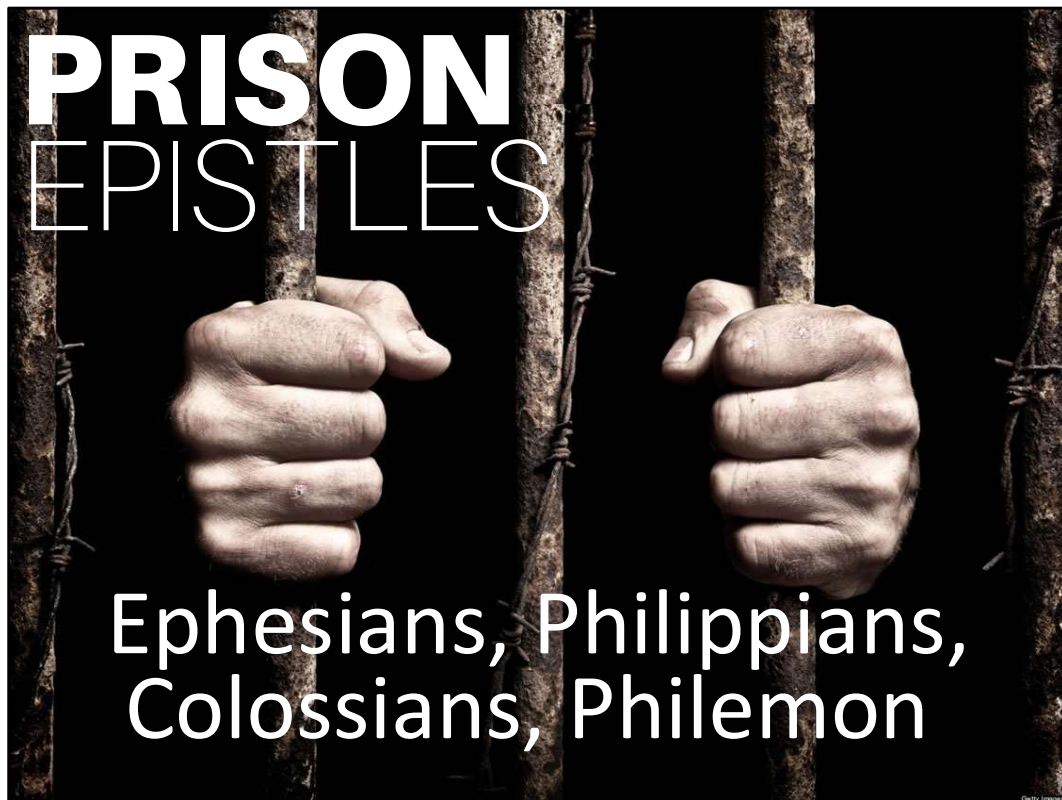
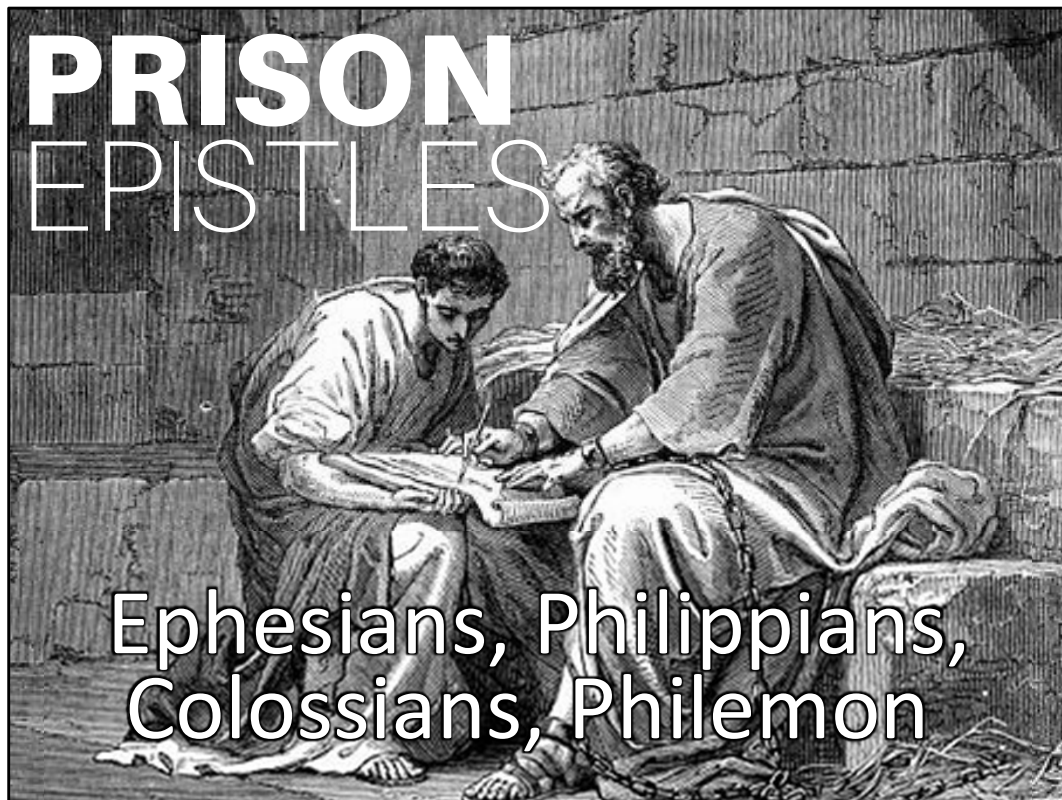


Bishop Lightfoot noted that “Without doubt Colossae was the least important city to which any epistle of St. Paul is addressed.” While it had been “a great city of Phrygia” it was in the twilight of its influence and importance when Paul wrote to Philemon and Apphia’s house-church there. But this 2,000 year-old letter, which presents Christ as the architect and sustainer of the universe and the reconciler of all things, both earthly and heavenly, provides answers to today’s most difficult questions, so this letter to a small flock in a declining city has become perhaps the most contemporary book in the New Testament.

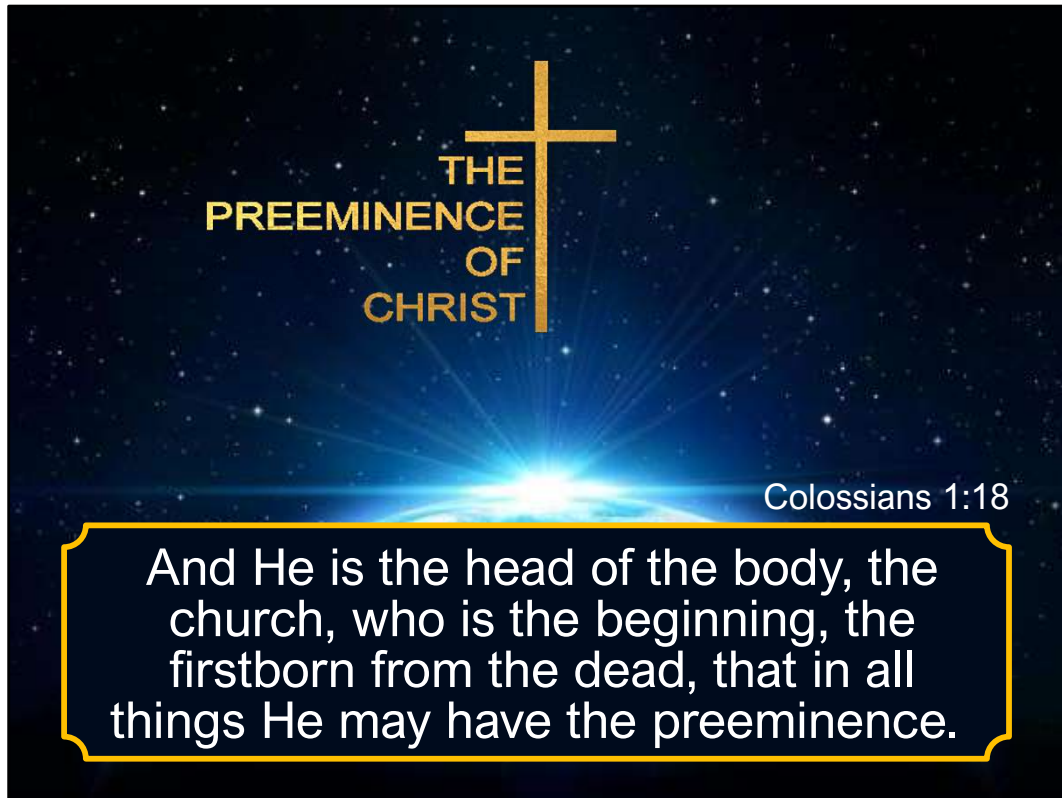


The apostle Paul wrote four of the 27 New Testament letters during his time under house arrest in Rome between approximately 60—62 AD. Each letter — Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon — is addressed to a specific church or individual. While each epistle addresses the specific needs of first-century Christians, each message is still relevant today. For example, there are many parallels between Ephesians and Colossians, but the emphasis in Ephesians is on the church, the body of Christ, but the emphasis in Colossians is on Christ, the Head of the body.



Colossian evangelist Epaphras had visited Paul in Rome with concerning news about the Colossian ekklesia. In the five years of its existence, false teaching and heresy had taken root, which devalued Jesus Christ as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. Paul wrote to the Colossians to refute this heresy and encourage believers to continue in their faith grounded in Christ alone.

In this letter, Paul uses the vocabulary of the false teachers, but corrects their definitions to their true Christian meanings. As we study Colossians, we will find words such as fullness, perfect, and complete, all of which were used by the gnostic heretics. He also wrote about wisdom, which was a key term in the gnostic vocabulary; and he had a great deal to say about angels and spirit powers too. Tychicus and Onesimus carried Paul's letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and Philemon to their destinations, while Epaphroditus delivered the letter to Philippi.



The theme of Colossians is that Jesus Christ is preeminent. The gospel message heralds the supremacy, headship, and the sole sufficiency of Christ to the church, which is His body. This little book shows Paul's "full-length portrait of Christ." There is no need to worry about angelic mediators or spiritual emanations. God has sent His Son to die for us! Every person who believes on Jesus Christ is saved and is a part of His body, the church, of which He is the Head. Believers are united to Christ in a wonderful living relationship! Furthermore, nothing need be added to this relationship, because each believer is "complete in him." All of God's fullness dwells in Christ, and each believer shares that fullness!

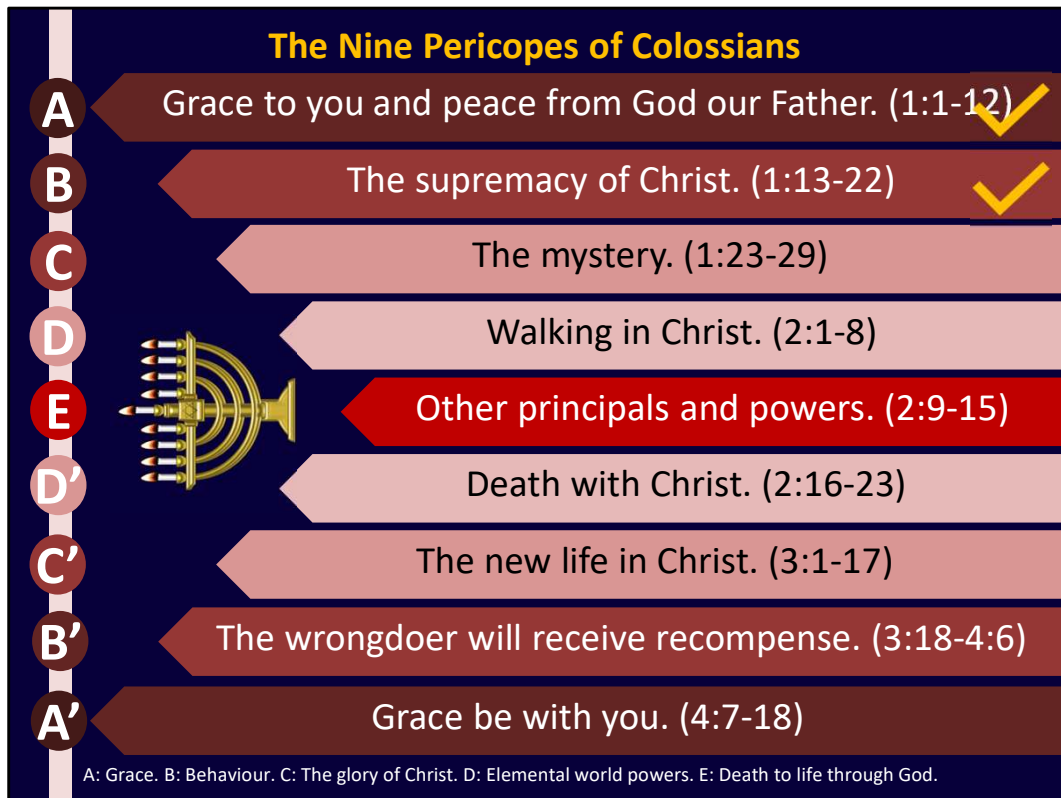
Charles Wesley wrote from it: *Thou, O Christ, art all I want, More than all in Thee I find.*

