

Colossians

Chapter 2

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

2:1 struggle. Gk *agona*; Eng “agony.” Paul shows great pastoral concern for their spiritual welfare. Theological errors are not to be overlooked or expected to go away on their own. (TLSB)

Laodicea. This letter was to be read to the church there too (4:16). Laodicea (modern Pamukkale) was only about 11 miles from Colosse. (CSB)

2:2 hearts ... knit together in love. Can also mean “instructed in love.” Our love and unity are not produced by our own efforts, but they are gifts generated by God’s love in Jesus. (TLSB)

assurance. Based on the power of God’s true Word (1Th 1:5). “He has overwhelmed us with unspeakable, eternal treasures by His Son and the Holy Spirit” (LC II 24). (TLSB)

2:3 hidden. Paul challenges the false teachers, who claimed special insight into the mysteries of God. All that we can and need to know about God is ultimately revealed to us in Christ. (TLSB)

knowledge. Paul stressed knowledge in this letter (v. 2; 1:9–10) because he was refuting a heresy that emphasized knowledge as the means of salvation (see Introduction to 1 John: Gnosticism). Paul insisted that the Christian, not the Gnostic, possessed genuine knowledge. (CSB)

2:4 no one. Paul leaves no room for error, because it is a persuasive deception that will lead people away from Christ. (TLSB)

2:5 absent ... in body... with you ... in spirit. Similar to 1Co 5:3. (CSB)

with you in spirit. The Holy Spirit ministers to our spirits through the Word. Both Paul and his hearers are united by their mutual attention to God’s Word in Christ. (TLSB)

good order ... firmness. Terms with military associations. These are God’s gifts to resist incursions of false teachings in the Church. (TLSB)

2:1–5 Whatever this false teaching is that has infiltrated the Colossian Church, it is not the teaching of Jesus Christ. We, too, can be drawn away from Christ by all sorts of attractive thoughts and words. Eventually, Christless or Christ-lite teachings will separate us from God and from one another. But the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge overcome all temptation and defeat all deception. His words will always encourage us and strengthen us in faith and love. • Grant, O Lord, that Your Word would be taught in its truth and purity in Christ, and protect us from those who would do otherwise. Amen. (TLSB)

Alive in Christ

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

2:6 received – Recalls the earliest Christian baptismal confession (Rm 10:9; 1Co 12:3). (TLSB)

walk in him. The believer’s intimate, spiritual, living union with Christ is mentioned repeatedly in this letter (see, e.g., vv. 7, 10–13, 20; 1:2, 27–28; 3:1, 3). (CSB)

walk. Gk *stoicheo*, “be in line with” or “keep in step with” (also translated from other terms). (TLSB p. 1904)

Through baptism Christ lives in us. This is a spiritual living that shapes every aspect of our life in accordance with the will of God.

2:7 rooted and built up. Both metaphors, one from nature and the other from construction, point to something that is firm and enduring. God’s Word makes this way of life in Christ possible. (TLSB)

Isaiah 11: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.”

Ephesians 2:20 “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

Matthew 7:24-29 “²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

Luke 6:43-45 “⁴³“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

2:8 *empty deceit* – Philosophy can help us with many questions but is powerless to explain God adequately. If we think it can, we are deceived. (TLSB)

As opposed to the “tradition” of Christian doctrine (1Co 11:2). (TLSB)

elementary spirits of the world. This term (which occurs also in v. 20 and Gal 4:3, 9) means false, worldly, religious, elementary teachings. Paul was counteracting the Colossian heresy, which, in part, taught that for salvation one needed to combine faith in Christ with secret knowledge and with man-made regulations concerning such physical and external practices as circumcision, eating and drinking, and observance of religious festivals. (CSB)

False teachings that are constructed from the basic elements of the fallen universe. Cf Gal 4:3, 9. In Col, they are closely related to fallen angels (vv 18–20). (TLSB)

2:9 *fullness of the Deity*. The declaration that the very essence of deity was present in totality in Jesus’ human body was a direct refutation of Gnostic teaching. (CSB)

A technical term among the Colossian heretics and later Gnosticism for a number of pseudo-divine beings that supposedly emanated from God (angels, rulers, authorities, thrones, dominions). Against this, Paul says everything that is of God dwells in Christ. We confess this in the Nicene Creed: “[Christ is] very God of very God, ... being of one substance with the Father.” “In this personal union the two natures have such a grand, intimate, indescribable communion that even the angels are astonished by it” (FC SD VIII 30). (TLSB)

bodily. Jesus of Nazareth is God in the flesh. Paul rejects the heretics’ principle that the flesh is evil. (TLSB)

