

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Introduction to Colossians**

Scripture: Colossians 1:1-2

Code: 2130

Take your Bible and turn with me to Colossians and I want us to, at least, begin to look at what God might have for us here. In introducing a book like this, it is critically important for us to have some overall understanding in background. Tonight we're going to begin a study that's going to take us probably for a couple of months, through this marvelous letter that Paul wrote to the Christians at Colossae. And I think it's only fair to you to give you an understanding of why I feel we should study the book, what the book is generally all about, and what we're going to learn from it. And I want to try to do that tonight.

At least for me, there are six important reasons for studying Colossians, six important reasons. Number one, and this is to try to update Colossians so that you'll understand how relative it is to today, this is an age of science. That's reason number one. Fantastic things are being done in science. We look about us and we find discoveries and accomplishments in everything from microbiology to macrospace, which would be the study of space and lunar studies and all that's involved with that. There are things all the way from nuclear medicine to nuclear power ... fantastic scientific advances. In fact, scientific and technological literature is flooding the world with 60 million pages a year. Scientific and technical information is coming at such a rapid pace that no human being could master as much as one single day's combined discoveries. In a rapidly advancing scientific world like this where 95 percent of all the scientists who have ever lived in history are alive today, we naturally ask questions about how is God related to this, how is Christ related to creation, to science, to discovery? Is He inside it or outside of it? Colossians answers this question. For example, in Colossians 1:16, it says: "For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth."

This is also an age of ecumenism. This is an age when people are working for a one-world church, the super-church. And I often ask myself if it won't be a body without a head. Will there be true unity without true doctrine? Can we really merge everybody religiously on the basis of philanthropy and culture and common enterprise socially? Efforts are not only being made to wed those who are already closely akin, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, in an ultimate ecclesiastical union ... but even non-Christian religious groups have been invited to be a part of this amalgamation --- Rama, Vishnu, Zoroaster, Buddah, Confucius, Moses and Mohammed have been lumped all together. They've all made their contribution along with Jesus and we ought to all get together. Is this the church God intends? Who is the head of such a church? What is the basis of its unity? Colossians answers this, chapter 1, verse 18: "And He is the head of the body, the church."

Now, this is also an age of no authority. This is an age where people are denying any absolute and opting out for relatives. All authority is suspect. There is nothing sacred. The overthrow of everything is at least allowable if not possible. Even religion has no authority. Every man is entitled to develop his own religion. We have in our world the religion of man, the religion of the human mind; no rules, no absolutes, just experience, fluctuating ethics, idol making. And Jesus is just another guru, like all the rest. His word is not absolute, His truth is not binding, He is not the one true God.

Now, in an age like this with no absolutes, somebody needs to really define who Jesus is. Colossians does that. Chapter 1, verse 15, "Jesus," it says, "is the image of the invisible God, the pre-eminent one of all creation." Chapter 2, verse 9, says: "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Colossians says there are some absolutes and Jesus is the first one.

Fourthly, this is an age of pragmatism. I feel that this is the age when people want to know what works. If you want to sell transcendental meditation, if you want to market yoga, if you want to get people to join in on reflection, then just tell them it will make some difference in their life, just tell them it will help them be a better whatever. This is a practical age and people are asking basically one question - Does it work? It isn't so important if it's true, it's important if it works. And I think in Christianity people would want to know the same thing - Does Christ work? Does He really change a life? Will I have peace? Does He give joy? Does He really bring happiness? Does He give meaning to life ... power...hope ... purpose? Colossians answers that. Chapter 1, verse 22, it says "That the body of His flesh through death is able to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight." He can change you. He can make you holy.

Chapter 2, verse 6 and 7, says: "That you're able to walk in Him to be rooted and built up in Him," and that's something that a lot of people need, roots. You can experience thanksgiving.

Chapter 2, verse 10, says: "And you are complete in Him."

Chapter 3, verse 3, says: "You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

There are some dramatic changes. And chapter 3, verse 12, all the way through chapter 4, verse 6, tells about the new power you have for a changed life. Three:12 says that we now have the capacity for tender mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing, forgiving, etc., etc., etc. All those things that men look for are possible. So, Colossians speaks to that age, the age of pragmatism.

I think, too, fifthly, this is an age of frustrated relationships. The mass of people in our world are looking for meaningful relationships. They are looking for fulfilling relationships with each other. Yet, so many people are desperately unfulfilled. I would say most people are desperately unfulfilled. Many

people are lonely. Many, many people are totally unrelated in a meaningful way to anybody, even their wives, their husbands, their parents, marriages, families, people who have to work together; none of them can get along. They have a difficult time building bridges to one another.

