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### ***Freedom from Legalism (2:16–23)***

#### ***Bibliography***

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#### ***Translation***

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, do not let anyone pass judgment on you with regard to food and drink or concerning a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a sabbath day. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. <sup>18</sup>Let no one condemn you, delighting in humility and the angelic worship [of God], which<sup>a</sup> he has seen upon entering. He is puffed up with idle notions from his unspiritual mind, <sup>19</sup>and he does not hold fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. <sup>20</sup>Since you died with Christ from the control of the elemental spirits of the world, how can you, as if you still lived in a worldly way, voluntarily place

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<sup>1</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 135.

*RevExp* Review and Expositor

*JTS* Journal of Theological Studies

ed. edited, edition(s), editor

*NTS* New Testament Studies

*ZKT* Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie

*ST* Studia theologica

*ThBer* Theologische Berichte

<sup>a</sup> a. The reading ἧ (“which”) is strongly supported by P<sup>46</sup> and good representatives of the Alexandrian and Western types of text (Ⲭ\* A B D\* etc). On the insertion of the negative “not” (οὐκ or μή) due to a failure to understand Paul’s idiom, and on the number of conjectural emendations see the exegetical comment below.

*yourselves under the regulations:*<sup>21</sup> “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not even touch!”<sup>22</sup> *These are all destined to perish with use, for they are based on human commands and teachings.*<sup>23</sup> *Such regulations actually lead—though having a reputation for wisdom in the spheres of voluntary worship, humility and<sup>b</sup> severe treatment of the body, without any value whatsoever—to the gratification of the flesh.*

#### **Notes**

a. The reading ἧ (“which”) is strongly supported by P<sup>46</sup> and good representatives of the Alexandrian and Western types of text (Ⲭ\* A B D\* etc). On the insertion of the negative “not” (οὐκ or μή) due to a failure to understand Paul’s idiom, and on the number of conjectural emendations see the exegetical comment below.

b. The καί (“and”) was omitted by P<sup>46</sup> B 1739 Origen<sup>lat</sup> and other Fathers, and this is strong and early external evidence. Accordingly ἀφειδίχα σώματος is not the third in a series of datives after ἐν (“in”) but is an instrumental dative (“by severe treatment of the body”) qualifying the previous prepositional phrase. On the other hand, the omission may have been accidental since it is found in Ⲭ A C D<sup>gr</sup> H 33 81, etc

#### **Form/Structure/Setting**

This lengthy and involved section, which follows hard upon the positive exposition of God’s work in Christ and the Colossians’ union with him in his death, burial and resurrection, springs out of (οὖν, “therefore”) what has preceded (see Lohmeyer, 96, and Lähnemann, *Kolossenerbrief*, 136) The short warning about the “philosophy” in verse 8 is developed in the further injunctions of this paragraph. There are formal analogies between the expression μή οὖν τις ὑμᾶς (“Therefore do not ... anyone ... you”) and the opening words of verse 8, βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς (“See to it that no one ... you”), while verse 18 continues with a similar introductory formula, μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς ... (“let no one [condemn] you”).

The first sentence (vv 16, 17) opens with a warning μή οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω (“Therefore do not let anyone pass judgment upon you”). Five areas covered by the prohibition are then

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<sup>b</sup> b. The καί (“and”) was omitted by P<sup>46</sup> B 1739 Origen<sup>lat</sup> and other Fathers, and this is strong and early external evidence. Accordingly ἀφειδίχα σώματος is not the third in a series of datives after ἐν (“in”) but is an instrumental dative (“by severe treatment of the body”) qualifying the previous prepositional phrase. On the other hand, the omission may have been accidental since it is found in Ⲭ A C D<sup>gr</sup> H 33 81, etc

A Codex Alexandrinus

B Codex Vaticanus or MT MS, edited by Jacob ben Chayim, Venice (1524/25)

D Codex Bezae or Deuteronom(ist)ic

C Codex Ephraemi Syri

H Holiness Code

enumerated and the first three of them are introduced by the preposition ἐν (“in,” that is, “with reference to”):

ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει,  
ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων.  
“with regard to food or drink,  
or concerning a religious festival, a new moon celebration  
or a sabbath day.”

Verse 17, which spells out the reason for Paul’s attack is constructed as a sharp antithesis. The first clause is the criticism, the second the Christological contrast:

ἃ ἔστιν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων,  
τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.  
“These are a shadow of the things that were to come;  
the reality, however, is found in Christ” (NIV).

In verse 18 with a similar introductory formula to that of verse 16 the apostle refutes one of the claims of the false teachers voiced in the Colossian community: μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω (“let no one condemn you”). The words which immediately follow, θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ... ἐμβατεύων (“delighting in humility ... entering”), which are attached grammatically to καταβραβεύετω (“let [no one] condemn”) are best understood as quotations from catchwords of the “philosophy” (see the relevant comment) and indicate the basis of the opponents’ haughty manner. The two participial clauses which follow, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ... (“puffed up without reason ...” v 18) and οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν ... (“not holding fast to the head,” v 19) are Paul’s severe criticisms of the false teachers. The remainder of verse 19 is a relative clause (ἐξ οὗ ..., “from whom”) dependent on κεφαλὴ (“head”) which speaks of the growth of the whole body. By means of two prepositions ἐκ (“from”) and διὰ (“through”) both the source of the sustenance by which the body lives and the channels through which the nourishment comes are mentioned.

In the strongly polemical section of verses 20–23 the apostle begins with a conditional clause to remind his readers that they were united with Christ in his death (cf. v 11), and to show that this death severed the bond which bound them to the “elemental spirits of the world”: εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου (the introductory εἰ does not express doubt but means “if as is the case,” “since”; cf. 3:3). The second half of the sentence, in which the application is made, consists of a rhetorical question and a rebuke: τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε; (“How then can you conduct your lives as if you still lived in a worldly way?”).

Three negative regulations, examples of the kinds imposed by the principalities and powers, are then quoted by Paul as he ridicules his opponents with biting irony: μὴ ἅψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης (“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not even touch!” v 21). By means of two relative clauses several criticisms of these kinds of regulations are made: ἃ ἔστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῆ ἀποχρήσει, ... (v 22, “all of which are destined to perish through use ...”), and ἅτινά ἐστιν ... πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός (v 23, “which things [actually] lead to the gratification of the

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NIV The New International Version (1978)

cf. *confer*, compare

flesh”). Strictly speaking the first clause with its relative ἧ (“which”) makes an objective statement about the regulations, while the second with its relative of quality ἅτινα (“which sort of things”) characterizes and condemns the precepts of verse 21 and others like them. The prepositional phrase within the first clause (which echoes the wording of Isaiah 29:13 LXX), κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων (“according to the regulations: and doctrines of men”) points out that these taboos are merely human inventions. Within the second relative clause a lengthy parenthesis is found (for a detailed justification of this see the comment on λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας ἐν ἐθελοθησκίᾳ καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ ἀφειδίᾳ σώματος, οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι) (“though having a reputation for wisdom in the spheres of voluntary worship, humility and severe treatment of the body, without any value whatsoever”). The parenthesis consists of a concessive clause λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα κτλ. (“though having a reputation ...”). Prohibitions of the kind mentioned in verse 21 carry a reputation for wisdom in the spheres mentioned (note the preposition ἐν, “in,” qualifies the three following nouns which are linked by καί, “and”). The second clause within the parentheses is subordinate to the concessive clause and is Paul’s comment: οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι (“without any value whatsoever”).

### **Comment**

Bad theology leads to bad practice. The false notions about the person and work of Christ, which are corrected in the positive affirmations of chapter 2:8–15, have their inevitable corollary in these unusual aberrations on the practical side (Martin, NCB, 89). Masson (130) has aptly entitled this section “A Defence of Christian Liberty,” for in it the apostle points out that since God has divested the principalities and powers of their authority and dignity in Christ (and Paul has already said that Christ is head over all of these principalities, 2:10) then those who have been united in him are free from the constraints of the “elemental spirits of the universe.” The evil powers which are seen to be behind the false practices and regulations (2:20) have been defeated and publicly disgraced in Christ. The Colossians are not to be impressed by those who boast of their own experiences and arrogantly pass disparaging judgments on the readers in connection with various ordinances.

