



# COLOSSIANS





COLOSSAE





Denizli, Turkey

Colossae







*unrestrained license*



**Author:** Paul the Apostle and Timothy

**Date:** AD 60 from a Roman prison (Acts 28). The time of Paul's imprisonment in Acts 28 was ca. AD 60-62.

Tychicus carried both the Ephesian and the Colossian letters (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7), and half of the content of Ephesians overlaps that of Colossians.

**To whom was it written:**

Paul was writing to the church at Colossae.

Epaphras had founded the church (1:7; 4:12-13), not Paul (2:1).


The church was composed mostly of Gentiles (1:27; 2:13)

- who were influenced by a “vain” philosophy (2:8)
- composed of an incipient form of Gnosticism (2:8-10),
- legalism (2:11-17),
- mysticism (2:18-19),
- asceticism (2:20-23).

In brief, the heresy was a form of Judeo-philosophical and mystical asceticism, a forerunner of second-century Gnosticism.

Mysticism: a doctrine of an immediate spiritual intuition of truths believed to transcend ordinary understanding, or of a direct, intimate union of the soul with God through contemplation or ecstasy.

Asceticism - the doctrine that a person can attain a high spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial, self-mortification, and the like



## Why was it written:

Paul desired to show the Colossians their **completeness** in Christ (ch.1)

He wanted to lead believers into spiritual **maturity** (2:1-17)

His design was to counter the Gnostic-like, legalistic, mystical heresy in the church (2:18-23)

He desired to teach about our **new life in Christ** (3:1-4:6)

He wanted to inform them about the state of affairs (4:7-18).

## Theme:

The theme of Colossians is the complete adequacy of Christ as contrasted with the emptiness of mere human philosophy.

“complete adequacy of Christ”:

- in who He is
- in who we are in Him





Since Gnosticism lacked a common authority, it encompassed a variety of beliefs. Central to many, if not most, were:

1. a cosmic dualism between spirit and matter, good and evil
2. a distinction between a finite OT God, Yahweh, who was equated with Plato's *Demiurge* or Craftsman, and the transcendent God of the NT
3. a view of creation as resulting from the fall of Sophia (Wisdom)
4. an identification of matter as evil
5. a belief that most people are ignorant of their origins and condition
6. an identification of sparks of divinity that are encapsulated in certain spiritual individuals
7. a faith in a docetic Redeemer, who was not truly human and did not die on the cross. This Redeemer brought salvation in the form of a secret *gnosis*, or knowledge, that was communicated by Christ after his resurrection.



Since Gnosticism lacked a common authority, it encompassed a variety of beliefs. Central to many, if not most, were: (cont.)

8. a goal of escaping the prison of the body, traversing the planetary spheres of hostile demons, and being reunited with God

9. a salvation based **not** on faith or works but on special knowledge, or *gnosis*, of one's true condition

10. a mixed view of morality. Carpocrates urged his followers to engage in deliberate promiscuity. Epiphanes, his son, taught that licentiousness was God's law. Salvation of women depended on their one day becoming men and returning to the conditions of Eden before Eve was created. Oddly enough, women were prominent in many Gnostic sects.

11. an interpretation of baptism and the Lord's Supper as spiritual symbols of the *gnosis*

12. a view of the resurrection as spiritual, not physical.

*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Norman Geisler, 1999, p.274



## The Colossian Heresy

In order to understand the full implications of the truth in Colossians, the student must first acquaint himself with this heresy.

Bishop J.B. Lightfoot – “The doctrine of the Person of Christ is here stated with greater precision and fullness than in any other of Saint Paul's epistles.”

The heresy contains two elements that are fused into one system. Paul mentions:

- Observation of sabbaths and new moons
- distinction between meats and drinks
- circumcision
- these point to an element of ***Judaism*** in this system

His reference to:

- a self-imposed humility
- service of angels
- hard treatment of the body
- a superior wisdom
- these ideas indicate that he is dealing with a ***Gnostic*** element

## The Colossian Heresy (cont.)

Gnosticism was concerned with two questions:

**How can the work of creation be explained?**

**How are we to account for the existence of evil?**

Problem created: How can one reconcile the creation of the world and the existence of evil with the conception of God as the absolute Being?

(OR: How to explain the fact of a holy God as creator, and a universe in which there is sin?)

**Gnostic answer:** If God had created the universe out of nothing, and evolved it directly from Himself, then God being holy, could not have brought an evil universe into existence. Otherwise, one is driven to the inescapable conclusion that **God created evil**, which is impossible, since He is holy.

