

Epistle to the Colossians

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

The Epistle to the Colossians emphasizes the glory and preeminence of Christ and the believer's completeness in Him, countering false teachings and errors among the Colossian Christians.

Scripture: Colossians 1:15, Colossians 2:8-9, Colossians 2:11, Colossians 2:14

Topics: "Christ Preeminence", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches about the dangers of being led astray by false teachings and the importance of staying rooted in Christ. He emphasizes the preeminence of Christ as the Head of Creation and the Church, warning against being spoiled by worldly philosophies and traditions of men. Gaebelein highlights the mystery of God revealed in Christ, in whom believers are complete and filled with all the fullness of God. He addresses the significance of being circumcised in Christ, buried and raised with Him through faith, and the victory over principalities and powers achieved by Christ's triumph on the cross.

Transcript

Colossae was a city of Phrygia, a district in Asia Minor. It was pleasantly located in the valley of the Lycus, a branch of the Meander. Two other cities are also mentioned in this Epistle to the Colossians, the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13). Laodicea was only nine miles and Hierapolis, thirteen miles from Colossae. Laodicea was a very rich and influential city. Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs. Colossae was the smallest of these three cities. Christian believers lived in all three cities and later the Lord selected the church of the Laodiceans and addressed to it the final message of the seven churches (Rev. 3). The region of Phrygia was well settled by Jews, some of whom were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). We shall find through the study of this Epistle that a Jewish sect which held evil doctrines flourished in the whole region; this sect was known as the Essenes, and the Spirit of God warns against their false teachings in the Epistle. Phrygia also was known as the seat of other heresies, especially an oriental-philosophical mysticism.

The Church in Colossae

It seems that the church in Colossae was preeminently a Gentile church (2:13). How did it come into existence? Paul evidently did not visit the city, though he passed through Phrygia (Acts 16:6; 18:23), for he writes in this Epistle, "For I would that ye know what great conflict I have for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (2:1).

It seems also clear that the church in Colossae came into existence after Paul had passed through that region the second time as stated in Acts 18:23, for if a church had existed then in that city, he would probably have visited Colossae. If we turn to the nineteenth chapter of the book of Acts, which records the long sojourn of the Apostle Paul in Ephesus, we have a hint on how the gospel was made known to the Colossians. First we read that Paul continued for two years, "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). And then Demetrius the silversmith witnessed to the extension of the work of Paul while being in Ephesus. "Moreover ye see and hear, that not only in Ephesus, but almost throughout Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people..." (Acts 19:26).

Asia does not mean the continent, but a province of Asia Minor, of which Phrygia was a part. The whole region heard the gospel during his stay in the prominent city of Ephesus ; among the visitors who listened to the messages of Paul were people from Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. These carried the gospel back to their homes and thus churches were formed. Philemon and Epaphras of Colossae must in this way have heard the gospel from the apostle and became the instruments through whom the church in their home-city was founded.

That Epaphras was the more prominent one becomes certain from chapter 1:7 and 4:12-13.

The Occasion and Object of the Epistle

Paul in Rome had received, probably through Epaphras, the information that the Colossian Christians were facing great dangers as to their faith. What the danger was the text of the Epistle will show us more fully. A number of false doctrines emanating from philosophical speculations, oriental mysticism, asceticism and Judaism, were being advocated amongst them and threatened the complete corruption of the church. Later a system known by the name of Gnosticism (from the Greek word "gnosis"--knowledge) wrought great havoc in the Church; the beginning of it was troubling the Colossians, who seemed to have been an intellectual class to whom the philosophical, mystical and ascetic teachings appealed in a special way. Gnosticism attempted to explain creation, the origin of evil, God, etc., apart from the revelation God has given in His Word.

Besides speaking of a certain class of beings, half-gods of different rank, they denied that God had created the world, but that an inferior being had called it into existence. This system taught that matter is evil and that the only way to escape from evil would be to repudiate matter completely. The worst feature of these Gnostic teachings was a denial of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. It was a philosophical, theosophical speculation, anti-Christian throughout. Well did Polycarp say to the Gnostic Marcion, "I know thee, thou firstborn of Satan." While this evil system had not yet fully developed in the Colossian church, the foundation for it had been laid and the Holy Spirit anticipated its coming, and in sending this document to the Colossians answers the false teachings of Gnosticism. This is of equal interest and importance to the Church in the twentieth century. "Christian Science," so-called, that philosophical-theosophical-mystical cult, is a satanic revival of ancient Gnosticism. The Epistle to the Colossians must, therefore, be an effectual weapon against this cult, which denies the two pillars of Christianity, the Son of God and the finished work of the cross.

The Colossians were also being misled, as the second chapter shows us, by other false teachers. Judaizers were at work among them. We are not left to infer respecting the class of religionists to which these teachers belonged, for the mention of "new moon and Sabbath" in chapter 2:16, at once

characterizes them as Judaizers, and leads us to the then prevalent forms of Jewish philosophy to trace them. Not that these teachers were merely Jews; they were Christians (by profession), but they attempted to mix with the gospel of Christ the theosophy and angelology of the Jews of their times. They became infected with theosophic and ascetic principles and were gradually being drawn away from the simple doctrine of Christ. This false system of philosophy and ascetic mysticism, attempting to intrude into unseen things, with which was linked angel-worship, limited the superiority and greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ and more so the sufficiency of His work of redemption.

The occasion of the Epistle was the existence of these evil things among them. The object in writing was more than counteracting the false doctrines. The Holy Spirit unfolds the truth of the gospel, showing in this Epistle the majesty and glory of Christ, that He has the preeminence in all things, head of creation and head of the Church; it unfolds the completeness of His redemption and the believer's completeness in Christ as risen with Christ and in living union with Him, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Like all the great Pauline Epistles, containing the revelation of God to man, the Colossian Epistle with its vital and glorious truths, is meat in due season for God's people, especially in these days when we are confronted by the same errors in modern movements and energized by the power of Satan to destroy the very foundations of the faith.

