defined ὁμαλῶς π. καὶ ἀπροσκόπως Hm 6, 1, 4. γυμνὸν π. *go naked* **Rv 16:15**. μόνον π. *walk alone* Hv 4, 1, 3 (cp. Jos., C. Ap. 1, 281). περιεπάτετε ὅπου ἤθελες *you used to go where you pleased* **J 21:18** (En 17:6 ὅπου πᾶσα σὰρξ οὐ περιπατεῖ).—Abs. *walk (about)* (Diocles 141 p. 180, 19f; Diod S 1, 70, 10; EpArist 175; Just., D. 127, 2) **Mt 9:5; 11:5; 15:31; Mk 2:9; 5:42; 8:24; Lk 5:23; 7:22; J 5:8f, 11f; 11:9f; Ac 3:6, 8ab, 9, 12; 14:8, 10; 1 Pt 5:8; Rv 9:20** (cp. Ps 113:15); Hv 2, 1, 3; (go for a) *walk, be out walking* **Mk 16:12; Lk 24:17; walk by** **J 1:36**. περιπατῶν ἀφύπνωσα *as I walked along I fell asleep* Hv 1, 1, 3. περιπατῶν ἀνεμνήσθην *as I was walking along I remembered* 2, 1, 1.

d. in imagery, and far on the way toward the nonliteral use of the word: doubters are περιπατοῦντες ἐν ταῖς ἀνοδίαις Hv 3, 7, 1. Esp. in John: περιπατεῖν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ **J 8:12; 12:35b; 1J 2:11; cp. 1:6**. Corresp. ἐν τῷ φωτὶ vs. 7; ἐν αὐτῇ (=ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ φωτός) B 19:1 (but it may also refer to ἡ γνῶσις; then the pass. would belong under 2aδ below). μέγα δὲ ἀσεβείας ὑπόδειγμα ἐν τούτῳ τῷ κόσμῳ περιεπάτησεν ὁ Ἰούδας *Judas went about in this world as a notable example of impiety* Papias (3:2). Abs. περιπατεῖτε ὡς τὸ φῶς ἔχετε *walk while you have the light* **J 12:35a**.

2. to conduct one's life, comport oneself, behave, live as habit of conduct, fig. ext. of 1:

a. of 'walk of life', go about (Philod., *Περὶ παρρησίας* p. 12 Ol.; Epict. 1, 18, 20; s. Simplicius in Epict. p. 125, 52 Düb. Esp. acc. to OT models: 4 Km 20:3 ἐν ἀληθείᾳ; Pr 8:20 ἐν ὁδοῖς δικαιοσύνης.—Eccl 11:9). In the NT this use of the word is decidedly Pauline (the pastoral epp. do not have the word at all); elsewh. it is reasonably common only in 2J and 3J, live, conduct oneself, walk, always more exactly defined

a. by an adv. ἄξιως τινός **Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Th 2:12; Pol 5:1. ἀτάκτως 2 Th 3:6, 11. εὐσχημόνως Ro 13:13; 1 Th 4:12.**

β. by the dat. to denote attendant circumstance, kind, or manner (TestIss 5:8 ἀπλότητι.—B-D-F §198, 5; s. Rob. 528–32) κώμοις καὶ μέθαις **Ro 13:13**. τοῖς ἔθουσιν **Ac 21:21; cp. 15:1 D; πνεύματι π. Gal 5:16. τῷ αὐτῷ πνεύματι 2 Cor 12:18.**

γ. by a comparison ἕκαστον ὡς κέκληκεν ὁ θεός, οὕτως περιπατεῖτω **1 Cor 7:17**. περιπατεῖν καθὼς τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ **Eph 4:17; ὡς τέκνα φωτός 5:8.—Phil 3:17; 1J 2:6**. The comparison is implied fr. the context (ὡς ἔχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) **Phil 3:18.—πῶς (καθὼς) περιπατεῖτε Eph 5:15; 1 Th 4:1ab.**