But the fact of a holy God and an evil universe still remained, and the Gnostic must explain. He does so by putting forth the theory of some antagonistic principle, independent of God, by which his creative energy was thwarted and limited. This opposing principle of evil the Gnostic thought of as the world of matter. Thus, evil is seen by him to be residing in the material universe.

The Gnostic then asks the questions, How then is creation possible? How can the infinite communicate with the finite, the good with the evil? How can God act on matter? God, he says, is perfect, absolute, incomprehensible.





God is holy,  
perfect, absolute,  
incomprehensible

The Gnostic view of how the  
creation of matter (which is evil)  
is possible by a holy God.

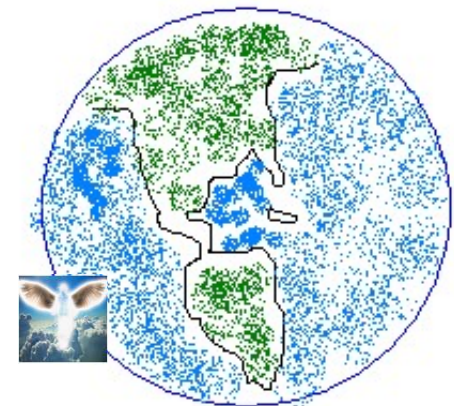
emanations, effluence,

aeons, spirits,

intermediary beings,

angels

Evil resides in  
the material,  
sensible world

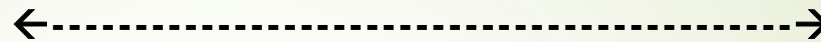


In each successive evolution the Divine  
element is feebler, until contact with matter  
is possible, and creation ensues.

Thus Gnostic speculation on the existence of evil ends in a dualism.

# Why study Church history and apologetics?

Only divine,  
not human



Only human,  
not divine

Jesus  
raised

## Erroneous/heretical views of the person of Jesus Christ

Timeline →

V

Gnostics/Docetists  
(late 1<sup>st</sup> cent. & 2<sup>nd</sup> cent.)

Sabellianism  
(late 3<sup>rd</sup> cent.)

Appollinarianism  
(4<sup>th</sup> cent.)

Eutychians  
(5<sup>th</sup> cent.)

Ebioites  
(2<sup>nd</sup> cent.)

Arianism  
(4<sup>th</sup> cent.)

Nestorians  
(5<sup>th</sup> cent.)

**There is nothing new under the sun!**

Deism 1700s

Unitarianism 1700-1800s

Liberalism 1800s

Jehovah's Witnesses 1870

Way International 1950



## ***Resulting Ethics***

From these philosophical speculations, two opposing codes of ethics emerged, a ***rigid asceticism*** and an ***unrestrained license***. The problem confronting the Gnostic was as follows:

Since matter is evil, how can one avoid its baneful (destructive, pernicious) influence and thus keep his higher nature unsullied? The answers:

***Rigid asceticism***: all contact with matter should be reduced to a minimum. Thus:

- the material part of man would be subdued and mortified
- live on a spare diet and abstain from marriage
- prohibit the anointing of the body with olive oil

***Unrestrained license***: since one cannot escape contact with matter, cultivate an entire indifference to the world of sense.

- simply follow one's own impulses
- do not give matter any status of importance
- treat matter as foreign or alien to oneself
- one has no duties or obligations to matter; use it or leave it unused as one likes

**Asceticism - the doctrine that a person can attain a high spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial, self-mortification, and the like**

Gnosticism had no direct connection with Christianity in itself.

The Essenes, a sect of Jews, brought Gnosticism into the professing Christian Church.

## **Gnosticism introduced into the church in Colossae by the Essenes**

- a sect of Jews
- a members of a brotherhood
- involved in mystical speculation involving a rigid Asceticism
- included a rigorous observation of the Mosaic ritual
  - strict abstinence from work on the Sabbath;
  - whole days given over to religious exercises and exposition of the Scriptures;
  - the name of Moses was of highest reverence (Moses's name blasphemed = punished by death)
- marriage was an abomination (so they adopted children)
- marriage, necessary for preservation of the race, was still seen as evil
- drink no wine, eat no meat, lived on bread and vegetables
- prided themselves on the exclusive possession of religious secrets
- condemned all natural cravings
- placed angels in the category of beings that should be worshipped
- didn't believe in resurrection of the body, but in continuance of the soul-life (matter is evil)

## Some Gnostic Leaders

**Simon** the sorcerer of Samaria (Acts 8) was the first gnostic.

**Saturninus** (Satornilos) Asserted that the incorporeal Christ was the redeemer, denying that Christ was really incarnated in human flesh. This belief is shared with **docetism**.