What about relationships? Colossians speaks clearly to this issue. Chapter 3, verse 18, tells you all about wives and husbands, and how to have a positive relationship in a family in a marriage. Verse 20, about children...verse 21, about fathers.... verse 22, about servants, or employees. Verse 1 of chapter 4 about employers.... all about relationships and how they work. So, to those in frustrated relationships, Colossians comes to the rescue.

Sixthly, this is an eschatological age, and by that I mean ever since, say the last ten years, when books started coming out like THE POPULATION BOMB and FUTURE SHOCK and all these things, I think people have become aware of the fact that we could be near the end of the world. Man sees himself on a collision course with ultimate catastrophe. We could starve to death, food wars and famine are very possible. Nuclear devices have already been planted in off-shore installments and I was reading recently where if anybody or anything ever triggered those things, it could create a tidal wave that would destroy the coastal cities. And one commentator I heard, just this week, said it is not without possibility that such could cause a two-mile high tidal wave. War could destroy us, nuclear war, chemical biological warfare. Pollution could choke us. When Apollo 8 took photos of the earth's surface, it discovered that not Los Angeles, but the worst smog in the world was Osaka and Tokyo. And along that strip in Japan, 34 tons of dirt a month falls on every square kilometer and only 17 tons in New York. We look at this age, it's eschatological, I mean, a lot of people think we're moving in on the end. Colossians answers that, Colossians has something to say about destiny, something to say about the future. In chapter 1, verse 12, it says: "Giving thanks to God who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints." And in verse 13 it talks about a coming kingdom or a kingdom with a coming aspect. Hey, there's a destiny factor here. There's something in the future. Chapter 3, verse 4, "When Christ who is our life, shall appear," that tells us there's something going to happen in the future, Christ will appear then we will appear with Him in glory.

View this age from every angle and you're going to find Colossians is up to date. It's critical for today. It presents an ageless, timeless eternal Christ as the solution to the dilemma of every man. Let the age of science know that He is the architect, the Creator and the sustainer of the universe. Let the age of ecumenism know that He is the one true head of the one true church, His own body. He is the all-sufficient Savior, the source of its vital unity. Let the age of no-authority know that He is the only authority, the image of the invisible God, the pre-eminent one in the universe, the embodiment of divine fullness, the source of all knowledge and all wisdom. Let the age of pragmatism know that He can change a life miraculously and totally. He alone can give love and joy and peace and forgiveness and every other good thing, and a new capacity for living life to the fullest. And let the age of frustrated relationships know that He is the source of true love and understanding. He builds families and marriages and friendships. And let the eschatological age know that He is the end, the hope, the

climax, the coming King, the one in which all history resolves. And when they know that they will know the message of Colossians.

Let's begin by looking at the first two verses. And this is just the introduction. Verse 1, "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." You'll note in most manuscripts that the last phrase, "And the Lord Jesus Christ," does not appear. Certainly it's true, it's just that some manuscripts include it and some do not.

Now as Paul introduces the book, I'm going to use this as a springboard to give you an overview, as Paul introduces the book, he gives the four normal elements--of an introduction. This is very typical. Four normal elements....number one is the writer. When we write a letter we put our signature at the end and you've always got to fumble through to see who wrote you the letter, Paul starts with his name. This was typical..."Paul." And, you know, I can't help but read the name and not be grabbed, just something about that name just clutches me. It fires up my imagination. He towers over me like no other human being, apart from our Lord. His personality is such a devastating thing, it's a combination of an absolutely brilliant mind, an absolutely indomitable will and yet a tender heart. A unique man who was Jewish by his ancestry and yet he was a Roman citizen by birth and possessed a combined culture of the Greek and the Jew gained from rearing in Greek culture in Tarsus and the training by Jewish teachers, such as Gamaliel. He even became a Pharisee. He was a man with a totally world view, at least in the world in which he was familiar.

He was thrust into the ministry and he became largely the determining cause of the future course of history. Such a man is so astounding that if we had one letter from that man we would have an unbelievable treasure, and we've got 13 of them. How rich we are. So, he introduces himself. And that would be enough for us and probably enough for the people in Colossae, really, some of them anyway who certainly knew of him, but he adds this. He always adds this, "An Apostle of Jesus Christ." And the reason he adds that is because it states his authority. He is not about to write a letter that gives his opinion. He is not simply a messenger. He is somebody clothed with the authority and endowed with the Dower of the sender. He is not just carrying a message, he represents authority and power. And you know, he asserts that apostolic authority when he writes to churches where he felt it was necessary.