**[CLICK]** The Key verse is Colossians 1:18 "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

<b>Outline</b>	
<p><b>Doctrine: Christ's Preeminence Declared</b> (Colossians 1)</p>	<p>A. In the gospel message—1:1-12            B. In redemption—1:13-14            C. In creation—1:15-17            D. In the church—1:18-23            E. In Paul's ministry—1:24-29</p>
<p><b>Danger: Christ's Preeminence Defended</b> (Colossians 2)</p>	<p>A. Beware of empty philosophies—(2:1-10)            B. Beware of religious legalism (2:11-17)            C. Beware of man-made disciplines (1:18-23)</p>
<p><b>Duty: Christ's Preeminence Demonstrated</b> (Colossians 3-4)</p>	<p>A. In person purity—3:1-11            B. In Christian fellowship—13:12-17            C. In the home—3:18-21            D. In daily work—3:22-4:1            E. In Christian witness—4:2-6            F. In Christian service—4:7-18</p>

This relatively brief letter has a three-fold message:

- In the first doctrinal portion, Paul declares Christ's preeminence. **[CLICK]** Paul did not begin by attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. Chapter 1 exalts Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in five areas: the gospel message, redemption, creation, the church, and Paul's own ministry.
- **[CLICK]** He then addresses the danger that has arisen in Colossae and defends Christ's preeminence. **[CLICK]** Paul attacks the heretics on their own ground, exposing the false origin of their teachings and showing how their teachings contradict everything Paul taught about Jesus Christ. The believer who masters this chapter is not likely to be led astray by some alluring and enticing "new-and-improved brand of Christianity."
- **[CLICK]** Finally, Chapters 3 and 4 applies the preeminence of Christ to the daily affairs of life. **[CLICK]** The greatest antidote to false teaching is a godly life, but what we believe determines how we behave. Wrong doctrine **always** leads to wrong living, so right doctrine should lead to right living.



The letter consists of nine pericopes, or thought bubbles, which form a balanced chiasm, or menorah literary structure.

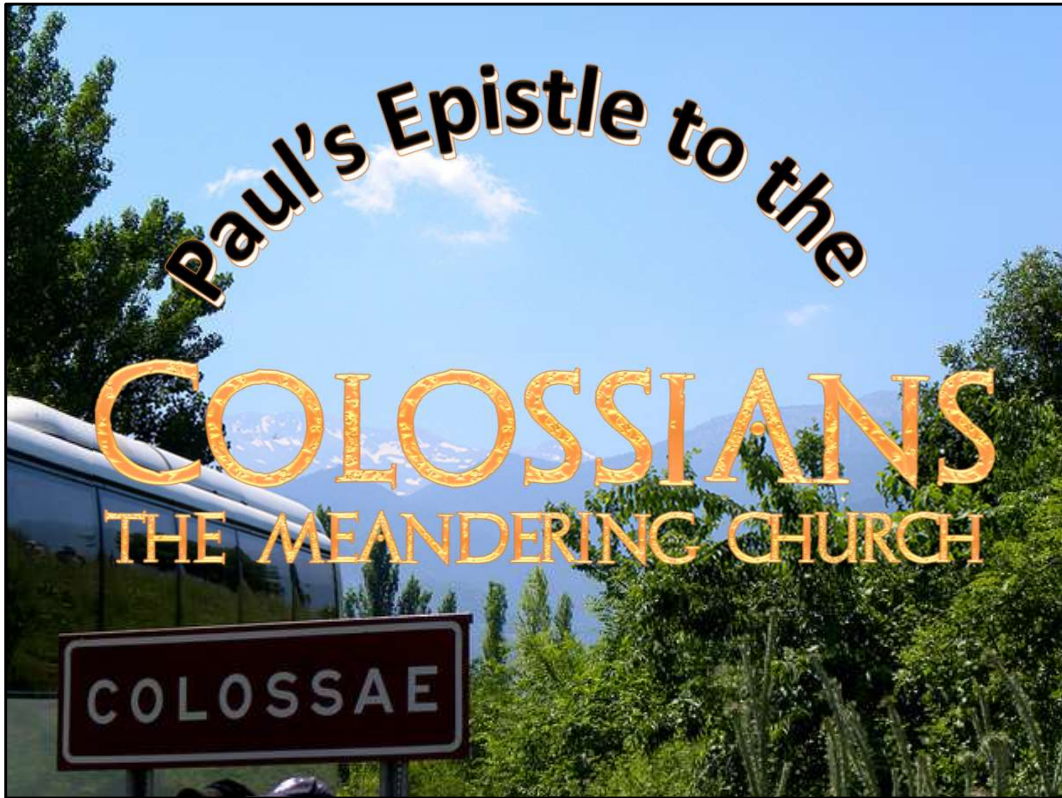
## The Nine Pericopes of Colossians

Former half	Relation	Latter half
<b>Salutation</b> (1:1-12) grace to you and peace from God our Father. (1:2)	<b>Grace</b>	<b>Final greetings</b> (4:7-18) Grace be with you. (4:18)
<b>The supremacy of Christ</b> (1:13-22) And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds (1:21)	<b>Human behaviour</b>	<b>Exhortations</b> (3:18-4:6) For the wrongdoer will receive recompense for the wrong he committed, and there is no partiality. (3:25)
<b>The mystery</b> (1:23-29) to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. (1:27)	<b>The glory of Christ is open to Gentiles</b>	<b>The new life in Christ</b> (3:1-17) When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. (3:4)
<b>Walking in Christ</b> (2:1-8) See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. (2:8)	<b>The elemental powers of the world</b>	<b>Death with Christ</b> (2:16-23) If you died with Christ to the elemental powers of the world, why do you submit to regulations as if you were still living in the world? (2:20)
<b>Christ is Preeminent over all Principalities and Powers</b> (2:9-15) For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (2:9-10)		

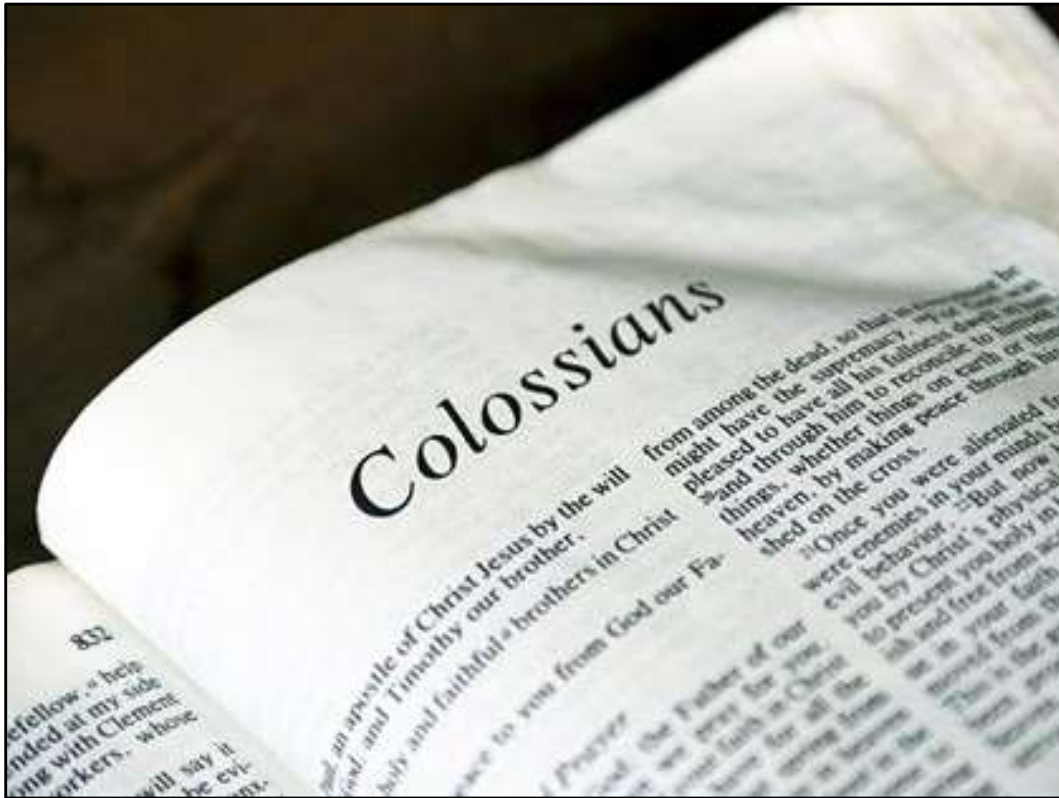
This is another way to show the chiasmic structure. It adds a little bit more information by selecting the most relevant verse(s) from the pericope to summarise its main thought. As you can see, both salutation and final greetings focus on grace, a concept near and dear to Paul who knew that he could only be saved by God's grace.

Because Colossians is written to remind the local believers what they were initially taught about Christ's preeminence, and because the Colossian heresy apparently attacks that very concept, the centrepiece of the book confirms that Christ is preeminent over all principalities and powers.



