

Col 2:9 For in Christ all the fullness^o of the Deity lives in bodily form,
Col 2:10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head^p over every power and authority.

Christ's incarnation was real. The Word became flesh. But, Christ did not set aside any of His powers as God either. Christ was both fully God, and fully man.

What exactly was the Colossian heresy? We have chapter 2 to derive what the false teaching Paul was countering.

Earlier in Galatia, in the letter to the Galatian churches, Paul counters the judaizer controversy where the judaizers were trying to force Christian converts to be circumcised. There is certainly some element of this it seems here, but the Jewish part seems to be broader here than just circumcision.

Paul also taught justification by faith and not works in Galatians. We know that we cannot improve our standing before God by works, and that we are justified only by Christ's blood shed on the cross on our behalf redeeming us from our sin. Without Christ, no matter how hard we work at good deeds and "religiousness", we know that our sin would separate us from a Holy God. There certainly seems to be some of this being taught too – or at least some type of required asceticism as well that is not present in mainstream Jewish life.

There was also some sort of paganism, or syncretism with eastern mystery religions. Very similar to the modern new age movement. Christianity was being attempted to be mixed in with other religions. We know that there is only one way to the father, and that is Jesus Christ:

Jn 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am^d the way^e and the truth^f and the life.^g No one comes to the Father except through me.^h

anything that tries to minimize Christ's redeeming work, or mix in some works based system of salvation, and you know that it is false teaching.

Paul talks about some of the pagan syncretism in chapter 2. He refers to powers that the Colossian false teachers might have been teaching as stocheia, or elemental forces. It appears that the false teachers were teaching that the elemental forces served as intermediaries between man and God. Another element that was taught in this pagan syncretism is that in a universe governed by powers, you either had to worship and appease the powers. Paul counters with the very logical argument that Christ rules over these powers, and created these powers. The supremacy of Christ in all things is the answer to this false teaching.

Finally, one more syncretic element mixed in was "Jewish Gnosticism", or Merkabah mysticism. This is where the thought that spirit and matter are antithetical to each other. So Christ could not have been matter, and also been God. Either one or the other they falsely taught was not true. Then also, if matter and spirit cannot interact, intermediaries (in the form of the powers above) were necessary to communicate between man and God. We know that this is not true – Christ removed the barrier on the cross. It is also important to note that the barrier was not matter / spirit, but was our sin.

Col 2:11 In him you were also circumcised, ^r in the putting off of the sinful nature, ^{7s} not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,

What God really desired was circumcision of the heart – not some outward sign but an inward conversion:

Dt 10:12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you ^t but to fear ^u the LORD your God, to walk ^v in all his ways, to love him, ^w to serve the LORD ^x your God with all your heart ^y and with all your soul, ^z

Dt 10:13 and to observe the LORD'S commands ^a and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? ^b

Dt 10:14 To the LORD your God belong the heavens, ^{c d e} even the highest heavens, ^{f g} the earth and everything in it. ^h

Dt 10:15 Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved ⁱ them, and he chose you, ^j their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. ^k

Dt 10:16 **Circumcise ^l your hearts, ^m therefore, and do not be stiff-necked ⁿ any longer.**

Dt 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods ^o and Lord of lords, ^p the great God, mighty and awesome, ^q who shows no partiality ^r and accepts no bribes. ^s

Dt 10:18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, ^t and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. ^u

Dt 10:19 And you are to love ^v those who are aliens, ^w for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. ^x

Dt 10:20 Fear the LORD your God and serve him. ^y Hold fast ^z to him and take your oaths in his name. ^a

Dt 10:21 He is your praise; ^b he is your God, who performed for you those great ^c and awesome wonders ^d you saw with your own eyes.

Dt 10:22 Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, ^e and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky. ^f

Dt 30:6 The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, ^k so that you may love ^l him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

Jer 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, ⁱ you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath ^j will break out and burn like fire ^k because of the evil ^l you have done— burn with no one to quench ^m it.

Part of the syncretism that the false teachers may have been advocating may have included circumcision for males. But, the same teaching from Galatians applies:

Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus ^u neither **circumcision** nor uncircumcision has any value. ^v The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. ^w

Gal 5:7 You were running a good race. ^x Who cut in on you ^y and kept you from obeying the truth?