In Philippians, for example, where it isn't necessary for him to establish his authority because it's already established, he doesn't bother to say it. In I and II Thessalonians where it isn't necessary to establish his authority, he doesn't bother to say it there either. And in Philemon, where he's not using authority, but asking a favor, he doesn't say anything about his authority. In contrast, in Galatians, he spends two chapters on his authority cause it was in question. And now in writing the Colossians, he simply states it in order that they might know that this is no opinion from some missionary, but it is the authoritative utterance of the divinely appointed mouthpiece of Jesus Christ, this is God's Word.

"Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ ..." how come? ... "by the will of God." He did not attain his office by aspiration, by usurpation, by nomination, but by divine revelation ... the will of God. So, we meet the writer.

Secondly, his companion. In so many of his letters he 'introduces the person who's with him while he's writing. It isn't a co-author, it's just who was there with him..."And Timothy," actually it says "And brother Timothy." He is not saying Timothy is writing. He is saying Timothy is with me. He included Timothy as his companion when he started in II Corinthians, in Philemon, in Philippians, in I Thessalonians and II Thessalonians. In Galatians, he includes a group of brethren that are with him. In I Corinthians 1 he includes Sosthenes, brother Sosthenes. So, it's his habit to include in the greeting whoever is with him, as if to say - It's me and my friend who is with me, saying hello. Only more than that, speaking to you as the Apostle of Christ.

I can't help but just say a word or two about Timothy. Paul loved Timothy in a very, very unique way. I'm sure Paul loved many, many people and particularly many of those that he had won to Christ, but he had a very unique love for Timothy. Timothy was the one who comforted him. Timothy was the one whose presence he most loved. Read sometime Philippians 2:19 to 23 and just feel his feelings toward Timothy. During the long years of toil that Paul spent as an Apostle, Timothy had been his comrade. Timothy's an interesting character. He was very delicate ... frequently sick, timid, hesitant, always in need of encouragement and cried a lot ... that was Timothy. Yet no one ever in all of Paul's ministry is ever seen in such a relationship to Paul as Timothy. In no one did Paul place such confidence and in no other did he lavish such love. He was truly Paul's son in the faith. So, he says - Timothy's with me - and that's good for Paul ... that's good, because as he writes he's in prison and to have Timothy is a blessing.

Third, the readers. The writer, his companion and the readers ... verse 2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae ... And you'll notice how this narrows - "To the saints," that's a broad term - and out of the saints, "To the faithful saints" and from the faithful saints to the ones that are at Colossae. He narrows his letter right down to the objective, to the saints.

Do you know what a saint is? You say - Oh, yes, they're those ones that they have statues of. No...the word saint, just to give you, this is maybe coming at it from a little different angle, I know you're familiar with...but I don't want to say what you already know, I want to say what maybe you haven't thought of ... the word saint in the original Greek, listen to this now, has no ethical or moral meaning at all. It has no righteous character in its terminology. It has no moral significance, it has no ethical significance, it simply means set apart one ... a separated one. We speak of a church as a holy place. Now, that doesn't mean that the brick and the stone and the wood has some kind of ethical quality, it doesn't mean this is moral mortar. No. What it means is it's holy only in the sense that this has been set apart for the use of God's people. We speak of the Bible so often and we say the "Holy Book." The paper is not ethically different than any other paper, and the ink doesn't have

any moral quality at all, but when we say it's a Holy Book, we mean of all the books in the world this book has been set aside as the one single book through which God conveyed His truth. It's set apart from all other books. We come to the Lord's table sometime and we take the bread and we say - "This is holy bread." Well, it isn't any different than any other ordinary bread, but it has been set apart as a symbol of Jesus Christ. Holy simply means set apart. You know what a Christian is? He's holy. That does not make, necessarily, an ethical or moral statement about him; it simply says he has been set apart from the world of ordinary people to belong to God. Now whether or not he is genuinely holy is something that has to be examined-to see whether he's living up to the fact that he is set apart.

"To the saints," and then he narrows it a little more, "and faithful brethren." Now, I'm not only talking of the saints, but I'm talking to the ones that have been faithful. I'm talking to the ones that have been loyal, and that's the idea here. It's as if it would be translated this way, and this can be done because *kai* can be translated this way, "To the saints even the faithful brethren." It's not the saints over here and the faithful brethren over here, as if there's an adverse meaning; it's the saints, even the faithful brethren.