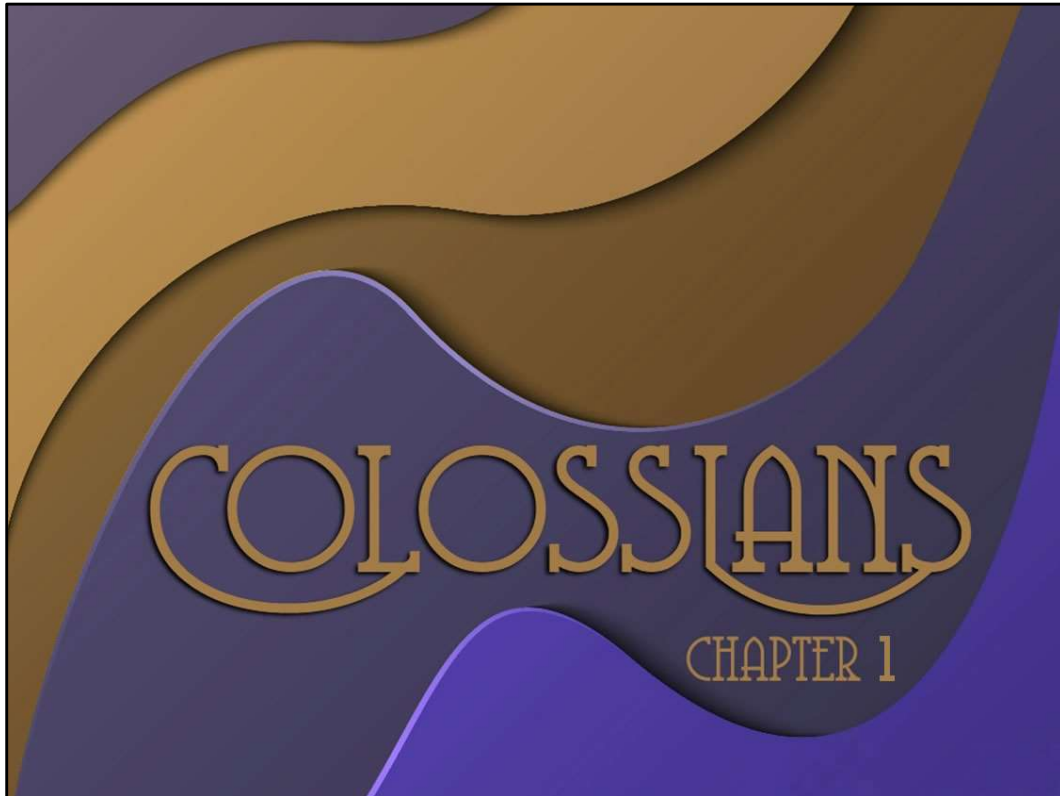


Paul addresses the meandering Colossian ekklesia

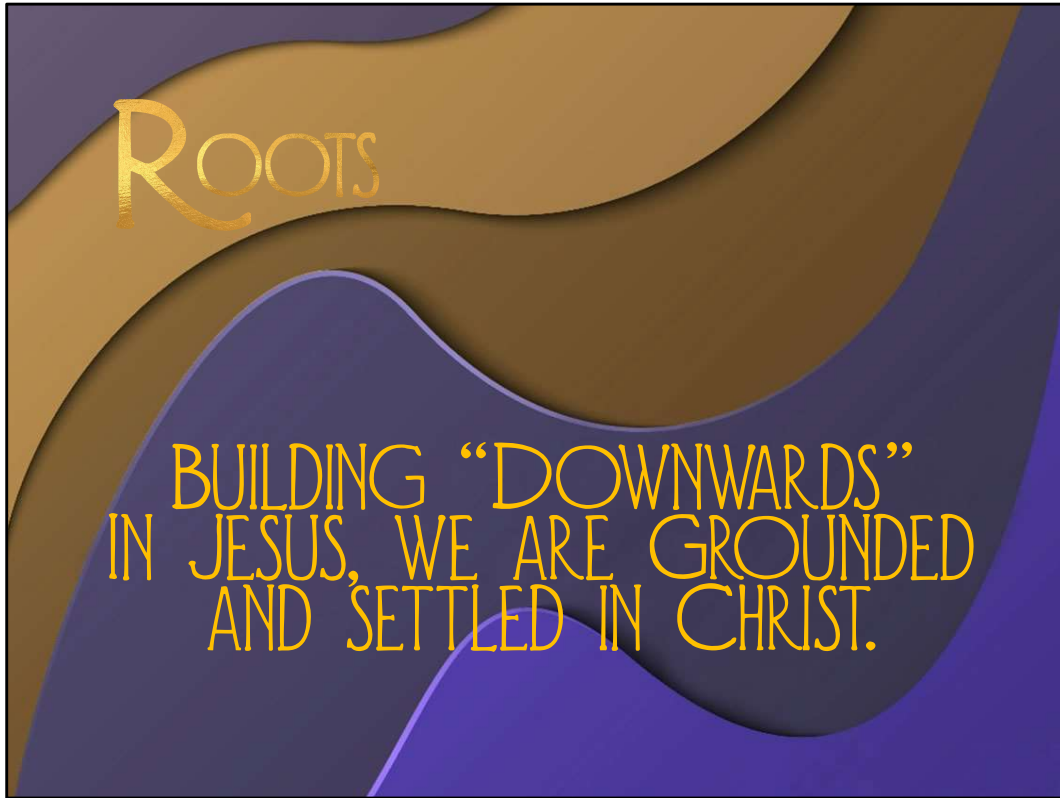


His message is that Christ is preeminent. Colossians 1:18 will state “He is the head (the lifesource and leader) of the body, the church, and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.” So what is pre-eminence? Preeminence is:

- The quality of being superior
- It's a high status or distinction given to anything considered to be the best at something
- To be in front of or have priority over
- To be foremost in time, place, order or importance
- To Hold first place in Rank and Influence.



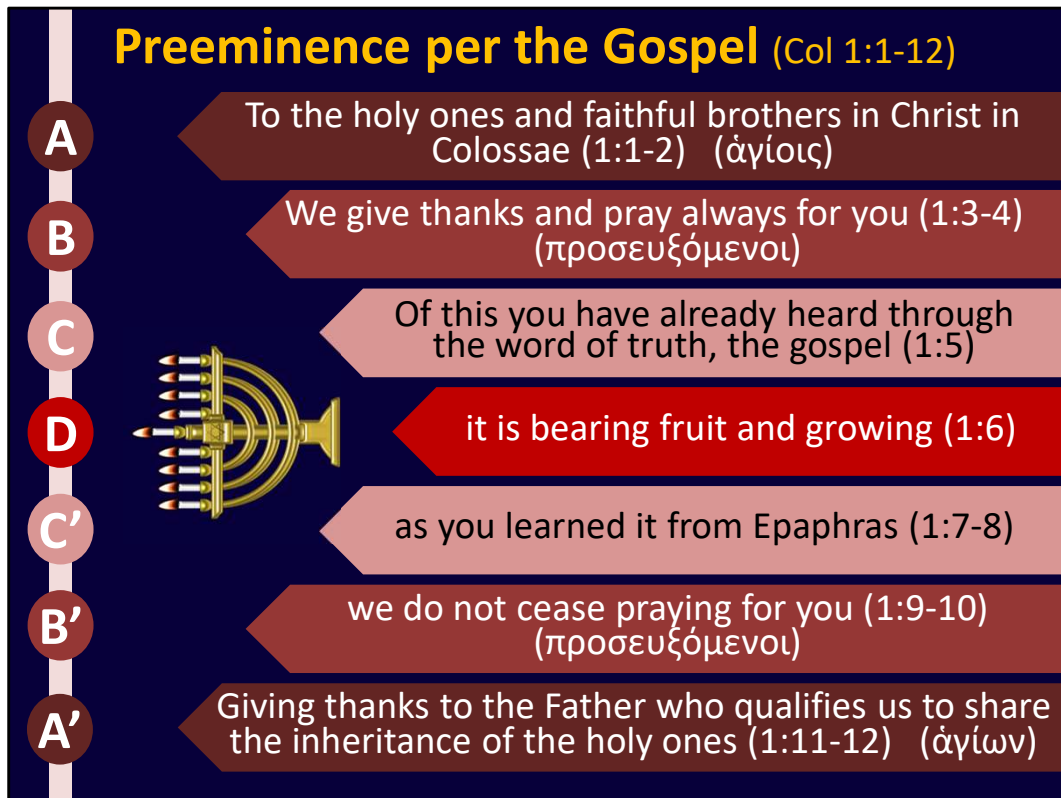
Chapter 1 declares the preeminence of Christ. Colossians was written because a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call gnosticism, threatened the purity and peace of the Colossian assembly. Gnosticism comes from the Greek word gnosis (KNOW-sis), which means “to know.” The gnostics considered themselves “in the know” when it came to the deep things of God. They considered themselves the “spiritual aristocracy” in the church and promised people such a close union with God that they would achieve “spiritual perfection” and spiritual fullness when they entered into the prescribed teachings and ceremonies. There was also a “full knowledge,” a spiritual depth, that only the initiated could enjoy. This “wisdom” would release them from earthly things and put them in touch with heavenly things. Of course, all of this teaching was simply man-made philosophy. Paul will counter this by declaring that Jesus Christ settled the sin question in His work on the Cross. All that the believer needs is Jesus! He alone is Preeminent!



Chapter One is about our ROOTS in Christ. By Building "Downwards" In Jesus, we are Grounded and settled in Christ. (1:23)

Building downwards speaks about digging foundations, going deeper, allowing the roots of our lives to be settled in Christ.

Note that Paul builds this foundation through prayer. Paul and Jesus both model prayer for us. Both gave thanks to the Father for all He has done for us.



The salutation declares Christ's preeminence in the Gospel message, which the Colossians had heard declared truthfully by Epaphras. Paul didn't start his letter by directly attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. Instead, he began by exalting Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence. The people to whom Paul was writing had become Christians because of the gospel message brought to them by Epaphras, and Paul reminded them of the foundation of their faith.

## The supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:13-23)

A

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us to the kingdom of the Son (1:13-14)

B

By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are in earth (1:15-16)

C



He is the head of the body, the church (1:17-18)

B'

to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλάχαι) all things to Himself, whether things on earth or in heaven (1:19-20)

A'

yet He has now reconciled (ἀποκαταλλάχαι) in his fleshly body through his death (1:21-22)

A: Forgiveness. B: Everything in heaven and earth. C: The Head of the church.

The false teachers in Colossae didn't deny the importance of Jesus Christ, they simply dethroned Him, giving Him prominence but not preeminence. In their philosophy, Jesus Christ was but one of many "emanations" through which people could reach God. Paul uses his second pericope to declare the supremacy of Christ.



<sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,  
<sup>14</sup> in whom we have **redemption** through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

**He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.**

The Messiah came in the flesh and through His blood on the Cross our sins have been redeemed, paid for and forgiven once and for all.



**All things were created through Him and for Him.**

**[CLICK] <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.**

“...consist” means to be held together. Jesus Christ holds everything in existence together. He is responsible for the four forces in nature: gravity which keeps physical things in their place; electromagnetic force which binds radio and light waves and chemical bonds of molecules; and strong and weak nuclear forces which hold the nucleus of atoms together.



**18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, **that in all things He may have the preeminence.**



'Christ washing the Feet of the Disciples' by Jacopo Tintoretto, 1575-1580.

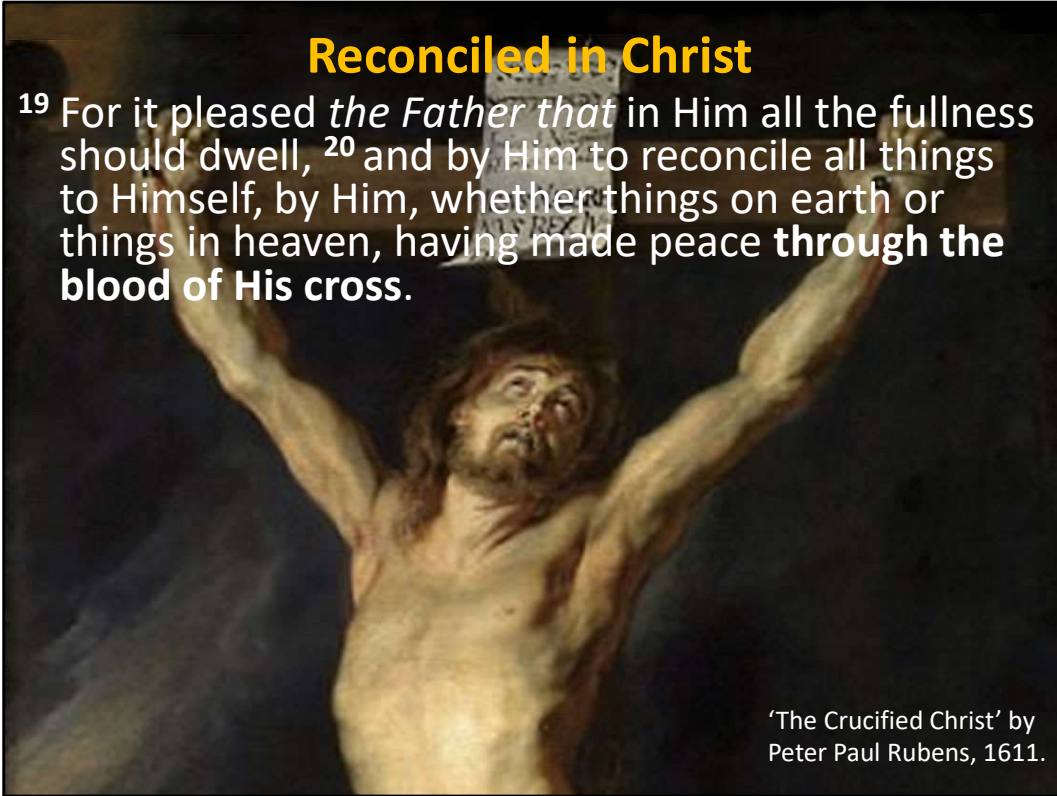
**And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.**

This is the key verse in the whole book of Colossians, and it is the only place in Scripture where the word preeminence, the theme of this book, is used. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the Aleph and Tau, the A to Z. He is the beginning, the first born, the Creator, the first in rank or influence.

Christ is preeminent over all creation, and He also is the Head of the church, the whole body of Christians living and dead.

## Reconciled in Christ

<sup>19</sup> For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, <sup>20</sup> and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace **through the blood of His cross.**



'The Crucified Christ' by Peter Paul Rubens, 1611.

**For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell,**

The Gnostics' favorite term "...fullness" = pleroma, does not mean what Gnostics think it means, the various spiritual 'levels' and the beings or entities between God and man that they made up; it means the fullness of God which permanently dwells in Jesus Christ. God the Father is in Him!