As many commentators have indicated our knowledge of the Colossian “heresy,” which at best is fragmentary and indirect, is derived mostly from this passage (see the fuller discussion on the nature of the false teaching in the Introduction, xxx–xxxviii). The section is written in a polemical style and filled with allusions to the teaching and catch-words of the philosophy. However, some of the sentences are tightly constructed (cf. vv 18, 21 and 23) so that it is not always clear when the writer has taken words over from the opponents and used them polemically, or when the phrases are his own formulation.

16. μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω. “Therefore, do not let anyone pass judgment on you.” The οὖν (“therefore”) links this passage with the preceding (cf. 2:6; 3:1). The evil powers have been signally defeated in Christ (v 15). The Colossians are not to observe the following customs and rituals as obligatory for this would be to acknowledge the continuing authority of the powers through whom these regulations are mediated, the very powers which had been overthrown. κρίνω in this context is used of the judgment which people customarily pass upon the lives and

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LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

NCB New Century Bible [Commentary] (new ed.)

actions of their fellow men (BAG, 452), so trying to influence them, and it means to “take one to task” (Lightfoot, 191), “pass judgment on” (Rom 2:1, 3; 14:3, 4, 10, 13; 1 Cor 10:29; etc). μή τις (as in v 8) rather than μηδείς (“no one”), may point to definite persons Paul has in mind (von Soden, 52, Abbott, 263). Also the present imperative μή ... κρινέτω (“do not ... let judge”) probably implies that this sitting in judgment was already being done by some. But *whoever* it is that tries to act in this way is behaving falsely.

This taking the Colossians to task occurred in two main areas: (a) with respect to *food*: ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει (“about what you eat or drink”), and (b) regarding *holy days*: ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων (“with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a sabbath day”).

ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει (“about what you eat or drink”; lit. “with regard to food and drink”). Paul is probably not referring directly to the OT food laws since the Torah contained no prohibitions respecting drinks, except in a few special cases (e.g. of priests ministering in the tabernacle, Lev. 10:9; of liquids contained in unclean vessels, Lev 11:34, 36; and of Nazirite vows, Num 6:3; on βρώσις, “eating,” “food,” see Behm, *TDNT* 1, 642–45, and on πόσις, “drinking,” “drink,” note Goppelt, *TDNT* 6, 145–48). Nor is he directing attention to abstentions similar to those enjoined in the apostolic letter of Acts 15:23–29 in which Gentiles without compromising their Christian liberty were to behave considerately to their “weaker brethren” of Jewish birth. Rather, these are more stringent regulations of an ascetic nature apparently involving the renunciation of animal flesh and of wine and strong drink, after a Nazirite fashion. They follow from the demand of “severe treatment of the body” (v 23), whereby abstinence from certain food is required (v 21; cf. 1 Tim 4:3).

There are various reasons why abstinence from food and drink was practiced in the ancient world: the belief in the transmigration of souls might prevent a person from eating meat. Some practiced asceticism since it was bound up with their views of purity. Others thought that by fasting one served the deity, came closer to him or prepared oneself for receiving a divine revelation, a point that is important in the light of verse 18 (see Behm, *TDNT* 4, 924–35, especially 926, where the relevant Hellenistic texts are noted). The observance of taboos and sacred times in the Colossian “philosophy” seems to have been related to obedient submission to the “elemental spirits of the universe” (cf. v 20).

The apostle lays down the principle of Christian liberty: don’t let anyone sit in judgment on you. In writing to Corinth and Rome, where Christians had scruples about food and drink as well as the observance of holy days, Paul introduces the further principle which might impose a

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BAG W. Bauer, W. F. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1979)

lit. literally

OT Old Testament

e.g. *exempli gratia*, for example

*TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., tr. G. W. Bromiley *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., ET (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)

voluntary limitation on one's Christian liberty, i.e. "the strong" should go out of their way to avoid offending the tender consciences of "the weak" or scrupulous (Rom 14:1–15:13; 1 Cor 8–10). But at Colossae the scrupulous were threatening to impose their rigid principles on the rest of the congregation. Christian liberty needed to be asserted in the light of false attempts to undermine it.

ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ σαββάτων. The injunction continues: "[don't let anyone take you to task] with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a sabbath day." The Greek phrase ἐν μέρει, denoting a category, comes to be used with a technical meaning "in the matter of," "with regard to" (cf. 2 Cor 3:10; 9:3, and note the extrabiblical examples listed in BAG, 506), and it is followed by three nouns (in the genitive case). The terms "festival" (ἑορτή), "new moon" (νεομηνία) and "sabbath" (σάββατα) often occur in the OT to describe special days dedicated to God (LXX Hos 2:13; Ezek 45:17; 1 Chr 23:31; 2 Chr 2:3; 31:3). For Israel the keeping of these holy days was evidence of obedience to God's law and a sign of her election among the nations. At Colossae, however, the sacred days were to be kept for the sake of the "elemental spirits of the universe," those astral powers who directed the course of the stars and regulated the order of the calendar. So Paul is not condemning the use of sacred days or seasons as such; it is the wrong motive involved when the observance of these days is bound up with the recognition of the elemental spirits.

On the question as to what were the main influences on the Colossian "philosophy," Jewish or pagan, and the possible links between the false teaching and nonconformist Judaism, as evidenced at Qumran, see the survey of scholarly opinion in the Introduction.

17. ἃ ἔστιν σκία τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (NIV). The ground for Paul's attack is now given (the clause is an exegetical relative one, supplying the basis for what has just been said; so rightly Meyer, 386). They must not be judged in these matters *because* they all belonged to a transitory order.

The contrast between outer appearance and the real substance was taught in Plato (especially the famous image of the cave in his *Republic*, 514a–518b) and frequently taken up in Hellenistic times. True being belongs to the realm of ideas and not to the shadows which they cast in this world and which are perceived by our senses (cf. Lohse, 116). σκία ("shadow") and εἰκῶν ("form," "image") were the two terms most frequently used to describe the contrast, though on occasion σῶμα ("body") was employed in place of εἰκῶν ("form," "image") for true reality as distinct from mere appearance (Lohse, 116; cf. Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 160, 161). (For examples see Philo, *Conf.* 190, *DemigrAbr* 12, etc; cf. Schulz, *TDNT* 7, 394–97. In Josephus there is the oft-quoted example of Archelaus appearing in Rome to petition the emperor for the shadow [σκία] of rule when he had already appropriated the body [σῶμα], *J. W.* 2.28.)

There are, however, two significant differences between the Platonic and Philonic use of this "shadow/substance" contrast and that of Paul. The first difference is an eschatological one. At Colossians 2:17 the first member of the contrast σκία ("shadow"; not "outline" or "sketch" as

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i.e. *id est*, that is

Philo, Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum*

J. W. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*

some earlier commentators suggested, which would be σκιαγραφία or σκιαγράφημα) is qualified by τῶν μελλόντων (lit. “of the coming things”). The antithesis is not set within the framework of a timeless metaphysical dimension but is understood as a contrast between the two ages (Schulz, *TDNT* 7, 398; Schweizer, 120): “shadow” is used not so much in the Platonic sense of a copy of the heavenly and eternal “idea” as in the sense of a foreshadowing of what is to come. At Hebrews 10:1 the same point is made (by means of the terms σκία, “shadow” and εἰκόν, “image”) where the writer is thinking more especially of the law concerning matters of priesthood and sacrifice in relation to the wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple (on the differences between Philo and Hebrews regarding time and eschatology see R. Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* [ALGHJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 1970] 142–59). The expression “the things to come” (τὰ μέλλοντα) does not refer to what lies in the future from the standpoint of the writer (as Meyer, 387, argued), so pointing, for example, to the time of the Second Coming, for then the σκία (“shadow”) would not have been superseded and the ordinances referred to would retain their importance. Rather, the expression is to be interpreted from the period when the legal restrictions of verse 16 were enjoined; it is future from the standpoint of the OT (cf. Williams, 105, Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrieff*, 136, and Schweizer, 120). Christ has arrived. The substance has already come. The regulations belonged to a transitory order, and have lost all binding force. Hence the RSV translation “a shadow of the things to come” is ambiguous, if not misleading; better is the NIV rendering “a shadow of the things that were to come.”

