

# Colossians

## Polemic Against Error [2:8-23]

### Pre-Gnostic Error: Deity of Christ [2:8-10]

- Be careful that no one takes you captive through empty, deceitful philosophy,   
Βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης
  - The phrase “See to it that” is from βλέπω (blepō) which means “see”, “look at”, or “observe”.
  - Here this word is used in the sense of “beware” or “be careful”.
  - The phrase “takes ... captive” is from συλαγωγέω (sulagōgeō) which means “make a captive of”.
  - This word describes carrying someone away as a spoil of war.
  - The word “philosophy” is from φιλοσοφία (philosophia) which means “love of wisdom” or “philosophy”.
  - This is the only occurrence of this word in the N.T.
  - This is significant given the emphasis the Greeks put on their philosophers [Acts 17:18].
  - This is not a reference to philosophy in general, but to worldly, religious philosophy.
  - All theories about God and the world and the meaning of human life was called ‘philosophy’ at that time, not only in the pagan schools but also in the Jewish schools of the Greek cities.
  - The phrase “empty deception” is κενῆς ἀπάτης (kenēs apatēs) which means “empty deceit”.
  - This phrase is used here as a qualifier for the type of philosophy Paul is referring to.
- in accordance with the tradition of men and the fundamental principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.  
κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν·
  - The phrase “according to” appears 3 times in this verse and is the preposition κατὰ (kata) meaning “in conformity with” or “in accordance with”.
  - The word “tradition” is from παράδοσις (paradosis) which means “that which has been handed down”.
  - This can be good [1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6].
  - Here this is the tradition of men and is not good [Mark 7:3-13; Gal 1:14].
  - The phrase “elementary principles” is from στοιχεῖον (stoicheion) which means “elements”.
  - Here this refers to fundamental principles.
  - The word “world” is from κόσμος (kosmos) which means “world”, “realm”, or “arrangement”.
  - Here this refers to Satan’s world system.
- For in Him all the fullness of Deity continually dwells in bodily form,   
ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς,
  - The phrase “all the fullness” is πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα (pan to plērōma) which is the exact same phrase we saw in Col 1:19.
  - The word πλήρωμα (plērōma) refers to a quantity of something with an emphasis on completeness.
  - The idea expressed here is that of totality.
  - The word “Deity” is from θεότης (theotēs) which means “deity” or “divinity”.
  - This refers to being God in all aspects – character, essence, nature, etc.
  - The word “dwells” is from κατοικέω (katoikeō) which means “dwell”, “inhabit”, or “reside”.

- This is a present tense verb meaning that it is continually true.
- The phrase “in bodily form” is σωματικῶς (sōmatikōs) which means “bodily” or “corporeally”.
- This word would include both the σῶμα bodies of Jesus’ birth and resurrection [1 Cor 15:44].
- and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head of every ruler and authority; καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας.
  - The phrase “made complete” is from πληρῶω (plēroō) which means “fill up” or “complete”.
  - This is a perfect tense describing a past completed action with present ongoing results.
  - We saw πληρῶω (plēroō) in Col 1:9, but there it was describing spiritual growth.
  - Here this participle is describing the completeness that is the result of our position in Christ.
  - This is a passive participle meaning that God brings this completeness about.
  - It is related to the “fullness” of v. 9 in that Christ is able to make us complete because He is God.
  - The word “head” is κεφαλὴ (kephalē) which can refer to a part of the body or high status.
  - Here this word clearly refers to the supremely high status that Jesus Christ has.
  - The phrase “over all rule” is πάσης ἀρχῆς (pasēs archēs) which means “of every ruler”.
  - This places Jesus Christ higher than any ruler, earthly or heavenly.