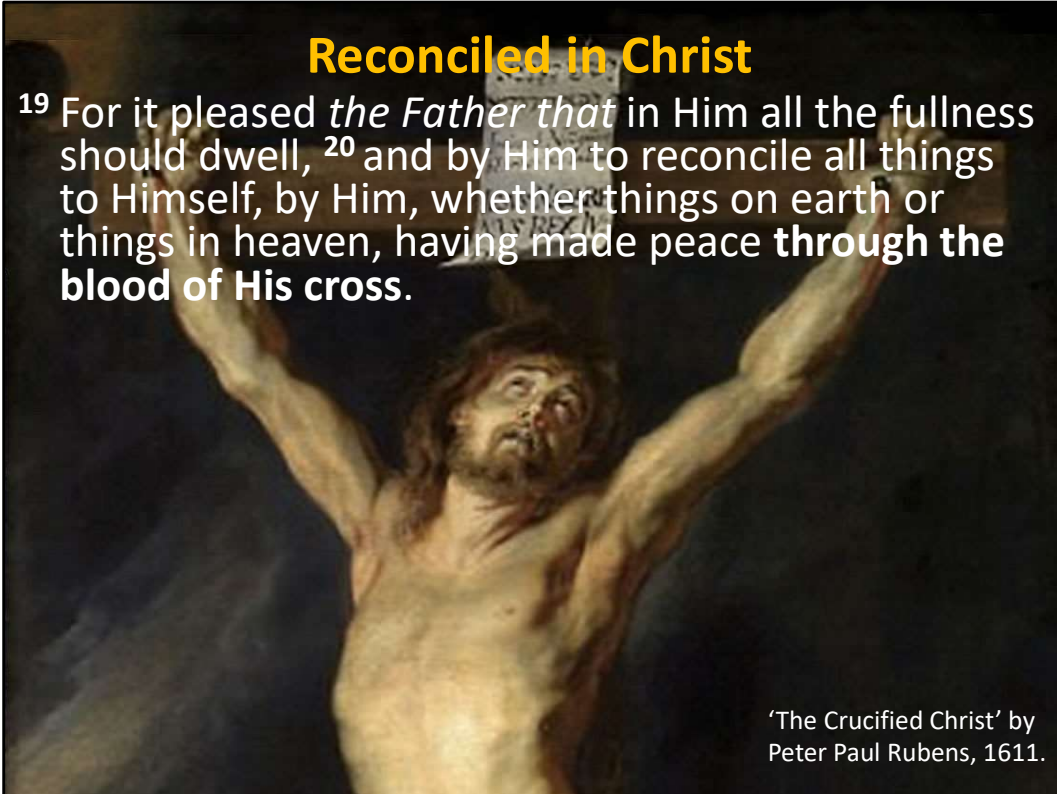
**and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.**

Paul gives three main truths:

- 1) Bu His blood Jesus has taken care of all things.
- 2) Jesus is sufficient; all that we need is in Him.
- 3) God is pleased when Jesus is honored and given preeminence.

## Reconciled in Christ

<sup>19</sup> For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, <sup>20</sup> and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace **through the blood of His cross.**



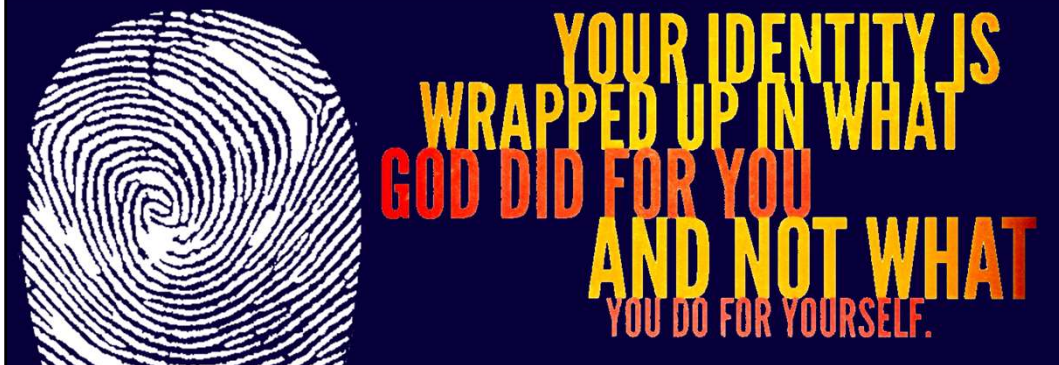
'The Crucified Christ' by Peter Paul Rubens, 1611.

Paul basically says that all the make-believe of the Gnostics is rubbish. Christians are not reconciled to God through angels, but through God's Son in two ways:

- 1) At Calvary Christ's death took away the sin that was a barrier between God and man, enabling God to show us mercy instead of judgement. This was all God's doing... man had nothing to do with this reconciliation.
- 2) Our part is simply receiving that reconciliation through faith.

Paul again contrasted the false Gnostic beliefs about Christ not actually coming in the flesh with the truth of the gospel, which shows that the Messiah **did** live on earth as a human. Paul says that Christ's death on the cross will reconcile us to the Most High God, as long as we faithfully hold fast to the gospel.

- Though once alienated from God, scripture never calls upon Mankind to make peace with God. Only He can offer reconciliation. And He has, through Christ's death on the Cross.
- But while God's election does not waver, we must affirm it through our faith, conduct, and witness of the Spirit.



**Though once alienated from God, scripture never calls upon Mankind to make peace with God. Only He can offer reconciliation. And He has, through Christ's death on the Cross.**

The purpose of our reconciliation with God is our personal holiness.


**But while God's election does not waver, we must affirm it through our faith, conduct, and witness of the Spirit in our lives.**

The unsaved are without hope, but our hope is in Christ and false teachers will not move us away from Him.

**The mystery (Colossians 1:24-29)**

**A** Mission of the apostles (1:24-25)

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,  
 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

**B**  The mystery (1:26-27)

26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.  
 27 **To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles:** which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

**A'** Mission of the apostles (1:28-29)

28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.  
 29 To this [end] I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

And now we come to Paul's third pericope, or major thought, in Chapter 1, which is a **divine secret** that Paul has been honored to present, a mystery hidden from the beginning of time which Paul is about to reveal by divine revelation.

Wow! Paul is playing the Gnostics at their own game here!

**The main reason for this slide is to show the concentric parallelism of this pericope.**

- Paul's mission is to fulfill the Word of God.
- Now he's blessed to be able to reveal a real mystery, that salvation is available to the Gentiles as well as Jews.
- And everything that has gone before in the letter is focused on this mission.

## The Mystery

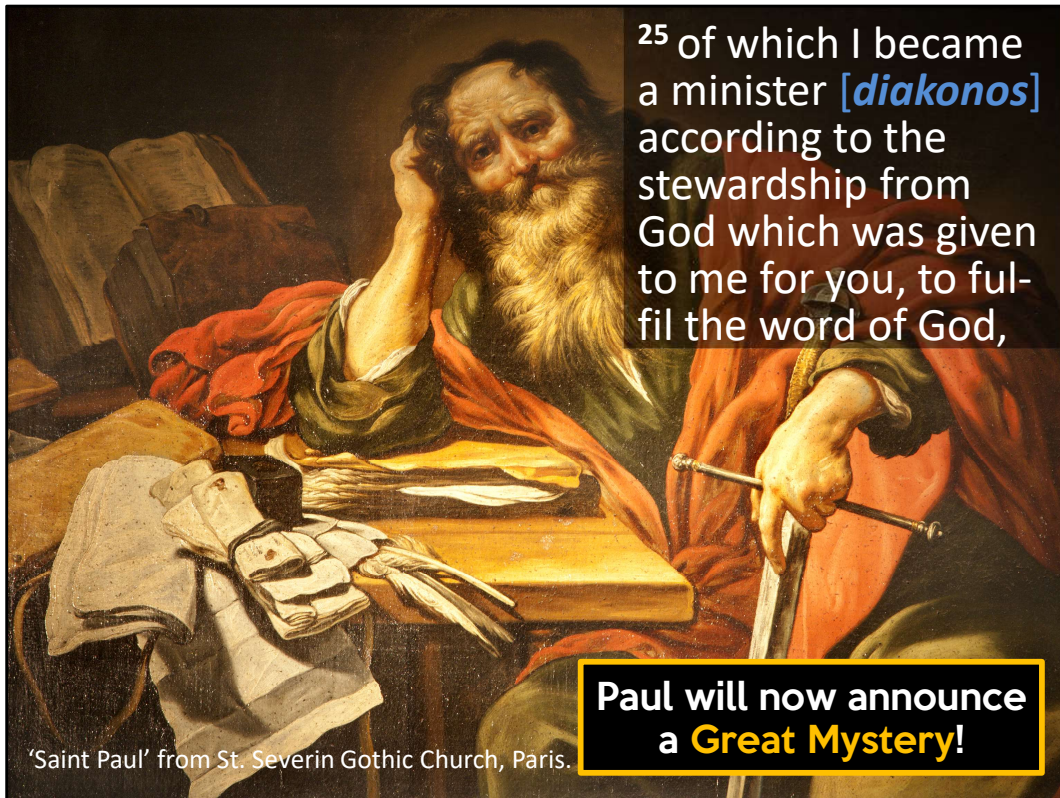
<sup>24</sup> I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church [*Body of Christ*],

Fresco: "Paul is Stoned in Lystra",  
Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Rome.



**<sup>24</sup> I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,**

When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on false charges, the Jews listened to his defense until he used the word "Gentiles". That word infuriated them and drove them to demand his execution. Had Paul compromised with the Jews and stopped ministering to Gentiles, he could have been spared a great deal of suffering.



**25 of which I became a minister [*diakonos*] according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God,**

When Paul calls himself a "minister" (Gr. *diakonos*), most assume that to be an office within the hierarchy of the early church. But the Greek word really only means "one who renders service," or "a servant." The NKJV translates this word as "servant", "deacon", and "minister, each multiple times". Unfortunately, the English translations reflect the traditional hierarchical view of church government of the translators, rather than the actual meaning of the word itself.

Paul's dispensation or stewardship in God's redemptive plan was, specifically, to make salvation known to the Gentiles. Paul is again using the words of Gnostic teaching to present his Christian message. Religious cults used *mysterion* to refer to religious secrets confided only to the initiated, a secret rite. Paul is emphasizing that the teaching the Colossians had received about Christ was the true revealing of the long-hidden mystery of God. Conversely, whatever mystery the Gnostics thought they had was false.

<sup>26</sup> the **mystery** which has been hidden from **ages** and from **generations**, but now has been revealed to His saints.

English (KJV)	Greek Root	Biblical usage
<b>mystery</b>	μυστήριον mystērion	1) something unknown and mysterious; 2) an initiatory religious rite; 3) a secret known only by divine revelation
<b>ages</b>	αἰών aiōn	1) for ever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity 2) the worlds, universe 3) period of time, age
<b>generations</b>	γενεά genea	1) The whole multitude living at a time. 2) An age; the time occupied by each successive generation, 30-33 years.

**the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.**

“...mystery”: In the world of the 1st century, musterion meant 1) something mysterious; 2) an initiatory religious rite; or 3) a secret known only by divine revelation. Paul uses the last category, sacred secrets made known to the initiated, divine secrets that could never have been discovered by human reason—especially limited by observing a cursed creation.

The mystery is the breaking down of the wall between the Jews and the Gentiles, and the acknowledgement that Gentiles may also be partakers of the privileges of the gospel. Paul noted this in Ephesians 3:6, *“That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers together of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”*

And very cleverly, Paul makes his great announcement, using the language of the Gnostics, whose man-made religions focused on the first meaning of two of the Gnostic’s favorite words - mystery and Aeons (ahee-ohn’). His use of generations (ghen-aa-yoh’) also stresses that the mystery had been hidden from everyone who ever lived, including the Gnostics. Ouch!

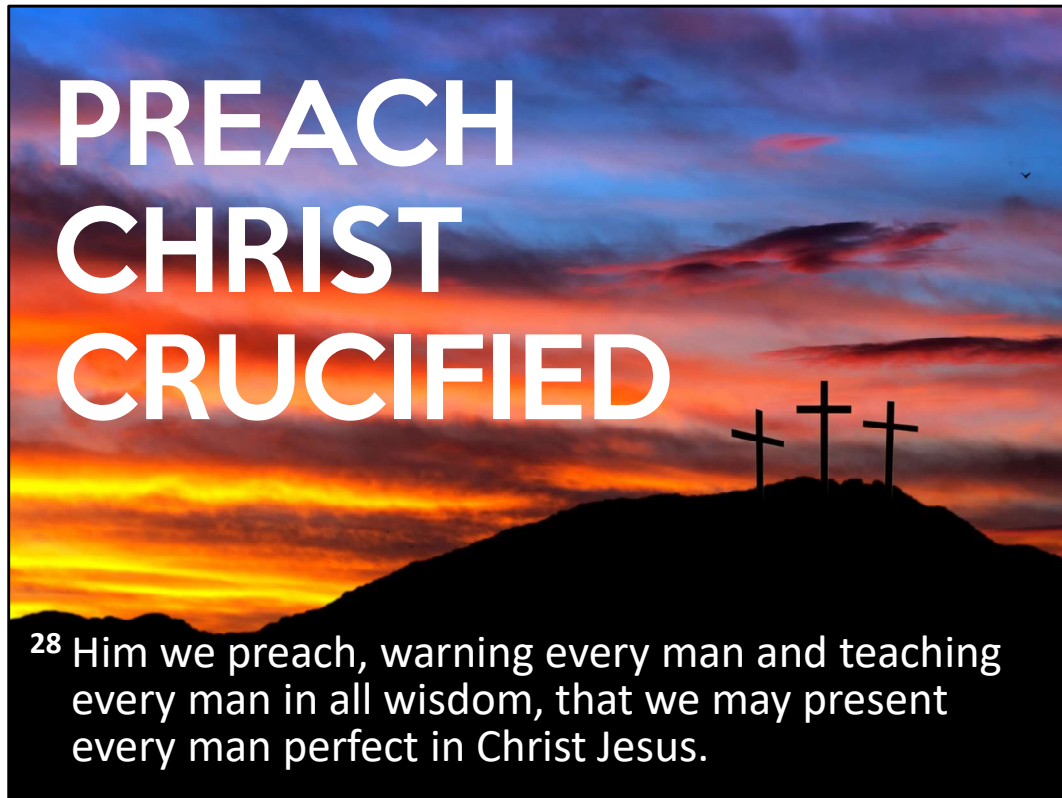


<sup>27</sup> To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this **mystery** among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.