Colossians in Contrast with Ephesians

Colossians was written by Paul about the year 62 A.D., from the Roman prison, and, as stated in the introduction to the Epistle to the Ephesians was carried by the same messenger who also received the Ephesian Epistle from the hands of the Apostle. Tychicus was this messenger (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7-9). There is a striking resemblance between these two Epistles, which have been called "twins." Dean Alford speaks of it as follows: "in writing both, the apostle's mind was in the same frame--full of the glories of Christ and the consequent glorious privileges of His Church, which is built on Him, and vitally knit to Him. This mighty subject, as he looked with indignation on the beggarly system of meats and drinks and hallowed days and angelic mediations to which his Colossians were being drawn down, rose before him in all its length and breadth and height, but as writing to them, he was confined to one portion of it, and to setting forth that one portion pointedly and controversially. He could not, consistently with the effect which he would produce on them, dive into the depths of the divine counsels in Christ with regard to them."

Ephesians and Colossians embody the highest revelations God has given to man. Colossians is the counterpart of the Ephesian Epistle; each may be viewed as a supplement to the other. In Ephesians the revelation concerns mostly the body of Christ (the Church), the fullness of that body, its rich privileges and heavenly destiny; in Colossians the head of that body in His fullness and glory is blessedly revealed. In Ephesians we find repeatedly the blessed position of the believer stated "in Christ Jesus"; in Colossians we read of Christ in the believer, "Christ in you." Ephesians reveals the calling of God and exhorts believers "to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called"; Colossians making known the Lord and His glory, exhorts "to walk worthy of the Lord."

Controversy concerning evil doctrines and errors is absent in Ephesians; it is prominent in Colossians. In Ephesians the Holy Spirit and His work in the believer is fully brought out. Then we read of the quickening, the sealing, the filling of the Spirit and are warned against quenching and grieving the Spirit; in Colossians nothing is said about the Holy Spirit, the doctrine concerning the Spirit is absent. The annotations will point out the reason for this.

At the same time the redemption truths of Ephesians as well as Romans and Galatians are all touched upon in Colossians. The great truths contained in these wonderful Epistles must ever be kept in freshness and in power by the Spirit of God before the heart and mind of God's people, so that they can live and walk as those who are redeemed and be kept in the enjoyment of salvation. The more these deep and precious documents are studied the greater the blessedness for God's people. May God the Holy Spirit, the author of this Epistle, fill, through His message, our eyes and hearts with Him who is our Lord and the Head of His body.

The Division of Colossians

Chapter 2:9-10 is the center of the Epistle. "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power." It is the very heart of the Epistle, the key which unlocks its heavenly treasures. We get in this verse the scope of the Epistle. The apostle does not begin by warning the Colossians of the danger and by exposing the fatal errors which were creeping in among them. He writes first of Him and His glory. The Spirit of God wants the Colossians to get the right estimate of the Person and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His dignity and preeminence in all things, of the great work of reconciliation, the peace which was made in the blood of the cross and the present and future results of this work.

Then He shows that the believer is in Christ, that He who is bodily in glory, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells is the fullness of the believer. Each is complete in Him. And therefore ordinances, philosophy, traditions of men, intruding in mysterious things, angel-worship, cannot add anything to the believer's knowledge or perfection. His perfection is Christ. Then follow exhortations, how a believer who is risen with Christ and one with Him should walk down here. We divide, therefore, this Epistle into three parts.

- I. THE PERSON OF CHRIST, HIS GLORY AND HIS WORK (1)
- II. COMPLETE IN HIM, IN WHOM ALL THE FULLNESS DWELLS (2)
- III. THE PRACTICAL RESULTS, LIVING AS RISEN WITH CHRIST (3:4-4:18)

Analysis and Annotations

I. THE PERSON OF CHRIST, His GLORY AND His WORK

CHAPTER 1

1. The introduction (1:1-8)
2. The prayer (1:9-14)
3. The person and glory of Christ, Head of creation and Head of the Church (1:15-18)
4. The work of reconciliation and the double ministry (1:19-29)

Verses 1-8

This Epistle unfolds the doctrine of Christ and therefore Paul speaks of himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God; Timotheus is spoken of as a brother. In addressing the Philippians, the apostle

spoke of himself and of Timotheus as servants and did not mention his apostleship at all. In addressing the Colossians, when error is to be refuted and truth to be revealed, he uses his title as apostle. He addresses them as saints and faithful brethren in Christ and the precious greeting to such whom God has separated from evil and unto Himself follows: "Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace and peace belonged to them, as it belongs to all who are in Christ. Their state could not affect what God has bestowed upon them in His Son.

Then he gives thanks "to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." He had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus; of the love which they had towards all the saints and then mentions the hope which is laid up for them in heaven. Faith, love and hope are the blessed marks of all true believers, produced in them by the Spirit of God. Their faith in Christ Jesus was manifested in love for all the saints. "This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23). "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

And they also know the blessed hope which they had heard and learned in the word of the truth of the gospel. The gospel then had produced these blessings among the Colossians, who were once heathen; and the same gospel was also going out in all the world bringing forth fruit wherever it was received in faith. Could this be said of the various philosophical systems which were being introduced among the Colossians? Or could mysticism and law-keeping show such results? Only those who hear and believe the gospel know the grace of God in truth. Then Paul mentions Epaphras, the beloved fellow servant, who was for them a faithful minister. Through his ministry they had learned these things, while Epaphras had declared unto Paul their love in the Spirit. This is the only time the Spirit of God is mentioned in this Epistle.

It is different in the Epistle to the Ephesians. There the fullest teachings concerning the Holy Spirit are given. Every chapter in Ephesians speaks of the Holy Spirit. We read there that He is the seal and the earnest; He is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; access is through Him unto the Father; the church is described as the habitation of God through the Spirit, who has also made known the mystery hid in former ages. Furthermore He strengthens the inner man that Christ may dwell in the heart by faith. Then the unity of the Spirit is spoken of in Ephesians; believers are not to grieve the Spirit by whom they are sealed unto the day of redemption; the filling with the Spirit, spiritual songs as the result, the sword of the Spirit and prayer in the Spirit are likewise mentioned in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Why is all this omitted in Colossians? Why is this Epistle silent about the work of the Spirit in the believer? The reason is of much interest. Our Lord said concerning the coming of the Spirit of truth, "He shall not speak of Himself," and again He said, "He shall glorify Me" (John 16:13-14).