The second difference is Christological: the “substance belongs to Christ” (τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ). σῶμα, perhaps of the body that casts a shadow, in contrast to σκία (“shadow”), comes to be used of “the thing itself,” “the reality” (BAG, 799), or “the substance.” This is not the sense in which the term is used elsewhere in the letter, and attempts have been made to understand σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ here as the “body of Christ.” Lohse (117) for example, argues that since σῶμα is employed rather than the more frequently used alternative εἰκόν (“image”) the author obviously wants to emphasize this term “body” once again. He adds: “The reality which exists solely with Christ is shared only by those who, as members of the body, adhere to the head (2:19).” This statement is correct, but whether it springs out of the phrase in question or has to be read back into it is the issue. Lohmeyer (123) went further than other commentators in seeing a reference to the cosmic body of Christ but this is unlikely (see above 48–50). Benoit (*RB* 63 [1956] 12; cf. Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene*, 161) claims that the term σῶμα is being used not simply to signify “substance.” Had Paul meant only this he would have written τὸ δὲ σῶμα ὁ Χριστός (“the substance is Christ”—a nominative case; cf. Schweizer, 121, who thinks the nominative was probably original, but there is no manuscript evidence to support this). Instead, the present expression is elliptical and when written fully reads: τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“the substance is the body of Christ”). According to Benoit σῶμα thus has two meanings: (1) “reality” as opposed to shadow, and (2) the resurrected body of Christ, that is the church.

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ALGHJ Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums (Leiden: Brill)

RSV Revised Standard Version (NT 1946, OT 1952, Apoc 1957)

RB *Revue biblique*

Although many recent writers (cf. Moule, 103, Martin, NCB, 91, 92) have understood σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ as denoting the body of Christ, one wonders whether the double reference is necessary. On this view σῶμα requires to be understood as appearing twice, as well as having two different meanings. But the sentence can be understood more simply by referring it to the shadow/substance contrast alone (cf. Bruce, 245, who claims that the attempts to interpret the phrase of the “body of Christ” are unsatisfactory, while Best, *Body*, 121, asserts we must not fall into the error of assuming that “every time Paul uses this word he gives to it its theological undertone—unless it cannot be explained without that undertone”).

Christ and his new order are the perfect reality to which these earlier ordinances pointed. These prescriptions of days gone by were but a shadow. They have lost any binding force. Since the reality is here, the things of the shadow no longer constitute a norm for judgment (Bandstra, *Law*, 92).

18. This verse has been described as one of the most contested passages in the NT, presenting great difficulties in language and content (Percy, *Probleme*, 143). However, the researches of Francis (*Conflict*; and subsequently Kehl, *ZKT* 91 [1969] 364–94, and Bandstra, *Dimensions*, 329–43) have helped to throw light on the possible background to the passage as well as the meaning of some of the more difficult terms in it. Although there is still considerable difference of opinion about the details (note the Introduction, xxxvi–xxxviii), the general drift of Paul’s thought is reasonably clear. In our exegesis we shall restrict our discussion to the more likely possibilities, and in particular attention will be given to Francis’ two articles: “Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18,” *ST* 16 (1963) 109–34, *Conflict*, 163–195, and “The Background of EMBATEYEIN (Col 2:18) in Legal Papyri and Oracle Inscriptions,” *Conflict*, 197–207.

μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύτω. As in verse 16, though with different words, the apostle refutes one of the claims the opponents made at Colossae: “let no one condemn you.” The main verb καταβραβεύω is rarely found in Greek literature (BAG, 409). It has been thought here to retain the primary sense of the simple verb βραβεύω, to “act as umpire or one who gives the prize” (see Stauffer, *TDNT* 1, 637–39). The force of the word would then be to “deprive,” “disqualify” or “encroach upon another’s interest.” However, it is probably better, with many modern commentators, to understand it as meaning to “condemn,” and so is equivalent to κατακρίνω (cf. F. Field, cited by Pfitzner, *Paul*, 156).

A series of dependent participial clauses follows: εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος (“puffed up without reason”) and οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν ... (“not holding fast to the head”) are Paul’s negative evaluations of the false teachers. The words that immediately follow the warning, θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ... ἐμβατεύων, indicate the basis for their position and haughty manner. These phrases “delighting in humility,” “worship of angels,” and “which he has seen upon entering” are therefore best understood as quotations from catchwords of the “philosophy” rather than Paul’s critical or ironical remarks about their behavior (cf. Lohse, 117, 118, Francis, *Conflict*, 167–85; against Percy, *Probleme*, 169, who took the entire clause as a critical remark).

θέλων ἐν. The expression is akin to the Hebrew ḥāpēs b<sup>e</sup>, to “delight in” (1 Sam 18:22; 2 Sam 15:26; 1 Kings 10:9; 1 Chr 28:4; Pss 111:1; 146:10) and so refers to those practices in which the advocates of the philosophy took pleasure (cf. Lightfoot, 193, Moule, 104, Schrenk, *TDNT* 3, 45, Percy, *Probleme*, 145–47; this seems more likely than the view that θέλων meaning

“willfully” is an adverbial absolute modifying καταβραβεύτω: “let no one willfully disqualify you,” so Dibelius-Greeven, 34, and A. Fridrichsen, “ΘΕΛΩΝ Col 2:18,” *ZNW* 21 [1922]135–37). Francis, *Conflict*, 167, renders the expression “being bent upon” (RSV “insisting on”).

ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων: “In humility and angelic worship [of God].” (The two nouns ταπεινοφροσύνῃ and θρησκεία are joined by the one preposition ἐν and thus closely linked.) The Greek word ταπεινοφροσύνῃ is normally used in the NT in a good sense of the Christian grace of “humility” (cf. 3:12; Phil 2:3; 1 Pet 5:5). Most exegetes have therefore thought that here a false humility is being spoken about and have suggested that it is to be understood in the light of the following phrase, “worship of angels” (so Meyer, 393, Lightfoot, 194, Abbott, 268, and Scott 54). However, if the term was employed by the opponents it must carry some sense such as “mortification” or “self-denial.” Can we be more specific than this? Lohse, 118, contends that the two occurrences of the term (vv 18 and 23), both in the context of worship, point to the eagerness and docility with which a person fulfills the cultic ordinances (=“readiness to serve”). He understands this not so much of a disposition as of cultic conduct.

Francis (*Conflict*, 167–71) has taken a different line. He has argued that the term was used extensively in Jewish and Christian literature to denote fasting and other bodily rigors (note in Col 2:16–23 the references to food and drink, and severity to the body, point to fasting). These ascetic practices in Jewish mystical-pietistic literature were effectual for receiving visions of the heavenly mysteries. Francis claims that though the technique of “humility” (a prerequisite for receiving visions) was widespread in the Hellenistic world, ταπεινοφροσύνῃ receives this application only in Jewish/Christian sources (notably Hermas, *Vis.* 3, 10, 6; *Sim.* 5, 3, 7, Tertullian, Philo, *Som.* 1.33–37; Mos 2.67–70; QE 2.39; 1 and 2 Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2-3 *Apoc. Bar.*, etc; for references see *Conflict*, 167–71). On Francis’ view, which seems likely (see Introduction, xxxvi–xxxviii), the apostle is stating that the advocates of the Colossian “philosophy” delighted in ascetic practices as a prelude to the reception of heavenly visions.

θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων. The phrase has normally been taken (with the genitive being regarded as objective) to denote “the worship directed to the angels.” θρησκεία (“worship”; cf. Acts 26:5; James 1:26, 27) can be used in either a positive or a negative way, depending on the particular context (Schmidt, *TDNT* 3, 157, 158). This statement concerning angel-worship seems to go beyond speculation about angels present in the Jewish schools and denotes an actual cult of angels. The principalities and powers might have been in view but Paul here refers to angels as a class (according to Bruce, 247, this is the natural inference from the definite article “the” before “angels,” τῶν ἀγγέλων). There is little evidence for the worship of angels among the Jews (cf. A. L. Williams, “The Cult of Angels at Colossae,” *JTS* 10 [1909] 413–38”, Percy, *Probleme*, 149–55, and Carr, *JTS* 24 [1973] 496–500), and so it is argued that the expression is evidence of the syncretistic character of the “philosophy” at Colossae. It was Jewish mixed with pagan elements.

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*ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

*Vis.* Visions

*Sim.* Similitudes

Philo, Philo, *De Somniis*

2-3 *Apoc. Bar.* Syriac, Greek Apocalypse of Baruch

The angels determined the course of the cosmos and with it man's circumstances. Men submitted to the angels in the cult by performing the prescribed acts and by fulfilling the regulations laid down (so Lohse, 118, representing the majority view).

