

## Course Notes for Colossians

### I. Background to Colossians

#### A. The City of Colossae

##### 1. Location

- in Asia Minor (at Paul's time the Roman province "Asia")
- about 100 mi E of Ephesus in the Lycus R valley
- forms a triplet of cities w/ Laodicea 10 mi W and Hierapolis 13 mi NW

##### 2. History

- back around 500-400 BC C. was most important of 3 cities, on major crossroads, important in wool trade
- by NT times, Laodicea had become more important, as N-S road had moved to L.
- after time of Justinian (c 550 AD), C. gradually abandoned for more fortified city of Khonai
- C. destroyed by Turks in 12th cen, now abandoned
- to date no archeological dig, though Near East Archeological Society has projected one

##### 3. Inhabitants

- native Phrygian city (name prob only makes sense in Greek accidentally: *kolossos* - statue, esp gigantic; cp Colossus of Rhodes, 70 cubits high)
- Greek settlers from time of Alexander
- Jews brought into area by Antiochus 3 (c 190 BC)  
(see Josephus, Ant 12.3.4); probably settling in C. soon after if not immediately

##### 4. Church

- app founded by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12,13), perhaps while Paul was in Ephesus & all Asia heard the Gospel (Acts 19:10); Epaphras prob a convert of Paul
- members may have included Philemon (see Phm & Col 4:9 re/ Onesimus as "one of you"), also app Paul's convert
- poss Archippus another official in church (4:17; Phm 2), tho seems more likely he is at Laodicea
- no definite statement about Jewish-Xns in church, tho Col heresy definitely includes Jewish ideas

## B. The Authenticity of the Colossian Letter

### 1. Traditionally, no question ever raised

- prob ref to by Polycarp in 10:1 (Col 1:23, steadfast), 11:2 (Col 2:3, covetousness = idolatry); Ignatius in Ig Eph 10:2 (Col 1:23); Trall 5:2 (Col 1:16)
- used by heretics: Basilides (120-30); Marcion (140ff), Valentinus; Marcionite Prologue (Theron, sect 64); Valentinians (Irenaeus, Ag Her 1.4.5)
- listed in Muratorian Canon
- cited frequently by Irenaeus (e.g., Ag Her 5.12.3)

### 2. With Rise of liberalism, all traditional authorship questioned on basis of internal (subjective) criteria

#### a. Literary Questions (see Guthrie, 553)

- sentences have unusually large no. of dep. clauses
- some other grammatical peculiarities
  - ++ *en* w/ subst very frequent
  - ++ unusual genitives
- many unusual words
- many characteristic Pauline ideas missing
- A.Q. Morton's computer studies:
  - ++ sentence length
  - ++ freq of commonest words (*kai, de, en, autos, eimi*)results: Pauline eps fall into 7 groups:
  - (1) Rom, Gal, Cor, poss Phm
  - (2-5) Heb, Eph, Php, Col separately
  - (6) 1 & 2 Thess
  - (7) Pastoralsresults more divergent than most liberal scholars willing to admit  
can we use such a method to overthrow historical testimony from author's time?

#### b. Doctrinal Questions (see Lohse, 177-183)

- does Col show fully developed gnosticism of 2nd cen? no, too Jewish (e.g., 2:16-17)
- does Col show different theol than acknowledged Pauline epistles? Lohse thinks so, but seems question of emphasis rather than contradiction

## C. The Letter to the Colossians in Paul's Ministry

### 1. Review of Paul's Missionary Activities

- a. 1st Journey (AD 48-50)  
Crete & So. Asia Minor (prob Galatian cities)
- b. 2nd Journey (51-53)  
Gal cities to Troas to Macedonia to Greece  
Mainly Corinth, 18 months
- c. 3rd Journey (54-58)  
To Ephesus (about 3 yr)  
(Colossian church founded here?)  
Then Macedonia, Greece  
Journey to Jerusalem w/ contribution
- d. Caesarean Imprisonment (58-60)  
Rescued from mob in temple  
Taken to Caesarea for safekeeping
- e. Voyage to Rome (60-61)
- f. First Roman Imprisonment (61-63)  
(Probable writing of Colossians)
- g. Further Travels (63-67?)  
East, Spain?
- h. Second Roman Imprisonment (67?)  
Death by Roman execution

## 2. The Prison Epistles

- a. Group includes Eph, Php, Col (see 4:3,10), Phm
- b. Some close connections between:
  - (1) Colossians and Philemon  
Onesimus accompanies both (C 4:9; P 10)  
Archippus "receives" both (C 4:17; P 2)  
Similar greeters (C 4:10-14; P 23-24)
  - (2) Colossians and Ephesians  
Very similar subject-matter (see later)  
Tychichus delivers both (C 4:7-8; E 6:21)

Looks like Eph Phm Col written same time; Php either earlier or later

### 3. Place of Writing?

- a. Rome - traditional
  - most natural interp of "Praetorium" (Php 1:13), "Caesar's household" (Php 4:22)
  - imprisonment looks fairly open (Col 4:3-4); compare Acts 28:30-31, contrast situation at Caesarea
- b. Caesarea
  - Paul known to have been imprisoned there
- c. Ephesus
  - no definite Biblical evid Paul imprisoned here
  - Marcionite Prol to Col "wrote from Ephesus"
  - trads of "Paul's prison"; lion licking feet (3rd cen)
  - vague passages in NT:
    - ++ 2 Cor 11:23 "many imprisonments"
    - ++ 1 Cor 15:32 "fought w/ beasts at Eph"
    - ++ 2 Cor 1:8-10 "affliction in Asia"
    - ++ Rom 16:3-4 "Prisc & Aq risked necks"