### **Legalism Error: Reality in Christ [2:11-17]**

- and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, Ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετιμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ
  - The phrase “in Him” is repeated here to once again emphasize the believer’s position in Christ.
  - Understanding positional truth and all that goes with it helps orient the believer to grace.
  - The word “circumcised” is from περιτέμνω (peritemnō) which literally means “cut off around”.
  - In the N.T. this word is most often used to refer to the physical act of circumcision [Lk 1:59; 2:21].
  - Here, however, a different kind of circumcision is clearly in view.
  - This is a circumcision that is not handmade (ἀχειροποίητος, acheiropoiētos) [Mark 14:58].
- in the disarming of the fleshly body by the circumcision of Christ; ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,
  - The word “removal” is from ἀπέκδυσις (apekdusis) which means “stripping off” of garments.
  - This is a hapax legomenon, but is closely related to ἀπεκδύομαι (apekduomai) [Col 2:15; 3:9].
  - The phrase “the body of the flesh” is the verbose literal translation of τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός (tou sōmatos tēs sarkos).
  - A better translation is “the fleshly body”.
  - The phrase “by the circumcision of Christ” tells us that Christ Himself facilitated the “cutting off” of the power of our sinful flesh through His sacrificial death on the Cross.
  - This verse makes it clear that this “circumcision” occurs only for those who are “in Him” (identified with Christ) which takes place through the baptism of the Holy Spirit when we place our faith in Christ.
- having been buried together with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up together with Him συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε
  - The word “buried” is from συνθάπτω (sunthaptō) which comes from θάπτω (thaptō) meaning “bury”.

- The συν (sun) prefix means “together with”.
- “Together with Him” is language of identification.
- The phrase “in baptism” tells us that we have been identified with Christ’s burial thru Spirit baptism.
- The phrase “in which” refers back to “in baptism”.
- The verb “raised up with” is from συνεγείρω (sunegeirō) and refers to Christ’s resurrection.
- The συν (sun) prefix again means “together with”.
- The word for “Him” (αὐτῷ, autō) appears only once, but it applies to both “buried” and “raised”.
- This verse, then, tells us that we have been identified with Christ’s burial and resurrection through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- through faith in the operating power of God, who raised Him from the dead.  
διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.
  - Our identification with Christ (as well as His burial and resurrection) comes through faith.
  - No work of ours can accomplish this [Eph 2:8-9].
  - The word “working” is from ἐνέργεια (energeia) which we saw in v. 1:29 to mean “operating power”.
  - We know salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ [John 3:16], but that faith is implicitly in the operating power which God demonstrated at the Cross and the resurrection.
  - God (θεός, theos) here is a reference to God the Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
  - In our identification with Christ, we also have been raised from being spiritually dead to a new life.
- When you were spiritually dead, living in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,  
καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν,
  - The word “dead” is from νεκρός (nekros) which means “dead” – physically or spiritually.
  - This is the same word used of Christ’s resurrection in the previous verse.
  - In that verse νεκρός (nekros) was used regarding Jesus’ physical death [John 19:30].
  - Here, this word is describing the state of spiritual death that all of us are born into [Psalm 51:5].
  - The word “in” (ἐν, en) is included in some Greek manuscripts and not in others.
  - The similar statement Paul made in Eph 2:1 does not have the Greek word for “in”.
  - However, the dative case of the phrases that follow can mean “in” implicitly.
  - The NASB has a note saying this could be translated “by reason of”, but that is not biblical.
  - We are all brought into this world spiritually dead because we all died in Adam [1 Cor 15:22].
  - As the corporate head of the entire race, when Adam sinned, we all sinned with him.
  - As mentioned, the phrases “your transgressions” and “the uncircumcision” are in the dative.
  - The dative case is locative and, in this case, describes the place where unbelievers reside.
  - The word “transgressions” is from παράπτωμα (paraptōma) meaning “a violation of standards”.
  - The standard which has been violated here is God’s standard of righteousness.
  - The phrase “the uncircumcision of your flesh” refers to the unbridled sin nature of the unbeliever which has not been disarmed by the circumcision of Christ as described in verse 11.