δ. by a prepositional expr. The sphere in which one lives or ought to live, so as to be characterized by that sphere, is designated by ἐν: pl. *in sins* **Eph 2:2; Col 3:7; in good deeds Eph 2:10;** in the Lord's ordinances B 21:1 (Philo, *Congr. Erud. Gr.* 87 π. ἐν ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ κρίσεσι κ. προστάξεσιν). Cp. Hb 13:9. Sing. ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς **Ro 6:4. ἐν πανουργίᾳ 2 Cor 4:2. ἐν ἀγάπῃ Eph 5:2. ἐν σοφίᾳ Col 4:5. ἐν (τῇ) ἀληθείᾳ 2J 4; 3J 3f; ἐν ἀκεραισύνῃ B 10:4; cp. B 19:1 (s. 1d above). ἐν ἀλλοτριᾷ γνώμῃ IPhld 3:3. ἐν ἀμώμῳ ... συνειδήσει Pol 5:3. ἐν αὐτῇ (=ἐν τῇ ἐντολῇ) **2J 6b. ἐν αὐτῷ (=ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ) Col 2:6.**—The norm of conduct is designated by κατὰ w. acc. (s. κατὰ B5bγ) κατὰ ἄνθρωπον like ordinary (unregenerate) persons **1 Cor 3:3. κατὰ σάρκα** according to the old self viz. the 'flesh' as opposed to the new self under the 'spirit' **Ro 8:4; 2 Cor 10:2. κατὰ ἀγάπην Ro 14:15. κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων Mk 7:5. κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ 2J 6a.**—BEaston, *NT Ethical Lists: JBL* 51, '32, 1–12; SWibbing, *D. Tugend-u. Lasterkataloge im NT*, '59; EKamlach, *Die Form der katalogischen Paränese im NT*, '64; HBraun, *Qumran u. das NT II*, '66, 286–301; JHolloway III, ΠΕΡΙΠΑΤΕΩ as a Thematic Marker for Pauline Ethics '92.**

b. rarely of physical life gener.: ἐν τούτῳ τῷ κόσμῳ περιπατεῖν (formulation as in Papias [3:2]) B 10:11. ἐν σαρκὶ **2 Cor 10:3. διὰ πίστεως περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ εἰδους 5:7.—B. 690. M-M. EDNT. TW.**

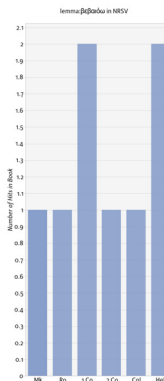
[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 803.]

²³Mt. 7:22-23 (NRSV): "22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out de-
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based Christian life begins with a deep commitment to Jesus Christ and then flows into a distinctive Christian lifestyle built on obedience to Christ as Lord.

Paul then fleshes out this core admonition to be walking in Christ with a wide array of extensions in verse seven. **First**, such a walk is ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ, **rooted and built up in him**. With two graphic word pictures from agriculture and construction, the apostle underscores the setting in which we make our journey in Christ. The perfect tense participle in Greek for the first word, ἐρριζωμένοι, stresses that those spiritual roots as the source of life and nourishment were planted at the beginning in conversion in Christ, and that those roots continue to supply all that is needed to make this journey from the resources of Christ Himself. The second present tense participle, ἐποικοδομούμενοι, highlights the ongoing actions of building a life in Christ. And we will always be a spiritual house under construction until Jesus returns. This spiritual life, labeled here as a spiritual house, is an ongoing construction job that uses Christ as its material and also its builder. Even though here to main thrust is toward individual believers, the community aspect remains significant in the images, as the next phrase makes clear. Individuals thrive spiritual in the context of a spiritual community where collective encouragement and instruction provide needed guidance.²⁴