Location does not drastically affect interp of letter  
Problem of not being mentioned in Acts favors Rome

### 4. Date of Letter

depends on place of writing

- a. Rome: 61-63 AD
- b. Caesarea: 58-60
- c. Ephesus: 56-57

### 5. Circumstances Surrounding Letter

- Paul in prison (4:3,10,18), but can have visitors, write letters, perhaps even preach
- has been joined (visit? fellow prisoner?) by Epaphras, app founder or at least principal worker in church at Colossae
- major thrust of letter is problem of some heresy, which presumably led Epaphras to come seeking Paul's advice; yet Ep does not return immediately with letter

## **D. The Religious Background of Colossians**

### 1. Paganism

a. Phrygian Religion:

Native to Asia Minor before Greeks not much known until mixed with Hellenism

See W. M. Ramsay, "Religion of Greece & Asia Minor" in *HDB*, extra vol, 109ff

Fertility religion, something like Baalism of OT Canaan, but dominated by the Great Mother as source of fertility; emphasis on death-rebirth with seasons; ritual prostitution; female-dominant in some areas

Hellenized form at Ephesus in Diana/Artemis cult

b. Hellenism:

Developed form of polytheism imported from Greece

Pantheon of 12 gods & goddesses, sort of a family led by Zeus; each god/goddess has many spheres of activity, prob due to earlier syncretism

By NT times, a rather dry, ritualistic religion carried on by state authority for state benefit

Individual participation mostly for temporal advantage  
i.e., success in business, love, health, etc.

c. The Mystery Religions

Various religions developed from polytheism of various Mediterranean countries, usually in competition with state religion of area

More secret, individualized

Definite decision necessary to become worshipper

Often a complex training period and initiation, w/ secret passwords, doctrines, ceremonies

Promised salvation to believer in an afterlife

Examples: Orphism, Isis, Mithra, Eleusinia

d. Summary on Pagan Religions

All more or less polytheistic, tolerant, syncretistic

Big on ritual, not much on personal ethics

2. Sectarian Judaism

As opposed to "mainstream" Judaism of OT, Pharisees, Sadducees

Evidenced from various sources, of uncertain connection

a. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

(1) Emphasis on Law

e.g., Jubilees traces many Mosaic laws back to creation or to time of patriarchs

esp. Sabbath: observed by God and highest angels at creation (Jub 2:18)

(2) Interest in Angels

created on first day (Jub 2:2); many kinds listed

observed Sabbath (Jub 2:18)

Gen 6:2 interpreted as angels taking women (Jub 5:1; 1 Enoch 6-7), causing God to send flood

astrology/magic was secret of fallen angels (Jub 8:3; 1 Enoch 8)

names of angels: bad (Enoch 6 names 19); good (1 Enoch 9 names 4; 1 Enoch 20 the 7 archangels)

(3) Interest in Visions (more widespread)

Jub given to Moses on Sinai by angel (Jub 1:1;2:1)

1 and 2 Enoch in vision of angels (1 En 1:2; 2 En 1:4-9); latter includes trip to heaven

2 Baruch contains visions (2 Bar 36, 53)

3 Baruch also a trip to heaven

4 Ezra has 7 visions in 14 chapters

b. The Essenes and the Qumran Community

Think these same; at least some overlap most likely

(1) According to Josephus:

(a) Stringent on Law, going beyond OT

temple defiled, so don't offer sacrifice

do have baptisms

exceed all others in virtue

reject pleasures as evil

wear white garments, use no oil

communal: all goods in common

live by selves

no wives (not true of all varieties of sect)

no servants

(b) Elitist, Secretive

probationary period of several years

4 classes of membership (seniors defiled by touch of juniors)

complete rule by elders

secret doctrine, involving special books, names of angels

(2) From Qumran literature

(a) Used, copied, wrote (?) OT Pseudepigrapha

- (b) Stringency re/ law
- (c) Elitist, secretive
- (d) Angels: more details
  - about ten terms for angels
  - titles given for 6 particular angels
  - names of 5 given
  - in Verres (210-13) have "Angelic Liturgy," app picturing 7 archangels as they worship
- (e) Visions: nothing definite
  - some hints re/ visions: "transcendental knowledge," "lore of the sons of heaven" 1QS 4:22

c. The Therapeutae: known only from Philo, *Contemplative Life*

- (1) Similar to Essenes, but known to exist outside Palestine ("found many places"); headquarters near Alexandria in Egypt; monastic, elitist, secretive, w/ perhaps some interest in numerology & calendar
- (2) Differ in giving much larger place to women, though segregation maintained
- (3) More clearly ascetic: virginity app a virtue; likewise fasting; diet of bread and water; wine and meat app forbidden
- (4) Scripture: allegorical interp mentioned; study writings of founders; compose own hymns and psalms