Francis (*Conflict*, 176–81; cf. Carr, *JTS* 24 [1973] 499, 500), on the other hand, has argued that the phrase (taking the genitive as subjective) denotes “the worship which the angels perform.” Using a wide range of sources representing what he terms ascetic-mystic piety Francis drew attention to the many descriptions of angelic worship. So the Ascension of Isaiah 7:13–9:33 has a sevenfold description of the angelic worship which the visionary sees; the Testament of Levi 3:4–8 details the liturgical climax of Levi's entry into heaven (note Rev 4, 5 which records John's vision of the heavenly liturgy). Participation in the angelic worship is detailed in several sources: so Isaiah participates in the worship of the fifth, sixth and seventh heavens (Asc Isa 7:37; 8:17; 9:28, 31, 33), while the daughters of Job praise and glorify God in an angelic tongue (Test Job 48–50). Frequently the Qumran literature refers to the members of the community as priests who offered sacrifice (=the Qumran way of life) not only before Yahweh but also *in communion with the angels* (cf. 1QSb 4:25, 26; 1QH 3:20–22, etc; note Kehl, *ZKT* 91 [1969] 383–92). Francis thus claims that these texts provide a better background to understanding the “worship of angels” than does the “syncretistic” view—the initiate is enraptured and participates in the heavenly worship of God performed by the angels.

Martin (NCB, 94), following Lohse (119), claims that there is “a fatal objection” to Francis' view, namely, this reading “fails because of v 23 where ‘self-chosen worship’ (ἐθελοθρησκία) specifically characterizes the concept ‘worship’ (θρησκεία) as performed by men” (Lohse, 119). But the term ἐθελοθρησκία (“self-made religion,” perhaps “would-be religion,” BAG, 218) presents no obstacle to the second interpretation of the phrase since the term does not specify a cult performed by men. It says no more than that the advocates of the “philosophy” “chose/aspired to/gave pretence of some worship ... We could say, if we accepted Lohse's translation, that the Colossians chose for themselves the worship performed by the angels” (Francis, *Conflict*, 182). Accordingly, the false teachers claimed to have joined in the angelic worship of God as they entered into the heavenly realm and prepared to receive visions of divine mysteries.

ἃ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεύων (lit. “which he has seen upon entering”). The third quotation from the catchwords of the “philosophy” is not patently clear, and its precise significance turns on the meaning of ἐμβατεύων. Because of the difficulty of reducing the phrase to intelligible terms all sorts of changes have been suggested: (1) one of the earliest attempts to make sense of the expression was to insert a negative: hence AV “intruding into those things which he hath *not* seen.” The negative μή which denies the reality of the experience claimed was due to a failure to understand Paul's idiom (cf. Bruce, 246, Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 623); and (2) conjectural emendations (see Bruce's full note page 248, n. 93) which appear to be variations of Lightfoot's proposal to read κενεμβατεύω, “tread the air.” None of these suggested emendations carries conviction.

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1QSb Appendix B (*Blessings*) to 1QS

1QH Hôdâyôt (*Thanksgiving Hymns*) from Qumran Cave 1

AV Authorized (King James) Version = KJV

ἐμβατεύω means to “set foot upon,” “enter” (a place, city, sanctuary, etc); “come into possession of”; “enter into a subject,” i.e. investigate it closely (cf. BAG, 254; Preisker, *TDNT* 2, 535). The major attempts to unravel the meaning of the phrase (as distinct from unhelpful conjectures) are as follows:

(a) In the light of the connotation of ἐμβατεύω to “approach something in order to investigate it” (cf. 2 Macc 2:30; PhiloDeplant 80) Preisker (*TDNT* 2, 535, 536) argued the phrase meant: “what he had seen in a vision, he tried to investigate” (in order to gain deeper insight into divine mysteries). On this view Paul is refuting the earnest quest for knowledge which characterized the “philosophy” at Colossae (and elsewhere, cf. 2 Tim 3:7; 2 John 9). According to Preisker the false teachers waited for moments of ecstatic vision and then entered by painful investigation into what had been seen in ecstasy.

(b) The dominant interpretation takes its point of departure from the use of ἐμβατεύω (“enter”) as a technical expression in the mystery religions to describe the initiates entering the sanctuary so as to consult the oracle on completion of the rite (cf. S. Eitrem, “EMBATEYΩ. Note sur Col 2, 18,” *ST* 2 [1948] 90–94). First William Ramsay (in a communication to the *Athenaeum* in 1913; for details see Bruce, 249) and then Dibelius (*Conflict*, 61–121) drew attention to the inscriptional data from the sanctuary of Apollo at Klaros. From this evidence Dibelius argued that the time of entering was the climax of the initiation while the inner sanctuary, or possibly the oracle grotto, is the place one entered. Building on this fixed use of the term ἐμβατεύω (“enter”) as one element in the mystery rite, it was assumed that in the Colossian “philosophy” certain cultic rites were performed. Our expression ἃ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεύων (translated “as he has had visions of them during the mystery rites”) indicates that the one upon whom the initiation rites were performed, experienced the vision of cosmic secrets. Cultic rites were actually performed in order to worship the “angels” and the “elements of the universe.” Because of their teaching and greater experiences the followers of the philosophy were boastful, considering themselves to be superior to the members of the congregation (cf. Lohse’s reconstruction, 118–21, which follows Dibelius’ presentation closely). Critics of Dibelius have noted that the two situations are not parallel (cf. Lyonnet, *Bib* 43 [1962] 417–35, and *Conflict*, 147–61; Schweizer, 123, 124, claims the linguistic parallels are uncertain) but exponents of the view argue that this does not overthrow Dibelius’ basic model.

(c) Rejecting the view that the mystery language or practice had penetrated the church at Colossae, it has been argued that ἐμβατεύω does not have the uniform technical significance that Dibelius and others claimed for it. Francis, first in his article “Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18” (*Conflict*, 163–95) but more fully in “The Background of EMBATEYEIN (Col 2:18) in Legal Papyri and Oracle Inscriptions” (*Conflict*, 197–207; the criticisms of Francis by Lohse, 118–20, and Martin, *NCB*, 94, 95, do not take into account this development in the latter article), questioned whether the verb had the precise significance Dibelius gave to it. The term was used broadly in the OT (cf. Josh 19:49, 21) and the papyri to denote the “entering into possession of” something, particularly the possession of property (in the legal papyri over a period of six centuries from the third century B.C. it had this significance). In Joshua the giving of the land constituted the fulfillment of God’s promises. To possess the land was to “have a portion in the Lord” and so to “have the right to worship him” (cf. Josh 22:24–26). Francis argues that the unexpressed object of ἐμβατεύων (“entering”) in Colossians is “not a plot of ground, but it is a

portion in the Lord” (*Conflict*, 199; cf. the tribe of Levi which received no land but their portion was still the Lord God of Israel). So he holds that the entering here is “the heavenly realm” (*Conflict*, 197; he also notes that certain of the fathers explicitly employed ἐμβατεύω with heaven as its object; cf. Nemesius of Emesa, *De Nat Horn Matt*, 63–65). Though drawing on a different history of religions background Bousset argued that Colossians 2:18 could be explained with reference to the heavenly journey of the soul, while Nock suggested the term “may indicate some claim to special knowledge obtained on a visionary entry into heaven” (A. D. Nock, “The Vocabulary of the New Testament,” *JBL* 52 [1933] 131–39, especially 133). Recently Carr (*JTS* 24 [1973] 492–500) has produced additional evidence to that of Francis for this meaning of ἐμβατεύω (“enter”) in mystical asceticism. He claims that Colossians 2:18 is concerned with visions and with the encountering of the divine in real religious experience. It is the heavenly sanctuary where the worship conducted by the angels (Carr also understands θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων as a subjective genitive) occurs and this appears in the mind of the worshiper. So it was not the mystery language or practice which was penetrating the church at Colossae. Rather, it was a similar problem to what was encountered elsewhere: “claims to spiritual superiority validated by claims to higher religious experience through mystical-ascetical piety” (Carr, *JTS* 24 [1973] 500; cf. Bandstra, *Dimensions*, 329–32).

Although we may agree with Schweizer (124) that we know too little about the specific background at Colossae to be certain as to the precise meaning of this phrase, we consider a stronger case has been made for the third view (*c*). Dibelius’ approach (*b*) has serious weaknesses (he builds too much on ἐμβατεύω as a technical expression), while the first view (*a*) though possible is not as cogent as the approach of Francis and others (note the Introduction).