Second, it is καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, **and established in the faith, just as you were taught**. This third word picture occurred often in the ancient commercial world in the sense of a guarantee of purchase or warranty. The derivative idea is that of to strengthen or to make firm and solid. That background stands behind the eight uses of it in the New Testament. The present participle use again stresses an continuous strengthening of one's faith commitment to Christ (τῇ πίστει) within the framework of the initial teaching about faith that was received by the Colossians at the time of the conversion (ἐδιδάχθητε). Although some try to see in this a growing understanding of the details of the system of belief given to them in core expression at conversion, the more consistent understanding of πίστει here is that it means the same thing here as it 1:4; 2:5; 2:12, that is, a faith commitment to Christ in which one's life and very existence is turned over the Christ as Lord. Paul reminds them that Epaphras taught them this principle of faith at their conversion. Now they need to continue strengthening it as the clear confirmation of their commitment to Christ, as they have already been doing (cf. 2:5).



Third, it is περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, **abounding in thanksgiving**. The final qualifier of walking in Christ is to be overflowing with thanksgiving to Him for His marvelous blessings. In the letter Proem in 1:11-12, Paul had linked becoming strong with being thankful.²⁵ Now he repeats this with greater emphasis on the role of thanksgiving as an essential element of the journey with Christ through life. The spiritual journey through life in Christ is to be saturated with thanksgiving to God for all that He had done for us in Christ.

When viewed together, this is some journey we are taking through life! Christ is at the heart of the

mons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ 23 Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

22 πολλοὶ ἐροῦσίν μοι ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ· Κύριε κύριε, οὐ τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι ἐπροφητεύσαμεν, καὶ τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι δαιμόνια ἐξεβάλομεν, καὶ τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι δυνάμεις πολλὰς ἐποιήσαμεν; 23 καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὐδέποτε ἔγνω ὑμᾶς· ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.

²⁴Both the composite¹⁹ *ep-oikodomeō*, as well as the simplex *oikodomeō*, are used by Paul for the building up of the individual²⁰ as also with the image of the building of the community (see Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 3:10ff.). Even though the metaphoric language in this verse uses the firmness of a well-founded construction as the point of comparison and does not compare the community with a building, there is still no reason to exclude the latter concept in the verses under consideration. We can hardly justify the idea that a certain individualization of the concept of building up can be determined in the sense that the eye on the neighbor as ‘the primary movement of the Pauline view’ has disappeared.²¹ The use of *pistis* (*faithfulness*) in this verse counters such a thesis (see below). Also, the concept of the building of the community is not excluded in this passage (as W. M. L. de Wette [42] argues), because the preterite tense was not used. Certainly we read in Eph 2:20: ‘Build upon (aorist!) the foundation of the apostles and the prophets,’ but the community is not described as an already completed structure. In Eph 2:22 we read, ‘through him also you are ‘built together.’” The verb here is in the present.” [Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 304.]

²⁵**Col. 1:11-12.** 11 ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν μετὰ χαρᾶς, 12 εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί,

Note that at the end of the letter in 4:2 Paul will link thanksgiving with spiritual alertness and praying: **Τῇ προσευχῇ** προσκαρτερεῖτε, **γρηγοροῦντες** ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν **εὐχαριστίᾳ**, Spiritual sensitivity and thankfulness go hand in hand and invigorate our prayer life.

journey. Our spiritual roots are planted deeply in Him and from Him we draw all our nourishment. This in turn supplies the material for the building of a spiritual house whose atmosphere is permeated with the sounds of thanksgiving to God. Critical to the success of this journey is a faith commitment to Christ that continues to be strengthened and 'firmed up' all through the journey within the framework of the initial commitment made to Christ at conversion.

It's no wonder that Paul now turns to the Colossians to tell them that they don't need the twisted non-sense being offered them by the false teachers in their midst. They just need to continue building on what they have already received. Now, such is not bad advice for us in today's world either!

Warning to not be taken captive, vv. 8-15:

"8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it."

8 Βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν· 9 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς, 10 καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὃς ἐστὶν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας, 11 ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 12 συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν· 13 καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ· χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα, 14 ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ· 15 ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.