While the Ephesians knew Christ, owned Him and His glory, the Colossian Christians, through false teachers, were being turned away from Christ; they began to lose sight of the glory of Christ by listening to philosophy (2:8); their eyes were no longer only on Christ. He therefore aims in this Epistle to glorify Christ, to lead the Colossians back to a full realization of the Person and Glory of Christ and their completeness in Him. He directs their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ and thus fulfills his mission, speaking not of himself and glorifying Christ. (Certain sects which claim a restoration of Pentecostal power and gifts are constantly occupied with the Holy Spirit, His work in the believer; they speak much of the Spirit, the feelings He produces, the energy He gives, etc. Nowhere in the Word are believers told to be occupied with the Spirit. The one object given to the believer to have ever before the heart is the Lord Jesus Christ and His glory. One finds among these people who claim a restoration of apostolic gifts

(notably the smallest, speaking in tongues) those who are quite ignorant of the work of Christ, and the glory of Christ.)

Verses 9-14

Next follows a prayer, Paul being only the instrument of the utterance of the Spirit of God. And it is a prayer fully adapted to the conditions of the Colossian Christians. It is still the prayer of the Holy Spirit for all the people of God. The leading petition in this prayer is for the knowledge of the will of God--"that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." All the other requests may be looked upon as the results of a spiritual understanding of the will of God. What is the meaning of the will of God? It is that will of God of which we read so much in the first chapter of Ephesians and concerns those who are in Christ. What we possess in Christ, what God has made us in Him and given to us with Him, according to the good pleasure of His will, is that which believers need to know. What God has willed for those who are redeemed by the blood of His Son, how they are constituted in Him holy, put into the place of sons, accepted in the Beloved, heirs of God, sealed and indwelt by His Spirit, is the knowledge with which Christians should be filled. This the Colossians lacked.

The full knowledge of that will would have kept them from listening to the enticing words of false teachers, who promised them wisdom, knowledge and other benefits, which are only found in Christ and which the believer possesses in Him. And this knowledge of His will is a growing knowledge and must govern the walk of the believer. It is needed "to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Such a walk is only possible by enjoying constantly the relationship into which the gracious will of God has brought the believer; the more we enter into all grace has done for us and lay hold of it, the more we shall walk worthy of the Lord. And this walk is "unto all pleasing." With a true Christian, God may be displeased, though He condemn not; and there is a lack of felt fellowship. Only as walking worthily of Christ can we abound in obedience to God, and be as children intimate with their father. Every Christian's habitual question should be, not, "What must I do to escape censure, or win wages?"

But "What will please God?" It produces also fruit bearing in every good work and growth by the true knowledge of God. And this gives strength in the way down here. "Strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and long suffering with joy." In the midst of tribulation and suffering strength is supplied through the might of His glory. It is the glory of Christ and Christ in glory which strengthens the believer, gives power to endure and to pass through every trial and hardship with joy. To know this will of God in Christ and Christ and His glory constantly before the soul, this is what leads to Christlikeness and what gives victory as we walk through a world to which the believer no longer belongs. "For, with our feet outside of the land, our way must be a toilsome and afflicting one, dreary enough and a perpetual outrage to the soul strung to heavenly purity and peace and worship. But He who was from heaven and is now its attractiveness went through it all with a glow of gladness that broke out in a rapture at times of greatest neglect and misapprehension and hatred from without (Matt. 11:25-27). He was as a weaned child, desiring nothing here.

There has been no promise of making things smooth here, but the opposite, and if we nestle we must have made the nest by gathering worldly materials, by accepting a friendship where He would get hate. God brings nothing before us to hold the heart in comfort, peace, and joy, but the glory to be revealed. And is it not enough for that and enough to wait for?" (M. Taylor, Colossians) Being filled with the knowledge of His will produces likewise worship. "Giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness

and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love; in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." It is a part of the prayer that Christians might give thanks to the Father in spiritual worship.

And these things mentioned are known to the believer if he is filled with the knowledge of His will, for they tell us what God hath done for the sinner who believes on His Son. Here are the most assuring statements, the things forever settled for those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an inheritance of the saints in light and the Father hath made us meet to be partakers of it through the work of His Son. From the Father we receive this inheritance. The title to that inheritance, which every true child of God fully owns, is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fitness to be there is the new nature bestowed upon the believer. It is therefore not, as so often stated, that we try to fit ourselves for heaven; this is impossible. The moment a sinner accepts the Lord Jesus Christ, he is made meet to be a partaker of that inheritance. All the glory of that inheritance is at once put on the side of him who trusts on Christ. All was done for us once for all when Christ died; in Him we are sons and if sons, heirs of God, the fellow heirs of Christ. "There can be no greater acceptance of us in heaven than God gives us now in Christ, for even there we shall stand accepted in Him alone.

Our Father will not more fully rejoice over us there than He does here; for then, as now, He will see us only as in Christ. Our meetness, then, for the one part of the inheritance is just our meetness for the other part. And so, when some eminent saint comes to his death-bed, what is it that gives him his comfort, his serene triumph, in that critical hour? Is it his progressive practical sanctification? Indeed, no. He is too conscious of many failures, that he should rely on that as his passport through the gates into the city. Thankful he is to God, that He has enabled him to serve Him with whatever degree of faithfulness, and he may speak of it to the praise of the glory of His grace; but he rests not his destination on so imperfect a prop as that. What is it then? Just this: the infinite value of the blood which sprinkled him. On that he rests, as on the Rock of Ages. Yes, Christ Himself is our only meetness for the inheritance, and our believing on Christ is our having the meetness" (Bishop W. Nicholson).