Whatever the precise spiritual experiences the proponents claimed to have passed through, their exploitation of these experiences to their own advantage stands in contrast to Paul’s apologetic account of the unusual things that happened to him when he “was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell” (2 Cor 12:4, NIV; cf. Bruce, 250).

εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ. If in the earlier phrases Paul has quoted from the catchwords of the philosophy, then with these words he presents the first of two devastating criticisms: “his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions” (NIV). Being puffed up (φυσιόω in the passive means to “become puffed up,” “become conceited,” BAG, 869) was a standing and characteristic danger of the Corinthians (all the NT references to the word, apart from Col 2:18, occur in the Corinthian correspondence: 1 Cor 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; 2 Cor 12:20). It took various forms: boasting against Paul, moral indifference (5:2) and exalting oneself above another (4:6). The apostle states that “knowledge puffs up” (8:1) and its proponents are conceited. At Colossae whoever laid claims to these exalted and heavenly experiences was puffed up. The cause of this conceit was “the mind of his flesh” (ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ), an unusual expression (though cf. Rom 8:7, “the mind [φρόνημα] that is set on the flesh”) that means the attitude and outlook which are characteristic of the old nature, dominated by the flesh. The νοῦς (cf. Behm, *TDNT* 4, 950–60) is that aspect of a man’s mentality which when enlightened can distinguish between good and evil, as well as recognize and respond to the claims of God (Rom 7:21–25; 12:2). It may be controlled by the old nature as long as one goes on living κατὰ σάρκα, “according to the flesh. “Perhaps the proponents boasted (εἰκῆ means

“without cause”) they were directed by the mind (ὕπὸ τοῦ νοός); Paul’s answer is, yes. But a mind of the flesh! (τῆς σαρκός is a possessive or characterizing genitive). Bornkamm (*Conflict*, 140; cf. Martin, NCB, 92) suggested they were boasting of their acquaintance with divine “fullness” and being full of knowledge (γνώσις), when all they are full of is their own pride!

19. καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν. “And not holding fast to the head.” The second criticism is even more devastating: the self-inflation and pride in these private religious experiences come from not maintaining contact with Christ, the head. κρατέω—a verb employed in a variety of ways (sometimes of arresting [Matt 14:3; 21:46] or of seizing a person forcibly [Matt 12:11; 18:28])—is used here of “holding fast to someone” and so remaining closely united to him (cf. Mark 7:3; 2 Thess 2:15; Rev 2:13, 14, 15; note BAG, 448; Michaelis, *TDNT* 3, 910–12; the antithesis is ἀφήμι, to “let go,” cf. LXX Song of Sol 3:4, “I held fast [ἐκράτησα] to him and would not let him go“ [οὐκ ἀφήσω]). The false teacher’s behavior shows he is not keeping a close hold of Christ (Best, *Body*, 126); in fact, it is evidence of his rejecting the head (the negative οὐ, instead of μή, with the participle is equivalent to an affirmative sentence meaning “he is letting go of, or rejecting,” Zerwick, *Greek*, 148; cf. Dibelius-Greeven, 36, BDF para. 430[3]). No doubt those who sought to make inroads into the community presupposed that they were Christians (Percy, *Probleme*, 142). Indeed, how else could they have attempted to make these inroads? But they face the most serious of condemnations: they are severing themselves from the very one who is the source of life and unity.

The “head-body” relationship is employed again in this passage (cf. 1:18). Since he is Lord over all, Christ is described at chapter 2:10 as “head of every power and principality” (though these powers are not said to be part of his body). Here at chapter 2:19 the two metaphors have to do with his headship over the church. Dibelius-Greeven (36) argued along similar lines in their exposition of chapters 1:18 and 2:10, that “body” denoted the cosmos here and “head” the rule over every principality and power. The false teachers hold to the members of the cosmos-body (i.e. to the principalities and powers) instead of Christ as the head. But this line of interpretation introduces un-Pauline elements into the argument (cf. Percy, *Probleme*, 382–84; Bruce, 251; cf. Robinson, *Body*, 66) and the view is rejected as being inadequate (σῶμα does not refer to the cosmos in Pauline thought: cf. Merklein, *Amt*, 29, 30, and Bedale, *JTS* 5 [1954] 214).

κεφαλὴν ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα κτλ. “The head from whom the whole body....” Although he is not explicitly named it is clear that Christ is that head (cf. E. D. Roels, *God’s Mission. The Epistle to the Ephesians in Mission Perspective* [Franeker: Wever, 1962] 107). As such he (the concentration on Christ is so strong in the text that the masculine relative pronoun “from whom,” ἐξ οὗ, is used although the word “head,” κεφαλὴ, in Greek is feminine gender; noted by many commentators including Schweizer, 125) is both the source (ἐκ, “from,” signifies source, while διὰ, “through,” denotes the channels through which the nourishment, etc, come) of the sustenance by which the body lives as well as the source of unity through which it becomes an organic whole (Best, *Body*, 127). There is no explicit mention of direction by the head. It might be argued, however, that headship implies this. Further, the suggestion in the immediate context is that each part of the body will function properly only as it is under the control of the head. If it acts independently the consequences can be very serious. The false teachers are in great peril and each member of the congregation should heed the apostle’s warning.

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BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (University of Chicago/University of Cambridge, 1961)

The human body provides the analogy for Paul's description, and the image used here corresponds to ancient physiology (note the evidence from ancient medical writings in Lightfoot, 196–98): ἄφαι are the “joints” (lit. the “points of contact,” akin to ἄπτομαι, “touch”) while σύνδεσμοι are the “ligaments” (cf. BAG, 785; Fitzer, *TDNT* 7, 856–59) which provide nourishment (ἐπιχορηγέω, though understood by Robinson [*Ephesians*, 186, 187] with reference to Eph 4:16, as “furnished,” or “equipped,” is better taken as “provided,” “supplied” [Lightfoot, 198, and note Moule's discussion, 107]; on this rendering, however, the physiology' is not to be pressed as though the joints and ligaments were strictly the channels of supply) and “unite” the members of the body (on the various meanings of συμβιβάζω, here used figuratively meaning “unite,” “knit together,” see 2:2). With his illustration about the ligaments, nerves or muscles as we would call them, Paul indicates that the body is constantly supplied (note the *present* participles) with energy and nourishment by the head, and is held together as a unity by that head alone (at Eph 4:16 the emphasis is upon the vital cohesion and union of the parts with each other, here it focuses on the continuous dependence on the head). The physiological language is metaphorical; the joints and ligaments are not to be understood with Masson (198), commenting on Ephesians 4:1–16 of ministers, who are distinct from ordinary church members, or with Schnackenburg of office bearers (“Christus, Geist und Gemeinde [Eph 4:1–16],” *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament. Studies in honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley [Cambridge: University Press, 1973] 290; cf. Merklein, *Amt*, 114, 115; so rightly Schweizer, 126).

πᾶν τὸ σῶμα ... ἀύξει τὴν ἀύξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ The whole body (πᾶν τό shows that no member is to be excluded) which is totally dependent on the head to nourish and unify it is said (lit.) to “increase with the increase of God.” ἀύξάνω (and ἀύξω), meaning to “cause to grow,” in later Greek came to be used intransitively of to “grow,” “increase” (John 3:30; Acts 6:7; Eph 4: 15; BDF, paras. 101, 309[2]; BAG, 121). The expression “the growth of God” (τὴν ἀύξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ) is probably, with many recent exegetes, to be understood as an accusative of content (so BDF para. 153[1], F.-J. Steinmetz, *Protologische Heils-Zuversicht. Die Strukturen des soteriologischen und christologischen Denkens im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief*. [FTS 2; Frankfurt: Knecht, 1969] 128; Lohse, 122; cf. Matt 2:10; Eph 2:4). But what does the genitive “of God” (τοῦ θεοῦ) mean? And how are we to understand the nature of the growth: in size or in perfection? Because Christ, the head, is the source (ἐξ οὔ) of the increase then the words “of God” must describe its nature, i.e. it is a divine type of growth. So the increase comes from Christ and its quality is divine (Best, *Body*, 128). This suggests that its growth is in terms of perfection. But does this growth include a numerical increase, both the inward and the outward (as Steinmetz, *Heils-Zuversicht*, 128, argues; Merklein, *Amt*, 94, refers to it as “intensive-ethical” and “extensive”)? Schweizer, with explicit reference to this passage, considers that mission as a salvation historical phenomenon derives from the notion of the growth of the body. In other words, growth for him must include numerical increase (*Neotestamentica*, 301, cf. 327, 328; Merklein, *Amt*, 94, endorses this pointing out that such a growth is a particular interest of Colossians, cf. 1:6, 10, where the same verb “grow,” ἀύξάνω, is found, and especially 1:26, 27). However, without wishing to deny the importance of the world-wide spread of the gospel (1:6) or the significance of making the mystery known to Gentiles (note especially 1:24–29), the immediate context has nothing to do with numerical increase; it is concerned with growth in