Now which ones, Paul? The ones at Colossae, who are at Colossae. Well, let's talk about Colossae. We have to understand a little bit of background about it. We don't know when it was founded, but it was already in existence in the days of Xerxes, who was the king of Persia from 486 to 465 B.C., so about 500 years before Christ was born Xerxes, who incidentally is the same as Ahasuerus, the king during Esther's time. At that time, Colossae was in existence. It was still there-in Paul's day. So, it was an old city. It was located about a hundred miles from Ephesus. Now, if you want a general area in your mind, it's in what today would be known as Turkey, and what in Paul's day was known as Asia Minor, just across from Macedonia. It was located, as I said, about 100 miles from Ephesus and the river Lycus joined another river called the Meander, for you that are history buffs, or geographically inquisitive. Lycus and Meander rivers, right in that little valley, three important cities grew. One was called Hierapolis, the other was called Laodicea and the third was called Colossae. That little triad of cities occupied that little area; it was in the area of Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia Minor.

Now, the area was known for two things, and we can relate to the first one -earthquakes. Earthquakes destroyed Laodicea many times. The second thing that it was known for was from the Lycus river there were chalk deposits that were left and some historians have said that they left amazing configurations all over the area where the water would spill out and it would rise at flood time and it would leave this chalk and all kinds of strange formations that looked like monuments would result. Now, on the land where there wasn't any chalk, the land was super fertile and they grew pasture there and had excellent, excellent pasture land for sheep and it became the wool center of the Ancient World. And they used the chalk, also, for making dyes. They would raise the sheep, get the wool and then dye the wool right there. Interestingly enough, by 400 A.D.... 400 years after Christ ... Colossae no longer existed...totally out of existence. And today, I'm not sure, there's a little debate about this, but I'm not sure today that conclusively anybody can even find the ruins. We can find the

ruins of Laodicea and Hierapolis, but not of Colossae apparently.

It was a Gentile city but there are estimates that in those three cities there could be as many as 50 thousand Jews, and the reason the estimate that is they found some papers about a tax that the Jewish community there was sending back to Jerusalem and by the amount of the tax they can deduct how many Jews there would have been in order to give that amount, and they estimate about 50 thousand Jews. So, there would be a large Gentile population and a rather large Jewish population. So, there were the saints in Colossae. Not a famous city, a very insignificant one. And in the day of Paul it was a nothing place, it was totally insignificant. It was on the way down to its extinction. How did the church get started there? Well, let me give you just a quick look at that. On Paul's third missionary journey, he went to Ephesus. Ephesus was a great center of Asia Minor. And Paul went there on his third journey and he stayed there for three years. Remember? During the three years that he was in Ephesus, he never visited Colossae, as far as we know, but people started coming to him from all over Asia Minor. And do you know that during those three years the church at Ephesus was founded, and all seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were founded, you have Ephesus, Laodicea, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Pergamum, all of those, Thyatira, all of those churches were founded during that time and so was the church in Colossae and so was the church in Hierapolis? They were all outgrowths of Paul's ministry on his third missionary journey, as he ministered there.

In Acts chapter 19, verse 10, it says, and this is part of his ministry there in Ephesus, "And it continued for the space of two years," this was the first part of it, "so that all they who dwelt in Asia," that's Asia Minor, a province, "all that dwelt in Asia Minor heard the word of the Lord Jesus both Jews and Greeks." Verse 26, when they wanted to throw him out, they said, "Moreover you see and hear that not alone in Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia Minor, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people saying, They are no gods which are made with hands." So, it is the comment of Luke in verse 10 and it is the comment of his persecutors in verse 26 that his gospel had filled the whole of Asia Minor. From the vantage point of Ephesus, people would come hear the gospel and go back. From Colossae came a group of people ... Epaphras, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus. From Laodicea came Nymphas. All of them received Christ under the ministry of Paul, all of them went back to be used of God to begin churches. The most influential person in the beginning of those three churches in those cities was Epaphras.

If you look at chapter 4 of Colossians, and verse 12, you'll meet him. "Epaphras, who is one of you," see, he's a Colossian, "who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you." Epaphras had come to visit Paul from Colossae. So, he says he sends his greeting. He's always laboring fervently for you in prayers that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God ... what a dear guy ... for I bear him witness that he has a great deal for you -now watch - and them that are in Laodicea and them in Hierapolis. Apparently, Epaphras had been used to found all three churches. And what had happened was Paul now has finished up his three years at Ephesus. He spent a winter in Greece writing, and

then he started back to Jerusalem. He gathered the collections to take to the poor saints, went all the way back to Jerusalem.