And more than that, "He hath delivered us (not a gradual deliverance, but a deliverance accomplished) from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." And the deliverance takes place as well as the translation into His kingdom, when we believe on Christ. There is a power of darkness. Satan is the ruler of darkness and to this power of darkness the unsaved sinner belongs. We are by nature the complete subjects of this power and also the children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). As such we are in a helpless condition and if deliverance is to take place it must come from the side of God. And it has come for all believers. All who are in Christ are no longer under the authority of Satan, the prince of the power of the air, they are taken from his domain and rule and are translated into another kingdom, the kingdom of the Son of his love.

My chains are snapped, the bonds of sin are broken,

And I am free.

Oh! let the triumphs of His grace be spoken

Who died for me.

The expression "kingdom of the Son of His love" has been identified with the Church, while others make it to mean the coming kingdom, which will be set up when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again. But it does not mean the body of Christ and much less the kingdom on earth, which is termed the kingdom of the Son

of man. We quote from the Synopsis by Darby, who gives the correct meaning of this term.

"Here alone, I believe, is the kingdom called the kingdom of the Son; and, I think, it is only as introducing His Person as the center of everything and giving us the measure of the greatness of the blessing. It is the kingdom of One who has this place, the Son of His love, into which we are introduced. It is indeed His kingdom; and in order that we may apprehend the character of this kingdom as it is now for us, and our nearness to God as having part in it, it is called the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is this which is the present foundation and characteristic of the relationship with God of those who are truly in and of it. As the kingdom of the Son of man, it is His manifestation hereafter in glory and in government. Here it is characterized by the relationship of the Son Himself to the Father, in His person, with the addition of that which gives us a full title to share it--redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Blessed possessions! Blessed assurance! In Christ, fit for glory; in Christ, delivered from the power of darkness and near to God now as He, the Son of His love, is near, belonging to same realm of glory; in Christ redemption, the forgiveness of sins. There are no "ifs" and no questionings. All is positive. For all this we should give thanks to the Father and praise Him for what He has done for us. Such worshippers the Father seeketh (John 4) for they delight in His Son, in whom all His delight is. Yet how little such true worship is rendered! And why? Because Christians are so little filled with the knowledge of His will, with that which grace has accomplished in Christ. (The spiritual condition of a Christian may be learned by his prayer. One who knows what God has done, who has looked deep into the gospel of God, whose heart knows and enjoys Christ will praise much and thank the Father for all these blessed realities. But how many ask God constantly to give to them that, which they already possess; and there is no real worship possible unless we know and enjoy His grace. Bye and bye all our prayers will cease and it will be all praise and worship--when we are with Him in glory and know what grace has done for us forever.)

Verses 15-18

With these verses we reach the heart of this chapter. Christ, the Son of His love, having been named in the prayer, the Holy Spirit reveals Him now in His Person and glory as well as the work of redemption accomplished by Him. It is a remarkable portion of this Epistle in which all the errors about the Person of Christ are refuted and silenced. Arianism, Socinianism, Unitarianism, Russellism, Christian Science and other "isms" which rob the Lord Jesus Christ of His full glory and deny His deity, are completely answered in the brief words which unfold His glory. It was Arius of Alexandria who taught in the beginning of the fourth century that the Lord Jesus was a creature, the first of all created beings, though superangelic, yet not eternal in His being nor a partaker of the divine essence. The council of Nicea (325 A.D.) condemned the wicked theory of Arius. Socinus in the Reformation period revived this error, as did Priestly and Martineau in England and Channing and others in America. It remained for one Charles T. Russell, whose system is known by different names, to popularize these false and corrupt views and spread them throughout Christendom. Russell with Arius asserts that in His preexistent state Jesus was a pure spirit, higher than the angels, yet only a creature. When born of the Virgin Mary, He dropped His spirit nature while on earth. He teaches that the atonement offered by our Lord was only human, having nothing divine about it. Russellism also denies that the human body of our Lord was raised from the dead. The whole system is a conglomerate of Arianism, Ebioniteism and Rationalism. Christian Science equally denies the deity of Christ and contains in itself all the fatal errors of Gnosticism, which the Colossians were facing in their day.

1. The first statement concerns His absolute deity--"Who is the image of the invisible God." He is the image of God in all His fullness and perfection. As the image of God, the invisible God, He therefore is

God. "He is the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His substance" (Heb. 1:3). He has made known God to man; in Him we see what God is. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared Him" (John 1:18). Were He not the essential image of God in His own person, one with God in eternity and glory, He could not be the representative image of God by incarnation.

2. "Firstborn of all Creation"--not as the Authorized Version has it "the firstborn of every creature." It is here where the false teaching originates, which claims that our Lord was after all only a creature, called into existence by God, and not very God. This passage teaches no such thing. The title "Firstborn" denotes His priority to creation, for He is creation's head; the headship of all creation belongs to Him. When He who is the image of the invisible God takes His place in creation, as He did in incarnation, it can only be as the Firstborn, as the beginning of the creation of God, the head of all. He, who became man, under whose feet as the second Man all things will be put in subjection (Ps. 8; Heb. 2), is the Lord from Heaven, the Creator of all things.

3. That He is not a creature, though He took on the creature's form, is at once demonstrated by the words which follow. The Holy Spirit anticipated the errors which would deny His glory and therefore we read of Him as the Creator. "For by Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him." It is therefore absolutely certain that the "Firstborn" does not mean that our Lord is a creature, but the Creator. These words which were written by the apostle are revelation. Nor is Paul the only instrument through whom the Spirit of God makes known His glory. John wrote in the beginning of his Gospel the same truth. "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). The Son of God is therefore the Creator, yet not to the exclusion of the power of the Father, nor the operation of the Spirit.