**<sup>27</sup> To them (the Saints) God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

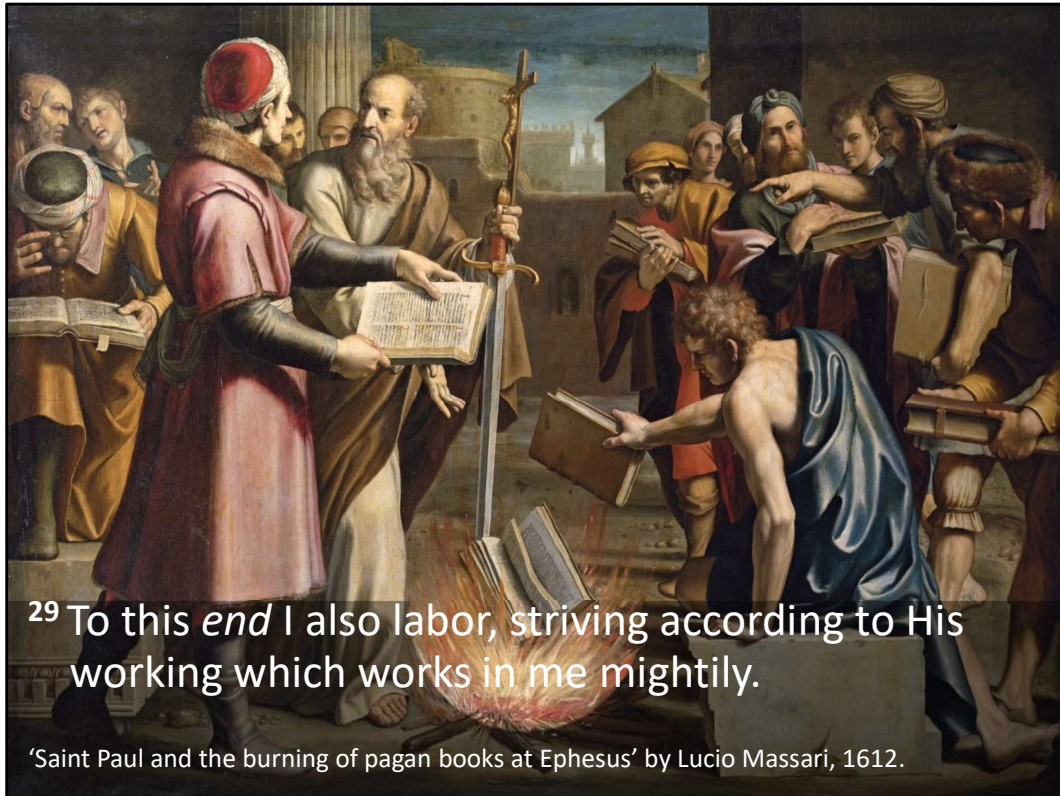
The word for “saints” is hagios (hagg-ee-os), which means those whose services God employs and those set apart for God to be exclusively His. This appellation is used throughout the N. T. to mean Christians, those whom God has selected, that under the influence of the Holy Spirit may be rendered partakers of salvation in the kingdom of God. In other words, every believer is a saint, not merely a special group of believers selected by a particular denomination!



**<sup>28</sup> Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.**

“Him”: Christianity is about a person, not a “system.” Paul preached (warned, announced as a herald); Paul was a teacher of the truth. (How far would we get if highway signs only told us where the roads were not going?) What was Paul’s message?

**[CLICK] Preach Christ Crucified.**



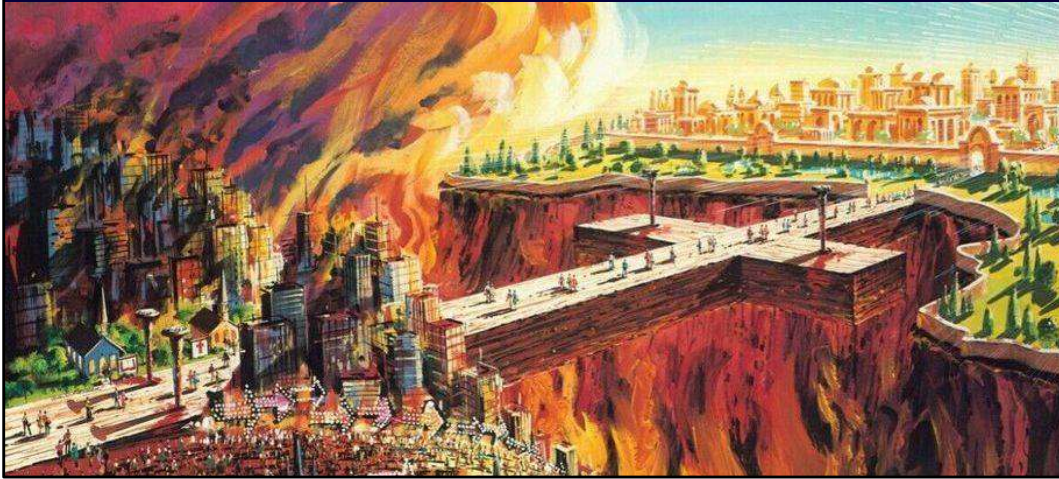
**29 To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.**

Paul is describing his prayer life using terms fitting to great athletic competitions. “...striving”: Literally, “For this I labor to the point of exhaustion, agonizing”: agonizomai to contend, struggle, with difficulties and dangers; to endeavor with strenuous zeal, strive: to obtain something. We usually picture prayer as calm and comfortable, and yet Paul exerted his spiritual muscles the way a Greek runner would exert himself in the Olympic Games. In verse 4:12, he will encourage Epaphras to pray the same way. So should we wrestle with God in our prayer? That’s not what Paul is saying; he is describing a spiritual striving, reliant upon God’s power at work in his life. He demonstrates that with the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, we can pray mightily in the will of God. Prayer isn’t trying to change God’s mind or give Him new ideas, it should be about learning what is the mind of God and asking accordingly. The Holy Spirit knows the Father’s will and helps us pray in that will. That’s truly powerful prayer!

Paul continues this theme in the first verse of Chapter 2.

## Paul Declares Christ's Preeminence:

- In the Gospel message (Col. 1:1–12)
- In redemption (Col. 1:13–14)
- In Creation (Col. 1:15–17)
- In the church (Col. 1:18–29)



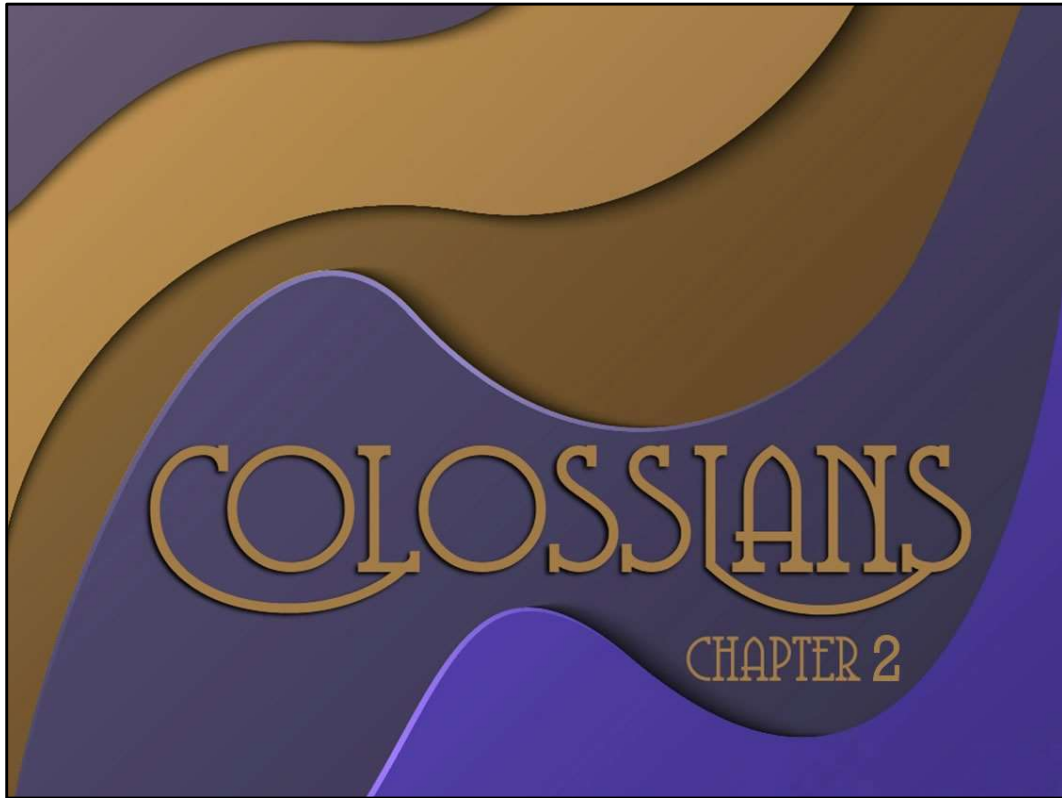
This ends Chapter 1, where Paul declared Christ's preeminence:

**[CLICK]** In the Gospel message (Col. 1:1–12)

**[CLICK]** In redemption (Col. 1:13–14)

**[CLICK]** In Creation (Col. 1:15–17)

**[CLICK]** In the church (Col. 1:18–29)



Paul has declared the doctrine of the preeminence of Christ.  
Paul will now defend Christ's preeminence against the danger of empty philosophies, religious legalism, and man-made disciplines.



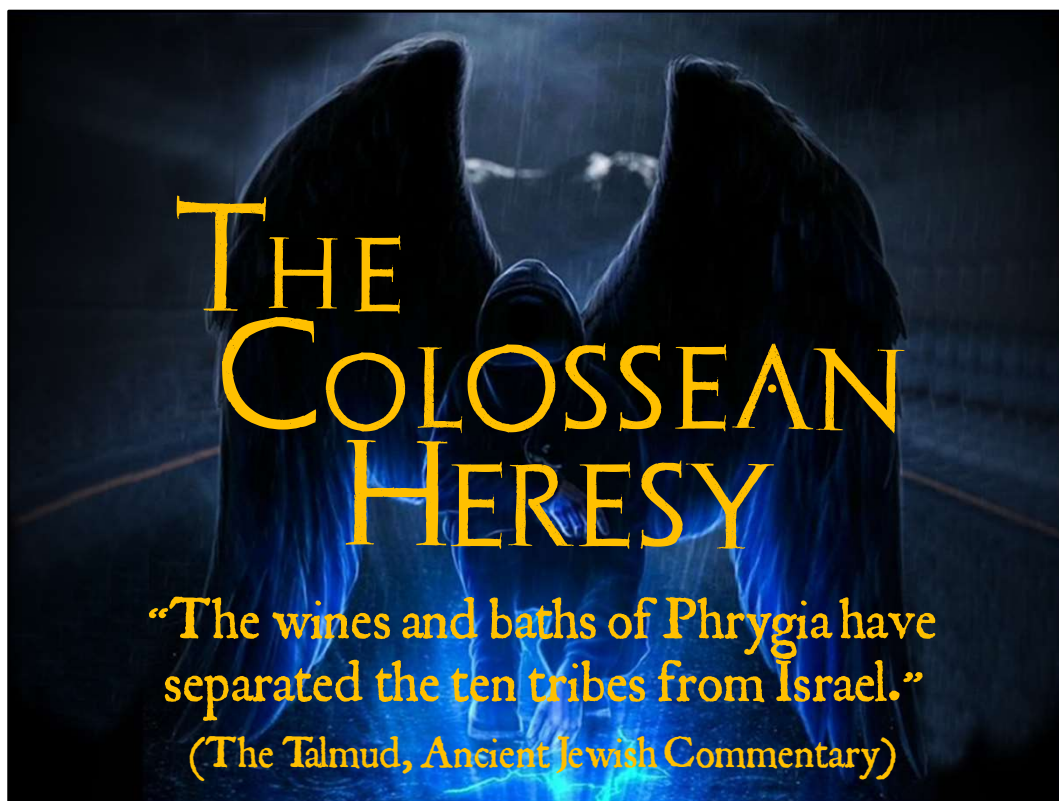
Chapter 2 builds "Upwards" to build up our "RELATIONSHIP" with and in Him. In this chapter, Paul will defend Christ's preeminence. Knowing that there were enemies attacking the Lycus River Valley ekklesia, Paul offers encouragement. By heeding his admonitions, the Colossians and others can overcome their enemies. The Christian life doesn't stand still: believers either go forward or gradually slip backward. Paul's call is "Let us go on to maturity!"