3. Heretical "Christianity"

a. NT Period

- (1) Colossians (Colossae, province of Asia)
  - 2:4: delude w/ persuasive arguments
  - 2:8: philosophy = empty deception
  - 2:16 judging in regard to food, drink, festival, new moon, Sabbath
  - 2:18: self-abasement, worship of angels, pride, visions?, not holding to head = Christ
  - 2:20-21 elements, submission to rules, don't taste, touch, etc.
  - 2:23: appearance of wisdom, self-made religion, self-abasement, severe treatment of body
- (2) 1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Ephesus, province of Asia)
  - law, myths, speculation, genealogies
- (3) 2 Corinthians 10-13 (Corinth, province of Achaia)
  - Jews who emphasized works, visions

b. Later

- (1) Encratites: a heresy of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, app intermediate betw Xy and Gnosticism; Tatian one of its most famous proponents; several apocryphal Acts seem to be Encratite (Acts of Jn, Peter, Andrew, Thomas)
  - (a) Ascetic:
    - anti-marriage AJ (Jas 266); API 2:5; APt 34
    - no meat AT 20 (bread w/ salt, water; fasting)
  - (b) Elitist, esoteric: AJ 100
  - (c) Heavy on wonders
  - (d) Docetic view of Jesus: AJ 97-98; APt 20,21
  
- (2) Gnosticism: more elaborate theology, mythology
  - (a) Developed forms (mid 2nd cen) often violently anti-Jewish, taking part of serpent (Ophites) or wicked persons (Cainites) in OT
    - [1] Against matter (GT 114) sometimes ascetic (no meat, wine, marriage or intercourse), sometimes libertine (wear out body by various sins)
    - [2] Elitist, esoteric: GT title, 13, 23
      - 3 classes of mankind: hulic, psychic, pneumatic
    - [3] Emphasis on revelation, visions, knowledge: GT 1,3,5
  - (b) But hints of development from Jewish background
    - [1] note use of OT, above
    - [2] James the Just: GT 12
    - [3] fasting, sabbath: GT 27
    - [4] angelic hierarchy (e.g., in Apocryphon Jn) somewhat like Enoch, Jubilees

4. Summary on Religious Background

- a. NT period characterized by enormous variety of religions, religious views, most of them syncretistic.
- b. Many of these big on secret doctrine and ritual, restricted membership, etc.
- c. Some groups ascetic, in reaction to gross materialism and licentiousness of large segments of society.
- d. In Jewish circles, several fringe groups, some of which (Essenes, Therapeutae) share features of Colossian heresy.



- e. Some later heresies from Christianity (Encratites, Gnostics) also share features with Colossian heresy.

## II. Exegesis of Introductory Section (1:1-13)

### A. The Salutation (1-2)

1. Follows standard format for Hellenistic letter  
(see samples in Acts: 15:23-29: Jerusalem council letter; 23:26-30: Tribune's letter to governor; also samples in Loeb Classical Library, *Select Papyri I*, ch V, items 88-169)
  - a. Sender(s) in nominative
  - b. Recipient(s) in dative
  - c. Greetings: Greek *chairein*, ANE "peace"; often something about health here; pagans often thank gods
  - d. Body of letter: what it is mainly about
  - e. Closing: often greetings from or to friends; use of *erroso*, *errosathe*: "fare well"
2. Paul's Modifications
  - a. Generally longer throughout (the 82 letters in LCL above take up about 65 pages, vs 13 Pauline letters in *Jerusalem Bible* taking 135 pp; i.e. 3/4 page vs 10 pp)
  - b. Greetings distinctively Xn: *charis* for *chairein*, plus "peace" and ref to God and Christ
  - c. Body longer, often (as in Col) divided into doctrine & exhortation sections
3. The Senders
  - a. Paul often associates others w/ self in sender spot:
    - (1) Paul alone in 5 letters: Rom, Eph, 1-2 Tim, Tit
    - (2) Paul with one other in 5:
      - (a) Timothy: 2 Cor, Php, Col, Phm
      - (b) Sosthenes: 1 Cor
    - (3) Paul with two others in 2:  
Timothy & Silas: 1-2 Thess
    - (4) Paul with unspecified others in 1: Gal
  - b. Significance of co-sender?  
Not enough info to be sure; prob share in authority & interest re/  
church/person to whom letter sent
    - (1) 3 of 5 with Paul alone to immed assistants; many think Eph a circular letter; Rom to church neither Paul nor assistants had founded

- (2) Timothy and Silas helped found Thess church
  - (3) Ditto for Timothy re/ Philippi & Corinth (perhaps Silas not present when letters sent?); also Tim acted as Paul's rep there: 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; Php 2:19
  - (4) Sosthenes (if same as in Acts 18:17) a Corinthian, perhaps a church leader there?
  - (5) Group mentioned in Gal may be Xns at Antioch; if so, could vouch for incidents w/ Peter, Jerusalem Council
- c. Perhaps Timothy known in Colossae? later in charge at Ephesus, might have labored in Col?

#### 4. The Recipients

note single article: is this Granville-Sharp's rule indicating single group? or does *kai* connect adjectives instead of nouns?  
"saints & brothers" or "holy & faithful brothers"?  
doesn't use "church", paralleling Rom, Eph, Php  
in contrast to Cor, Gal, Thess  
standard terms for Christians

### B. Thanksgiving for the Colossians' Faith (3-8)

#### 1. Syntax

- rather complex construction of dependent clauses  
can be considered one sentence
- (3) *proseuchomenoi*: time "when I pray"?  
circumstantial "and pray"?  
means "by praying"?
  - (4) *akousantes*: prob causal "because I heard"
  - (5) *dia* prob refers back to "love" & poss "faith"  
*tou euaggeliou* prob epexegetical to "word of truth,"  
i.e., "the word of truth which is the Gospel"
  - (6) *kathos...kathos* prob comparison  
*epignote*: "acknowledge" or "come to know well"?