With this second long Greek sentence Paul touches on an alternative way of advocating the Christian life floating around Colossae and the other towns in the Lycus Valley. Additionally, the next two pericopes, vv. 16-19 and 20-23, will also touch on further aspects of this phoney teaching.

The question arises as whether this was unique to Colossae, and perhaps to the Lycus valley region, or, whether this was something in common with other false teachings in Pauline churches elsewhere in that world? The depictions in the letter suggest aspects that connect to Judaism, and also to ancient Greek philosophical teachings. This has led to suggestions based on either a Jewish or a pagan orientation for the teaching. A few have tried to see two separate sets of false teaching floating around the Lycus valley area.

Until recent times the tendency of scholars was to identify in Paul's description here the tendencies of later Gnosticism and to assume the presence of Gnostic teachers at Colossae, either with a full blown version or what has come to be labeled a Proto-Gnosticism.²⁶ As a system of belief, Gnosticism seems to have originated from mixing elements of various religious traditions with streams of Greek philosophical thinking, most particularly a Platonic based dualistic view of life and reality.²⁷ At some unclear point, this thinking

²⁶Two varieties of second century Gnosticism appear to have arisen, one based in Iran and the other in Syria. But the influence of these 'philosophies' became wide-spread over the ancient world. For a helpful summary, see Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 873-876. S.V., "Gnosticism," by Gerald L. Borchert.

²⁷At the heart of Platonic dualism as applied to the individual is the contention that human beings are made up of two parts: σῶμα (body) and ψυχή (soul). This is the application to the being of the person in Plato's concept of reality split into two segments: the material, visible elements, and the invisible, eternal elements. The material and visible side, including the σῶμα, is completely corrupt and unredeemable. But the invisible aspect, including the ψυχή (soul), is eternal in nature and inherently uncorrupted. The temporary embedding of the ψυχή in a corrupt σῶμα is what generates human life. The orientation during the period from birth to death should be on the invisible side in order to succeed in this life. Disciplined education of the mind to focus attention away from the material body and exclusively on the eternal reality that is not visible is the only way to achieve this goal.

In the second century forms of Christian Gnosticism, this foundational concept of Platonism led to a variety of strange thinking about personal salvation. It was gained through a highly emotionally charged 'experience' in which one mysteriously received a secret heavenly salvation knowledge (γνώσις), which was validated through speaking in tongues. This 'salvation' both purified the ψυχή and permanently insulated it from any future corruption by the σῶμα. Thus Gnosticism was the first movement to advocate

filtered into segments of Christianity and became highly influential in the second Christian century. But the continuing question marks about the beginnings of this movement, especially inside Christianity, have raised serious questions about the earlier tendencies of scholars to see Gnostic influence at Colossae and being addressed by Paul in his letter in the late 50s of the first Christian century. It is more feasible to see some of the ideas contained in later Gnostic writings being present at this earlier time, but without any identification with an organized movement that could be labeled either Gnosticism or even Proto-Gnostic.

Clearly some of the traits referenced by Paul in 2:8-23 have clear signals of ancient Jewish origins. Some tendency has been to see a Jewish foundation to the false teaching, perhaps along the lines of the so-called Judaizers who came into the churches of Galatia. But while some Jewish traits are common between the depictions in Colossians and Galatians, the problem at Colossae seems to be very distinct from the one at Galatia, which was clearly Jewish in orientation and background.

Increasingly, proposals move toward a way of thinking that freely picked up elements from wherever. Given the polytheistic orientation of religious traditions in that world, which would freely borrow ideas from one another, such a tendency is certainly possible for what was taking place at Colossae. Most likely what Epaphras reported to Paul about Colossae was the tendency of some, out of their non-Jewish background, to reach out to ways of thinking present in the world about them and incorporate ideas into their Christian thinking that seemed to make sense and have some sense of perceived compatibility with the Gospel. In the absence of any defined set of uniquely Christian scriptures at this point in time, it would have been easy to adopt ideas from a variety of sources. This most likely lies behind the distinctive language of Paul in reminding them of what they had received as orally transmitted instruction about their Christian faith in 2:6.²⁸

What then was Paul's warning to the Colossians? **First**, he labels the false teaching, v. 8, and **then** he focuses upon Christ, vv. 9-15.

