

## Lesson #12 - COLOSSIANS 2019

Before starting this lesson, **read chapters 1 - 4.**

In our New Testament, the books that follow Acts are teaching for the local churches and are divided into teaching, reproof and correction. The books of **teaching** are the most profound; the ones on **reproof** are the most practical and the books of **correction** are the most complex.

Paul gave the teaching about salvation to the **ROMANS**.

He reproofed the **CORINTHIANS** because they were not practicing their salvation.

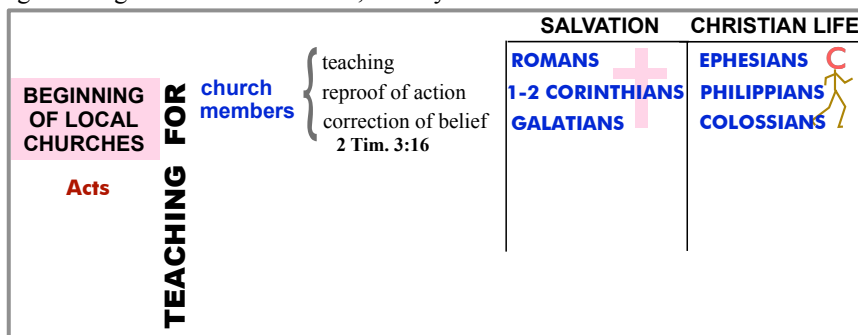
He corrected the **GALATIANS**, because they had *changed* the teaching of salvation

After salvation is the Christian Life. It is a new relationship with Christ as **Head** and all believers His **Body**.

Paul gave the written teaching to the **EPHESIANS**.

He reproofed the **PHILIPPIANS** because they were not united as one body against false teachers.

The **COLOSSIANS** have heard wrong teaching about Christ as **Head**, so they need correction.



### OUTLINE

What they should know 1-2  
Christ is Head of the Universe  
Christ is Head of the Church  
How they should live 3-4  
Their position  
Their practice

In the mid 50's AD, Paul was on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary trip. He spent over 2 years teaching in Ephesus, the capital of Asia province (53-55 AD). The book of Acts tells us that as a result, everyone thruout the province heard the gospel message. This includes the town of Colosse, some 100 miles southeast of Ephesus.

Epaphras, a man from this town, had gone to Ephesus, probably on business. In some way, he came into contact with Paul and heard him teach. After a time, he put his faith in Jesus and stayed to get further teaching. When he returned to Colosse, he began telling others of Jesus. Soon there was a group of believers who were meeting in the home of a businessman named Philemon. Even tho Paul never visited Colosse, a church was established with Epaphras as their pastor.



Five years go by and it is now 60 AD. Paul has been under house arrest in Rome. The Colossian church continues to grow. Just recently, visiting teachers have come to the church with false teaching. Epaphras, the pastor, as well as the Colossian believers know the teaching is wrong, but they do not know how to prove it is wrong. They do not know how to combat it. So Epaphras travels to Rome to get answers from Paul. But while there, he is taken prisoner because he is a Christian leader. Philemon 23.

Not long afterwards 2 believers are leaving Rome to return home to Asia province.

Paul uses the opportunity to send letters with them. One is for the Ephesian church. One is for the church in Colosse to give answers and correct the wrong teaching. Another is to Philemon who has the home where the church meets. Two other letters, which are not in our Bibles, are for churches in nearby areas.

## BACKGROUND

Visiting teachers had said it is true that people have salvation thru faith in Jesus. But to be obedient in the Christian life, all believers need to follow Jewish laws - the law of Moses and the laws of Mishnah. And if they want to advance in their Christian life, they need to follow certain ancient beliefs.

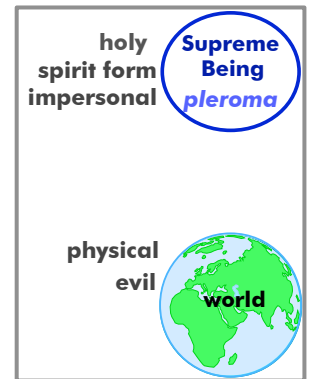
## EASTERN ANCIENT BELIEFS

These beliefs started in the east in and around India.