- He made you alive together with Him, having graciously forgiven us all our transgressions, συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα.
  - The phrase “He made you alive together with” is from συζωοποιέω (suzōpoieō).
  - The same power of God that raised Christ from physical death has raised us from spiritual death.
  - Again, the “together with Him” language speaks of identification with Christ.
  - We were dead spiritually, but in our position in Christ we have been made alive just as He is.
  - The phrase “having forgiven” is from χαρίζομαι (charizomai) which means “forgive” or “pardon”.
  - The more commonly used word for “forgive” is ἀφίημι (aphiēmi).
  - The word ἀφίημι (aphiēmi) emphasizes the legal aspects of forgiveness (a dismissal of charges) while χαρίζομαι (charizomai) emphasizes grace.
  - The phrase “all our transgressions” makes it clear that all transgressions – past, present and future – have been forgiven for those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.
- having blotted out the certificate of debt consisting of ordinances against us, ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ’ ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν
  - The phrase “having canceled out” is from ἐξαλείφω (exaleiphō) which means “wipe out” or “erase”.
  - The idea of this word is to remove something so as to leave behind no trace [Rev 3:5; 7:17; 21:4].
  - The phrase “the certificate of debt” is χειρόγραφον (cheirographon) which is a “record of debts”.
  - This is an account of all of the ways we fall short of God’s standard of righteousness.
  - The word “decrees” is from δόγμα (dogma) which means “ordinance”, “command”, or “decree”.
  - Here this is a reference to the ordinances of the Mosaic Law [Eph 2:15].
  - The phrase “against us” describes how the ordinances of the Law work to expose our shortcomings with the purpose of leading us to Christ [Gal 3:24].
- which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross. ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ.
  - The word “which” is a neuter pronoun referring back to the certificate of debt.
  - The two occurrences of the word “it” here refer back to the certificate of debt as well.
  - The word “hostile” is ὑπεναντίον (hupenantion) which means “opposed to” or “hostile”.
  - The record of our debts is hostile to us in the sense that it convicts us of our guilt before God.
  - The word “taken” is from αἶρω (airō) which means “take up” or “pick up”.
  - The verb is a perfect meaning that it is a past completed action with present ongoing results.
  - The phrase “having nailed” is from προσηλώω (proselōō) which means “fasten” or “nail”.
  - This is possibly an allusion to the “charge” against Christ being nailed to the Cross [Matt 27:37].
- When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He disgraced them in public, ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ
  - The phrase “When He had disarmed” is a participle of ἀπεκδύομαι (apekduomai) which means “strip off” or “disarm” and is a cognate form of the word ἀπέκδυσις (apekduasis) we saw in verse 11.
  - The phrase “the rulers and authorities” is just the plural form of the phrase we saw in verse 10 which says, “He is the head of every ruler and authority.”
  - This phrase, however, specifically refers to heavenly rulers and authorities.

- It makes no sense for Christ to disarm holy angels, so this is a reference to fallen angels and demons.
- The phrase “He made a...display of” is from δειγματίζω (deigmatizō) which means “make an example of” or “disgrace”.
- having triumphed over them through the Cross.  
θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.
  - The phrase “having triumphed over” is a participle of θριαμβεύω (thriambeuō) which means “lead in triumph” or “triumph over” [2 Cor 2:14].
  - The picture here is that these rulers and authorities were led around as a public display of Christ’s victory over them.
  - The phrase “through Him” is ἐν αὐτῷ (en autō).
  - While this could be a reference to Christ as the NASB has here, the nearest antecedent is “the Cross” (τῷ σταυρῷ, tō staurō) from the end of verse 14.
  - In addition, the more natural reading is that Christ is the subject of all of the participles in this verse, so this would not be a reference to Christ here.
  - Therefore, the best translation is to take this as a reference to the Cross.
- Therefore do not let anyone judge you in regard to eating and drinking  
Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει
  - The word “Therefore” introduces the conclusion to this passage and relates back to everything in verses 11-15, including the circumcision of the flesh, the gracious forgiveness of our transgressions, the blotting out of our debt, etc.
  - The phrase “no one is to act as your judge” is literally “do not let anyone judge you”.
  - This is in the form of a third person imperative which the believer is to obey.
  - The word “food” is from βρώσις (brōsis) which means “eating”.
  - The word “drink” is from πόσις (posis) which means “drinking”.
- or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day —  
ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων·
  - The word “festival” is from ἑορτή (heortē) which means “celebration” or “festival”.
  - This is a reference to the Jewish feasts – Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, etc.
  - The phrase “new moon” is from νεομηνία (neomēnia) which means “new moon” or “first of the month”.
  - This is a specific reference to the new moon celebration [Psalm 81:1-4].
  - By citing the festivals, new moon and Sabbath, Paul is referring to all of the various Jewish rituals [1 Chr 23:30-32; 2 Chr 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Neh 10:33; Hos 2:11].
- things which are a *mere* shadow of what was to come; but the reality is Christ.  
ἃ ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.
  - The word “shadow” is σκιά (skia) which means “shade” or “shadow”.
  - Here it is used to mean that which is a mere representation of something that is real [Heb 8:5].
  - The phrase “of what is to come” is τῶν μελλόντων (tōn mellontōn) which means “of the about to” or, as we say in Texas, “of the fixin’ to”.
  - This is a reference to the First Advent of Christ.
  - The phrase “the substance belongs to Christ” is literally “the body of Christ”.
  - This is in contrast with the shadow – the body is the reality represented by the shadow.