## Religious practices in Colossae

- For theology scholars, ancient Colossae is an extremely important site because Paul's letter to the Colossians addresses local Phrygian-Jewish-Pagan syncretistic practices adopted by many 'Christians' from the latter 1st century. They speculate that excavation of Colossae may reveal some of the religious practices Paul faced.
- The most noteworthy are the "self-imposed piety" and ascetically rigorous practices adopted by the Colossians and their worship of angels [Colossians 2:18].
- Colossae sprang back into Christian importance upon Laodicea's abandonment after the 602 AD earthquake.
- Colossae became the primary pilgrimage destination in the Byzantine Empire.

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- The most noteworthy are the "self-imposed piety" and ascetically rigorous practices adopted by the Colossians and their worship of angels [Colossians 2:18]. **We'll introduce the Colossian religious practices, the Colossian Heresy, before we get into Chapter 2, and discuss aspects of it in more detail later on as well.**
- Colossae sprang back into Christian importance upon Laodicea's abandonment after the 602 AD earthquake.
- Colossae became the primary pilgrimage destination in the Byzantine Empire.



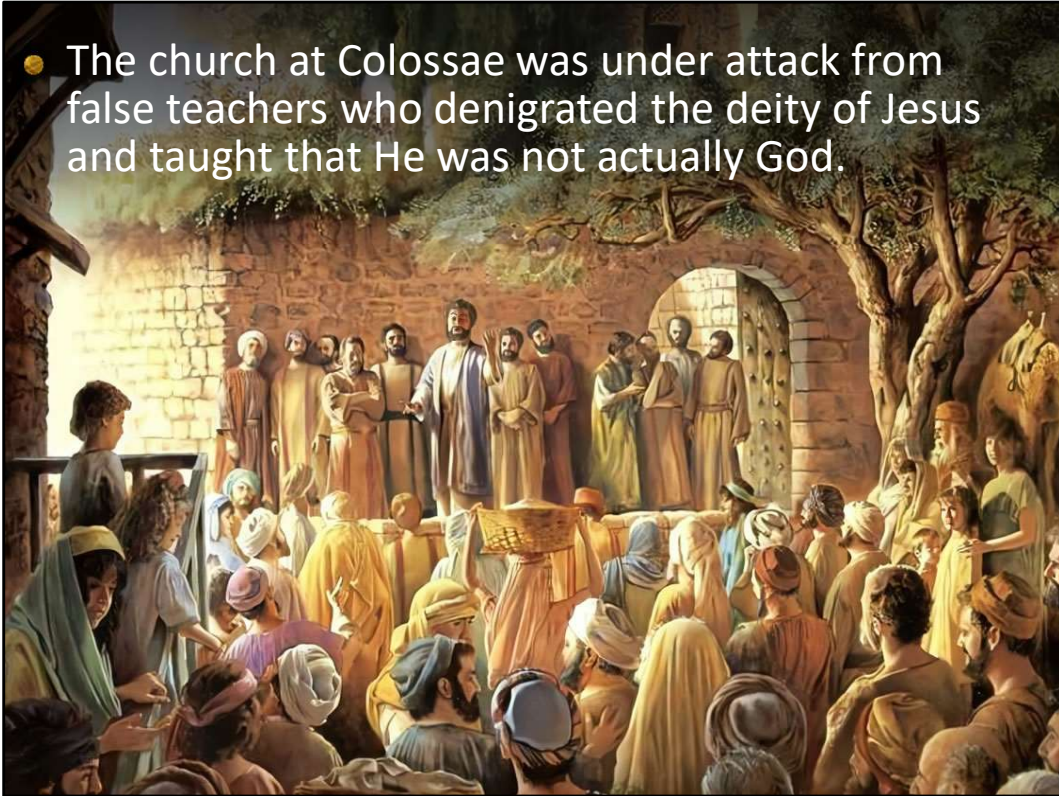
This all brings us to the actual heresy in Colossae that Paul was concerned about. We'll discuss the details in Chapter 2. But for now we can sketch out its dimensions from Paul's text in his epistle to the Colossians. The Lycus River Valley Jews seemed to enjoy the gay life of the Roman Empire as much as anyone. **[CLICK]** The Talmud, the ancient Jewish commentary on the Old Testament, states, **"The wines and baths of Phrygia have separated the ten tribes from Israel."**

The Phrygian Jews were impressed by Greco-Roman philosophy, which was very different from Hebrew thought. While Western philosophers elevated **"gnosis"** "knowledge", an intellectual understanding of things, to the highest pedestal, the Eastern Hebrew mindset valued "wisdom", the application and use of knowledge to the glory of God. No wonder the Phrygians, many of whom not long before had been known as barbarians, were confused and gullible. Gnosticism wasn't a separate religion; rather, it was a fusion of religious influences that suggested secret ways to get closer to God.

Colossae was known for a religious philosophy that blended Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and pagan influences into an angel cult.



- The church at Colossae was under attack from false teachers who denigrated the deity of Jesus and taught that He was not actually God.



The false teachers at Colossae denigrated the deity of Jesus; who they taught was not actually God. So in response in this letter, Paul describes Jesus the Son of God with some of the loftiest language in all the New Testament.

As a historical note: some modern scholars claim that the Gnostic movement did not develop until much later. That underpins their supposition that the New Testament wasn't written until the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries or even later, when Gnostic heresies were full-blown. But this is readily disproved by incipient features of Gnosticism present even in pre-Christian movements. The idea of two worlds, that all matter (including the flesh) was evil and only the pure spirit (intellect) was good, is deeply woven into both Jewish and Greek thought. So although the systematization of Gnosticism came later, there is nothing in Colossians which cannot be explained by longstanding Gnostic tendencies in ancient thought which appeared in many forms.

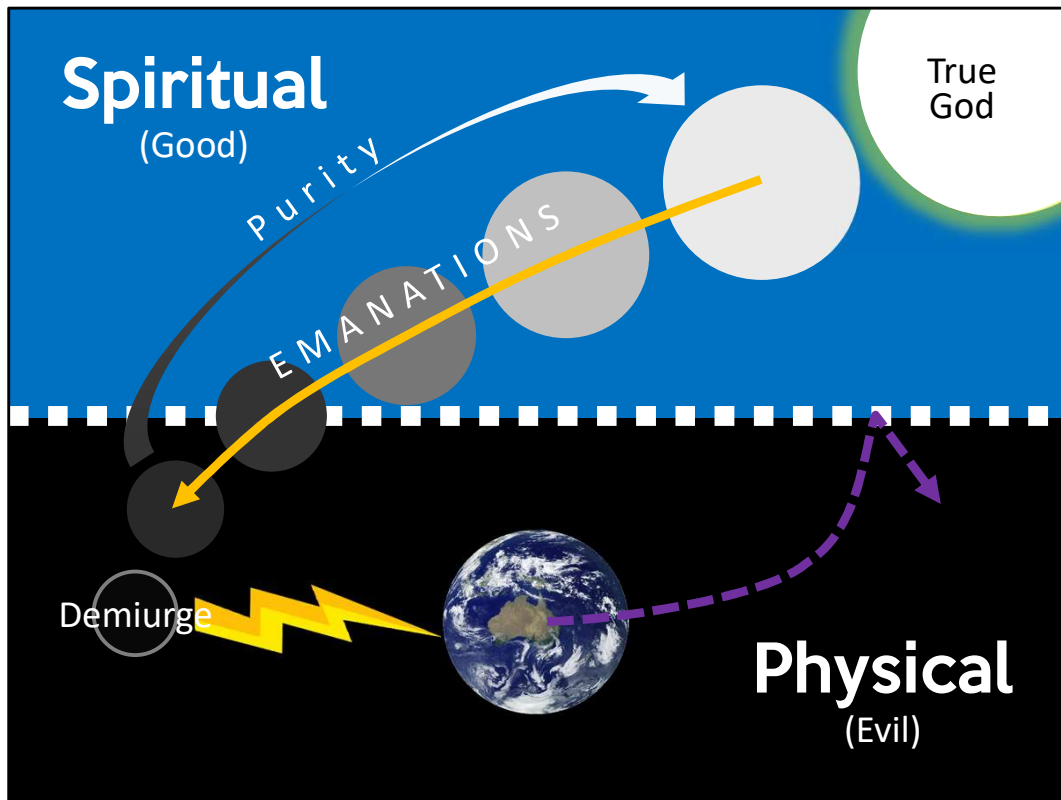
Namely that while God (spirit, mind) is holy, matter is corrupt. Between the two is a huge gulf. God created mankind in the gap.

Therefore, the way for people to get closer to God is by the regulated behaviour of religious rules and rituals, like self-denial.

# SHHH, IT'S A SECRET!

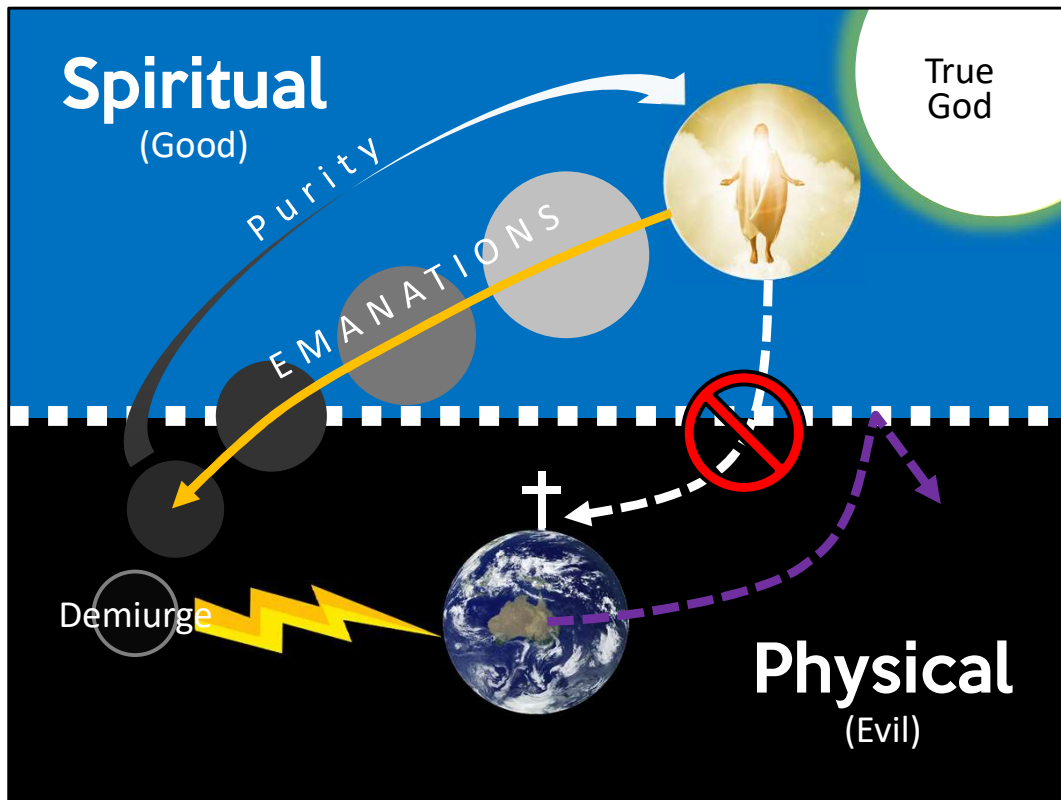


The Gnostics claimed to have a special, secret knowledge of the truth that is superior to faith. Uninitiated people didn't know this.



Here are some of the common characteristics of most varieties of Gnosticism.