He arrived at Jerusalem, and you remember the terrible trouble that happened? They threw him in jail. The next thing you knew he wound up in Caesarea in jail. He pleaded his case to Caesar and they shipped him to Rome.

And now he's in Rome and he's a prisoner, but as a prisoner he has liberty for people to visit him. So, in the Roman confinement, chained to a soldier, Epaphras arrives from Colossae and tells him about the Colossians and out of that comes this letter. A church he had never been to, as far as we know. A church he had not founded, but somewhere near 63 A.D., near the end of his imprisonment, Epaphras arrives, tells him about the church... and incidentally, he gave a favorable report, we'll see that when we start looking at verses 3 and following. Paul says "We give thanks to God for you." I mean, it was a good report.

But, there was a danger there too. And that's really why Epaphras came. He was concerned. And we'll see what he was concerned about in just a moment.

Now, that brings us, looking back at verses 1 and 2, to the fourth feature of this introduction ... the greeting. We've seen the writer and his companion and the readers, and the greeting - "Grace to you and peace from God our Father." That was the common greeting. Grace is God's spontaneous, unmerited favor in action. It's God's sovereign, freely bestowed, loving kindness in operation, and the result of it is peace. When God operates His sovereign grace on you, the result is you receive peace. Grace was a Jewish term, peace was Hebrew, both come flowing from God. So, Paul greets them.

So, he began. He began his letter as a result of the coming of Epaphras. But what did he have in mind? What did Epaphras tell him that made him write this thing? I mean, he didn't just sit down and ramble, he was speaking about something. What was it? That brings us to the fifth point in our little outline and that is the heresy. We've seen the writer, the companion, the readers, the greeting - five is the heresy. And you say - Where is that in the first two verses? It isn't there. But you can't understand the book unless you understand this and this is really fascinating... and you must understand it.

Here is a congregation of Gentiles, and they've got a smattering probably of Jewish believers maybe, just a very little and they've got a problem... there's a heresy that's beginning to creep into the congregation and Epaphras, their pastor, is really concerned. He makes a trip of a thousand to thirteen hundred miles, depending upon which way he took, to go to Rome and see Paul ... and he pours his heart out to Paul. He says, in effect, the people are super, Paul, but there's an imminent danger, there's a peril. And Paul writes to them and says, Hey, you are super people, but let me warn you about something. Further on you'll hear him say - Don't let anybody beguile you. It wasn't that they'd already been, it was that they were in danger of being beguiled. This is prevention.



You say - Well, what is the heresy? Well, it was a two-fold heresy. First of all, it was coming from paganism. Those people were living on the verge of paganism all the time. You know, in that one region, historians tell us that the deities such as Cybele, Men, Issus, Serapis, Helios, Selene, Demeter and Artimus dominated the worship of the people. I mean, there were gods, you know, ad nauseam ... plenty of them. And the basic evil that faced that church was a relapse into paganism. For the most part, they were new Christians and the pull of the darkness and the sensuality of the old life was strong.

Have you ever noticed that in your life? I notice that with new Christians. I notice it with myself. It ... I call it sometimes as I think Hendriksen uses the term, William Hendriksen, "The Cable of the Past." Life is like a cable, habit makes cables. A person weaves a thread everyday until it becomes an unbreakable cable ... and then you can't cut it, and the cable of the past tends to pull. And there was the environment of the present that they were living in, it was hard to row against the current. And then they had their own undertow of passion pulling them. And so, Paul's telling them - Don't go back... don't go back.

In chapter 1, for example, verse 23 says: "If you continue in the faith, grounded and settled and be not moved away." I don't want you to go back, stay in there, hang in there.

Chapter 2, verse 6, he says: "As you have received Christ, keep on walking in Him."

Chapter 3, verse 2, "Set your affections on thing above, not on things on the earth." Don't go back that way. So, that ... Paul sees the world and the flesh pulling them, pulling them.

But, there was another thing, that was Satan. The world and the flesh pulls and so does Satan, and while the vice, the world and the flesh, pulls the body, Satan pulls the mind. Satan is disguised as an angel of light and so here they've got vice pulling their...their lust, the lust of their body, and they've got false doctrine pulling their minds. Satan came in and sowed his false doctrine. And that becomes the real heartbeat of Paul's writing to counteract false doctrine. And this false doctrine, let me give it to you very simply, this false doctrine basically had two features. We don't know what brand it is, we don't have any title for it, it really isn't any particular system that we know about historically, but I'll define it for you. This false doctrine that Satan was beginning to spread, or at least going to try to spread in Colossae, had two basic features: number one, it included a false philosophy ... chapter 2, verse 8, "Beware, lest any man spoil you-through philosophy." Boy, a lot of people have been spoiled through philosophy, "And empty deceit." Hmmm. This is interesting.