The false teaching, v. 8. This teaching poses dangers to the Colossians because it can 'take a person captive.' The language of Paul is dramatic. The verbal expression ὁ συλαγωγῶν is found only here in the New Testament but in the surrounding Greek literature it expresses the idea of 'carrying off as booty' or 'as a captive' and conveys the sense of being taken carried away from the truth into enslavement to error.²⁹ The intense tone of the expression reflects Paul's seriously negative view of this teaching and its danger to the Colossians.

Notice that Paul does not stress the power of the idea to take one captive. Instead, it is the person advocating the idea who takes others captive: **τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν**. What is targeted here are individual teachers 'building their own empire' of disciples committed to them and their teaching.

The vehicle of this false teaching was "philosophy and vain deceit," διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης. One should clearly distinguish between modern definitions of 'philosophy' and ancient definitions. In the ancient 'getting one's soul saved' as the essence of conversion. Living the Christian life in this system then placed little value on ethical behavior. Gnosticism split into two directions at this point. The libertine branch taught that since the soul had been purified in conversion and was untouchable by sin and corruption, it made no difference how one 'lived in the body' since nothing the person could do physically would damage the purity of his soul before God. On the other hand, the ascetic branch of Gnostic asserted that since the body and everything material was completely corrupted, the Christian life should be lived out totally in contemplation on the 'spiritual' side of life. This could best be done in isolation from the rest of the world in ascetic communities cut off from the society. Denial of physical needs and urges, including sexual activity, should be made as much as humanly possible in order to focus completely on the spiritual.

²⁸"The Colossians have received Christ himself as their tradition. The expression τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον is not an allusion to sayings of Jesus communicated as directions for right conduct (though cf 1 Cor 7:10, 11; 9:14), as Cullmann, in *Church*, 64, suggested but is an early creedal confession 'Jesus Christ is Lord' (cf Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11). No doubt it summarizes the tradition delivered to the Colossians in Epaphras' initial evangelism which focused on the person of Christ Jesus (note 2 Cor 4:5). Whether 'Christ' (τὸν Χριστὸν) was here understood as a title or not is a disputed point (Moule, 89, 90, claims it is difficult not to give it the force of a title; so also Turner, *Syntax*, 167; against Lohse, 93, who regards it as joined to 'Jesus' to form a double name). Certainly the definite article 'the' (τὸν) before 'Lord' (κύριον) makes this term emphatic and probably as Foerster, *TDNT* 3, 1090, has suggested, gathers up all that Paul has previously said about Christ in Colossians. The one whom the Colossians received as their tradition is the center of God's mystery (1:27, 2:2), and the Lord in both creation and reconciliation (1:15-20). He is Lord absolutely (1 Cor 8:5, 6), not just one among many." [Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 108]

²⁹συλαγωγέω to gain control of by carrying off as booty, make captive of, rob τινά someone (Tat. 22, 2 [fig.]; Helioid. 10, 35 p. 307, 32 Bekker οὐτός ἐστιν ὁ τὴν ἐμὴν θυγατέρα συλαγωγήσας; Aristaen. 2, 22 Hercher) in imagery of carrying someone away fr: the truth into the slavery of error **Col 2:8**.—M-M." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 955.]

world the way every individual approached life and understood reality was labeled 'philosophy.'³⁰ In the thinking of the classical Greek philosophers of the third century BC, religion itself was one branch of philosophy, and an important source for philosophical thinking. So Paul is not condemning the idea of philosophy itself here. Instead, he condemns a philosophy which in itself is characterized by 'vain deceit,' κενῆς ἀπάτης.³¹ This 'philosophy' had no legitimate content, κενῆς, and thus was deceptive, ἀπάτης. Therefore it is worthless and dangerously misleading.