## Mysticism Error: Headship of Christ [2:18-19]

- Do not let anyone rob you of your reward by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels,  
μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύτω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων
  - The phrase “Let...keep defrauding...of your prize” is from καταβραβεύω (katabrabeuō) which means “decide against” or “rob of a prize”.
  - As with the judging of others in v. 16, this is a third person imperative which the believer is to obey.
  - The prize in view here would be a spiritual reward.
  - The word “self-abasement” is ταπεινοφροσύνη (tapeinophrosunē) which means “humility”, but is used here in the sense of self humiliation.
  - The word “worship” is θρησκεία (thrēskeia) which means “cultic devotion”, but can also be used of “religion” [Acts 26:5; Jas 1:26-27].
  - The word “angels” is a reference to the spirit beings created by God to populate the heavens.
- going on and on about what he has supposedly seen, conceited without any basis by his fleshly mind,  
ὁ ἐόρακεν ἐμβατεύων, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,
  - The phrase “taking his stand on” is from ἐμβατεύω (embateuō) which means “investigate closely” or “go into detail about”.
  - The usage here suggests someone who is droning on endlessly about something that he deems to be important.
  - The phrase “visions he has seen” is from ὄραω (horaō) which means “see”, “notice” or “witness”.
  - The tone of this verse indicates that the person has not really seen what he says he has.
  - The word “inflated” is from φυσιώω (phusioō) which means “puff up” or “make arrogant” [1 Cor 4:18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4].
  - The phrase “without cause” is εἰκῆ (eikē) which means “in vain”, “without purpose” or “for no reason” [Rom 13:4; 1 Cor 15:2; Gal 3:4; 4:11].
  - The phrase “by his fleshly mind” tells us that this person is under the control of his sin nature which is the source of his arrogance.
- and not focusing on the Head, from whom the entire body, being supported and knit together by the ligaments and tendons, grows spiritually with a spiritual growth which is from God.  
καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὖξει τὴν αὖξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ.
  - The phrase “holding fast to” is from κρατέω (krateō) which means “hold”, “seize” or “adhere to” [2 Thess 2:15; Heb 4:14; 6:18; Rev 3:11].
  - The phrase “the head” is a reference to Christ, the head of the Church.
  - The phrase “from whom the entire body” emphasizes that all believers (including pastors) must rely upon Christ in order to grow spiritually.
  - The words “grows” and “growth” are from the same root (αὐξάνω, auxanō) which is describing spiritual growth [Eph 2:21; 4:15; 2 Pet 3:18].
  - The phrase “which is from God” is literally “of God” and tells us that our spiritual growth can only come from God.

- The phrase “being supplied” is from ἐπιχορηγέω (epichorēgeō) which means “supply”, “support” or “furnish”.
- The root word here refers to a choreographer who provided support for the ensemble he oversaw and the word came to mean “provide for”, but the body analogy prefers “supported”.
- The phrase “held together” is from συμβιβάζω (sumbibazō) which means “unite” or “knit together”.
- In Col 2:2 we translated this “united”, but here the body analogy prefers “knit together”.
- The words “joints” and “ligaments” actually describe connective tissue and would be better translated “ligaments” and “tendons”.