Well, what are you saying, John? Listen to me. Here's what they were saying. The Greeks loved knowledge, oh did they love it. They literally gloated over what they knew, and the higher you got in knowledge and the more difficult you were to understand, and the further you got spaced out with

strange, weird understanding, the more snobbish you became. The heretics were saying this: they were saying, "The simplicity of the gospel is not adequate." Now listen. The simplicity of the gospel is not adequate. Jesus Christ is not enough; you must have elaborate knowledge in addition to having Him. Salvation is... watch ... Christ plus knowledge equals salvation. They claimed secret visions, chapter 2, verse 18, "Intruding into those things," literally it says, "Taking his stand on the things he has seen, and being vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind." You know what it was? Here's what was happening. This guy's pretending to see a vision, and he comes and says - I have seen a vision...I have seen the supernatural - and he assumes an air of deep insight into divinely revealed mysteries, see. And he prides himself on his superior knowledge and this is what became later gnosticism, from gnosis to know... superior knowledge. It isn't gnosticism yet because gnosticism isn't really defined for many years after this, but here are the seeds of it, intellectual snobbery. Some- body was saying it isn't enough to know Jesus, you can't defeat the powers of the emanating demons, you can't crack the barriers to get to the divine realm by Jesus alone, you've got to have superior knowledge. And so, they were talking about weird philosophies, and they were intruding, verse 18 says, "Into things they had seen and their fleshly mind was being puffed up." Jesus isn't adequate. You see, Jesus, they believed, was one of the emanations.

Here's what they believed. God was good. God was Spirit. Matter was evil. Remember that? That's the same as the Gnostics. How could God-good create matter-evil? He couldn't, so you know what God did? He just spawned off a whole bunch of sub-gods and they kept going and going and going and going and going and going and finally down here they started getting bad and got worse and worse and worse and then a really gross one created matter. And God was so far removed that He had nothing to do with it. You know who Jesus was? He was in line up here, one of the good emanations and the bad ones were the demons. And between man and God was this barrier of evil demons and the only way you could ever get through that was to have super-knowledge and to worship the good emanations who could help you get through. That's why they worshipped angels, because they felt they needed the angels to crack through to get to the divine realm and Jesus was one of those angels. He wasn't enough, you had to know more than just Him. He wasn't God, He was sub-God, He was an emanation.

This later became, as I said, fully developed into Gnosticism. Jesus was a good emanation. Some of them said He was a phantom, and that's why Paul says in 1:22 that: "In the body of His flesh," He did this. And in chapter 2, verse 9, he says: "The Godhead dwells in Him bodily."

Now, this philosophy said Jesus can't save you. Jesus plus knowledge ... you need the help of Jesus but don't forget you need all the other angels you can get too, so worship them all ... cause when you start to crack through that bad group of there of emanations, you're going to need some good emanations to kind of run as pulling guards for you, and that's why they worshipped angels. Look at chapter 2, verse 18, it says right in the middle: "Worshipping angels ... They were worshipping good emanations.

You know what this philosophy attacked, beloved? It attacked this. It attacked the deity of Jesus Christ. Did it not? Head on - and do you know that becomes the theme of this letter? Jesus is God, chapter 1, verse 15, He is the image of the invisible God, the pre-eminent one in creation. Chapter 1, verse 27: "Christ is the hope of glory, and in Christ," I love this, the end of verse 28, "every man can be perfect." Listen, what is he saying? He's saying Christ is God and Christ is all you need. You don't need anything else.

Chapter 2, verse 3, "You don't need anymore knowledge, for in Christ are hidden ... what? ... all the treasures of ... what?... wisdom and knowledge."

Chapter 2, verse 9: "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead."

Chapter 2, verse 19: "And by Him who is the head, all the body, joints and bands, are being held together."

In other words, he just keeps saying - Christ is God and Christ is sufficient and you don't need anything else. No greater claims were ever made in any other epistle than are made in this epistle for Christ. Philosophy isn't necessary, He's all you need. Right? Not Christ plus knowledge equals salvation.

