

DEITY OF CHRIST

Summary and Historical Background

Paul was concerned for the Christians that lived in the Lycus Valley where Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis were located. He had never been to these places, but he had heard the report of Epaphras regarding them. He was concerned about the false teachers that had begun to disseminate their doctrines among these believers. The doctrines of these heretics denied that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man, and as a result they denied God's offer of salvation by faith in the death of Christ on the cross.

Paul wrote this letter to strengthen the faith of these believers in the truth that Jesus Christ is the only and all sufficient Savior of lost sinners. Negatively, he refuted the heresy of these false teachers with its deceptive philosophy, Judaistic legalism, angelic mysticism, and empty asceticism. Positively, he directed the Christians to seek the true treasures of wisdom and knowledge from Jesus Christ, "the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9).

STUDY NOTES**I. Concern of Paul — 2:1-5**

2:1 — "Great conflict" - Paul's concern for the Colossian believers caused him to struggle against spiritual forces on their behalf (cf. Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:29), primarily through prayer. Literally, Paul "agonized" for them.

"For you ... them at Laodicea" — Paul was concerned for both of these churches in the Lycus Valley (cf. 4:15, 16). He had never seen them, but he labored on their behalf as though they were his own converts.

2:2 — "Hearts might be comforted" - Paul wanted the believers to be "encouraged" as they faced the "Gnostic" heresy in their midst. Possibly the word translated "comfort" also carried the thought of being "strengthened" for their trial.

"Being knit together in love" — May convey the idea of "unity" through love among the believers. However, "knit together" is also used to express "instruction." If used in this sense it was Paul's desire that they would be taught the truths of the Christian life in a spirit of love. Whether "unity" or "instruction", either would be an "encouragement" to the hearts of the believers.

"Unto . . . full assurance of understanding" — This is the first result of being "knit together." Believers would receive an understanding of their faith that would produce positive assurance for them. Believers need full assurance to withstand the heresies of false teachers.

"To the acknowledgment of the mystery of God" — This is the second result of being "knit together."

They would have a full knowledge of God's mystery — a truth that could only be known by God's revelation.

"Christ" — The mystery of God is Christ. He is the perfect revelation of God. God, Who is Spirit, is revealed in Christ, Who is flesh.

2:3 — "In whom are hid all the treasures" - All the spiritual treasures available to man are found in Jesus Christ, including salvation, sanctification and glorification. The "Gnostics" could add nothing to these treasures.

"Wisdom" — Refers to the application of truths so that right actions are taken. Christ makes this wisdom available to those who put their trust in Him.

"Knowledge" — Refers to the apprehension of truths so that right judgments are made. Christ makes this knowledge available to His people.

2:4 — "Beguile" - Paul revealed the cunning of the "Gnostic" teachers by this descriptive word. It meant they reasoned falsely to get their ideas across to others. They were deceivers. It was for this reason he agonized for them in prayer. (2:1).

"With enticing words" — These "Gnostics" had persuasiveness with their words. Such a power can be used for good or for evil. These false teachers used it to beguile others.

2:5 — "Absent in the flesh" - Another reason why Paul agonized so greatly for these believers was his absence from them. He would have liked to be with them, but he was hindered by His Roman imprisonment.

"With you in the spirit" — However, he wanted them to know that he was with them in spirit which meant his prayers were active for them. He was doing all that he could on their behalf, and that was a great deal.

"Order" — This was a military term that described soldiers that were all in their proper place in the line. The "order" of the Colossian Christians caused much joy for Paul.

"Steadfastness" — This term also had a military meaning. In that sense it meant that all the soldiers together produced a solid line against the enemy. Thus far the Colossian church had shown such "steadfastness," which was a source of joy to Paul.

II. Conduct of Believers — 2:6, 7

2:6 — "As" - Indicates the direction in which the believers were to walk. They were to walk as they had been instructed.