Additionally, the appeal of these teachers was 'according to the tradition of men,' κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. The source of their teaching lay in human, rather than divine, origins. No revelatory aspect was connected to this teaching, even though such was most likely claimed for it.³² In our world we tend to pit things coming from God (via revelation) and things coming from men (via thinking). What was the case with these teachers, their contention that their teaching was κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων was a way to stating that it had been around for a long time, been proven to be valid over time, and thus had a divine origin. This claim Paul vigorously denies here. Its falseness is asserted by the following phrase standing in apposition to this one, and thus re-defining it.

The false content derives from the fact that it was "according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ,' κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν. This teaching focused on turning to an authority base in contradiction to Christ. Thus its content was false and dangerously misleading. The real authority base for their false teaching was τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου.³³ This phrase is notoriously difficult to understand, and thus to translate. It is also found in Gal. 4:3, 9. There the meaning is slightly more obvious

³⁰“The term ‘philosophy’ (φιλοσοφία) which occurs only here in the NT (the cognate φιλόσοφος, ‘philosopher,’ is used of the Epicureans and the Stoics at Acts 17:18), carried a wide range of meanings describing all sorts of groups, tendencies and viewpoints within the Greek and Jewish worlds (Michel, *TDNT* 9, 172–88), from the Greek pursuit of knowledge and wisdom to the sects of Hellenistic Judaism which sought to present themselves as ‘philosophies’ (so Philo designated the Torah as ‘the ancestral philosophy [ἡ πάτριος φιλοσοφία,’ *Leg* 156; ‘the philosophy according to Moses [ἡ κατὰ Μωϋσῆν φιλοσοφία],’ *Mut* 223; while Josephus described the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes as the three philosophies [τρεῖς φιλοσοφίαι] within Judaism, *Bell* 2.119; *Ant* 18.11; for details see Bornkamm, *Conflict*, 140).”[Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 110]

³¹The Greek construction τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης [article noun + noun] clearly signals that philosophy and vain deceit are one concept viewed two ways.

³²“But the manner in which the words are introduced here does suggest that the false teachers had set forth their ‘philosophy’ as ‘tradition’ (παράδοσις), thereby pointing to its antiquity, dignity and revelational character (cf Michel, *TDNT* 9, 186). Paul, however, rejects any suggestion of divine origin. This was a human fabrication standing over against the apostolic tradition which centered on ‘Christ Jesus as Lord.’ Its false content was ‘according to the elements of the universe and not according to Christ.’” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 112]

³³“There are two Pauline letters which use this term *stoicheia* (rendered ‘rudiments’ in the KJV and the ARV, ‘elemental spirits’ in the RSV and the NEB, ‘basic principles’ in the NIV). The other is the letter to the Galatians. In Gal. 4:3, 9, the *stoicheia* are the forces which regulated both Jewish life under the law and pagan life in the service of ‘beings that by nature are no gods.’ The Galatian converts’ reversion to the domination of the *stoicheia* was shown in their observance of the Jewish sacred calendar: ‘You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years’ (Gal. 4:10). Since those calendrical divisions are regulated by the heavenly bodies, some association of the *stoicheia* with the planets may be implied. (It may be inferred from Col. 2:16 that similar calendrical observances were enjoined by the Colossian heresy.) Again, the argument of Galatians has suggested to many exegetes that the *stoicheia* in that letter are closely related to (if not identical with) the angels by whose agency the law is said to have been administered (Gal. 3:19). The objection that some of these meanings are not attested for *stoicheia* until later may be answered in part by the consideration that the phrase ‘the elements of the world’ in this sense is an original Pauline contribution to religious vocabulary. In the divine providence there was a time when the *stoicheia* fulfilled a supervisory role in the lives of the people of God, as a slave-attendant looked after a freeborn child until he came of age. The coming of age of the people of God coincided with the advent of faith in Christ: to remain under the control of the *stoicheia* after that was a sign of spiritual immaturity.