**Cerinthus** of Asia minor was teaching **adoptionism**, the heresy that Jesus was merely a man upon whom Christ descended at his baptism. Since Christ could not die, he departed from Jesus before his crucifixion.

**Marcian** of Pontus was a controversial, though atypical, Gnostic. He believed that the God of the OT was different from the God of the NT and that the Canon of scripture included only a truncated version of Luke and ten of Paul's epistles (all about the pastoral epistles). His views were severely attacked by Tertullian (ca. 160s – ca. 215). **Marcian became a stimulus for the early church to officially define the limits of the canon.**

**Valentinus** of Alexandria was another prominent Gnostic. He came to Rome in 140 and taught that there were a series of divine emanations. His followers included Ptolemaeus, Heracleon, Theodotus, and Marcus.

Heracleon's interpretation of John is the first known NT commentary.

*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Norman Geisler, 1999, p.274



Gnostic heresy	Paul's response
intellectual exclusiveness; Secret knowledge “perfect” = (those possessing the superior wisdom)	Universality, everyman (believer) presented as mature/perfect in Christ 1:28; 3:11
wisdom (sophia), <a href="#">understanding (sunesis)</a> , knowledge (epignosis) 1:9,28; 2:3,23; 3:16; 4:5   <a href="#">1:9; 2:2</a>   1:9, 10; 2:2; 3:10	Paul uses the same gnostic terms and translates it to the higher sphere of Christian thought
false gnostic wisdom of man	true wisdom of the Gospel 1:5, 9
secret mysteries given to initiates	<b>all</b> the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ 2:9 “all” is used 40 times
successive emanations, angelic mediators	Jesus Christ is the creator of the universe; head of the church 1:15-20
divine fullness (πληρωμα) distributed among aeons	divine fullness permanently at home in Jesus Christ. “He exhausts the godhead. In him resides the totality of the divine powers and attributes.” 2:9
basic principles of this world 2:8 false, worldly, religious, elementary; combining secret knowledge with human regulations concerning physical practices	we have died with Christ to those principles 2:20

Term / Phrase	Gnostic's Special Use	Paul's Christian Use
<p>“perfect”</p> <p>teleioo Τελειωω</p>	<p>employed by the mystery religions &amp; Gnostics to describe those who had become possessors of the secrets or knowledge boasted of by the particular religion</p>	<p>in Christ every believer is one of the “perfect” (or mature)</p> <p>1:28, How is it that we can be mature? 2:10-14; 3:3</p>
<p>“Fullness”</p> <p>πληρωμα</p>	<p>Gnostic philosophical term meaning the sum of supernatural forces controlling the fate of people</p>	<p>1:19, the totality of God with all His powers and attributes; 2:9, that the very essence of deity was present in totality in Jesus' human body</p>
<p>“knowledge”</p> <p>επιγνωσις γνωσις</p>	<p>A full knowledge shared only with the elite few, the initiates</p> <p>1:9,10; 2:3</p>	<p>denotes exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition, and is a strengthened form of <i>gnosis</i>, expressing a fuller or a full knowledge, a greater participation by the knower in the object known, thus more powerfully influencing the knower.</p>

## Outline of Colossians

### 1 *Doctrinal*--Deeper Life (1:1-2:7)

- a. Preeminence belongs to Christ (1:1-19)
- b. Reconciliation made by Christ (1:20-23)
- c. Mystery revealed in Christ (1:24-29)
- d. All wisdom and knowledge are in Christ  
(2:1-5)
- e. Therefore, live in Christ (2:6-7)

### 2 *Polemical*--Higher Life (2:8-23)

- a. "Gnosticism" is heresy--deity is in Christ  
(2:8-10)
- b. Legalism is heresy-- reality is in Christ  
(2:11-17)
- c. Mysticism is heresy-- headship is in Christ  
(2:18-19)
- d. Asceticism is heresy-- dead in Christ (2:20-23)

### 3 *Spiritual*-- Inner Life (3:1-17)

- a. Seek new life above (3:1-4)
- b. Put off all life below (3:5-11)
- c. Put on new life below (3:12-17)

### 4 *Practical*-- Outer Life (3:18-4:18)

- a. Perfect your private life (3:18-4:1)
- b. Perfect your prayer life (4:2-4)
- c. Perfect your public life (4:5-6)
- d. Perfect your personal life (4:7-18)