perfection (at 1:6 the increase is numerical, while at 1:10 it is a growth in perfection: the mere mention of the term “increase” does not mean that both notions are necessarily included). Paul here is drawing a contrast between the divine growth of the whole body (πᾶν τὸ σῶμα) and the individual growth of the Colossian false teachers (Best, *Body*, 128). In fact, theirs is not a growth at all; it is a vain puffing up by their fleshly minds (v 18). The believer cannot grow to perfection alone. The “growth of God” only occurs as the “ultimate result” of the body’s union with the head; the nourishment and unity which come through the joints and ligaments “are only intermediate processes” (Best, *Body*, 128, following Lightfoot, 198).

The application to the Colossian situation is plain: the false teacher who does not depend on the head has no contact with the source of life and nourishment, and does not belong to the body. The community must realize that they must remain in living union with Christ as the head. Let them not be drawn off or enticed away by the appeal of the false teachers to their heavenly experiences.

20. Paul had already told his readers that they were united with Christ in his death (v 11). He now takes this up and applies it with special reference to their circumstances.

εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου. Because the Colossians have died with Christ on the cross (the εἰ does not express doubt, but means “if, as is the case,” “since”; note 3:3 and cf. BDF para. 372), then that death severed the bond which bound them to the “elemental spirits of the world.” Paul normally uses the dative case after the verb “die” (ἀποθνήσκω) of the person or thing from which one is separated by death (e.g. Gal 2:19, he died to the law [νόμῳ], while at Rom 6:2, he speaks of having died to sin [τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ; cf. BAG, 91]). Here the preposition translated “to” really means “from,” that is, “out of the control of” (BDF para. 211, consider ἀπό is used here for a genitive of separation with the added thought of alienation). Robinson (*Body*, 43) has caught the sense well with his rendering: “Ye died with Christ out from under the elements of the world.” As death breaks the bond which binds a subject to his ruler so dying with Christ severs the bond that bound the Colossians to the slavery of the principalities and powers (on the meaning of τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου see 129–132).

τί ὡς ξῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίξεσθε. The application is made by means of a rhetorical question and a rebuke (cf. Martin, NCB, 96): “How can you, as if you still lived in a worldly way, voluntarily place yourselves under the regulations?” κόσμος (“world,” in the phrase ἐν κόσμῳ) is interpreted by exegetes in various ways, depending on their understanding of the “elements of the world” (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου). So Schweizer (126, 127) argues that the two expressions mean the same thing, while Bandstra (*Law*, 69) contends the reference is to “the world of mankind, the whole sphere of human activity.” On the view that the “elements” denote personal forces such as the principalities and powers it is best to take the phrase as describing the situation in which the world dominates a person’s existence, the old way of life (Caird, 200, renders the phrase by “worldly”).

δογματίζω means to “represent and affirm an opinion or tenet,” “establish or publish a decree,” “proclaim an edict” (Kittel, *TDNT* 2, 231; cf. LSJ, 441, and Lohse, 123). It is akin to δόγμα (“decree,” “ordinance”) used in the plural at chapter 2:14 of the regulations with their penalty clauses associated with the signed acknowledgment of our indebtedness before God. Here the restrictive regulations have particular reference to ordinances of taste and touch (v 21 lists three of them), though we should not suppose that the verb is specifically limited to these.

The passive voice of the verb carries the notion of “allowing oneself to be ...” (some older grammarians took the verb as a middle voice with much the same significance, so Robertson, *Grammar*, 807, “probably direct middle”; Abbott, 272, cf. Turner, *Syntax*, 57), so that a literal rendering is “let yourself be regulated” (BDF para. 314; cf. 1 Cor 6:7). The point is that the Colossians were in danger of falling victim to the false teaching and of voluntarily placing themselves under the regulations imposed by these powers (Hooker, *Christ*, 317, considers that the admonition does not mean the Colossian Christians have already submitted to the regulations). This was tantamount to reverting to the slavery previously experienced in their pagan past (cf. Gal 4:3, 8, 9).

21. μὴ ἅψη μὴδὲ γεύσῃ μὴδὲ θίγῃς. “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not even touch!” Paul quotes three examples of the sorts of regulations imposed by the principalities and powers. They are all negative and admit of no exceptions (note the OT apodictic laws). It has been suggested that, because of the form in which the regulations are cited here, Paul is ridiculing his opponents (so Lohse, 123, who cites Chrysostom with approval: “Mark how he makes sport of them, *handle not, touch not, taste not*, as though they were keeping themselves clear of some great matters”) attributing to them a total withdrawal from all worldly contacts (Caird, 200).

The three verbs appear to deal with regulations concerning food and drink (cf. v 16). However, the first and last words are virtually synonymous (cf. LXX Exod 19:12) and it is difficult to pinpoint any distinction between them. Bauer (BAG, 102, 103) suggested as a possibility that ἅπτομαι could be translated to “eat something” (like our “touch food”). Accordingly, the three prohibitions would form an anticlimax: “Do not eat, do not taste, do not touch!” But ἅπτομαι has a more general meaning than “eat” and this suggestion is unlikely. On the basis of it being used with a sexual connotation (cf. 1 Cor 7:1, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” γυναικὸς μὴ ἅπτεσθαι), R. Leaney proposed that the false teachers forbade sexual relations (“Colossians ii. 21–23. [The use of πρόσ],” *ExpTim* 64 [1952–53] 92). But this is unlikely for the following reasons: first, nowhere else in this letter is there the slightest hint of a prohibition of sexual relations (the false teachers of 1 Timothy 4:3 forbade marriage but there γαμέω, “marry,” is used). Second, when ἅπτομαι is employed with this connotation the object of the verb makes plain that this is meant (cf. Gen 20:4, 6; Prov 6:29; 1 Cor 7:1). The verb by itself can apply to a wide range of areas. Third, the immediately following words (v 22, “These are all destined to perish with use”) suggest material objects such as food and drink are in view: verse 22a does not apply if sexual relations are meant.

If as Lightfoot (201) and others have suggested ἅπτομαι can have a somewhat stronger connotation than the rather colorless word θιγγάνω and means to “take hold of” something with a view to possessing it (Lohse, 123) then the threefold prohibition could refer to defilement incurred through the sense of touch, though in different degrees: “Handle not, nor yet taste, nor even touch.”

22. Several criticisms of the false teachers’ approach are set forth by the apostle: (1) ἅ ἔστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει. The things covered by the taboos are perishable objects of the material world, destined to pass away when used (the expression ἔστιν εἰς denotes appointment = “is destined for”; cf. Acts 8:20; 2 Pet 2:12: so Oepke, *TDNT* 2, 428). Paul is probably thinking especially, but not exclusively, of food (cf. Harder, *TDNT* 9, 102). φθορά refers to the “physical dissolution” (Abbott, 274) of such things in their natural use (ἀπόχρησις, “consuming,” “using

up,” so BAG, 102; although the term can have, on occasion, the connotation “abuse,” this does not fit the present context where the reference is to physical objects being used in a proper and ordinary manner). If these objects are transient and perishable then the proponents of the “philosophy” lack a true sense of proportion by making them issues central to their teaching. Matters of food and drink are of no consequence as far as godliness is concerned (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 6:13)—particularly when a test case is made of their abstinence or enjoyment (Martin, *Lord*, 96; for Paul overindulgence that leads to gluttony and drunkenness is another question, 1 Cor 5:9; Eph 5:18, as is food offered to idols, 1 Cor 8). (See R. J. Austgen, *Natural Motivation in the Pauline Epistles*. 2nd ed. [Notre Dame: University Press, 1969] especially chapter v, “Natural Motivation and Dietary Practices,” 98–117.) There may be the further point, as Lohse, 124, has suggested, that because of their false legalism the proponents failed to recognize God’s good gifts and his purpose of giving them, namely, that all without exception (πάντα) should be consumed through proper use.