#### 2. Content

Paul thankful for Colossians in his (regular) prayers  
thankfulness based on report of their faith & love  
faith & love caused by hope stored away in heaven  
hope previously heard in Gospel  
Gospel with you and growing (as in all world)  
w/ you & growing from time you heard the grace of God  
grace learned from Epaphras  
Epaphras faithful servant

Epaphras made known your love

### C. Prayer for Colossians' Growth (9-13)

1. Connection with preceding: "therefore" (9)  
previous clause (demonstrated love)?  
whole previous section (3-8)?  
something intermediate?
2. *pauometha* + ptcs. (9)  
an unusual construction, but common for this particular verb  
supplemental use of ptc completing vague verb (Chapman, 30)
3. *epignosis* (9-10)  
4x in Colossians (2:2, 3:10; plus verb once) out of 20x in NT and 14x in Paul  
possibly picking up a term used by heretics?
4. Content  
Paul prays and requests that:  
Col be filled with true knowledge of God's will  
true knowledge = all sp wisdom & understanding?  
w/ result that:  
they walk worthy of Lord w/(?) every desire to please in (by?) every good  
work b f & g in true k of God (note repetition of b f & g from 1:6)  
with (in?) all power => endurance & patience  
with thanks to God  
who made us fit for the inheritance  
who rescued us (note light/darkness contrast)  
who transported us

### III. Exegesis of Doctrinal Section (1:13-2:3)

#### A. Summary & Transition (13-15): The Pre-Eminence of Christ

1. Grammar
  - (13) aorist for "rescue" and "transfer": already in kingdom in some sense?
  - (13) "son of his love": qualitative genitive "beloved son"
  - (14) "redemption" and "forgiveness" in apposition
  - (15) *eikon* - figure, image, likeness, as of a statue, picture; similitude, semblance (LS, 401); image, likeness; form, appearance (BAG, 221); MM adds "description" (MM, 183)  
In Bible: freq of man as image of God (LXX Gen; 1 Cor 11:7); but note 2 Cor 4:4: X as image of God; Rom 1:23: changing glory of God into image of mortal man; Heb 10:1: law as "shadow" not

"image"

(15) *prototokos* - usually firstborn in time, but also: principal heir: Israel God's firstborn (Ex 4:22; Jer 31:9); Jacob getting birthright; Joseph double portion; in fact, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim all principal heirs, tho not born first  
pre-eminence: Job 18:13; Isa 14:30; R Bechai on Pentateuch: "God the firstborn of the world" (Lightfoot, 147)

2. Structure

darkness/light contrast  
authority/kingdom parallel

3. Christ characterized

redeemer from sin  
image of invisible God  
firstborn of creation (= Creator? heir?)

**B. Christ's Work in Creation (16-17)**

1. Agent of all creation (16)

*en* - in or by; usual representation of X's work in creation; cp John 1:3 *dia* w/ Col 1:16 *en, dia*  
*ta panta* twice, w/ detailed list of angelic terms (cp Eph 1:20-21)

2. Goal or Purpose of all creation (16)

*eis auton*

3. Before all creation (17)

temporal or pre-eminence?  
here temporal best fits *hoti* as causal in v 16 and #4, below

4. Upholds all creation (17)

*sunistemi* - intrans - stand w/ or by; be composed of; continue, endure, exist, hold together (BAG, 790-1); cp *pheron* in Heb 1:3

**C. Christ's Work of Redemption (18-20)**

1. Head of the Church (18)

*kephale* - using head/body analogy; see Col 2:19; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; 1 Cor

11:3

2. Beginning (18)

how connected with context? beginning of new race?

3. Firstborn from Dead (18)  
temporal? not if OT & NT resurrections counted  
poss temporal if first w/ glorified body meant
4. First in Everything (18-19)  
prob combining both B and C, creation & redemption  
not vis a vis Father & Spirit  
but because he alone of all creatures is also God (19)  
"all the fulness" dwells (*katoikeo* - live, settle, perhaps as opposed to *paroikeo* - live temporarily)  
"fulness" cp Col 2:9
5. Through him everything reconciled (20)  
through blood of cross  
both on earth and in heaven  
dead saints? angels?

#### **D. Christ's Work among the Colossians (21-23)**

1. Former state (21)  
once alienated, enemies  
*en* by evil works
2. Present state (22)  
now reconciled  
*en* by his body  
*dia* through his death  
goal - to present you holy, spotless, blameless before him (at judgment?)
3. The Condition (23)  
*ei ge* - if indeed  
*epimenete* - stay, remain, continue, persevere (BAG, 296)  
"founded, steadfast, not moved"

#### **E. Christ's Work through Paul (1:24-29)**

1. Suffering for Church (24)  
*anapleroo* - fill a gap, make complete, fulfill an agreement (BAG, 59); Paul somehow "completes" X's sufferings
2. Servant of Church (25-27)  
*oikonomia* - administration, stewardship, responsibility given by God to fulfill (cp v 24) word of God  
*mysterion* - app in apposition to "word of God"

mystery, secret, secret rite, secret teaching, revealed secret (BAG, 530-1)  
used in LXX only in Daniel chs 2 & 4 re/ interp dreams  
Gospels: mysterious parables of kingdom  
Epistles: Gospel itself; secrets; parable  
Revelation: riddle; God's plan for ages?  
note esp where mystery = Gospel and mystery = Gentiles  
fellow-heirs  
here mystery explained as hidden from ages & from generations,  
now revealed to saints & among nations  
X in you, hope of glory  
parallel to HS as down-payment? 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14  
cp Mt 28:20 - with you always