Gal 5:8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ^z

Gal 5:9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." ^a

Gal 5:10 I am confident ^b in the Lord that you will take no other view. ^c The one who is throwing you into confusion ^d will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.

Gal 5:11 Brothers, if I am still preaching **circumcision**, why am I still being persecuted? ^e In that case the offense ^f of the cross has been abolished.

Gal 5:12 As for those agitators,^g I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Gal 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free.^h But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature¹⁸; ⁱ rather, serve one another^j in love.

Gal 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."^{19k}

Gal 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Col 2:12 having been buried with him in baptism^t and raised with him^u through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.^v

Ro 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized^b into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

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

Ro 6:5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.^f

Ro 6:6 For we know that our old self^g was crucified with him^h so that the body of sinⁱ might be done away with,²⁴ that we should no longer be slaves to sin^j —

Ro 6:7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.^k

Ro 6:8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.^l

Ro 6:9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead,^m he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.ⁿ

Ro 6:10 The death he died, he died to sin^o once for all;^p but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Ro 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin^q but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Ro 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign^r in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Ro 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness,^s but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.^t

Ro 6:14 For sin shall not be your master,^u because you are not under law,^v but under grace.^w

Eph 2:4 But because of his great love for us,ⁿ God, who is rich in mercy,

Eph 2:5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions^o —it is by grace you have been saved.^p

Eph 2:6 And God raised us up with Christ^q and seated us with him^r in the heavenly realms^s in Christ Jesus,

Eph 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace,^t expressed in his kindness^u to us in Christ Jesus.

Eph 2:8 For it is by grace^v you have been saved,^w through faith^x —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

Eph 2:9 not by works,^y so that no one can boast.^z

Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship,^a created^b in Christ Jesus to do good works,^c which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Baptism is also putting off our sinful nature.

Col 2:13 When you were dead in your sins^w and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature,⁸ God made you⁹ alive^x with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Same principle as above – we share in the new life Christ gave us, whether in the past we were Jew or Gentile, the new life Christ received when God raised Him from the dead. God has forgiven our sins – Christ paid the price for them on the cross so our Holy and Just God could have the penalty for our sins paid. Christ was substituted and received the penalty we all deserve – death. But, He is risen. God raised Him, and we too share in that new life now with him.

Col 2:14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, ^z that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Mt 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ^a

Mt 5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ^b

Mt 5:19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments ^c and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. ^d

Ro 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, ^v it says to those who are under the law, ^w so that every mouth may be silenced ^x and the whole world held accountable to God. ^y

Ro 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; ^z rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ^a

Ro 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, ^b apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ^c

Ro 3:22 This righteousness from God ^d comes through faith ^e in Jesus Christ ^f to all who believe. ^g There is no difference, ^h

Ro 3:23 for all have sinned ⁱ and fall short of the glory of God,

Ro 3:24 and are justified ^j freely by his grace ^k through the redemption ^l that came by Christ Jesus.

Ro 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, ^{16m} through faith in his blood. ⁿ He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished ^o —

Ro 3:26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Ro 3:27 Where, then, is boasting? ^p It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

Ro 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ^q

Ro 3:29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ^r

Ro 3:30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ^s

Ro 3:31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Christ came to fulfill the law. Christ fulfilled the law perfectly for us – and again it is only through His substitution that we are alive – only by His grace. Through him, we have a new covenant and the old covenant does not apply.

2Co 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant^j —not of the letter^k but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.^l

The Glory of the New Covenant

2Co 3:7 Now if the ministry that brought death,^m which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory,ⁿ fading though it was,

2Co 3:8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

2Co 3:9 If the ministry that condemns men^o is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!^p

2Co 3:10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.

2Co 3:11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

2Co 3:12 Therefore, since we have such a hope,^q we are very bold.^r

2Co 3:13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face^s to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.