### **Asceticism Error: Freedom in Christ [2:20-23]**

- Since you have died with Christ to the fundamental principles of the world,  
Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου,  
  - The opening “If” of this verse is Εἰ (Ei) plus the indicative of ἀποθνήσκω (apothnēskō) which is a first class conditional meaning “Since”.
  - The phrase “you have died” is an aorist tense of ἀποθνήσκω (apothnēskō) describing our once-and-for-all-time identification with Christ’s death that took place at the moment of our salvation.
  - The phrase “elementary principles” is from στοιχεῖον (stoicheion) which we saw in Col 2:8 to mean “fundamental principles”.
  - The word “world” is from κόσμος (kosmos) which means “world”, “realm”, or “arrangement”.
  - Here this refers to Satan’s world system.
- why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to ordinances, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not even touch!”  
τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε; μὴ ἅψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης,  
  - The phrase “in the world” is ἐν κόσμῳ (en kosmō) which is intended to be in direct contrast with our life in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ, en Christō).
  - The phrase “do you submit yourself to decrees” is from δογματίζω (dogmatizō) which means “put under obligation by means of ordinances”.
  - The word “handle” is from ἅπτω (haptō) which means “take hold of”, “hold”, or “make contact with”.
  - Given that we have another word for “touch” in this verse, “handle” is a pretty good translation.
  - The word “touch” is from θιγγάνω (thigganō) which simply means “touch”.
  - It is given as a stricter rule than “Do not handle”.
- (which all *refer to* things destined to be broken down by being consumed)  
ἃ ἐστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει,  
  - The word “which” is a plural, neuter pronoun referring back to the prohibitions in verse 21.
  - The NASB makes this the beginning of a parenthetical clause which fits with the Greek.
  - The phrase “destined to perish” is εἰς φθορὰν (eis phthoran) which means “to destruction”.
  - The picture here is of organic matter which will be broken down [1 Cor 15:42, 50].
  - The phrase “with use” is from ἀπόχρησις (apochrēsis) which means “consuming”.
  - This word is an instrumental dative here and means “by being consumed”.

- — in conformity with the commandments and teachings of men?  
κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων,
  - The NASB has used a dash here to indicate that this refers back to an earlier section of the text.
  - This part of verse 22 continues Paul’s thoughts on submission to the “Do not” ordinances [vv. 20-21].
  - The phrase “in accordance with” is the preposition κατὰ (kata) which means “according to”, “in accordance with” or “in conformity with”.
  - The idea is agreement with something.
  - The word “commandments” is from ἔνταλμα (entalma) which means “official commandment”.
  - The word “teachings” is from διδασκαλία (didaskalia) which means “teaching” or “instruction”.
  - The “teachings” encompass all that was taught whereas the “commandments” are the specific orders given, presumably with consequences.
  - The phrase “of men” refers to people, not just males.
  - The contrast here is between that which comes from God and that which comes from men.
- These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom  
ἅτινά ἐστιν λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας
  - The phrase “These are matters” is a reference to the commandments and teachings of men.
  - This would also include the fundamental principles of the world [Col 2:20].
  - The word “appearance” is from λόγος (logos) which means “word”, “statement”, “report”, etc.
  - In this context, the idea is “a report” concerning the supposed wisdom of these matters.
- in would-be religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body,  
ἐν ἐθελοθησκία καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνη [καὶ] ἀφειδία σώματος,
  - The phrase “self-made religion” is from ἐθελοθησκία (ethelothrēskia) which means “do-it-yourself religion” or “self-proclaimed religion”.
  - The idea here is “would-be religion”.
  - The word “self-abasement” is ταπεινοφροσύνη (tapeinophrosunē) which means “humility”, but as in v. 18 this has the sense of self humiliation here.
  - The phrase “severe treatment” is from ἀφειδία (apheidia) which means “spare nothing”.
  - Here it means to hold nothing back in harsh treatment of the body.
- which is of no value in fighting against fleshly gratification.  
οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός.
  - The phrase “but are of no value” is literally “which is not in value”.
  - A better translation is “which is of no value” and is a reference back to the self-abasement, etc.
  - The word “against” is πρὸς (pros) which means “to” or “toward”, but can mean “against” [1 Cor 6:1; Eph 6:12; Col 3:13].
  - The idea here is to “fight against”.
  - The word “indulgence” is from πλησμονή (plēsmonē) which means “satisfaction” or “gratification”.