## F. Summary (2:1-3)

Paul struggling for Colossians et al  
to bring them to full knowledge of mystery of God  
mystery of God = Christ looks like best variant re/ both internal & external  
evidence  
In Christ all treasures of wisdom & knowledge hidden

## III. Exegesis of Polemical Section (2:4-3:4)

### A. Exhortation to Perseverance (4-7)

1. Connection with previous (4)  
*touto lego* connects back to 2:1-4 at least, perhaps whole doctrinal section or even  
whole letter
2. First Clear Reference to Heresy (4)  
*paralogizomai* - deceive, delude (BAG 620)  
*pithanologia* - persuasive speech; plausible (but false) argument (BAG 657)  
previous hint 1:23 "not moved away from hope of Gospel"

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## Excursus: The Identity of the Heresy in Colossians

Specific Indications:

- 2:4 delude w/ persuasive argument
- 2:8 philosophy = empty deception  
acc to tradition of men, elements of world
- 2:16 judging in regard to food, drink, festival, new moon, Sabbath
- 2:18 self-abasement, worship of angels (?), visions (?)

pride, not holding to head = Christ  
2:20-21 elements, submission to rules: don't handle, taste or touch  
2:23 appearance of wisdom, self-made religion, self-abasement, severe treatment  
of body

Other statements may refer to heresy, but cannot be sure unless we identify it:  
e.g., circumcision, baptism

Relatively clear inferences:

1. Seems to involve Judaism: 2:16 not easily otherwise understood; likewise "angels" gives better fit.
2. In spite of some commentators (Lohse, Martin), looks legalistic, even tho *nomos* does not occur: 2:16; 2:20-21 (rules); 2:8, 20 (elements; cp Gal 4:3, 9).
3. This would fit either a relatively std form of Judaism (not Sadducees, prob not Pharisees) or some sort of syncretism of a pre-Gnostic or Gnostic sort, whether basically pagan (w/ Jewish elements), basically Jewish, or basically Xn.

Problems:

1. How to take "worship of angels"?
  - (a) objective genitive  
heretics actually worship angels
  - (b) subjective genitive  
heretics interested in how angels worship God  
If former, pretty unorthodox for known Judaism  
(but recall Rev 19:10; 22:8-9)  
If latter, fits known character of Essenes
2. How much of Paul's own discussion is structured by beliefs of this heresy?  
(i.e., using their terms in response)

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Back to course outline:

3. Paul concerned though absent (5)  
cp 2:1; 1:9 re/ Paul's struggles for them; 4:12 Epaphras' yet rejoicing in their order (*taxis*) & steadfastness (*stereoma*); both terms have military uses
4. Paul's exhortation (6-7)  
note the test: as received, as taught

contrast 2:8: trad of men, not acc to X  
new true doctrine must agree w/ old true doctrine  
note the source: walk in X, rooted & bult up in Him  
note the lifestyle: put doctrine into practice, grow, be thankful

## B. Warning against False Doctrine (8-15)

### 1. Characterized (8)

its action: "taking prisoner, plundering"

its real nature: "philosophy" prob their term (popular even in some Jewish circles); Paul's, "empty deception"

its source: human tradition

its content: *stoicheia* - elemental things

secular use: rudiments (ABCs); physical elements (air, fire, earth, water);  
heavenly bodies; elemental spirits

NT use: Heb 5:12: basics of Xy; 2 Pet 3:10: physical elements; Col 2:8,  
20; Gal 4:3, 9 disputed: either rudiments of legalism or elemental  
spirits; either poss in our context, with both rules and angels;  
former looks better in Gal

contrast w/ Xy: true Xy has its source & content in X

### 2. Christ is the Antidote (9-15)

[applying truths from doctrinal section]

#### a. His Nature (9)

(1) "fulness of deity" - perhaps *pleroma* refers to gnostic sort of view; they later used term for whole group of angels or (better) divinities of which X was only one; but also applicable to any view which downplays X, as this heresy clearly does

(2) "bodily" - real human nature; ascetics usually view body as inherently bad; idea very common at this time

(3) "dwells" - poss *katoikeo* as opposed to *paroikeo* - "sojourns, lives for awhile"; Cerinthian gnostics saw X as only temporarily in Jesus

#### b. His Work in and for Christians (10-14)

(1) you are made full (10)  
not incomplete;  
& since Christ is above all, why look elsewhere?