2Co 3:14 But their minds were made dull,^t for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant^u is read.^v It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

2Co 3:15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

2Co 3:16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord,^w the veil is taken away.^x

2Co 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit,^y and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.^z

2Co 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect^{3a} the Lord's glory,^b are being transformed into his likeness^c with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Heb 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator^j of a new covenant,^k that those who are called^l may receive the promised^m eternal inheritanceⁿ —now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.^o

Col 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities,^b he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them^c by the cross.¹⁰

Gal 4:8 Formerly, when you did not know God,^j you were slaves^k to those who by nature are not gods.^l

Gal 4:9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God^m —how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslavedⁿ by them all over again?^o

Gal 4:10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!^p

Gal 4:11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.^q

It appears it was very popular and part of the syncretism in Asia Minor to still try to give some power to the stocheia – either as intermediaries to get to God or still as idols. We know again that this is foolishness – Christ is supreme and above all powers and authorities:

Col 1:15 He is the image^h of the invisible God,ⁱ the firstborn^j over all creation.

Col 1:16 For by him all things were created:^k things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;^l all things were created by him and for him.^m

Col 1:17 He is before all things, ⁿ and in him all things hold together.

Eph 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened ^o in order that you may know the hope to which he has called ^p you, the riches ^q of his glorious inheritance ^r in the saints, ^s
Eph 1:19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power ^t is like the working of his mighty strength, ^u

Eph 1:20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead ^v and seated him at his right hand ^w in the heavenly realms, ^x

Eph 1:21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, ^y and every title ^z that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ^a

Eph 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet ^b and appointed him to be head ^c over everything for the church,

Eph 1:23 which is his body, ^d the fullness of him ^e who fills everything in every way. ^f

Christ is supreme above all things – He created them all and rules them all.

Col 2:16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you ^d by what you eat or drink, ^e or with regard to a religious festival, ^f a New Moon celebration ^g or a Sabbath day.

This again was the Colossians being falsely taught that they had to follow the Jewish religious festivals and diet.

Nu 28:11 “ ‘On the first of every month, ⁿ present to the LORD a burnt offering of two young bulls, ^o one ram ^p and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. ^q

Nu 28:12 With each bull there is to be a grain offering ^r of three-tenths of an ephah ^{68 s} of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, a grain offering of two-tenths ^t of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil;

Nu 28:13 and with each lamb, a grain offering ^u of a tenth ^v of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. This is for a burnt offering, ^w a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD ^x by fire.

Nu 28:14 With each bull there is to be a drink offering ^y of half a hin ⁶⁹ of wine; with the ram, a third of a hin ⁷⁰ ;and with each lamb, a quarter of a hin. This is the monthly burnt offering to be made at each new moon ^z during the year.

Nu 28:15 Besides the regular burnt offering ^a with its drink offering, one male goat ^b is to be presented to the LORD as a sin offering. ^c

Christ fulfilled the law. It is not through our own works that we earn any justification before God – it is only through Christ's holiness and substitution for us on the cross. Anything else we try to substitute is idolatry. Christ alone is all we need.

Mk 7:1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and

Mk 7:2 saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” ^g that is, unwashed.

Mk 7:3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ^h

Mk 7:4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. ¹⁹) ⁱ

Mk 7:5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders ^j instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?”

Mk 7:6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “
 ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.
 Mk 7:7 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’”^{20 k}
 Mk 7:8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”^l
 Mk 7:9 And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in
 order to observe²¹ your own traditions!”^m
 Mk 7:10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’^{22 n} and, ‘Anyone who curses his
 father or mother must be put to death.’^{23 o}
 Mk 7:11 But you say^p that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might
 otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God),
 Mk 7:12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother.
 Mk 7:13 Thus you nullify the word of God^q by your tradition^r that you have handed down. And
 you do many things like that.”
 Mk 7:14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand
 this.
 Mk 7:15 Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what
 comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’”^{24 ”}
 Mk 7:17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him^s about this
 parable.
 Mk 7:18 “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the
 outside can make him ‘unclean’?
 Mk 7:19 For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying
 this, Jesus declared all foods^t “clean.”)^u
 Mk 7:20 He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’
 Mk 7:21 For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft,
 murder, adultery,
 Mk 7:22 greed,^v malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.
 Mk 7:23 All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ ”

Here we see where Jesus tells us that what we eat does not make us unclean. The asceticism the Colossian false teachers were trying to instill just has no place – Christ's work on the cross is sufficient.

Col 2:17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come;ⁱ the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Paul again proclaims the supremacy of Christ – Christ triumphed over legalism on the cross. We need to be careful to always by faith trust alone in Christ's atoning sacrifice for us – and not in ourselves or our own works or holiness. They are insufficient – only the sacrifice of a sinless man in our place are we redeemed and sufficient.