There's a second factor in this heresy. The first one was false philosophy, the second was Judaistic ceremony, legalism. Now, you say - Well, that's a strange bedfellow for Greek philosophy. You're right, but it was there. Somehow this strange heresy was a combination of Greek philosophy and Jewish ceremonialism, or legalism. Look at chapter 2, verse 11. Some of them were saying you had to be circumcised to be saved: "In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands," he says. You don't need a circumcision ... what...what was this part of the heresy saying? Watch. Christ plus works equals salvation. The philosophy said Christ plus knowledge equals salvation, this is Christ plus works ... and God says - Christ plus nothing equals salvation. That's the message of Colossians.

Chapter 3 tells us a little more about ... chapter 3, he says: "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision." Don't get into that. That's not an issue. There's no need to even be concerned about that.

And so, they were concerned with things that there was no reason to be concerned with ... none whatsoever. It even went so far, as for example, in chapter 2 verse 20, "If you're dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world are you subject to ordinances, touch not; taste not; handle not." This is like asceticism, you know, they couldn't do anything. "Which are all to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men... these things have

indeed a show of wisdom or self-imposed worship." And so, he really says - You don't need those things, "Touch not; taste not; handle not" and all that. It's pointless.

In verse 16 of chapter 2, "Let no man therefore judge you in food or drink or the respect of a feast day, or a new moon or a Sabbath day," listen, "those are a shadow of things to come, but the body is Christ." I love that. Do you know what he says? What do you need with the shadow when the One who cast the shadow is here? See? Forget the shadow, the One who cast the shadow is here ... the body is here ... you don't need the shadow.

So, here they were, wrapped up in Greek philosophy and Jewish ceremonialism, these false teachers, and they were just beginning to attack the church at Colossae.

You say - What a weird mixture, where did it come from? We don't know. We don't even know who these people were, but there is a...there's precedent for this. There was a group of people in Israel called the Essenes. Have you ever heard of them? The three major groups among the Jews, the three major religious sects in Judaism: Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. The Essenes were ascetics, and by that I mean they were far out. In fact, they believed that you shouldn't have anything, that you should be totally deprived of everything. I mean, they were really far out. They were Gnostics, that's interesting ... they believed that the body was corruptible, that matter was corruptible and spirit was good and imperishable. So, they had that same philosophical strain. They saw the soul in the prison of the body, which was a Greek concept. It was their concept and the reason the Greeks had it and they had it was the devil ... the same devil, whether he's working with the Greeks or with anybody else. They were super-strict legalists. They went way beyond the Pharisees. They were celibate. And they adopted children in order to propagate their theology. Some of them married but if they did marry they gave their wife a three year probation period. I don't know on what criteria they decided whether they should continue it after that or not. They hated riches. You know what Josephus says about them? Josephus says they worshipped angels. Isn't that interesting? It's amazing, but all of the things that this strange group of people did effecting the Colossian church are also characteristic of these people, the Essenes. The Essenes were vegetarians, super legalistic. That may well be that the influencing group behind the picture at Colossae was this group of Essenes, but whatever. They , were saying Christ plus rules and laws equal salvation ... Christ plus knowledge equals salvation. Paul wants to say in Colossians - Christ plus ... what? ...nothing equals salvation.

You say - Well, how could anything get such a mixed-up deal with philosophy and legalism and angel worship and asceticism and all this garbled together? It's because Satan propagates all this false religion. But you know there are people like that mixed up. I got a letter and I just wanted to share it with you, it came to our tape ministry from a really strange place ... the Anondage Spiritual Community and Retreat. Just to show you an illustration of how confusing things can get...this is the letter. "In the magnificent creation which He has bestowed on us, our community is quiet and restful.

The land payment was made. There has been very little hammering, sawing and buzzing about in the community as our head monk, Ben, and his beloved wife, Mona, have been on vacation for several weeks. Ben is the founder of Anondage. His devotion flows through Karma Yoga. He is a carpenter, electrician, plumber, sheet rocker, painter, insulator, cabinet maker, church and temple builder and an altar maker."

I mean, to build a church is one thing, to build a church and a temple is something. To build a church, temple and altars, that's kind of a mixture. Further it says: "We recently held a dance with Banana Boogie and Lazy Days donating the music. There was fun, frolic, food and noise. The Lord also supplied a couple of children who fluttered around making crosses on foreheads with tiger-balm ointment. Some unsuspecting children were surprised at suddenly having a cross burned on their forehead. There was a Bahai meeting in the lodge." Bahai is the thing that believes you can get to God anyway you want and there are nine doors. "Flickering firelight and refreshments set the stage, the muffins and jelly ... well, we don't need to read that.

