

## An Established Community

### God's Word:

Colossians 2:1-12

### Key Verse:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

Colossians 2:8

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### Breaking It Down:

The exact nature of the heresy in the Colossian church is not clear, but it seems to be connected with a false view of the nature of Christ. The city of Colosse was in a region with a rich heritage of Greek philosophy. This seems to have influenced the church in subtle ways and influenced the doctrine. Paul called the church back to a pure faith in Christ, a faith not mixed with paganism or philosophy.

The Romans had a tendency to incorporate foreign religions into their system rather than destroying them. Just as a person today may have several favorite authors, a Roman of the first century might have multiple religious allegiances.

In the Roman provinces, cities like Colosse might also have gods and temples unique to their region. Each of these deities had its own priesthood and beliefs. There was no pressure to make exclusive choices in religion. Perhaps the most sophisticated and mysterious of these ancient beliefs was *Gnosticism*.



Several things made Gnosticism incompatible with Christianity. Gnostics believed in many gods at many levels. Even if they eventually acknowledged a supreme deity, their

understanding of the spiritual world was at odds with the Jewish and Christian belief in a single God.

Gnostics made a radical division between the material world (which they believed was corrupt and evil) and the spiritual world (which they believed was the realm of truth and light). This made it inconceivable for them that the Son of God could assume a human body.

Paul realized that faith in Christ and the way of Christianity was exclusive, meaning that it could not be combined with other faiths without losing its essence. There was no room for compromise.

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### **Living It:**

To move away from what the Bible teaches is to engage in heresy and makes one a heretic. Heretics are nothing new to Christianity. Paul and the other apostles confronted them. Heretics in medieval Europe were punished harshly, even to the point of being burned at the stake. To be accused of heresy today won't lead to prison time or a fine by the court, much less execution by being burned at the stake. Heresy now flourishes with few constraints and is aided by a modern fascination with novelty and charismatic, self-promoting personalities.

*“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude” (verses 6-7).*

How are believers to “walk” in what they have received concerning Christ? Paul paints a picture of the ongoing Christian life. He says they are “rooted” (unshakeable, fixed, firmly grounded) and “built up” (to give constant increase in Christian knowledge and in a life conformed to that knowledge). Our spiritual understanding develops as a result of communicating with Christ and gaining strength through His word. The contentment that enables the believer to remain rooted and built up in Christ, rather than chasing things that seem momentarily more exciting, grows up through the disciplined practice of giving thanks. And the result is joy!



Verse 10 gives a final answer to the temptation to follow empty philosophies and ways of life that oppose Christ: “and ***you are complete in Him***, who is the head of all principalities and powers.” What more does Paul need to say? Everything they, and we, are tempted to seek outside of Christ, is found present in Him. The promise of Christ’s fullness is not a meaningless promise, but a sharing between the living Lord of the universe and those who are in union with Him. In Him we discover all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, according to the mystery of the Gospel, to all who call upon His name.

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### **Understanding It:**

1. What does it mean to walk in Jesus Christ as you have received Him? (Verse 6)
  2. What issues in the church concerned the apostle Paul?
  3. Since all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ, is it useful to read literature from other religious traditions? Why or why not?
  4. What are some ways you can improve your Christian walk?
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### **Doing It!**

This week:

1. Seek to draw closer to the Lord by further study of what it means to be complete in Christ who is the fullness of God. Show the results of your study to your teacher.
2. Identify areas in your life where you have not given Christ His rightful place as supreme authority and ruler. Release these to Him.
3. Identify people in your church you believe are struggling in their faith and begin, this week, to set aside time each day to pray for them.