“So, too, the form of teaching which was gaining currency at Colossae was something which belonged to a pre-Christian stage of experience; therefore, whatever its precise nature might be, to accept it now would be a mark of spiritual retrogression. As Paul goes on to assure them, they had said a long farewell to all such forces when they died with Christ to begin a new life in him. Formerly, when they were ‘in the flesh,’ they were unable to throw off the domination of the powers which controlled the present world-order in opposition to God. But now one has come to conquer these powers and liberate human beings from their sway; how foolish, then, it is for those who have enjoyed this liberation to go back and put themselves under the yoke of these discredited tyrants all over again! They have transferred their allegiance to the ruler of a new order, who has defeated the hostile powers; let his will and teaching be their rule of life henceforth.” [F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 98.]

than here.³⁴ These τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου have power to enslave (Gal. 4:3, 10), even professing Christians. They are weak and beggarly, τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα (4:9). They are labeled “beings that by nature are not gods,” τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσι θεοῖς. Christ has set believers free from their power in Christian conversion (4:3-7). When they take over control, their leadership demands individuals observe “special days, and months, and seasons, and years,” ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς. In Galatians, Paul moves toward identifying these στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου with the demons that promote idolatry and religious ritualism with no substance. Assuming he means the same thing with the identical label in Colossians, then Paul attributes the source of the false teaching at Colossae to the demonic world.

The adequacy of Christ, vv. 9-15. This prompts Paul to spend considerable effort reminding the Colossians of the complete adequacy of Christ as the exclusive source of their religious experience. Worded in the causal statement introduced with ‘because’ (ὅτι), this stands as the foundation of his warning to them. First, in the statement, “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς), Paul reaches back to the Christology hymn in 1:15-20,³⁵ “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι; 1:19b). Everything possible to know about God is found in Jesus Christ. The Colossians experiencing of Christ in conversion, described in 2:10b-15,³⁶ also plays off the Christological hymn in 1:15-20. The extension of ideas centers on their conversion being expressed as a spiritual circumcision: “In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ” (ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 2:11). What Christ cut off was not the foreskin of the male sex organ, but the entire fleshly body. Their baptismal experience at conversion reflects both death and resurrection: “when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, 2:12). Thus baptism signals union with Christ in both His death and in His resurrection. Out of spiritual death came spiritual life in coming to Christ: “And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross” (καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ· χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα, 14 ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ’ ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν

³⁴Gal. 4:3-10. 3 So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to *the elemental spirits of the world*. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. 9 Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly *elemental spirits*? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? 10 You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. 11 I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

3 οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιοι, ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι· 4 ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, 5 ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν. 6 ὅτι δὲ ἐστε υἱοί, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν, κρᾶζον· Ἀββὰ ὁ πατήρ. 7 ὥστε οὐκέτι εἰ δούλος ἀλλὰ υἱός· εἰ δὲ υἱός, καὶ κληρονόμος διὰ θεοῦ.

8 Ἀλλὰ τότε μὲν οὐκ εἰδότες θεὸν ἐδουλεύσατε τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσι θεοῖς· 9 νῦν δὲ γνόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ, πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα, οἷς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε; 10 ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς. 11 φοβοῦμαι ὑμᾶς μὴ πῶς εἰκὴ κεκοπίακα εἰς ὑμᾶς.

³⁵Col. 1:15-20 plus 21-22 (NRSV): “15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. 21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.”

³⁶Col. 2:10b-15: (NRSV): “who is the head of every ruler and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.”

ὁ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ, 2:13-14). Central to this is divine forgiveness of sin based upon the death of Christ on the cross.