Previously unknown	“mysteries” revealed	in the New	Testament
Matt. 13:11	Kingdom of heaven	Col. 1:26	The church
Luke 8:10	Kingdom of God	Col. 1:27	Indwelling of Gentiles
Rom. 11:25	Israel's hardening	Col. 2:2	Knowledge of Christ
Rom. 16:25-26	The Gospel	Col. 4:3	Proclamation of Christ
1 Cor. 4:1	God's revelation	2 Thess. 2:7	Lawlessness
Eph. 1:9	God's will	1 Tim. 3:9	The Christian faith
Eph. 3:2-3	God's grace	1 Tim. 3:16	Godliness
Eph. 3:4	Christ	Rev. 1:20	Seven stars
Eph. 3:9-10	God's church	Rev. 10:7	God's goal
Eph. 5: 32	Christ and the church	Rev. 17:5	Babylon, the great

## Col. 1:15-19

<sup>15</sup>“And He is the image [εικων] of the invisible God,  
the first-born of all creation. [προτοτοκος πασης κτισεως] Gen. 41:51-52 x Jer. 31.9 (Gen. 48:12-20)

Ps. 89:27 David appointed firstborn

<sup>16</sup>“For by Him all things [παντα] were created,  
both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities  
—all things [τα παντα] have been created by Him [δια αυτου] and for Him [εις αυτον].

<sup>17</sup>“And He is before [προ] all things [παντων],  
and in Him all things [τα παντα] hold together [συνεστηκεεν]. [stand together; consist]

<sup>18</sup>“He is also head of the body, the church;  
and He is the beginning [αρχη], the first-born [προτοτοκος] from the dead;  
so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. [preeminence, KJV]  
[πρωτευων – holding the first place]

<sup>19</sup>“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness [πληρωμα] to dwell in Him.

## 2. Jesus is NOT a lesser God than the Father

### f. Colossians 1:15

<sup>16</sup>“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.

<sup>17</sup> “And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (*NASB*)

<sup>16</sup>because by means of him all **[other]** things were created in the heavens and upon the earth the things visible and things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All **[other]** things have been created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup>Also, he is before all **[other]** things and by means of him all **[other]** things were made to exist, (*NWT*)



## “Godhead” (KJV)

### Col. 2:9

“For in him dwelleth all the fullness [πληρωμα (pl8roma)] of the **Godhead** bodily.” (KJV)  
θεοτητος (theot8tos)

### Romans 1:20

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and **Godhead**; so that they are without excuse”  
θειοτης (theiot8s)

### Acts 17:29

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God [του θεου (tou theou)], we ought not to think that the **Godhead** is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”  
το θειον (to theion)

- Theotes (θειος) indicates the Divine essence of Godhood, the Personality of God [Col. 2:9]
- Theiotes (θειοτης) indicates the attributes of God, his divine nature and properties. [Rom. & Acts]

*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W.E. Vine, 328-329



**Colossians 2: 9** -- Does this verse indicate that Jesus merely has divine qualities, or does it indicate that Jesus is really God?

JWs say this verse does not mean Jesus is intrinsically God Almighty like the Father is, but merely has divine qualities (Reasoning From The Scriptures, 1989, 421).

**Response:** This verse does not say Jesus just has divine qualities but rather that the absolute “fullness [literally, ‘full measure,’ ‘completeness,’ ‘totality,’ ‘sum-total’] of Deity” dwells in Christ in bodily form. [see NASB]

The verse means Christ has the very nature of God and is the very essence of deity. All that God is, has its permanent home in the Lord Jesus Christ in bodily form. This is supported by numerous other verses, both here in Colossians (cf. 1:15-18) and elsewhere (John 1:1; 8:58; 20:28; Phil. 2:6-8; Titus 2:13).



**Colossians 2:9** -- Does this verse prove that Jesus is God the Father and the Holy Spirit, as Oneness Pentecostals believe?

They say “Trinitarianism denies that the fullness of the Godhead is in Jesus because it denies that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit.” Because the *fullness* of the Godhead is said to dwell in Jesus, this must mean that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit.

**Response:** In this verse *Godhead* simply means deity. The word indicates that the fullness of deity--the very divine essence itself, including all the divine attributes--dwells fully in Jesus.

The verse indicates, then, that Jesus is fully God, *but it does not say that Jesus is the only person who is fully God.*

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**How do we do/practice these actions?**





How are you “complete in Christ”?

What does the last phrase in 2:23 mean? 2:20-23

“But are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”