(2) you have been circumcised (11-14)

(a) apparently ref to regeneration (real, spiritual)



circumcision, cp Lev 26:41; Dt 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25-6; Ezk 44:7,9; Acts 7:51)

- (b) God-made, not man-made "without hands"; probably heretics advocated necessity of physical circumcision
- (c) "removal of body of flesh" vs just a piece?
- (d) through baptism (12): new picture of regeneration?  
old: removal of sinful flesh by cutting off seed to come  
new: cleansing via death & resurrection of X,  
appropriated via repentance & faith  
if Essenes, heretics also required baptisms
- (e) made alive and forgiven (13)  
though dead in sins & sin nature  
made alive with Him
- (f) debt erased by nailing it to cross  
prob ref to charge being nailed up (Mt 27:37 etc)  
*dogma* against us presumably law, so law *is* mentioned in Col; hardly likely to be merely man-made rules in this context

c. His Triumph over Spiritual Enemies (15)

- (1) Disarmed or stripped them  
prob military analogy re/ defeated foes
- (2) Disgraced or displayed openly  
*deigmatizo* - expose, make an example of, disgrace, mock (BAG 172)  
*parrasia* - (dat) plainly, openly, publicly
- (3) Triumph in him (Christ) or it (cross)  
also military term; (1)-(3) fit picture of Roman military ceremony called a "triumph"

**C. Warning against False Practice (2:16-3:4)**

1. Characterized (16-19)

a. Ritual Law (16-17)

standard terms for such (2 K 4:23; 1 Chr 23:31; Isa 1:13-14; see also Jub

1:14; 2:9)

- (1) Heretics will try to judge you by it (16)
- (2) But it only foreshadows what X actually brings (17)  
shadow/body analogy seems to be in view (cp Heb 10:1) here  
Lohse & Martin weakest: shadowy rules

b. Esoteric & Occult Features (18-19)

- (1) Heretics will try to cheat you thru super-piety  
humility, visions, worship of angels (if this last really worshipping  
angels, would think this would scare off Xns, tho don't  
forget Rev 19, 22)  
*embateuo* - set foot upon, come into possession, go into detail; app  
a technical term for initiation in mystery religion (BAG  
254)  
but this humility = empty conceit  
super-spirituality = unregenerate nature (flesh)
- (2) Heretics don't hold to head (X), from which alone comes divine growth  
(so how can they be alive?)

2. Christ is the Antidote (2:20-3:4)

a. Death with Christ means death to the "old way" of holiness (20-23)

- (1) whether we take "elements" = regulations or spirits: died to law (Rom  
6); no longer subject to Satan's accusations (Rom 8:33)
- (2) such regulations involve things of no lasting existence in any case (22)
- (3) such regulations are merely human (22)  
difficult: if we press this, then 16-17 not OT law;  
prob like Heb 10:8-9 re/ change in law, which also uses shadow  
analogy (10:1) like Col 2:17
- (4) such regulations don't cure depravity anyway (23)

b. Resurrection with Christ means a heavenly life (3:1-4)

- (1) Seek & think about heavenly things (1-2)  
let them control your mind, not earthly things
- (2) Your life is hidden with Christ (3)  
protected? He is now in heaven, so invisible?  
prob picking up term "hidden" in 1:26; 2:3; "invisible" in 1:15,16;  
poss "stored up" in 1:5; plus several refs to "heaven and  
earth" and "mystery"  
likely these are also buzzwords of the heretics
- (3) When X is manifested, you will be too – in glory! (4)

## V. Exegesis of Horatory Section (3:5-4:6)

### A. Basically Attitude Exhortations (3:5-17)

#### 1. Put off the "old man" (5-9)

cp Rom 6:1-11 (esp 6); Eph 4:17-24 (esp 22)

Lists of sins & virtues common to exhortations, ethical writings of Greco-Roman period

Here we have two lists of sins and one of virtues

#### a. Put to death these sins (5-7)

(those which characterize unsaved?)

##### (1) Sins to put to death (5)

*porneia* (sexual immorality) - of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse; prostitution, fornication, unchastity

*akatharsia* (impurity) - lit., dirt; fig., immorality, viciousness

*pathos* (lustful passion) - passion, esp. sexual

*epithumia* (desire) - desire, longing; here esp indicated as evil (desire for something forbidden)

*pleonexia* (covetousness) - greed, avarice, insatiable desire; Paul equates with idolatry (cp Eph 5:5)

##### (2) Reasons to put them to death (6-7)

(a) God is going to judge these

ref to "sons of disobedience" uncertain text

may be borrowed from Eph 5:6

(b) You yourselves once lived like this

#### b. Put off also these sins (8-9)

(sins more common among Christians?)

*orge* (wrath) - anger, indignation, wrath

*thumos* (anger) anger, wrath, rage; (rarely) passion

*kakia* (hate) - (general) depravity, wickedness, vice; (more specialized) malice, ill-will, malignity

*blasphemia* (slander) - abusive speech, whether or not against God

*aischrologia* (shameful speech) - sh. speech, whether obscene or abusive

*pseudomai* (to lie) - lie, deceive by lying

#### 2. Put on the "new man" (10-17)

#### a. Design or purpose of the "new man" (10-11)

which is being renewed (pres ptc)

for full knowledge (epignosis)  
acc. to the image (eikon) of the Creator  
(obv allusion to creation)  
where (in the new man) no longer earthly distinctions Jew/Greek;  
circumcised/uncircumcised; (Greek)/Barbarian (even Scythian);  
slave/free  
but Christ is everything and in everyone (?)

b. So put on its characteristics (12-17)

since you are those chosen (*eklektos*), set apart (*hagios*) and beloved (*agapetos*)

*splachna oiktirmou* (heart of compassion)

*splachna* (pl) - innards, entrails; used fig. as seat of emotions,  
rather like English "heart"

*oiktirmos* - mercy, pity, compassion

*chrestotes* (kindness) - also goodness, mercy, generosity

*tapeinophrosune* (humility) - also modesty

*praiutes* (meekness) - also gentleness, consideration, courtesy

*makrothumia* (patience) - also forbearance, steadfastness

[characteristics continue beyond v 12, but no longer simple list]

(13) forgiveness:

*anecho* - endure, bear, put up with

*charizomai* - give freely, forgive, remit, pardon

(just as the Lord forgave you; cp Mt 18:23-35)

(14) love (*agape*)

above all (put on on top of all these other "clothes"?)

bond of perfection; either:

unites all the above virtues perfectly

unites the church perfectly

(15) peace (*eirene*)

let it *brabeuo* - arbitrate, judge, control, rule

called to peace in one body (a gradual transition has begun into

how to put on the new man, perhaps starting as early as v

13)

(16) God's word in you

let it dwell in you (*enoikeio*)

*plousios* - richly, abundantly

Paul explains w/ following:

teaching & warning yourselves by means of songs

singing to God in your hearts

(17) Summary?