"Received" — This could refer to their reception of Christ as Savior, but it probably refers to their reception of Him in every role He possessed, according to the instruction they had received from Epaphras concerning Him. "Received" is used for receiving instruction from a teacher.

"Walk in Him" — This is a command with a connotation they were to practice a certain kind of walk. They were to live their lives by the power of Christ's life in them. Their walk is described in four ways in v. 7.

2:7 — "Rooted" - This is a perfect passive participle. God permanently "rooted" them in the Christian life when they accepted Christ as their Savior and the results of this action are continuous.

"Built up" — This is a present passive participle. God is continually building up the believer in Christ over a whole lifetime of obedience to His Word.

"Established in the faith" — This is also a present participle which indicates the continual action of being established in the Christian doctrine of faith. Personal faith is not being considered here. Stable Christians stand against heresy best.

"Abounding . . . with thanksgiving" — This is a present participle which indicates the Christian who walks in the power of the life of Christ will continuously be abounding with thanksgiving.

III. Caution Against Gnosticism — 2:8

2:8 — "Spoil" - This word sometimes is translated "rob," but since the passage does not indicate what was robbed from these believers, it evidently means "capture." The believers were in danger of being "captured" by the philosophy of the false teachers.

"Through philosophy" — This term was used to describe any discussion about God, the world or human life. There were true and also false philosophies being taught. In this case it was a false one, but it was effective in capturing unsuspecting souls for "Gnosticism."

"Vain deceit" — These words modify "philosophy." The philosophy of the false teachers was an empty deception - it sounded good, but there was no truth in it.

"The tradition of men" — This was another description of the false teaching used by the "Gnostics" to capture men. Their teachings did not originate with God, but came from human speculations.

"The rudiments of the world" — This phrase refers to the elementary principles used in the teachings of these "Gnostics." This may have referred to the incorporation of Old Testament legalism into their system, elementary principles that were no longer valid since Christ died on the cross (cf. Gal. 4:3, 9).

"Not after Christ" — The teaching of the "Gnostics" did not come from Christ, nor was He the subject of it. This was the most obvious of their whole system.

IV. Completeness in Christ — 2:9-10

2:9 — "For in Him" - The "Gnostics" left Christ out of the central part of their religion, but Paul now shows His importance.

"Dwells" — This word speaks of the permanent residence of something. In this case Paul is speaking about the permanent residence of deity in Christ.

"All the fullness of the Godhead" — "Godhead" refers to the very essence of God. Christ was God. He was the fullness of God, not a part of God as the "Gnostics" taught. He was eternally God - deity dwelt in Him.

"Bodily" — Not only was Christ divine, but He was also human. He was all-God and all-man. He was the God-man. "Gnostics" looked upon matter as evil - flesh was sinful. This truth showed how wrong they were.

2:10 — "Complete in Him" - "Complete" is from the same root word as "fullness." Believers have been "made full" in Christ. It is a perfect passive participle which indicates God made believers "complete" in the past at the time of conversion and that work continues on and on in the life of the believer. He has no need for other mediators to intercede on His behalf whether they be saints or angels. God has already done it all in Christ.

"The head of all principality and power" — Christ is the head of all authorities whether they be angels or men.

V. Conversion by Christ — 2:11-15

2:11 — "Circumcised" - Circumcision of the flesh under the law was symbolic of the heart. Spiritual circumcision is accomplished at the time of conversion.

"Made without hands" — Spiritual circumcision is done by God in the inward part of man when his sinful nature is removed and a new nature is given to him (cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:3).

"Putting of the body . . . the flesh" — The flesh has reference to the sinful nature (cf. Gal. 5:19-21). The "flesh" is also called the "old man" in Col. 3:9.

"Circumcision of Christ" — This is the spiritual circumcision that Christ performed for each believer, not a physical circumcision that was performed for Him at eight days.