They said there is a **SUPREME BEING** who has divine nature. The divine nature was called **fullness** or in the Greek, **pleroma**. This Being was holy, impersonal, and in spirit form. Being impersonal, it was often thought of as *It* rather than *he*.

The **WORLD** was physical and it was evil. So they came to the conclusion, anything physical must be evil. The world was created as an evil world.

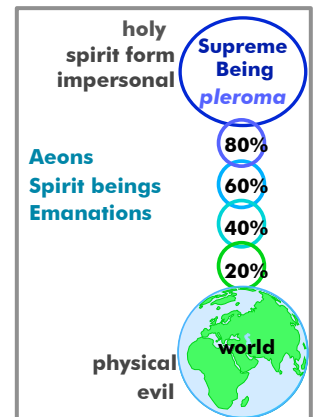
This conclusion raised the question, *Who created this evil? Where did it come from?* Since the Supreme Being is holy, "**it**" could not create an **evil** world. But if "**it**" did not create the world, who did?



After much thinking, the people asking the questions, came up with the answers.

They said, out from the impersonal Supreme Being, evolved an emanation. From the first evolved a second. From the second, a third, until there were 30 of them. They diagrammed them by means of small circles, one under the other, that looked like a chain linking the Supreme Being at the top circle, to the world at the bottom circle.

These **EMANATIONS** were known as **AEONS** or various levels of *spirit beings*. Each had some divine nature, but the further removed they were from the Supreme Being, the less divine nature they had. Finally, spirit being # 30, was far enough removed, it could have contact with evil. Therefore, the last spirit being is the one who created the physical, evil world. This meant the Supreme Being could still be holy and totally separated from evil.



Up to this point, all of this was a philosophy - explaining how an evil **world** came into being. But that led to more questions. How could people who lived in an **evil** world, have a relationship or contact with the Supreme Being who is **holy**? Their answers changed this philosophy into a religion.

To develop their ideas, they used a series of buzz-words. These are words that would have special meaning just for people inside their group.

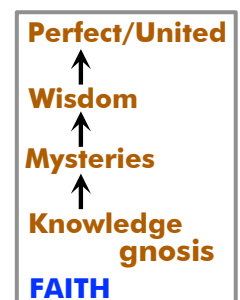
The emphasis was on special knowledge. The Greek word for *knowledge* is **gnosis**. The "g" is silent. So the religion became known as **GNOSTICISM**. Its followers were called **GNOSTICS**. Again the "g" is silent.

## GNOSTICISM

This new religion taught...

The Supreme Being can only be reached **thru** spirit beings or spirit guides. Most people live on a low spiritual level because they are guided by **FAITH**. But a chosen few can reach higher levels thru **knowledge** or gnosis.

According to them, this *gnosis* or **knowledge** was far better than faith.



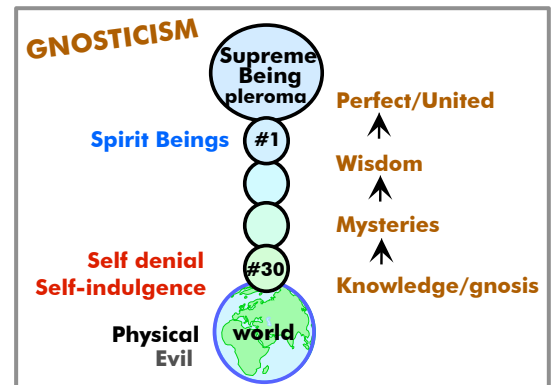
Starting with the spirit guide number 30, the one closest to the world, that spirit would give them special **knowledge** and teach them **mysteries** - secret information. Using that information, they had greater **wisdom** and could then make contact with the next highest spirit being.

The object was to finally connect with spirit guide number one - the one with the most divine nature, *pleroma* or *fullness*.

To contact these spirit guides, people had to separate themselves from the physical, evil world.

Sometimes it was thru **self-denial** - living on water and a sparse diet, no marriage, self-affliction, living in the desert. But that was not very popular and certainly did not attract a large following.

So they said it could also be thru **self-indulgence**. They rationalized - since anything physical was evil, only the spirit had value. One way to prove you have rejected your evil body was not restrain it. Let it do all the evil it wants. Self-indulgence.