Do everything in the name of Jesus  
Thanking God through Him

**B. Basically Action Exhortations (3:18-4:6)**

1. Toward Those at Home (or in Authority Relationship) (3:18-4:1)

a. Wives and Husbands (18-19)

cp Eph 5:22-23; 1 Pet 3:1-7

*hupotasso* - become subject; subject oneself, obey

*aneko* - it is proper, fitting

*pikraino* - make bitter; (pass) become bitter

b. Children and Parents (20-21)

cp Eph 6:1-4

*euarestos* - pleasing, acceptable

*erethizo* - arouse, provoke, irritate, embitter

*athumeo* - be discouraged, lose heart

c. Slaves and Masters (3:22-4:1)

*ophthalmodoulia* - eye-service; done only to attract attention

*anthropareskos* - man-pleaser (rather than God-pleaser)

*ex psuches* - from the heart, gladly

*apolambano* - receive, recover, get back

*antapodosis* - repaying, reward

*kleronomia* - inheritance, possession, property

*komizomai* - carry off, get (for oneself), receive

*prosopolempsia* - partiality, favoritism

*isotes* - equality, fairness

*parecho* - (mid) show oneself to be something, grant something to someone

2. Toward God: specifically Prayer (4:2-4)

a. Devote your selves to it

stay awake

be thankful

b. Pray for Paul

for opportunity to speak

for proper speaking (clarity? content?)

3. Toward Unbelievers (4:5-6)

- a. Live wisely (walk w/ wisdom)
- b. Make most of opportunities
  - exagorazo* - buy up, redeem (see discussion in BAG 271)
  - kairos* - time, both point of and time period; often right, proper, favorable time
- c. Speak out
  - w/ grace: attractiveness? showing favor?
  - w/ salt: prob ref to salt as seasoning rather than as preservative
  - w/ knowledge - knowing how to answer various kinds of people (cp 1 Cor 9:19-23)

**VI. Exegesis of Personal Section (4:7-18)**

**A. The Letter-Bearers (7-9)**

1. Tychicus (7-8)

presumably born of pagan parents, since name means "fortunate" and may refer to goddess Tyche  
associate of Paul from Asia (Acts 20:4)  
accompanied Paul taking gift to Jerusalem (ibid)  
apparently delivers both Col (4:7) and Eph (6:21), likely on same trip with Paul after 1st Roman imprisonment (Tit 3:12)  
also with Paul during 2nd Roman imprisonment (2 Tim 4:12)

2. Onesimus (9)

prob born slave, since name means "useful, profitable"  
apparently a Colossian (see remark here); at least from area  
much more info in letter to Philemon, whose slave he was

**B. Greetings from Paul's Associates (10-14)**

1. Jews (10-11)

see v 11 for fact these are Jews

a. Aristarchus (10)

name means "best-ruling"; Jews frequently had "secular" names, though avoided idolatrous ones  
mentioned also in Philemon 24  
presumably the same as Aristarchus of Thessalonica, who:

accompanied Paul & Luke on voyage to Rome (Acts 27:2)  
was previously w/ Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4)  
before that, caught by mob in Ephesus (Acts 19:29)

b. Mark (10)

well-known assoc of Paul & Peter, author of Gospel  
this is his Roman name; Jewish is John (*Johannan*)  
here his relation to Barnabas given: cousin  
apparently problem arising on 1st m.j. now solved

c. Jesus Justus (11)

Jewish name (Jeshua/Joshua) and Roman ("just one")  
otherwise unknown: not apparently either:

(1) Titius Justus (Acts 18:7) app a Gentile

(*sebomenos* - God-fearer = uncircumcised Gentile  
worshiping in synagogue)

(2) Joseph Barsabbas Justus (Acts 1:23); Jewish, but highly  
unlikely to have still a 4th name

2. Gentiles (12-14)

a. Epaphras (12-13)

app short for Epaphroditus, meaning "dedicated to Aprodite"; presumably  
of pagan birth

prob not same person as E. in Phil 2:25; 4:18, assoc with church at  
Philippi

our E. app founder of work at Colossae (1:7-8) and prob continuing as  
pastor or some such, working also at Laodicea & Hierapolis  
app brought word re/ situation at Colossae, but now for some reason  
staying with Paul rather than returning immediately (work w/  
Paul? further study?)

b. Luke (14)

some dispute re/ full name, whether Lucius, Lucanus or other; recent evid  
seems to favor first

this passage indicates he is a physician and, by separation from vv 10-11,  
a Gentile

acc to tradition (Eusebius, Jerome), he is native of Antioch

c. Demas (14)

short for Demetrius? (related to Demeter, "earth-mother")

mentioned here and Phm 24

later abandoned Paul for world (2 Tim 4:10)