2:10 *filled*. Completed. Christians have everything they need in Christ. (TLSB)

2:11–12 *circumcision*.† In the Israelite faith, circumcision was a sign that the individual stood in covenant relation with God. While this is the only reference where circumcision is associated with baptism, the passage teaches that, for the Christian, water baptism is the parallel rite of the new covenant relationship. It, like the Lord’s Supper, is a means of grace. (CSB)

A sign of God’s covenant establishing the people of Israel (Gn 17:9; see p 127). But in Christ the purpose of the covenant with Abraham (to be a blessing to all the families of the earth; Gn 12:3) was fulfilled. The new covenant is established with a different circumcision, Baptism. Infant Baptism is also supported by this verse, since the Israelite circumcision was performed on the eighth day after birth. Lutherans reject the teaching that God regards children as innocent before the application of the Word and Baptism (FC Ep XII 6). (TLSB)

6:11 *circumcision of Christ* – This is like our baptism. It is a means of grace. It works faith and brings us into the family of God.

6:12 *buried ... raised*. The same powerful working of God that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in Baptism. Baptism puts to death the sinful nature (Rm 6:6) and resurrects us in faith to a new life in Christ. Baptism is not just a symbol of what God does through the teaching of God’s Word. It is water combined with God’s Word that makes it a washing of regeneration (Ti 3:5–7). “When Paul describes conversion or renewal, he almost everywhere designates these two parts, *making dead and making alive*” (Ap XIA 46). “Faith is powerful through the power of God and overcomes death” (Ap V 129). (TLSB)

Romans 6:4 “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Romans 7:4 “So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Galatians 5:24 “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Ephesians 2:1-6 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature ^a and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,”

2:13 *dead*. All people are born spiritually dead. Though they bear God’s image, they are separated from Him. (TLSB)

forgiven us. Trespasses bury those who are spiritually dead. But those who are made alive in faith are delivered from the condemnation of their trespasses. (TLSB)

2:14 *legal demands*. A business term, meaning a certificate of indebtedness in the debtor’s handwriting. Paul uses it as a designation for the Mosaic law, with all its regulations, under which everyone is a debtor to God. (CSB)

The debtor kept a handwritten bill of indebtedness; in this case, it is the record of all our violations of God’s Law. This record is wiped away by Jesus’ death on the cross. (TLSB)

Psalm 130:3 “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?” (NIV)

Psalm 130:3 “if you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (ESV)

2:15 *he disarmed the rulers*. Not only did God cancel out the accusations of the law against the Christian, but he also conquered and disarmed the evil angels (powers and authorities, 1:16; Eph 6:12), who entice people to follow asceticism and false teachings about Christ. The picture is of conquered soldiers stripped of their clothes as well as their weapons to symbolize their total defeat. (CSB)

rulers and authorities. These are created by God and yet often corrupted by sin. They can be personal (such as angels) or impersonal (such as governments, economic systems, educational institutions). They might also be demons masquerading as idols or false gods. Cf 1:16; 2:9. (TLSB)

triumphing. Paul had in mind the Roman custom of stripping defeated armies of weapons and armor and parading them in a triumphal procession. Christians should not allow these “rulers” either to tempt or threaten them. (TLSB)

Through Jesus’ death on the cross he not only canceled the debt but made a mockery of all that would oppose him and his will. It gives us landslide victory like that described in Romans 8:37.

Lit. “leading them in a triumphal procession.” The metaphor recalls a Roman general leading his captives through the streets of his city for all the citizens to see as evidence of his complete victory. That Christ triumphed over the devil and his cohorts is seen from Mt 12:29; Lk 10:18; Ro 16:20. (CSB)

2:6–15 Seeking guidance and security from creation rather than from the Creator will end in disaster. We must not forget that all creation has been corrupted by sin. Created things, as good as they may be, are no substitute for God. He gives us the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. In Baptism, we have been raised up as a new creation. • “In Thee all fullness dwelleth, All grace and pow’r divine; The glory that excelleth, O Son of God, is Thine. We worship Thee, we bless Thee, To Thee, O Christ, we sing; We praise Thee and confess Thee, Our glorious Lord and King.” Amen. (LSB 527:3) (TLSB)

Let No One Disqualify You

16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. **17** These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. **18** Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, **19** and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. **20** If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— **21** “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” **22** (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? **23** These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

2:16 *judgment.* Though it is difficult to understand exactly what the Colossian heretics demanded, we can see that their demands included dietary rules (v 21), ascetic practices (vv 18, 23), and adherence to a cultic calendar (v 16). (TLSB)