The ultimate goal was to keep connecting with the spirit guides, thru either self-denial or self-indulgence. When the person finally connected with the highest spirit - the one with the most divine nature or fullness, their spirit could be absorbed into the Supreme Being - the divine cosmos and he/she would be perfect.

**Absorbed into the divine being** is best described as taking a drop of water and letting it fall into the ocean. It would be completely absorbed into the ocean, all separate identity would be lost. This was the Gnostic's idea of perfection. Their spirit would be absorbed into the divine cosmos. All their own identity would be lost - they would become part of the cosmos.

In the first century AD in the Middle East, the death and resurrection of **Jesus** was so well-known that Gnosticism had to include Him in their teachings.

Some said because Jesus had a **physical body** which would be evil, He was a sinful man like everyone else.

Other Gnostics said Jesus was the **lowest** of the spirit beings, number 30. His body was only an **illusion** or apparition.

The visiting teachers that came to the Colossian church believed a mixture of Judaism with Gnosticism. They were now trying to add this mixture to the gospel message about the Christian life. No wonder Ephraim was asking for help. Our book of Colossians is Paul's answer to this wrong teaching.

Paul understands Gnosticism. It would have been required study when he attended the university in Tarsus. Since the Colossians have been hearing all the Gnostic buzzwords, Paul uses them thruout his letter - **knowledge, wisdom, mysteries, fullness, and perfect**.

## CONTRAST BETWEEN GNOSTICISM AND THE GOSPEL - using the buzz-words of Gnosticism

*We have not stopped praying for **you** and asking God to fill you with the **knowledge** of His will thru all **spiritual wisdom** and understanding.* Colossians 1:9

### "YOU"

Paul says he is asking God to fill **ALL** of them - the word *you* is plural.

### "KNOWLEDGE"

Gnosticism was all about knowledge. It meant head knowledge or **theory**. The Greek word was **gnosis**.

Paul uses the word **EPIGNOSIS**. It means **practical** knowledge that you can use.

### "SPIRITUAL WISDOM"

In the Bible, whenever the word *spiritual* is used it means, *that which comes from the Holy Spirit*.

Paul makes the contrast.

Gnosticism offers **head** knowledge to just a **few** and it leads to **human** wisdom.

The Gospel offers **practical** knowledge to **all** believers and it leads to **wisdom** from the **Holy Spirit**.

## WHAT THEY SHOULD KNOW

### ABOUT JESUS AS HEAD OF THE UNIVERSE

The Gnostic teachers in Colosse have not denied Jesus. They said Jesus is spirit being number 30 - the lowest one that linked the Supreme Being to the evil world. Because He is the lowest, with the least amount of divine nature, believers should try to connect with spirit guides who have **more** divine nature and can give them **more** holiness.

They agree that Jesus is necessary for salvation.

But something **more** than Jesus is necessary, in order to advance in the Christian life.

Paul uses the rest of chapter one and all of chapter two to say, **there is nothing beyond Jesus**.

In 1:13 and 14, Paul is clearly talking about Jesus. Starting now with verse 15, he continues with a series of facts about Jesus.

Jesus is **the image of the invisible God** 1:15

The Greek word for **image** is *eikon*. It means **precise reproduction**.

Jesus is not a spirit being who is **partially** divine. He is the **exact** reproduction of God the Father.

Everything that is true of God the Father is equally true of Jesus.

Jesus is **the firstborn over all creation** 1:15

When this word is used about a woman and a baby it literally means a firstborn child.

But in other contexts, it does not mean **born** first but to **be** first - *that which is first or before something else*.

Paul says, Jesus is **first - before** creation.

He is using logic that people of his day would automatically see.

- If Jesus is **before** creation, it means He cannot be part of creation. He was not created.
- If He was not created, then He must be eternal.
- If He is eternal, then He is deity.

Jesus is **the Creator of spirit beings** – in this case, the angels.

*For by Him, Jesus, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. 1:16*

Jesus is not a created being. He **IS** the Creator.

The words *thrones, powers, rulers, authorities* are names of different levels of angels.

Angels were not only created **by** Jesus, but also **for** Jesus - to worship Him and to be His messengers.

Since Jesus **created** angels, obviously He is **greater** than angels.

He is **before all things**. 1:17a

The phrase *all things* – in the Greek was a philosophical term of the day.