The three are one, in character and in their work, in creation and in redemption the three persons of the Godhead are active. What a dignity and glory is His! All things visible were created by Him and for Him; all life, vegetable and animal, all matter and all physical forces, the small things and the big things, everything was called into existence by Him. The heavens are the work of His fingers (Ps. 8:3); the firmament showeth His handiwork (Ps. 19:1). The millions of stars with their suns, the planets and comets, the whole universe, unfathomable and incomprehensible for the creature, were all called forth by His omnipotent word. Not by science, nor by searching do we know of this, but "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). And then things invisible--how little we know of these! The innumerable company of angels, this vast and wonderful world of the unseen, are also created by Him. It is all "by Him" and "for Him"; He is the primal cause of it, as well as the final cause. In the presence of such deep and blessed revelations, which man's mind could never discover, in the presence of the infinite, the reasonings of Unitarianism and Darwinianism and all other reasonings crumble into dust. The evolutionary hypothesis of the creation of a cell or of "primordial germs" from which, through millions of years, all things were developed is an invention of man and completely silenced by this passage and other portions of the Word. "And what a wonderful light do these words throw upon creation itself and upon its destiny! Christ is not only the One under whom it is; He is not only the One who will bring it all into blessing, but He, the One who has become the man Christ Jesus, is the One for whom it all exists!" And such a One, the Lord of creation, by whom and for whom are all things is our Lord, with whom all who have accepted Him are one. How blessed, how safe we are in Him and with Him, sheltered and kept by His mighty arms! And when all

things are put under His feet, when in the dispensation of the fullness of times, all things in heaven and on earth are headed up in Christ, when the glories of the new creation are manifested, what glory will be ours in Him and with Him!

4. "And He is before all things and by Him all things consist." Everything depends upon Him; all things are held together by Him. Without Him all would cease to be. Four times in these two verses we read of "all things." All things created by Him; all things for Him; He is before all things; all things consist by Him.

Verse 18 reveals another headship and glory. "And He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence." From creation the Holy Spirit now leads us to another sphere, that of Redemption. Creation became marred and ruined by sin and He who is the head of all things in creation had to come to earth in the form of man to redeem. He died, and, raised from among the dead, He is the Firstborn, the head of the body, the Church, and as such the Beginning, that is, a new Beginning. The Church was not in existence before His death and resurrection from the dead. He could not be the Head of the Church till He had become the Firstborn by resurrection. And now He has a body, composed of all who have believed on Him as Saviour and Lord, born again and one Spirit with Him. This body is one with Him in life, in position and in glory. This body is the new creation, completely identified with Him, who is the Head, the fullness of Him who filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23)."

He is the Firstborn of creation, He is the Firstborn according to the power of resurrection, in this new order of things in which man is predestined to an entirely new position, gained by redemption, and in which he participates in the glory of God (as far as that which is created can do so), and that by participating in divine life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and everlasting life; and, as regards the Church, as members of His body. He is the Firstborn of creation, the Firstborn from among the dead; the Creator, and the conqueror of death and the enemy's power. These are the two spheres of the display of the glory of God. The special position of the Church, the body of Christ, forms a part of the latter. He must have this resurrection-glory, this universal preeminence and superiority also, as being man, for all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him" (Synopsis of the Bible). Thus in all things He has the preeminence. And we also must give Him in all things the first place. As we lay hold on the glory of Christ, the head of creation, the Risen One now, the head of the body in glory, and look forward to the day of consummation and glory to come, when we shall see Him as He is, and participate in the glory, which His grace has bestowed upon us, we shall indeed walk worthily of the Lord and be strengthened according to the power of His glory.

Verses 19-29

His great work of redemption and the ministry connected with it is the theme of the remaining verses of this chapter. "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell." It is to be noticed that the words "the Father" are supplied. If a word is to be used it must be the word "Godhead" (2:9). But there is no need to do that. The correct rendering of the verse is "In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell," and that is the fullness of the Godhead. It is a blessed and deep truth that the whole Godhead manifested itself in Him for the great purpose of redemption. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit dwelled in all fullness in the blessed One who walked among men. He could say of Himself that the Father dwelleth in Him (John 14:10); he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father (John 14:9) and again, "I am in the Father and the Father in Me." And He who spoke thus was and is the Son of God. And the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, was not given to Him by measure (John 3:34) but He was in Him in all His fullness. The fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in the incarnate One. The Gnostic teachers, which began

then to sow their evil seed in the early Church, used the word "fullness" (pleroma) very much, and meant by it the absolute perfection of deity.

But they taught that portions of this fullness were given to various divine incarnations and angels, who were generated by a supreme being. Christ, according to their philosophy, was an inferior being, who did not possess the pleroma of the Godhead. In answer to this perversion the Holy Spirit witnesses to the truth that in Him all the fullness, the pleroma, was pleased to dwell. The fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him and was manifested through Him, yet man, His creation, would not have Him. Man gave Him a cross which showed that man was irreconcilable as far as he was concerned. "He in whom all fullness dwelt, who was the one altogether lovely, who manifested the very character of God and brought among men unimagined goodness and power, who dealt with every need, going about doing good, who never refused a single soul, He was despised and rejected by man, hated without a cause. They crucified the Lord of glory, the Creator of all things. "And what was to be done? Ah! this was the serious question, and this it was which God was waiting to solve. He meant to reconcile man in spite of himself; He would prove His own love to be the conqueror of his hatred. Let man be unmendable, let his enemy be beyond all thought, God, in the calmness of His own wisdom, and in the strength of His unwearied grace, accomplishes His purpose of redeeming love at the very moment when man consummates his wickedness. It was at the cross of Christ. And so it was that, when all seemed to fail, all was won. The fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus; but man would have none of it, and proved it above all in the cross. Yet the cross was the precise and only place where the foundation that cannot be moved was laid. As he says, 'having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, by Him, I say, whether it be things on earth or things in heaven'" (W. Kelly).