(2) κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Paul’s second indictment is that these taboos are merely human inventions: they are “according to the regulations and doctrines of men.” Behind the phrase lies the wording of Isaiah 29:13 (LXX) which reads: “But in vain do they worship me teaching the commandments and doctrines of men” (ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας). In the original context the prophet complains that Israel’s religion is not a personal knowledge of God but a set of conventional rules learned by rote. The text was cited by Jesus in the Gospels (Mark 7:7; cf. Matt 15:9) in his dispute with the Pharisees and scribes about the “tradition of men” (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων), by which the Jews had nullified the word of God. That tradition is likened to the “commandments and doctrines of men,” an interesting juxtaposition for in Colossians 2 the same two expressions are employed: verse 8, “the tradition of men” (ἡ παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων), and this text. The second reference may be regarded as a “concretizing” of the earlier phrase, i.e. the tradition of men finds concrete expression in manmade commandments and teachings.

ἐντάλματα (“commandments”) occurs only three times in the NT (Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7; Col 2:22), each of which is an echo of the Isaiah text (29:13). In the Colossians reference it is closely linked with διδασκαλαί (‘‘teachings,’’ by means of the one definite article). The plural in the LXX is significant since it suggests a multiplicity of human teachings that lay no claim to absoluteness but stand over against the revelation of the will of God (cf. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 2, 161). Paul brings out the same point here about the ordinances being merely human with his emphasis on the last part of the phrase, τῶν ἀνθρώπων: “You died *with Christ* and yet receive orders *from men!*” These taboos of human origin frustrate the pure teaching of God with its liberating message.

23. (3) Paul continues his attack on the false teaching. The verse is not entirely clear as to its structure and meaning for it is not always certain when the apostle is quoting from catchwords of the opponents or making his own comments (cf. Moule, 108–10, Masson, 137, and Schweizer, 128). Some exegetes, assuming that the text was corrupted very early, sought to reconstruct it by means of conjectural emendations and additions (Nestle wanted to begin a new sentence with “severity” [ἀφειδία in the nominative case], cf. von Dobschütz; B. G. Hall, “Colossians II. 23,” *ExpTim* 36 (1924–25) 285, considers that “forgetting” was original, while others would add a line; for details see Lohse, 125, n.88). But none of these can claim any manuscript support since the manuscript tradition has retained the “obscurities” intact! In our estimation the most satisfactory explanation of the ambiguities is that presented by Reicke (*ST* 6 [1952] 39–53; cf.

Bengel 2, 466) and supplemented with additional arguments by Hollenbach (*NTS* 25 [1978–79] 254–61). The punctuation and rendering are as follows:

ἅτινά ἐστιν—λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας ἐν ἐθελοθρησκίᾳ καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ ἀφειδίᾳ σώματος, οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι—πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός.

“Which things lead—though having a reputation for wisdom in the spheres of voluntary worship, humility and severe treatment of the body, without any value whatsoever—to the gratification of the flesh.”

On this interpretation ἐστιν, (translated “are” because of the plural subject ἅτινα, “which things”) is not joined with ἔχοντα (“having”) to form a periphrastic present tense, but rather stands alone as the predicate of the main clause, which is ἅτινά ἐστιν ... πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός (“which things [actually] lead to the gratification of the flesh”). The conjunction μὲν (“though”) appears as the second word in its clause (λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα κτλ. “though having a reputation ...”), its normal position in the Pauline epistles and marks a subordinate clause as being concessive in relation to its main clause. It should, therefore, be translated as “though” (cf. Rom 7:25b; 8:10). Parallels to the construction ἐστιν πρὸς signifying “lead to” are to be found at John 11:4, “This disease will not lead to (οὐκ ἐστιν πρὸς) death,” and at 1 Corinthians 14:26, “May everything be done in such a way that it may lead to edification (πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν γινέσθω).”

(Hollenbach, *NTS* 25 [1978–79] 255, has demonstrated in detail that “virtually every occurrence of μὲν, regardless of its function, is immediately after the first word of the grammatical unit to which the μὲν pertains”; the exceptions he adequately explains: μὲν, “on the one hand,” “though,” would normally be followed by the correlative δέ, “on the other hand”: Lightfoot, 203, has pointed out that such suppressions were common enough in classical writers, e.g., Plato, and he claims that here an exact correlative is found in a new form οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι, “without any honor,” cf. Moule, 108, BDF para. 477[2], [3], Robertson, *Grammar*, 1152, and Lohse, 126. Reicke, *ST* 6 [1952] 43, argued it was an example of μὲν, *solitarium*, not an elliptical correlative, which appears absolutely like μήν, “indeed,” “and yet,” cf. Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 147. It seems best, however, to consider that the δέ would normally have occurred after the first word of the clause to which the concessive clause is subordinate, i.e. after ἅτινα, “which things”; but since the concessive clause is embedded within the main clause by the time the μὲν was written the proper place to insert δέ was already past—hence the omission, so Hollenbach, *NTS* 25 [1978–79] 260.)

ἅτινα (“which things,” cf. Gal 4:24; 5:19; Phil 3:7), a relative of quality, points back not so much to “the commandments and teachings” (τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας, v 22) as Masson (137) supposed, but to the precepts or regulations included under δογματίζεσθε (“you let yourselves be regulated”), of which verse 21 contains illustrations (Williams, 115): “Handle not, don’t taste, don’t even touch!” Verse 22 with its relative ἅ (“which”) makes an objective statement about the regulations, whereas this remark (ἅτινα, “which sort of things”) characterizes and condemns not only the particular precepts of verse 21 but also others falling within the same category (Lightfoot, 203).

λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας. Prohibitions of this kind carry a reputation for wisdom. λόγον ἔχω means to “have the reputation of,” “be considered as” (on other connotations see Lightfoot, 203, 204), with λόγος signifying “reputation,” “credit” (LSJ, 1059). It is employed to denote that which has no substance to it and stands in contrast to ἀληθεία, “truth” (it is synonymous with μῦθος, “rumor,” “fable,” cf. Stählin, *TDNT* 4, 770; Chrysostom aptly remarked: “neither the

power, nor the truth”). Even though the regulations have the reputation for wisdom they lack the reality. This wisdom is only a facade (note the play on φιλοσοφία, “philosophy,” 2:8 and σοφία, “wisdom”); true wisdom is to be found in Christ alone (2:3; cf. 1:9, 28; 3:16) for he is the wisdom of God (1:15–20). Zeilinger (*Der Erstgeborene*, 128, 129) has recently contended that in the phrase, “having the appearance of wisdom,” there is a deliberate polemic on the part of the author against a Jewish view (cf. Bar 4:1–4) which regarded the preexistent Torah (= Wisdom, σοφία) as the ground of all things; humility, reverencing of angels and the practice of ascetic severity leads ultimately to the possession of wisdom, the resurrection of the dead and with them the possession of life in the coming age. Against this the author argues that salvation from Christ is already objectively present—in Christ the gift of the eschaton has already been given.

ἐν ἐυελουρησικίᾳ καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ ἀφειδίᾳ σώματος. The false teachers’ reputation for wisdom was acquired “in the sphere of (ἐν, so Williams, 116, Schweizer, 128; Meyer, 410, regards the preposition as instrumental) voluntary worship, humility and severe treatment of the body.” ἐθελοθρησκία, a term which does not occur in Greek before Paul, is rendered by the RSV as “rigor of devotion” (BAG, 218, “self-made religion,” it cannot, however, be rendered in this way if Paul, as we contend, is actually quoting a catchword of the philosophy). At least three areas of meaning may be in view for compounds formed with ἐθελο-(BDF para. 118[2], who regard this as modelled after φιλο-, consider the first element governs the second, θρησκεία): (a) voluntariness, e.g. “voluntary servitude” (ἐθελοδουλεία; MM, 181, think ἐθελοθρησκία is a Pauline coinage on the analogy of this word); (b) interest, including delight or endeavor, e.g. “aiming at fashion” (ἐθελάστειος); and (c) pretense, as in “would-be philosopher” (ἐθελοφιλόσοφος, so Francis, *Conflict*, 181). In all cases the separate nuances point to the action of the will in different circumstances (hence BDF’s point about the first element of the compound governing the second, para. 118[2]). If this term, along with the other two, was used by Paul’s opponents, then it presumably meant that they had freely chosen the cult in which they participated. It corresponds to θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων of verse 18 which we have rendered the “worship which the angels perform” (see above 142, 143). Here the term ἐθελοθρησκία does not specify that it is worship performed by men (as Lohse, 119, and Martin, NCB, 94, suggested in their criticism of Francis, *Conflict*, 176–81), only that it is a freely chosen worship. If Paul did not coin the word but took it over from the “philosophy” then it is “a sarcastic borrowing from his opponents’ language” (W. L. Knox, *St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* [Cambridge: University Press, 1939, 171] cited by Martin, NCB, 98). The apostle regards this worship as freely chosen but wrong!