2:12 — "Buried . . . in baptism" - Some argue that this baptism refers to water baptism which was symbolic of a believer's conversion, i.e., burial with Christ. However, it seems to make more sense to consider this the believer's actual Spirit baptism into Christ's death, just as the circumcision in the previous verse was a spiritual one, not a literal cutting of the flesh.

"Risen with Him" — When the believer is baptized into Christ, it is not only into His death, but also into His resurrection.

"Through faith" — Spirit baptism cannot be accomplished without the faith of the individual who seeks the experience.

"Operation of God" — Spirit baptism must be done by the "energy of God." It is not within the power of man to accomplish it. He can perform water baptism, but not Spirit baptism.

"Raised Him from the dead" — Reference to Christ's resurrection, which was done by the same energy of God that raises believers from spiritual death.

2:13 — "Dead in your sins" - A sinner is spiritually dead as a result of his sins.

"Uncircumcision of your flesh" — He is also dead by nature. "Flesh" is a reference to his natural sinful state. "Uncircumcision" refers to the fact that the sins have not been cut off by faith in Christ.

"Quickened together with Him" — Refers to the new life that is given to the one who puts his faith in Christ. He is "made alive."

"Forgiven you all trespasses" — The Greek word for "grace" is a part of the word for "forgiveness." God's grace is manifested in His forgiveness of a believer's forgiveness. It cost Him much - the sinner nothing.

2:14 — "Blotting out" - Through forgiveness God "erased" man's debt to Him.

"Handwriting" — This was a bill showing the debt of a person to which he had affixed his signature, thus it was called a "handwriting."

"Ordinances" — The debt in the sinner's case was the result of not fulfilling the ordinances of God. These ordinances may be either His law on the tablets of stone or those written on the hearts of all men.

"Against us" — The law of God was good, but it was definitely "opposed" to the sinner.

"Contrary to us" — In fact, the law of God was "hostile" to the sinner. It condemned him for his sin and assigned him to the pit of hell.

"Took it out of the way" — Not only did God blot out a man's bill of debt when He forgave him, He also removed it as a barrier between Himself and the sinner.

"Nailing it to His cross" — Furthermore, God nailed this bill of indebtedness to the cross of Christ. The bill was paid in full when Christ died. No collection agency and no cult can collect those bills from sinners who trust in Christ's death on the cross for them.

2:15 — "Spoiled principalities and powers" - These principalities and powers could refer to either good or evil angels. There are good arguments for both views, but the majority of the scholars take this passage to mean the stripping of evil angels of their powers.

"Made a show of them openly" — Christ made an open show of them, exposing them to public shame, showing the universe that they were His captives.

"Triumphing over them in it" — This victory was accomplished at the cross of Christ. To those standing on Golgotha, it looked like the final defeat for Christ, but instead it was His greatest triumph. He conquered the evil angels by His death on the cross.

VI. Correction of the Heresies — 2:16-23

A. Legalism — 2:16-17

2:16 — "Therefore" - The basis for correcting the heresies of the "Gnostics" is found in the preceding verses (cf. vv. 11-15).

"Judge you" — No one was to act as their judge in the matters about to be mentioned. This is what the "Gnostics" were doing.

"In meat" — The Jews were obligated by the law to make a difference between clean and unclean meats in their eating, but that law was satisfied when Christ died on the cross (cf. Acts 10:15).

"In drink" — It is more difficult to find a reference in the law about drinking (cf. Lev. 10:9; 11:34, 36; Num. 6:3), but these were also satisfied by Christ's death.

"Holy day" — There were three annual feasts of great importance in the Jewish calendar. Attendance was required by law. They were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

"New moon" — There were also monthly celebrations for the Jews which were held at the beginning of each month.

"Sabbath days" — Finally, there were the weekly observances. On the seventh day of each week the day of rest had to be observed. The typical purpose of all these days was fulfilled in Christ. Observance was no longer commanded by God.

2:17 — "Shadow of things to come" - These rituals and holy days had to be observed because they were a shadow of Christ and His work of salvation which were to come in the future.