He made peace in the blood of His cross. Then the great work of redemption was accomplished. And through the blood of the cross, all things are to be reconciled by Him to the Godhead, whether things on earth or things in heaven. What reconciliation is this? It is a reconciliation which is not yet accomplished. It includes all creation and the universe. The heavens and the earth will be completely delivered from the power of evil. This reconciliation of all things in virtue of the blood of His cross will take place when He comes again, when all things are put in subjection under His feet. All is in disorder in creation; it is a groaning creation. Satan with his wicked spirit is in the heavenlies and defilement is there. Yet the purchase price has been paid in the blood of His cross. The reconciliation of all things yet to come is the same which Peter preached as "the restitution of all things of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Therefore the prophets in the Old Testament give us the meaning of this coming reconciliation. We find it predicted in portions of the prophetic Word, concerning the coming age, when righteousness reigns, peace is established, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth and the earth is full of His glory, when Israel has received the promised blessing and glory, and groaning creation no longer groans under the curse (Isaiah 11:6-9; Rom. 8:19-22). It will all be accomplished when He returns, whose right it is to reign and who paid for all in the blood of His cross. Then all present disorder will cease, the curse will be removed, Satan will be bound. This dispensation of the fullness of times will have come and Christ will reign and His saints with Him. Does this reconciliation include the unsaved, the unregenerated, who reject Christ and remain in their sins? Does it include Satan and the fallen angels? Some, who call themselves "Reconciliationists" or "Restitutionists" teach this; and so does Russellism and other cults. But it is not so. The Scriptures do not teach such a universal reconciliation which reaches the wicked dead and wicked spirits. The best proof is when we compare the statement here with a similar one in Phil. 2:10. In this

passage Paul speaks of the things under the earth, which are the lost. It is there the question of acknowledging the supreme authority of the Lord. But here in Colossians where it is the question of reconciliation, things on earth and things in heaven are mentioned, but the things under the earth are omitted, because there is not reconciliation for such.

"These shall go away into everlasting punishment"; no future reconciliation is anywhere promised in the Word of God for the lost. There is no new birth, no repentance, no faith in hell. Not a drop of the living water will ever reach there to quench the spiritual thirst of the damned. But while the reconciliation of all things awaits the return of our Lord to put all things in order, there is another reconciliation which is already effected. "And you being in time past alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh, through death, to present you holy and unblamable and irreproachable before Him; if indeed ye abide in the faith, grounded and firm, and not moved away from the gospel which ye heard, which hath been preached in the whole creation which is under heaven, whereof I Paul was made a minister" (verses 21-23).

This is spoken of those who have believed on the Son of God. All were once estranged from God and enemies in mind by wicked works, but having believed His work, His sacrificial death on the cross hath reconciled them. In virtue of this reconciliation believers are no longer enemies but made nigh, accepted in the Beloved and presented holy, unblamable, and irreproachable before God. What a change! And it is not of man, by his work, or having become a believer by living a fully separated life, but it is all through His death.

In Him we are constituted holy, unblamable and irreproachable; this is the believer's standing before God. The words "if ye continue in the faith," etc., are words of caution. They do not touch the election and perseverance of the saints who are members of the body of which He is the head. A believer thus reconciled will continue in the faith and will not be moved away from the hope of the gospel; this is one of the tests of salvation. There was danger for the Colossians to abandon the great fundamentals of Christianity; if they did so they rejected the grace which presented them to God and in doing this they showed that they had never received the reconciliation, for one who is reconciled continues in the faith and remains upon the sure foundation.

"All the blessedness that Christ has procured is for those that believe; but this of course supposes that they hold Him fast. The language does not in the smallest degree insinuate that there is any uncertainty for a believer. We must never allow one truth to be either shut out or enfeebled by another; but then we need also to remember that there are, and have always been, those that, having begun seemingly well, have ended by becoming the enemies of Christ and the Church. Even antichrists are not from without in their origin.

"They went out from us, because they were not of us." There are no enemies so deadly as those who, having received enough truth to overbalance them and to abuse to their own self exaltation, turn again, and would rend the church of God, wherein they learned all that gives them power to be specially mischievous. The apostle could not but dread the slide on which the Colossians found themselves; and the more so as they themselves had no fears, but on the contrary thought highly of that which had attracted their minds.

If there was danger, certainly it was love to admonish them; and in this spirit he therefore says, 'If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled.'" (if thousands and tens of thousands of members of the

professing church turn to "Christian Science" or accept the teachings of the "New Theology" and in doing so abandon the gospel and deny the doctrine of Christ, they show thereby that all their profession was only a sham, that they never received the love of the truth, were never real believers who have been reconciled.

They were at least the enemies of the cross who more openly deny Christ.) Then Paul speaks of himself as being the minister of that gospel which hath been preached in the whole creation. How he termed this gospel "my gospel" and received it by revelation, and the meaning of all this we learned from Romans and Galatians. And the sound of this gospel goes forth into all creation. We must notice here that up to this point in this Epistle we have learned of the two headships of Christ.

He is Head of Creation and Head of the Church. Then followed a twofold reconciliation. The reconciliation of all things which includes all creation over which He is the head, and the reconciliation of believers, who are in that body over which He is the head. All these wonderful revelations fully answered the teachers who brought among the Colossians the most deadly errors, denying the deity of Christ, as if some demiurge had created the world, etc. And these great statements of verses 15-23 also answer all heresies of today.

To the two headships of Christ and the two reconciliations there is now added a twofold ministry. The ministry of the gospel and the ministry of the church. Twice Paul writes he was made a minister, the minister of the gospel (verse 23) and the Church, whereof he was also made a minister (verse 25). It means that to him was given the revelation concerning the gospel of grace and glory and through him was also made known the truth concerning the Church, the body of Christ. There is then a blessed harmony in these statements.

1. The twofold Headship of Christ: Head of Creation and Head of the Church

2. The twofold Reconciliation: Reconciliation of all things (creation) and our reconciliation (the Church)

3. The twofold Ministry: The gospel. (preached in all creation) and The Church (to present every man perfect in Christ) Paul, to whom the Spirit of God revealed these great truths, fulfilled in this way the Word of God, for the truth about the Church, the body of Christ, is the highest revelation. He was shut up in a prison and was suffering "for His body's sake," which sufferings he looks upon as filling up that which remained of the sufferings of Christ in them. He rejoiced in these sufferings for he knew they were "for His body's sake." He knew and declared "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now hath been made manifested to His saints, to whom God would 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 mystery of which he writes is not the coming of Christ to this earth, His incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and coming again. All this was not a mystery, for it was revealed in the Old Testament. The mystery made known through him and of which he writes is a glorified Christ who unites all in His person, the Head in glory, who has a body composed of saved Jews and Gentiles, who are one in Him, and "Christ in (or among) you the hope of glory"--which looks forward to the consummation, when this body which is now forming, through the preaching of the gospel, is to be with the Head in glory. This is the mystery which was hid in former ages. It is unrevealed in the Old Testament and therefore exclusively a New Testament revelation. With such a revelation and ministry he preached, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; where unto I also labor, striving according to His working which worketh in me in power." Every man "perfect" means full-grown. (See Phil.