ταπεινοφροσύνῃ. See above on verse 18 (142) where it is suggested that the term has to do with fasting and other bodily rigors. Ascetic practices such as these were a kind of “humility technique” and regarded as effective for receiving visions of the heavenly mysteries. The false teachers’ reputation for wisdom was acquired in this sphere also.

ἀφειδίᾳ σώματος. The advocates of the “philosophy” described their way of life as “severe (lit. “unsparing,” akin to φείδομαι) treatment of the body” (BAG, 124), an expression that denotes a rigorous and austere way of life particularly with reference to the ascetic activity required by the regulations (cf. 1 Tim 4:3, “who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods”). By means of fasting and abstinence they thought to prepare themselves for divine

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MM J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder, 1930)

fullness and the reception of visions. Yet this too was nothing more than the mere appearance of wisdom (λόγον ... σοφίας).

οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τι. “Without any value whatsoever.” On the basis of the above mentioned explanation this clause is regarded as subordinate to the preceding words and is Paul’s comment. Whether the exponents of the “philosophy” employed the word τιμή (“honor,” “value”) as a slogan or not, the apostle’s assertion that the practice of these false teachers, though having a reputation for wisdom in the sphere of voluntary worship, humility and severe treatment of the body, is of no value whatsoever.

Although many commentators link the words οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τι, “without any value whatsoever,” with what immediately follows πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός, “for the satisfaction of the flesh,” as comprising one clause, this involves several difficulties: the position of οὐκ, “not,” is irregular and we would have expected it to precede ἐστίν, “is”; the meaning of the whole clause, and especially τιμή, is obscure; there is no precedent for ἐν τιμῇ, “with honor,” as a complement of ἐστίν, “is”; nor of τιμή (“honor”) occurring with a following πρὸς (“for”); and none of the attested meanings of τιμή seems to fit the context. Note the attempts of Lightfoot, 204–206, Moule, 108–110, and Lohse, 126, 127, and see Hollenbach’s critique, *NTS* 25 (1978–79) 258, 259.

ἄτινά ἐστίν ... πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός. The following are the most significant attempts to explain the meaning of this clause. Our preference is for the third suggestion:

(1) Many of the early fathers regarded the latter phrase as a further description of the Colossians’ ascetic practices. They equated σὰρξ (“flesh”) with σῶμα (“body”), took it in a positive sense and understood the phrase to mean “legitimate bodily satisfaction.” On this ancient interpretation the false teachers do not indulge the body, that is, they do not show it the respect given by God. They deprive it rather than satisfy it (cf. Delling’s presentation, *TDNT* 6, 133). However, several difficulties with this interpretation ought to be noted: (a) the links with the phrase “severe treatment of the body” (ἀφειδία σώματος) are awkward (so Moule, 109); (b) πλησμονή can hardly be rendered “reasonable wants” or “legitimate bodily satisfaction” in the light of σὰρξ (“flesh,” cf. v 18) which appears to stand in contrast to σῶμα (“body”) in the preceding clause and ought to be understood in Paul’s usual sense of “lower nature,” the old Adam-nature in its rebellion against God (Bruce, 256, and BAG, 673). (c) On this ancient view the apostle’s criticism is much too soft. He is not timidly remarking that the regulations fail because they do not hold the body in sufficient honor. Rather, this legalistic way of life leads only “to the satisfaction of the flesh.”

(2) Lightfoot (204–206, cf. Moule, 108–110), who interpreted the final phrase in conjunction with the preceding words (see above), rendered the Greek of the clause as “yet not really of any value to remedy indulgence of the flesh.” Apart from the difficulties already mentioned about this conjunction of phrases, the rendering of πρὸς as “against,” in the sense of combating, is unusual and does not read as easily as the following view.

(3) The Colossian proponents’ legalistic way of life leads only to the satisfaction of the flesh. πλησμονή (“satisfaction,” “gratification,” BAG, 673, Delling, *TDNT* 6, 131–34), which appears only here in the NT, occurred some twenty-eight times in the LXX. It was frequently used in a good sense to denote “satisfaction,” especially with food and drink, and other types of enjoyment (of satisfaction by nourishment: Exod 16:3, 8; Lev 25:19; 26:5; Ps 77:25; Hag 1:6; of the gifts of God which satisfy: Deut 33:23); but the term also occurred in a bad sense to denote “excess” or “satiety” which led to sin and apostasy from the Lord (Ezek 39:19; Hos 13:6). Probably behind Paul’s use of πλησμονή there is a play on the word “fullness.” The false teachers were concerned

about “fullness of life.” The aim and goal (πρός) of all their efforts—the observance of the strict regulations, the reverence and respect paid to the principalities and powers—was satisfaction. But all that was satisfied was “the flesh” (της σαρκός). Their energetic religious endeavors could not hold the flesh in check. Quite the reverse. These man-made regulations actually pandered to the flesh.

### ***Explanation***

In a paragraph that is polemical in style and filled with allusions to the teaching and catchwords of the philosophy Paul sets out what is, in effect, a charter of Christian freedom. False notions about “fullness,” and the person and work of Christ, which are corrected in Paul’s positive affirmations of chapter 2:8–15, have as their corollary these strange aberrations on the practical side. The apostle’s criticisms are devastating as he trains his guns first on the practices and the false notions lying behind them, then on the false teachers themselves.

The Colossians ought not to be taken to task by the adherents of the “philosophy” over matters of food, drink or holy days. Their stringent regulations of an ascetic nature which follow from the demand for “severe treatment of the body” (v 23) are a shadow of the things that were to come. Christ and his new order are the perfect reality to which these earlier ordinances pointed forward. The rigorous prescriptions of the false teachers have no binding force. The reality has already come and the things of the shadow no longer constitute a norm for judgment.

In writing to Corinth and Rome, where Christians had scruples about food and drink as well as the observance of holy days, Paul introduces the principle of Christian liberty, namely, “the strong” should go out of their way to avoid offending the tender consciences of “the weak” or scrupulous (Rom 14:1–15:13; 1 Cor 8–10). This, however, was not the issue at Colossae: the scrupulous were threatening to impose their rigid principles on the rest of the congregation. Christian liberty needed to be asserted in the light of false attempts to undermine it.

Further, if the Colossians were to fall victims to the false teaching and voluntarily placed themselves under rules and regulations, imposed by the principalities and powers, such as “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not even touch!” this would be to go back into slavery again, a servitude to the very principalities of the universe from which they had been freed when they died with Christ in his death. The matters covered by the taboos were perishable objects of the material world, destined to pass away when used. These taboos were merely human inventions, “the commandments and doctrines of men,” which frustrated the pure teaching of God with its liberating message. Although the prohibitions (of which v 21 contains illustrations) carry a reputation for wisdom in the spheres of voluntary worship, humility and severe treatment of the body, they were without any value whatsoever.

Concerning the false teachers the apostle’s words are just as severe. Those who laid claim to exalted heavenly experiences or visions as a prelude to fresh divine revelations were puffed up. They may have claimed that they were directed by the mind; but it was a mind of flesh. Theirs was the attitude and outlook which were characteristic of the old nature, dominated by the flesh. If they boasted of their acquaintance with divine “fullness” and knowledge, then all they were full of was their own pride! Worst of all those who took the Christians at Colossae to task, using their own private religious experiences as the basis of their authority, were in fact rejecting Christ as their head, the one who is the source of life and nourishment by which his body lives, and the source of unity through which it becomes an organic whole. The advocates of the false teaching face the most serious of condemnations: they are severed from the very one who is the source of life and unity. The application to the Colossians is plain: let them not be drawn off or enticed away by the appeal of the false teaching.