Then over here, he says this: "We have joined the Word of Grace Tape Library." See. "We welcome anyone who wants to come and listen to some beautiful tapes on the Bible, Christ and Christian living, the Reverend John MacArthur is the speaker."

And, I recently received a letter from them, they've asked me to come there and hold a retreat. Now, you talk about confusion, people, that isn't anything new. That isn't anything new. I mean, that is confusion. There's three more pages, but I'm not going to read it all to you.

It went on, incidentally, to talk more about the teachings of Ellen G. White and all of that, that was added to what they've been learning.

Well, you know the Colossians had some people sitting on their doorstep who were just about as mixed up. They talked about Christ, but it was Christ plus some super-knowledge. They had not only all of the philosophy that was into their heresy in Colossae, but they had all of the Jewish legalism. What a mess.

But, the one attack was this - Satan had concerted all of this hodgepodge to attack...what? ...the sufficiency of...whom? ...Christ. And that's always where he attacks. And listen to Paul's response in Colossians 2:9 "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," listen to me, "and you are ... what? ...complete in Him." Isn't that beautiful? There's the answer. You want to know God? Christ is the image of God. You want knowledge? In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You want to be accepted by God? Worship Christ not angels or celestial intercessors. You want to fulfill God's will? Don't fool with the shadow, the substance is Christ. You want holiness? It doesn't come from abusing your body, it comes from setting your affections on Him.

John Wesley said, "Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find." That's right. Christ is, Colossians 3:11 - beautiful, end of the verse, "Christ is all and in all." Isn't that it? Christ is all and in all.

Paul has one thing in mind in Colossians, Christ-sufficient. The story is told of the celebrated German sculptor, J. H. Von Donaker. Napoleon came to Von Donaker and he said: "I want you to make a statue of Venus for the Louvre in Paris," great gallery there. Von Donaker said, "No." An enormous sum of money was then offered to him by Napoleon. He still refused. The emperor angrily demanded the reason why, and this is Von Donaker's answer: "Sir, I have made a statue of Jesus Christ and I can never lower my chisel to carve an inferior subject." I like that.

Then he proceeded to tell a story, Von Donaker did. He said: "The first time I molded Christ, after two years of work, I uncovered the finished statue in the presence of my little girl. And I asked her, 'Who is that?' She clapped her hands in admiration and cried, 'It is certainly a great man.' And I smashed the statue and went to work again ... praying as much as I toiled. When I invited the girl again later to enter my studio, she went to the figure as if it were alive and said in awe, 'Oh, I know Him, He is the One who said, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.'"

Now, that's the message of Colossians. This is Paul's masterpiece of Christ. Let's pray.

We just feel, Father, like we've been lifted up and into the heavenlies. I just want to say Thank You that Jesus Christ is all and in all, and nothing more is needed. O what a joy it is to know that ... not Christ plus knowledge, not some super-visionary, supernatural ecstatic experience, not some philosophy, but we are complete in Him. Not some ceremony, some ritual, some rules, some works, but we are complete in Him.

Why your heads are bowed and your eyes closed in just a time of closing, this evening, if in your heart as you examine it, you have to recognize that you have never acknowledged-Christ as all in all, absolutely supreme, incomparable, having no equal and all sufficient, if you have not done that then you have a life that is an affront to God because the Bible says that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God. And maybe tonight you've heard what I've said in talking about Jesus Christ and you've maybe just got a feeling for what Paul is trying to get across in this letter and you're saying to yourself - If Christ is everything, if Christ is the answer to all of the dilemmas of this age and of my life and my destiny, then that's what I need...I need Christ ... I need somebody who can answer the questions of history...I need somebody who can put together the pieces of a broken life ... I need somebody who can change me ... somebody who can ... who can put my life together and make me able to have meaningful relationships ... I mean, I need somebody who can give me destiny. And you're willing to fall on the absolute and total sufficiency of Christ plus nothing, then He'll take you and absolutely transform your life for time and eternity.

You say - Well, John, what do I do if I want Him? That's simple enough to just say in your heart quietly and silently, between you and God - God, you know my heart and you know I want Christ, I confess my sin, I receive Him as Savior. Can you pray that prayer right now? I want Jesus Christ, I confess my sin and I receive Him as all sufficient Savior. In that act of faith and simple belief, Christ will invade your life and transform it ... and you'll come to know what all of us know He is indeed all and in all.

Our Father, we pray tonight that...that we might see the miracle of salvation in the life of some in our midst and that all of us would have a new experience of worship and adoration and love for the Christ, who has redeemed us who know Him. Amen.

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