3:15 and Heb. 5:14.) It is the believing apprehension of what Christ is for us and what we are in Him. Through this knowledge and heart occupation with the Lord of glory the believer becomes full grown and true Christian character is formed. And what toil and energy the great apostle manifested that this might be accomplished!

II. COMPLETE IN HIM, IN WHOM ALL THE FULLNESS DWELLS

CHAPTER 2

1. The mystery of God (2:1-8)
2. Complete in Christ (2:9-15)
3. Exhortations and warnings (2:16-23)

Verses 1-8

In view of the last verses of the preceding chapter we can understand his anxiety and the great conflict he had for the Colossians and for those living in nearby Laodicea, and for as many who had not seen his face in the flesh. He was deeply concerned about them after he heard of their danger of going into error. It was a spiritual conflict. He was greatly exercised in his thoughts and feelings. He knew the powers of evil so well; hence the burden for the Colossians, for the Laodiceans and for all others.

In writing to them about his great conflict for them, and therefore his prayerful interest in them, he did so that their hearts might be comforted thereby and then, being knit together in love for this purpose: "unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the full knowledge of the mystery of God in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (The translation in the Authorized Version is not correct. The words "of the Father and of Christ" must be omitted.

It is "The mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.") And what is this mystery of God in which the treasures, yea all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden? The mystery of God is Christ. But it is not Christ in incarnation, in His life on earth, His death on the cross and His resurrection. Nor is it Christ at the right hand of God, or Christ coming again to rule over the nations on earth and establish His kingdom of glory. All these things are subjects of divine revelation in the Old Testament.

They are not a mystery. It is Christ, the Head of the body and believers in union with the glorious Head, joined to Him by His Spirit, possessing His life, one with Him, destined to share His glory. This is the mystery of God in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And what treasures these are! How little His people know of all this mystery of God contains! It will take eternity to know and enjoy these treasures, the unsearchable riches. The Greek word for knowledge is "gnosis"; the false teachers called themselves, after this word, "gnostics," boasting of superior knowledge and as if they possessed mysteries unknown to those who believed on Christ.

We understand in this light the brief exhortation which follows: "And this I say, lest any man should delude you with enticing words." Being in Christ they had all in Him and no human philosophy or science, falsely so called, could give a greater wisdom or knowledge, than that which God had made known by revelation. The enemy's work is to keep God's people back from fully enjoying their union with Christ and increasing in the knowledge of it. Satan does this work in the garb of an angel of light, through all kinds of theories

and inventions.

Before the apostle sounds a more definite warning, he expressed his joy in seeing their order and steadfastness of their faith in Christ. No doubt a part of the Colossian church stood unwavering for the faith, while others had given ear to the delusive teachings. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." This was their danger, as it is still more in these days of declension and delusion, our danger, not to walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him.

They were not satisfied with Christ only. They did not realize that the secret of blessing and all a Christian needs, is to go on and know more and more of Christ. This they did not do but turned instead to other sources and listened to that which was not after Christ. "When we have received Christ, all the rest is but a development of that which He is, and of the glory which the counsels of God have connected with His person. Knowledge, or pretended knowledge, outside this, does but turn us away from Him, withdraw our hearts from the influence of His glory, throw us into that which is false, and lead our souls into connection with the creation apart from God, and without possessing the key to His purposes.

Thus, since man is incapable of fathoming that which exists, and of explaining it to himself, his efforts to do so cause him to invent a mass of ideas that have no foundation, and to endeavor to fill up the void that is found in his knowledge through his ignorance of God by speculations, in which (because he is at a distance from God) Satan plays the chief part without man's suspecting it" (Synopsis of the Bible). Then follows a stronger and important warning. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

It is a warning against the natural man's philosophy, and the religious man's traditions; both are not after Christ, but aim at the person, the work and the glory of Christ. Rationalism and ritualism are still the pronounced enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, as they were when He walked on the earth. (The Sadducees were the philosophers, the rationalists. The Pharisees, the most religious sect, the ritualists. Both combined in hatred of Christ.) Both may use His name, but deny His glory and reject the great truth of His headship.

Philosophy is the wisdom of this world. Well has it been said: "Philosophy is an idol of man, a blind substitute for the knowledge of God." It is false and ruinous whether it leaves Him out or tries to bring Him in, whether it denies the true God, or sets up a sham god. Atheism and pantheism are the ultimate goal and results of philosophy, and both set God and His revelation aside. This is especially true of the present day destructive Bible criticism, which claims to be "scientific" and "philosophical."

It is the most subtle deception the father of lies has produced. This destructive criticism, which denies with a show of learning the Word of God, denies with it God and His blessed Son; it is an antichrist, preparing the way for the final great delusion, the full manifestation of the mystery of iniquity, the man of sin. The evolution theory is another philosophy. Though proven to be untenable, preachers, and especially the teachers of the young, still adhere to it and thereby deny God's revelation.

The evolution-philosophy has no explanation for the sin and misery of the world, but makes it all a part of the nature of things which God could not avoid when He started the world evolving. It makes God the author of sin. And evolution offers no remedy for sin and its results. Evolutionists as found in all the prominent sects or denominations of Christendom teach that sin is only animalism left in man; and then they substitute for true conversion, regeneration, for reconciliation by the death of Christ and salvation by

grace--they substitute for it a development for the better by civilization and culture.

Evolution-philosophies are the enemies of revelation and the cross of Christ. "But obviously this evolutionary 'salvation' is largely or wholly a salvation of the race through the prospective future perfectibility of mankind as a whole; and it is childishly inadequate in dealing with the poor individual then and now who, under this hideous handicap fails in the sad conflict with his inherited animalism; and it has no gospel for these present moral failures (or those of the past), unless they can be reincarnated at a higher stage of the racial development, or have 'another chance' under some less hard conditions in the future while it goes without saying that, in the view of these theistic evolutionists, this racial culture of development can be accomplished without the intervention of a divine mediator and the help of a divine sacrifice" Professor Price.