### C. Greetings for Others around Colosse (15-17)

1. Brothers at Laodicea (15)  
obv a church there (see vv 13, 16)
2. Nympha (feminine) or Nymphas (masculine) (15)  
gender depends on variant later in sentence (*autes/autou*)  
if fem, means "bride" or "nymph"  
if masc, prob short from Nymphodoros, "gift of Nympha"  
otherwise unknown  
believer w/ house-church meeting in home, perhaps (from context) located in Laodicea
3. Instructions re/ Letter (16)  
Colossian letter to be circulated to Laodicean church  
Laodicean letter to be circulated to Colossian church  
Three possibilities re/ Laod letter:
  - (1) no longer extant
  - (2) Philemon - taking Onesimus to be from Laodicea instead of Colosse, or to belong to owner who is Laodicean
  - (3) Ephesians - some reason to believe it a circular letter; Marcion app called Eph Laod  
Col to read Laod copy
4. Archippus (17)  
common name, meaning "ruler of horses"  
mentioned in Phm 2  
app a Xn leader  
at Colossae or Laodicea?

### D. Paul's Own Greeting (18)

written in own hand  
cp 1 Cor 16:21; Phm 19  
esp 2 Thess 3:17 which (w/ 2 Th 2:2, 15) suggests this done to foil forgers  
main body of letter prob written by secretary  
cp Rom 16:22  
remember my chains  
grace be with you



## VII. Conclusions: The Value of Colossians Today

### A. The Similarity of Religious Situation Then & Now

#### 1. Religious Changes in the West since about 1950

c1950:

Most people in US (& Europe) professing Xns,  
In US most were churchgoers, even though mainline denominations had  
already largely been lost to liberalism  
Syncretistic religions (e.g., Theosophy, Bahai) very minor

since c 1965:

Generally much less interest in traditional Xy  
(though partly masked by semi-revival)  
Far fewer churchgoers  
Great influx of religious influences from Far East: e.g.  
Zen Buddhism  
Transcendental Meditation  
Maharaj Ji  
Hare Krishna  
Unification Church (Moon),  
Considerable growth of home-grown syncretistic religions:  
Scientology  
est (Erhard Seminars Training)  
Eckankar  
New Thought  
New Age movement  
Holistic health movement  
(see Newsletter and Journals of Spiritual Counterfeits Project for Xn  
perspective on these)

#### 2. Result:

**Like** 1st cen AD Roman Empire: many syncretistic and guru-type cults competing  
with Xy, some of which are totally pagan, others have some Xn, Jewish or  
Muslim elements

**Unlike** 1st cen situation: many today think they have tried Xy and it has failed

#### 3. Value of Colossians Today

a. As we are tempted to follow some "in" variety of "Xy" we need Paul's  
warnings.

- b. As we are confused by all the varieties of religion today, we need Paul's clear thinking.

## **B. Some Principles in Colossians for Recognizing Heresy**

1. Compare Doctrines with those of Biblical Christianity (1:7, 23; 2:4, 8)
  - a. Especially its Christology (1:13-22; 2:8-15)
  - b. Also its Soteriology is most important (1:13-14, 20-22; 2:8-23)
2. Compare Practices with those of Biblical Christianity (1:6, 10, 22, 28; 2:16, 18, 23; 3:5-17; 3:18-4:1)
  - a. Love (1:4, 8; 2:2)
  - b. Holiness (e.g., 3:5-9 vs 3:12-17)
  - c. Humility (2:18-23 vs 3:11-12)
  - d. Thanksgiving (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:16-17)

## **C. Some Specific Answers to Particular Modern Heresies**

(most heresies share some characteristics with that at Colosse)

1. To Occult-type Movements (spiritism, etc.)
  - a. There is spiritual power out there all right, but "spiritual" is not necessarily good, nor from God. (1:16; 2:18).
  - b. Christ has already defeated these powers (2:15), though their final disposal is still future.
  - c. What God really cares about is holiness, not special powers, in His people (3:1-4 and following).
2. To Gnostic-type Movements (secret teachings, inner circle, mystical illumination, emphasis on "knowledge"; e.g., Freemasonry, Mormonism, Scientology, etc.)

- a. There is no knowledge of God that does not ultimately come through Christ and His word, the Bible (2:3).
  - b. All experience must be tested against this standard (1:6-7; 2:4, 8, 18, 20-23).
  - c. True knowledge of God and union with Him is an *open* secret.
3. To Movements Playing Down the Person of Christ (e.g., liberal theology, all syncretistic cults, most other cults)
- a. Christ is God: He made everything, keeps it going, and it has its goal and purpose in Him (1:15-17; 2:9).
  - b. He alone has made reconciliation with the Father; there is no salvation that does not depend on His work *only* (1:13-14, 18, 20-22; 2:10-15, 19).
4. To "Super-Spiritual" Movements (legalisms of all sorts, incl. vegetarianism, asceticism)
- a. Christ did it all. These extra rules will earn us nothing (2:8-10, 16-23).
  - b. Such extra rules do not touch the real problem (our fallen, sinful nature) anyway (2:23).
  - c. What we really need (and can only get through Christ) is forgiveness, regeneration and a heavenly life (1:14; 2:13-14; 1:27; 2:19; 3:1ff).
  - d. God has made the family with its authority structures; don't treat it with contempt (3:18-4:1, looking back to 1:16).

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