Paul concludes in v. 15 by using the imagery of the ancient Roman military triumphal procession as the way to affirm the victory of Christ over all opposing powers and authorities, both human and spiritual: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it,” (ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ).³⁷ Christ in His death and resurrection has taken captive all rulers and powers both on earth and in Heaven. He celebrates His triumph over them in the victory march of the ascension and then again in His Second Coming at the end of human history. His people are then invited to celebrate with him this victory over all opposing powers as they watch His victory march.



2. What does the text mean to us today?

The areas of possible application of this passage to our daily lives are extensive. Our approach to Christian living should flow out of the framework of our initial faith commitment to Christ in conversion. The Christian life is a journey with deep roots in Christ, centered in the building of a spiritual house from Christ and that is saturated with thanksgiving to God. If this is how we come at the Christian life, we already have everything needed to succeed in that journey. Versions of the Gospel that suggest that there is something else required, such as religious ritualism, are potentially dangerous because they can enslave us and ruin our Christian life. They have their origin, not from Christ is provides everything we possibly need. Instead, they come from the demonic with Satanic power embedded in them. Our challenge is focusing on the complete sufficiency of Christ, and rejecting teachings requiring us to do things in order to merit approval from God.

- 1) Are you living your Christian life consistent with your profession of Him at conversion?
- 2) How solid are you in your faith commitment to Christ?
- 3) Are you cautious about the thinking of many teachers of Christian belief?
- 4) How thoroughly do you check out every idea put forth as Christian teaching?
- 5) How clearly do you understand what happened to you in conversion?
- 6) Can you celebrate the victory march of Jesus over rulers and powers?

³⁷“θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ. The word θριαμβεύω occurs only here and at 2 Corinthians 2:14 in the NT. The image behind this verb is that of a tumultuous procession through the streets of Rome to celebrate a military victory (note Williamson’s careful examination of the texts, *Int* 22 [1968] 317–32; and for a colorful account of a triumph see his lengthy quotation of Plutarch’s *Aemilius Paulus*, 32–34, on pp. 322, 323). The term ought to be translated: (1) to ‘enjoy a triumphal procession’ or ‘celebrate a victory’ (as distinct from ‘triumphing’ or ‘triumphing over,’ for these terms convey the idea of winning a victory, while the texts point to a Roman celebration, not the victory itself), when θριαμβεύω is used absolutely or followed by a prepositional phrase; or (2) to ‘lead as a conquered enemy in a victory parade,’ when followed by a direct personal object (as at 2 Cor 2:14 and Col 2:15). (Recently R. B. Egan, “Lexical Evidence on Two Pauline Passages,” *NovT* 19 [1977] 34–62, argued at some length that the meaning ‘reveal’ yields good sense in both Pauline instances of the verb θριαμβεύω; in our judgment, however, the case is not proven: first, it is doubtful whether this meaning of the term was sufficiently early and widespread for Paul to have used it in this way and for his two groups of readers at Corinth and Colossae to be in no doubt about its meaning. Further, the meaning “reveal” does not fit the Colossians context as well as the other rendering.)

“At 2 Corinthians 2:14 Paul is a prisoner in a triumphal procession. He is a slave in the triumph but paradoxically as a privileged captive, as a ‘slave of Christ.’ There is no extant evidence to suggest that the expression could apply to a victorious soldier or subordinate officer in a triumphal procession (cf Williamson, *Int* 22 [1968] 325, 326, and Delling, *TDNT* 3, 160). In the Colossians reference, however, the victims are true enemies. The ‘principalities and powers’ who have been conquered and are drawn along in God’s triumphal procession are not related to God or Christ as Paul and other Christians are. God parades these powerless ‘powers’ and ‘principalities’ to make plain to all the magnitude of the victory (Lohse, 112). Their period of rule is finished; they must worship and serve the victor. These authorities are not depicted as gladly surrendering but as submitting against their wills to a power they cannot resist. They have been pacified (1:20), overcome and reconciled, yet not finally destroyed or appeased. They continue to exist, opposed to man and his interests (Rom 8:38, 39). But they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ, and their ultimate overthrow, although in the future, is sure and certain (1 Cor 15:24–28).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 132]