"Christian Science" also comes under the garb of a philosophy. This wicked system with its outrageous deceptions may be termed the masterpiece of Satan. Against its blasphemous inventions the Spirit of God bears a perfect witness in the first chapter of this Epistle. Christianity is not science. Science is knowledge gained by experience, by searching. Christianity is a revelation from God. It is a faith. The traditions of men and rudiments of the world are terms which apply to the religion of the flesh, by which we mean a religion which the natural man can lay hold of and which suits perfectly the natural, unregenerated man.

This is ritualism, the Galatianized gospel which has the curse of God resting upon it. It brings in man's works, law-keeping, ceremonies, holy days, saints' days, the mass and other things. But it is not after Christ. Against these two currents, rationalism and ritualism, the Spirit of God warns. Any one who follows either must deny Christ and becomes spoiled and ruined. Verses 9-10 introduce us to the heart of this great document. "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are filled full, who is the head of all principality and power.

How this blessed statement recalls our attention to the great truths of the first chapter we do not need to point out. While in the first chapter He is displayed as the Incarnate One, who walked on earth, in whom all the fullness was pleased to dwell; in this statement of the second chapter we see Him as the Risen One, who is in glory as the Glorified Man and in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Glorious truth that there is the Man, in glory, in a real human body, the Man, who made peace in the blood of His cross.

The fullness of the Godhead dwelleth in Him and out of this fullness we receive grace upon grace, and that we might also be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19). In Him believers are filled full. In Him we possess perfection and completeness before God and are not wanting anything whatever as to our position before God. Believers are in Him before God, not in what they do or according to their service, or anything else, but in perfection of what He is. Who could add to His fullness and who can add to the fullness and completeness the believer possesseth forever in Him!

The child of God has no need of philosophy, ceremonies, asceticism, advanced thought, or any other thing. No need of the traditions of men as embodied in ritualism, a man-made priesthood which He hates (Rev. 2:15); or the mass with its terrible blasphemy, or the worship of angels! We have and are all in Christ. Our only concern must be to lay hold in a practical way of this fullness, to take more and more of Him and walk in the power of it. This is viewed next. The literal rendering of verses 11 and 12 is as follows: "In whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, in whom ye have been also raised

together through faith in the operation of God, who raised Him from among the dead."

Circumcision done by hand is for the Jew, the sign of separation from the Gentiles. Believers are circumcised in the circumcision of Christ, that is, "the putting off of the body of flesh" (not "putting off the body of the sins of the flesh") separated from it, by being made partakers of the efficacy of His death. In the death of Christ the old man is put to death as more fully demonstrated in Romans 6; we are dead to sin, because we are in Christ, who is our life. And having now no more confidence in ourselves we are the true circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:3).

Baptism is the symbol of this "buried with Him in baptism." And we are raised up with Him through faith in the operation of God who raised Him from among the dead. It is "through faith" this is accomplished and not in an ordinance; we are risen with Christ in possession of life. "It is thus that we are set free from the thought of deliverance by an ordinance, which so many hold today. We are 'raised up through the faith of the operation of God who raised Him from among the dead.'

Here we see distinctly what is meant. Resurrection is the opposite of burial. In burial a dead man is put among the dead. In resurrection a now living man is given his place among the living; and it is seen that Christ, identified with us through grace in His death, has been raised up of God; that we might find, therefore, our own title and ability to take our place amongst those truly alive. But then all depends upon this identification of ourselves with Him. Our eyes are now, therefore, to be upon Christ.

He is in this character our true self, and our confidence, therefore, is to be in Him. As we have had it in Galatians, we live, yet no more we, but Christ liveth in us. It is the One who is before God for us who is before us now in faith and whom we accept as now our true self, a self in whom we can have confidence, a self that we can contemplate with joy and satisfaction, and without the least tendency to such pride of heart as results naturally from what we call self-occupation.

Here is One who will draw us away from self, who will, as a Heavenly Object draw us completely out of the world, and accomplish our deliverance in both senses at the same time" (Numerical Bible). The truth unfolded in the Ephesian Epistle (chapter 2) is also mentioned here by the apostle. "And you being dead in offenses and the uncircumcision of your flesh hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." Blessed truth again! What follows has a meaning for both Jewish and Gentile believers.

"Having blotted out the handwriting in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, He has taken it out Of the way, having nailed it to the cross." The Colossians were Gentiles, they had not been under the law and its ordinances, therefore he writes not which were "against you" but "against us." All the ordinances were against them, for they were as Jews under obligation to keep them, as they had, so to speak, put their handwriting, their signature to it, when they said with one voice, "All the words which the Lord hath said we will do" (Exodus 24:3).

And inasmuch as they did not keep these ordinances, they were against them. The work of Christ has taken it out of the way; all was nailed to the cross. Then the signature was erased and the debt paid. The ordinances are removed. This applies to Gentiles as well and also in another sense. The law and the ordinances were the middle wall of partition, which excluded the Gentiles. Christ "has broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandment in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Eph. 2:14-15).

At the same time He spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, leading them in triumph by it. This means the principalities and powers of Satan and the wicked spirits. They were against us, but He has vanquished them in His death on the cross and in it has triumphed over them. Trespasses are forgiven; ordinances blotted out, completely gone; principalities and powers triumphed over. Verses 16-23. The chapter closes with warnings and exhortations. The first warning exhortation is against ritualistic legalism.

"Let none therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in matter of an holy day, or new moon, or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body of Christ." All the ceremonies of the law were shadows; the substance has come and the shadows have ceased. Ritualistic Christendom has aped the shadows and by doing so practically denies by it the truth of the gospel. It is a turning away from the substance and moving after the shadow. A religion in ordinances, so-called sacraments with mysterious powers, with an imposing ritual for the eye and the ear, which gives the flesh something to do and to boast in, is an invention of Satan. True Christianity has no holy days and feast days, saints' days, lenten days, etc.; nor d

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/arno-clemens-gaebelein-/epistle-to-the-colossians/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net