1. **[CLICK]** God is pure Spirit and therefore Holy.
2. **[CLICK]** Matter is physical and therefore corrupt and evil.
3. **[CLICK]** Therefore, there must be total separation between Spirit and matter or spirit will be corrupted.
4. **[CLICK]** Emanations (or angels) serve as mediators between a holy supreme God and corrupt matter. None were pure, but the higher the up order the purer they were.
5. A perfect God couldn't create a sinful world; so a third party **[CLICK]** called a **demiurge (di-me-ahge)**, between God and the world, did. This dude was the Jewish Jehovah of the Old Testament.
6. The way to get closer to God was through a Spiritual life and bodily denial and suffering. This is called asceticism. **[CLICK]** Of course, you can never become perfect.



1. Jesus was the highest emanation, so High He was divine! But a divine Jesus couldn't **[CLICK]** become human or suffer on the Cross and maintain the separation between spiritual purity and physical corruption, so the Gnostics had to get really creative.



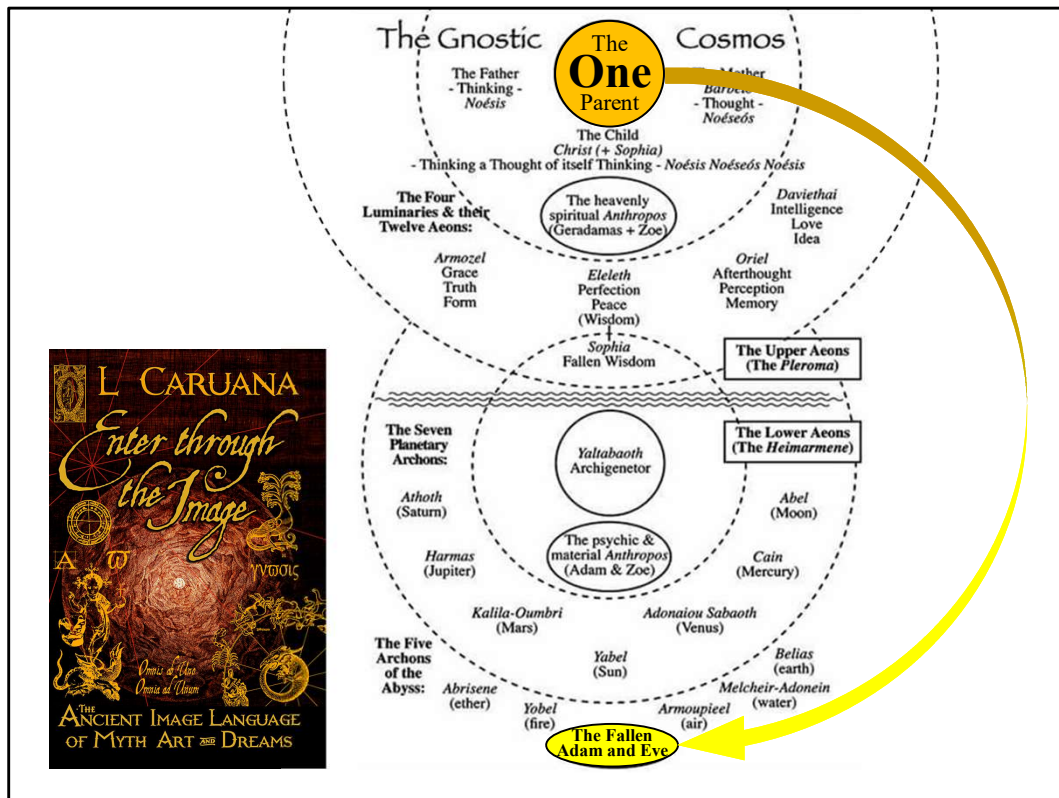
What happened is that various different groups of Gnostics came up with different solutions to this quandary. This is one of the simpler ones.

In 1945 a local farmer named Muhammed al-Samman from Nag Hammadi, Egypt found thirteen leather-bound vellum codices sealed in a buried jar. Dated to AD 300-350, they reveal a broad range of Gnostic beliefs held during the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Here are a few examples:

1. Docetists believed that Christ was pure spirit and only had a phantom body. He was an aeon without real humanity.
2. Cerinthians admitted that Jesus was indeed human but stated that Christ was an aeon who came on Jesus as the dove at His baptism and left Him on the Cross to die as a man.
3. Others taught that Jesus was just a man.

There were other guesses about the nature of Jesus as well. The gist is that the Gnostics more or less mixed Jewish and Christian doctrines that they didn't clearly understand with other philosophies.



For example, a single fragment of text among the documents states, quite mysteriously, to “...enter through the image.” From this, modern Gnostics utilize images from various eastern and western sacred traditions to achieve states of meditation that induce mystical experiences in the initiated. This chart from a book on the subject is one of the simpler depictions of a typically complex Gnostic cosmology showing [CLICK] how the most creative intellectuals perceive that the gap between God and Man can be filled.

## General issues in gnosticism

- Gnosticism denied the deity of Christ.
- It falsely concluded that matter is evil and spirit good.
- It was Jewish and legalistic, stressing the need for observing Old Testament laws and ceremonies;
- It was philosophical, laying emphasis on some special or deeper knowledge (gnosis);
- It involved worship of angels as mediators to God, believing that emanations associated with heavenly bodies influenced earthly events.
- It was exclusive, stressing the special privilege and “perfection” of those select few who belonged to this philosophical elite.

Paul addressed these heresies head-on:

- Christ is **preeminent** and **sufficient** in all things.
- He is **Creator** and **Redeemer** and the centre of the universe, not only as the active Creator but also as the **recipient of creation**—in His taking on of human flesh.
- Christ was and is the **visible image of the invisible God**, containing within Himself the **fullness of Deity**.
- Because of His divine nature, Jesus is **sovereign**, above all things with an **authority given Him by the Father**. He is also Head over the church.
- He has **reconciled all things** to Himself through His death on the cross, making believers alive to God and setting them on the **path to right living**.

Paul addressed these issues head-on describing Jesus with some of the loftiest language in all the New Testament. His messages include:

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- He is Creator and Redeemer and the centre of the universe, not only as the active Creator but also as the recipient of creation—in His taking on of human flesh.
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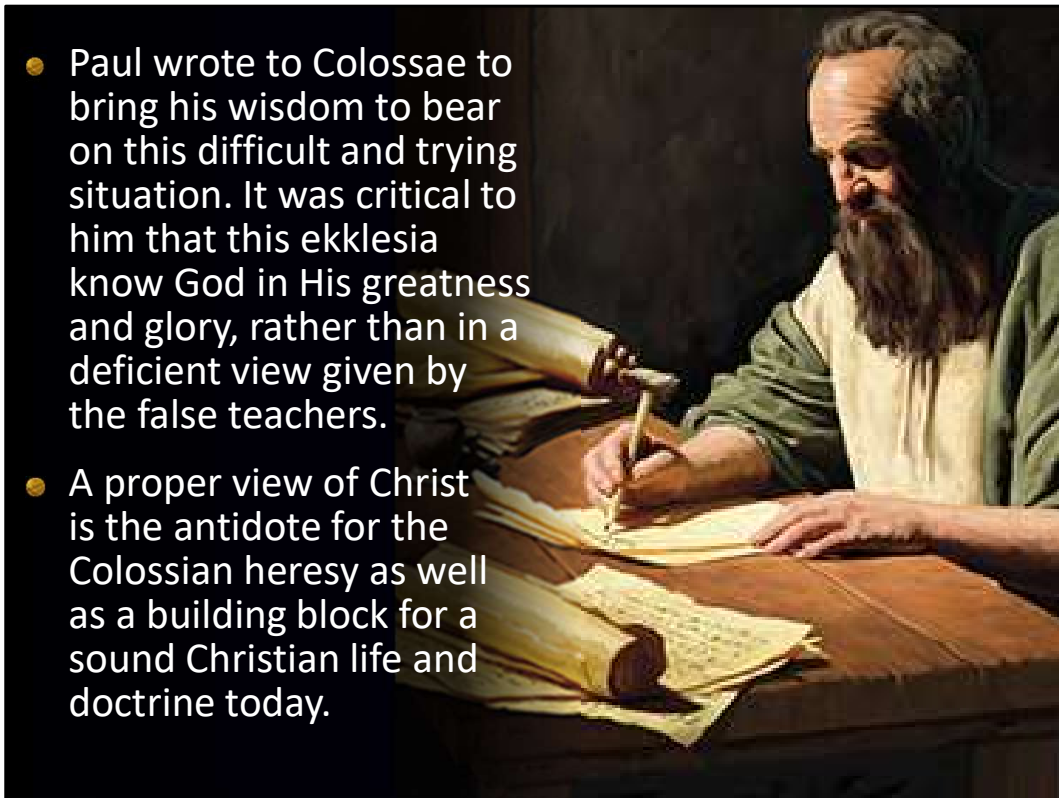
## What to look for in Colossians

1. Gnostic heretics said Christ's work was incomplete and sought to add to His work by calling for human works of religion or asceticism.

Paul stresses the divine person and finished nature of the creative and redemptive work of Christ (1:14-22; 2:8-15).

2. It claimed to be *human philosophy* based on the *traditions* of men, and included a form of Greek dualism that believed all matter was evil and that only pure spirit was good.

Paul warns against philosophical or religious arguments based on human tradition that appeals to its antiquity as a reason for acceptance. Don't accept empty speculations of man instead of the sure revelation of God (2:8, 18 with 2:3).

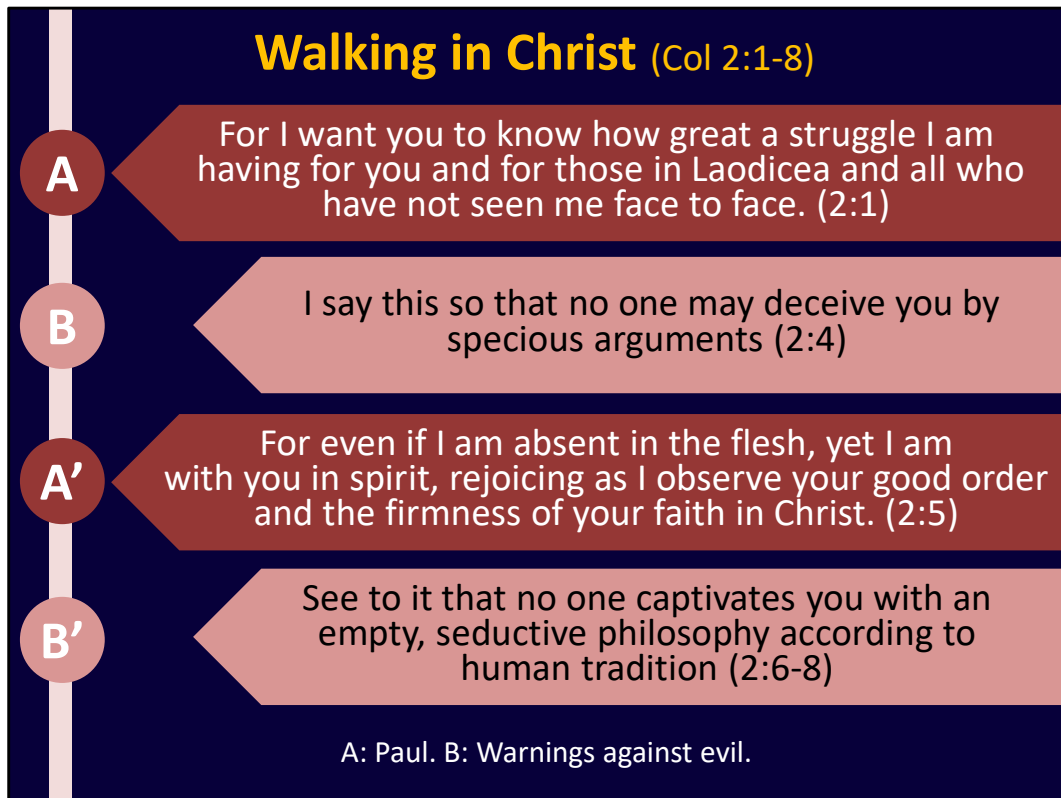


- Paul wrote to Colossae to bring his wisdom to bear on this difficult and trying situation. It was critical to him that this ekklesia know God in His greatness and glory, rather than in a deficient view given by the false teachers.
- A proper view of Christ is the antidote for the Colossian heresy as well as a building block for a sound Christian life and doctrine today.

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[CLICK]

- A proper view of Christ is the antidote for the Colossian heresy as well as a building block for a sound Christian life and doctrine today.



The first pericope in Chapter 1 shows a different form of parallelism. It's not concentric anymore. Unsurprisingly, the central message of this section on the supremacy of Christ is on Christ as the Head of the body, the church.