"Body is of Christ" — When Christ came He was like the "body" in comparison to the "shadow" which the body cast before it. The Old Testament was full of types and shadows, but all attention was to center on Christ once He had come, and the types and shadows would lose their value.

B. Mysticism — 2:18-19

2:18 — "Beguile you of your reward" - Legalists, such as the "Gnostics," held on to the shadows as a way of holiness and ignored Christ who alone offered salvation without money and rich rewards without price. Those who listened to the "Gnostics" would be defrauded of these blessings in Christ.

"Voluntary humility" — The false teachers taught a humility, a self-denial, that was of their own independent making. It certainly did not come from God. It was voluntarily created by them.

"Worshiping of angels" — This humility involved the worship of angels, which the "Gnostics" looked upon as mediators between them and God. Such worship was against Christ. They honored the creature more than the creator.

"Intruding into those things which he has not seen" — There is a question whether the "not" should be in the text. If it is, the text says the Gnostic was intruding into areas where he had no knowledge. If the negative is not in the text, then it says the Gnostic built his false doctrine on his own visions (rather than on the revelation of Christ).

"Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" — The "Gnostics" had, inflated egos caused by an exaggerated idea in their unregenerate minds that they had knowledge that was superior to that of others.

2:19 — "Not holding the Head" - The truth about the "Gnostics" is that they had no life because they were not connected to the Head, Jesus Christ. The simplest Christian who is connected to Christ is far superior to the "Gnostic," because the Christian has life.

"Having nourishment ministered" — The Christian is given nourishment and strength along with other believers through Christ, the Head.

"Knit together" — The Christian is able to function in unity with other believers by means of Christ. Or, this expression may mean he is taught by Christ (cf. 2:2).

"Increase with the increase of God" — The Christian is able to grow in harmony with other Christians through Christ in accordance with the growth that God desires for the body.

C. Asceticism — 2:20-23

2:20 — "Dead with Christ" - The Christian was made dead to sin and to the principles of the world when he accepted Christ. When he was united to Christ in salvation, he died with Him.

"Rudiments of the world" — The phrase refers to some of the basic principles of the world for practicing religion (cf. v. 8.). The Christian has been freed from these principles through death with Christ. The principles of asceticism, for instance, have no hold on him since he became a Christian.

"Living in the world" — The Christian lives in the world, but is not to be a part of the world system.

"Subject to ordinances" — Since a Christian is not a part of the world system, he is not to subject himself to the religious laws of the world.

2:21 — "Touch not; taste not; handle not" - This is a sample of the worldly laws of asceticism. Asceticism taught that the body is evil; therefore it must be punished and deprived. Notice how these laws came about as a result of a false premise.

2:22 — "Perish with the using" - Since these worldly things are so fragile that they perish with the use of them, why are religions giving such a high place in controlling one's life? It is foolishness. God created foods to be eaten ("to perish with the using") in order to strengthen one's body. The Ascetics' denial of this use was a denial of God's purpose. The denial of food has nothing to do with holiness. Holiness comes by a denial of sin.

"Commandments and doctrines of men" — A Christian is not a part of the world system, therefore he should not submit himself to the religious laws of men.

2:23 — "Show of wisdom" - These laws forbidding the normal practices of the body admittedly do show off a certain world wisdom that appeals to the flesh, i.e., the "old man."

"Will worship" — This is self-discipline. It does get the admiration of unsaved people, but it cannot save anyone from his sins. It merely draws attention to himself.

"Humility" — What appears to be humility to the world is inward pride before God.

"Neglecting of the body" — Asceticism denies the natural appetites and needs of the body to gain acceptance with God, but that can only be done by accepting the finished work of Christ on the cross.

"Not in honor to the satisfying of the flesh" — A very difficult phrase, but suffice it to say that asceticism provides no restraint to the satisfying of the fleshly appetites. This seems to be the meaning of the phrase. Only Christ can curb those appetites that are wrong. And those that are right should be enjoyed as a gift from God.