Sabbath. Indicates that there was a Jewish element associated with the Colossian heresy. (TLSB)

2:17 *shadow of the things to come.* The ceremonial laws of the OT are here referred to as shadows (cf. Heb 8:5; 10:1) because they symbolically depicted the coming of Christ; so any insistence on the observance of such ceremonies is a failure to recognize that their fulfillment has already taken place. This element of the Colossian heresy was combined with a rigid asceticism, as vv. 20–21 reveal. (CSB)

Paul taught that OT events, practices, and messages have their full meaning and realization in Christ (Rm 15:4; 1Co 10:1–11). An engaged couple who must spend time apart might cherish each other’s photo. But after they are married and living together, it would be odd to devote the same attention to the photo. “Scripture itself has abolished the Sabbath Day. It teaches that since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted” (AC XXVIII 59). (TLSB)

substance. Lit, “body” (see previous uses of the term at 1:22; 2:9, 11), which refers to Christ’s incarnation. (TLSB)

2:18 *puffed up without reason.* Humility in which one delights is of necessity mock humility. Paul may refer to a professed humility in view of the absolute God, who was believed to be so far above man that he could only be worshiped in the form of angels he had created. Second-century Gnosticism conceived of a list of spirit beings who had emanated from God and through whom God may be approached. (CSB)

asceticism. False humility or abasement. “When people believe that they are pure and righteous because of such hypocrisy, they hinder the knowledge of Christ and the knowledge of God’s gifts and commandments” (Ap XXIII 46). (TLSB)

disqualify. This term pictures an umpire or referee who excludes from competition any athlete who fails to follow the rules. The Colossians were not to permit any false teacher to deny the reality of their salvation because they were not delighting in mock humility and in the worship of angelic beings. (CSB)

Or, “cheat.” (TLSB)

going on in detail. Paul warns believers not to be deceived by those who claim special revelation. If it is not truly centered in Christ, it is not of the Holy Spirit; rather, it comes from the sinful nature. (TLSB)

what he has seen. Probably refers to professed visions by the false teachers. (CSB)

2:19 *not holding fast to the Head.* The central error of the Colossian heresy is a defective view of Christ, in which he is believed to be less than deity (see v. 9; 1:19). (CSB)

Christ is the head of all creation as well as the cause of our salvation (Eph 5:23). (TLSB)

grows with a growth that is from God – All who are in Christ are growing, not because of their own self-imposed religious exercises, but because of the Word of Christ. They grow according to the growth God gives. (TLSB)

2:20–23 “Paul says that traditions do not help with respect to eternal righteousness and eternal life, because food, drink, clothing, and the like are things that perish through use. Eternal life is worked in the heart by eternal things, that is, by God’s Word and the Holy Spirit” (Ap XXVIII 10). (TLSB)

2:20 *regulations.* Man-made regulations of false religion have nothing to do with Christ and the forgiveness of sins. (TLSB)

2:21 *Do not handle ... taste ... touch!* The strict ascetic nature of the heresy is seen here. These prohibitions seem to carry OT ceremonial laws to the extreme. (CSB)

Those who seek salvation through their own efforts gravitate toward external exercises that are easily seen and measurable. (TLSB)

2:22 *perish as they are used.* A religion constructed from decaying elements of this world is itself perishing. (TLSB)

2:23 A rather detailed analysis of the Colossian heresy: 1. It appeared to set forth an impressive system of religious philosophy. 2. It was, however, a system created by the false teachers themselves (“self-imposed”), rather than being of divine origin. 3. The false teachers attempted to parade their humility. 4. This may have been done by a harsh asceticism that brutally misused the body. Paul’s analysis is that such practices are worthless because they totally fail to control sinful desires. (CSB)

self-mad religion. The false teachers themselves had created the regulations of their heretical system. They were not from God. (CSB)

Self-imposed, external efforts (v 21) are vital to those whose religion is more about them than it is about God. (TLSB)

no value. Desires of the flesh cannot be overcome by self-denial. They can only be overcome by God's grace in Christ. (TLSB)

2:16–23 The Christian faith will not be replaced by man-made religion. Over the centuries, many have claimed to have found a substitute for Christ and His forgiveness: e.g., rationalism, evolutionism, socialism, and postmodernism. Sometimes these ideas are very impressive, and the lifestyles they conceive become extremely popular. But St Paul wrote, “Let God be true though every one were a liar” (Rm 3:4). These waves of man-made religion always end up breaking apart upon God's truth in Jesus, who “is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). • Thank You, Lord, for granting me faith and preserving my faith with the wisdom and substance of Christ. Amen. (TLSB)