## Not Philosophy but Christ

- <sup>1</sup> For I want you to know what a great conflict  
[*agony*] I have for you and those in Laodicea, and  
*for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,  
<sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged,  
being knit together in love,



**For I want you to know what a great conflict, I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love,**

Paul is addressing believers in both Colossae and Laodicea and possibly Hierapolis. The language implies that Paul knows some, but not all, of the believers in these cities. Yet he still feels intense emotion for them. Note that he is continuing the use of athletic metaphors.

“...being knit together” : The truth of Christ unites believers, while the error of the false teachers divides.

Throughout this letter, Paul explains his ministry. He not only stirs the affections of the believers as they realise how much he suffers for Christ and how much he does

for them. This also helps to silence the accusations of the enemy. Note in his letters how Paul takes time to minister to and encourage individuals, not just a collective body.

and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

**IN HIM LIE  
HIDDEN ALL THE  
TREASURES OF  
WISDOM AND  
KNOWLEDGE.  
COLOSSIANS 2:3**



and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Note how Paul has addressed all of the so-called secret knowledge of the Gnostics, using their very own terms, and relates it to the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

- “...all riches”: Christ is sufficient and complete.
- “...the knowledge of the mystery of God”: Incarnating the fullness of the Godhead, and all the divine wisdom and knowledge for the redemption and reconciliation of man
- “In whom”: The person is the key: in Him are all the answers! [The necessity of psychology to meet life challenges?

- “...all the treasures”: **[All!]** You don’t need to go beyond Christ to investigate human systems and philosophies, to explain the mystery of the universe and the relations of the Creator to His creatures.
- “...wisdom and knowledge” : Proverbs 8, personalized... Knowledge suggests the ability to grasp truth. Wisdom not only understands and defends truth, but applies it.



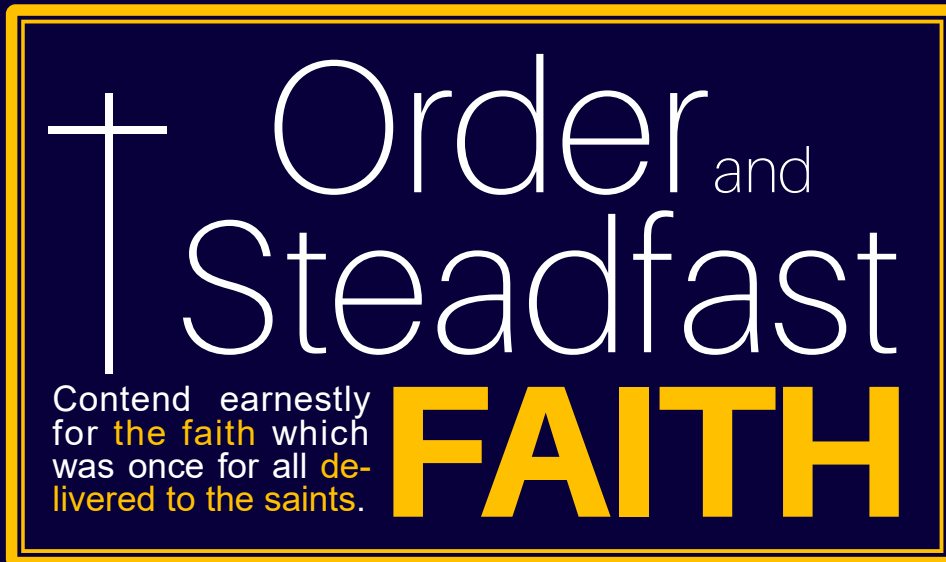
<sup>4</sup> Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

**Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.**

Advocates of error delight in packaging their systems in the most attractive phraseology, to entrap the unwary.



<sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

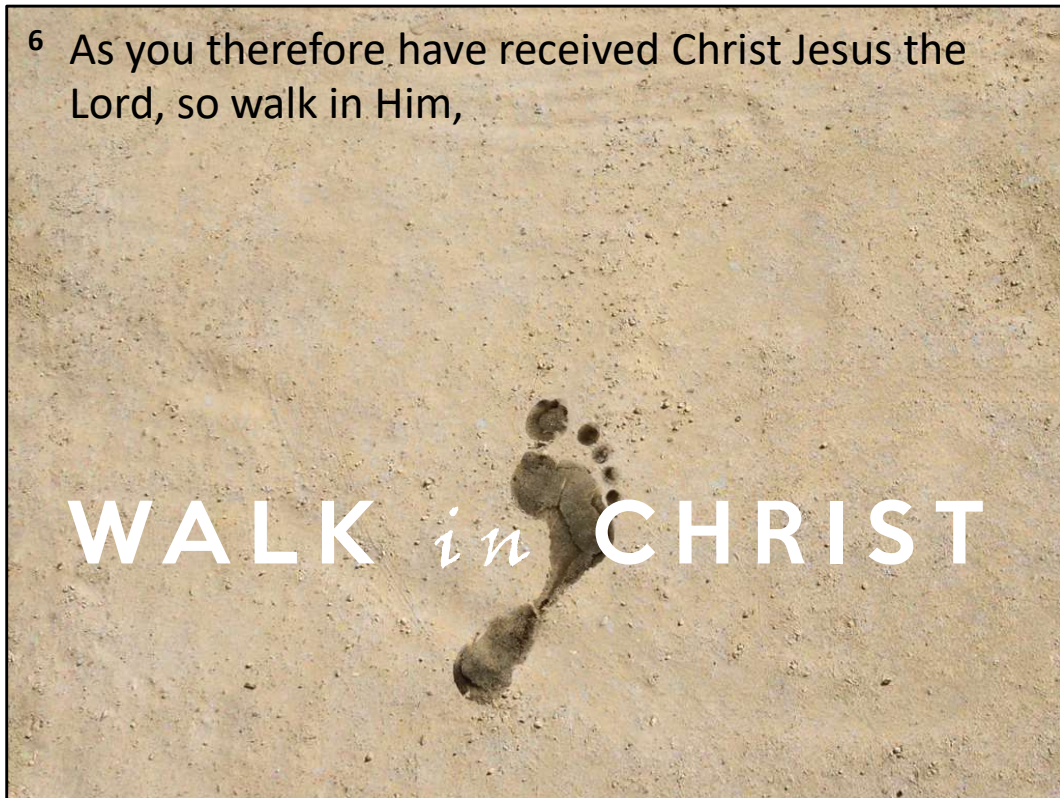


<sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Paul creates a solid word picture of the strength of their faith using the military terms order and steadfastness.

Yet his message is not only a compliment based on what he had heard of them, but also a military-style exhortation to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,” as Jude may write around the same time.

<sup>6</sup> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,



**As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,**

Paul reminds all believers – as well as the empty philosophers and false teachers – that our duty is not merely to understand Christ’s Way, but to actively walk with Him in it. Remember, in the Greco-Roman Western mindset, gnosis, knowledge, is the highest virtue because to them God is a remote perfect Spirit and everything else is corrupt, but to the Hebrew mind, the highest virtue is to actively live the life God had set out for us. Our duty is **doing**, not merely knowing.

<sup>6</sup> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

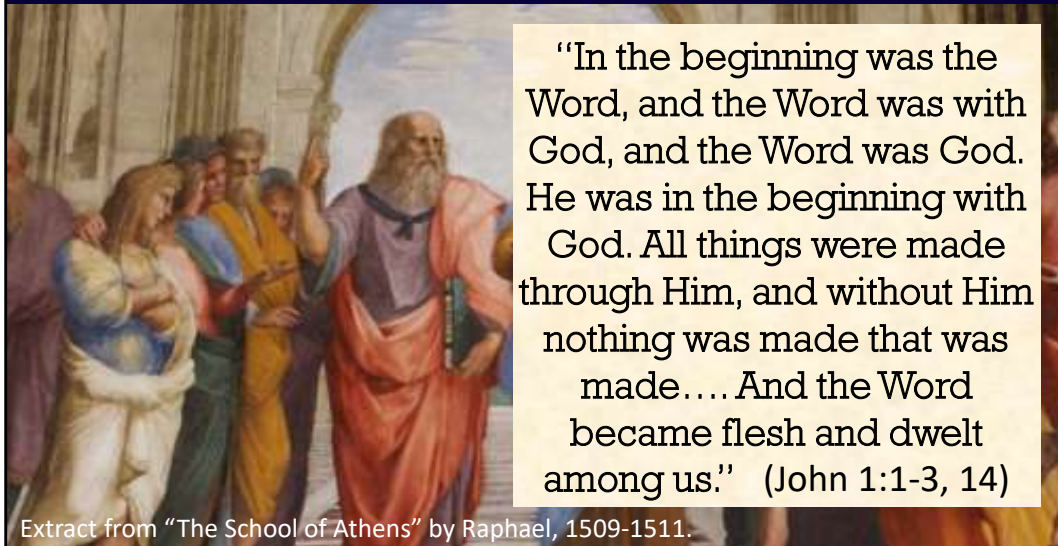


**rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.**

Paul continues building memorable word pictures:

- a) a tree, rooted (Similar figures in Eph 3:7). Rooted, once and for all; but (continually) growing, and built up, in Him.
- b) a building, built up is an architectural term;
- c) a school, where faith is established and taught;
- d) a river, abounding suggests a river overflowing its banks (Jn 4:10-14; 7:37-39).

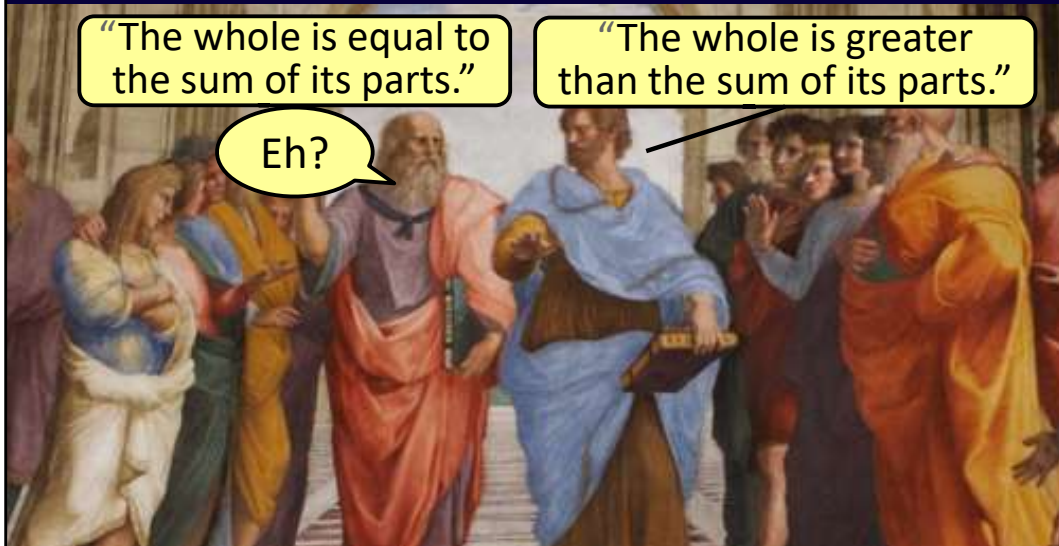
<sup>8</sup> Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [*stoicheion*] of the world, and not according to Christ.



**Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.**

- “...philosophy and vain deceit”: The history of philosophy is the story of contradictory, discarded hypotheses. This painting in the Vatican by Raphael represents “philosophy.” What’s interesting about the large original fresco is that while nearly every great ancient Greek philosopher can be found in the painting, few can be recognized because Raphael didn’t leave a guide. Still, we are just interested in the central characters with the books. Aristotle in blue carries his “Ethics” and Plato in red his “Timaeus”. The only minor problem is that Plato is a dead ringer for Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael’s tutor.
- Anyway, Plato yearned for a divine “Word”—logos—which would come with authority and make everything plain. Such a Word DID come with Christ, **[CLICK]** “In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

<sup>8</sup> Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [*stoicheion*] of the world, and not according to Christ.



“rudiment”. This means **stoy-khi'-on**, which actually means

*Metaphysics* 8.6 [=1045a], that many things with numerous parts aren't merely the aggregate but instead some kind of a whole beyond its parts. Like you can throw all the parts of a body together and you still lack the spark of life. Although Aristotle didn't use these exact words, this is where we get the expression **[CLICK]** “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” But he didn't go as far as Paul does here in identifying that Christ is the missing extra!

COLOSSIANS 2:8

**BEWARE**

**LEST ANYONE CHEAT YOU THROUGH  
PHILOSOPHY AND EMPTY DECEIT, ACCORDING TO  
THE TRADITION OF MEN, ACCORDING TO THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE WORLD,  
AND NOT ACCORDING TO CHRIST.**