It referred to everything or anything you could ever imagine that might have come into existence.

In the strongest possible way, Paul says Jesus existed as deity before any evolved spirit beings, amoeba, protozoa, Big Bang – or anything you can think of.

The Gnostics said Jesus was inferior and believers should look for higher spirit beings. Paul's argument is...

*Why give up Jesus for a system of angels when Jesus is the One who created the angels? He is so much greater.*

**In Him all things hold together, continue or consist.** 1:17b

The Greek verb means *He sustains the universe or He keeps things from flying out of orbit*.

Jesus not only created the universe - He holds the universe together.

## ABOUT JESUS AS HEAD OF THE CHURCH 1:18

**Jesus has ALL of God the Father's divine nature within Him.**

*For God (the Father) was pleased to have all His fullness (divine nature) dwell in Him, (in Jesus). 1:19*

The word fullness is *pleroma* - divine nature.

The Gnostics said the divine nature of the Supreme Being was divided between 30 spirit beings.

The Gospel says **all** of God the Father's qualities and nature are in Jesus - 100 %.

It is why Paul said earlier that Jesus is the image - the exact reproduction of God the Father.

### Jesus is the One who unites us with God the Father

Gnostics and the Gospel agreed - God is holy; we on this earth are unholy.

This has caused a separation between us and God.

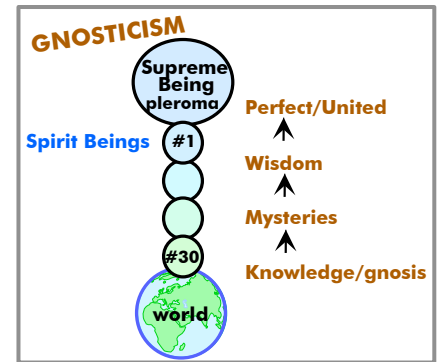
But they disagreed on how to deal with that separation.

Gnostics said...

Reaching the Supreme Being was thru knowledge and secret information from spirit beings.

It was a long, difficult process - taking many lifetimes and reincarnations.

It was available only to a select few.



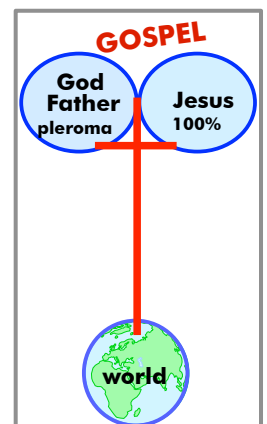
The Gospel says,

reaching God the Father is thru Jesus. 1:20-22

All the sin of the world was placed on Jesus when He was on the cross. He was separated from the Father. He made the payment for sin. If we accept His payment, we are no longer separated. We are immediately declared to be **in** Jesus. God the Father sees us in the holiness of Jesus, without blemish and free from accusation.

It is not us desperately trying to find God, somehow, someway, somewhere. God the Father has reached down to us thru Jesus on the cross, forgiving our sin and uniting us to Himself.

What Gnosticism and other religions offer thru a long, uncertain process of self-effort, God the Father offers immediately in Jesus. No wonder our message is called *good news* - the *gospel*.



**Jesus within us is God the Father's mystery** – information not previously known

"**Mystery**" could mean "secret information" or "information that previously was not known or revealed."

The Gnostics talked about **mysteries**, using the first meaning -

"*secret* information, known only by a chosen few."

Paul uses the word **mystery**, using the second meaning -

"information that has not previously been known."

God has a **mystery**. He now wants everyone to know about it so it can be available to them.

That new information – mystery - is **Christ in you, the certainty of glory.** 1:27

When we put our faith in Jesus, He comes to live within us by means of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is our certainty that we will be with God and live in His presence thruout all eternity.

### Jesus is the means of our holiness

Gnostics said to become holy, people had to keep Gnostic rules about...

Food, religious days 2:16

The worship of spirit beings or angels 2:18

Humility and harsh treatment of the body 2:23

The Gospel of the Christian life teaches that holiness comes thru Jesus.

*For in Christ, all the fullness of the Deity - all divine nature - lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness or divine nature in Christ... 2:9*

Jesus is not spirit being number 30 with the least amount of divine nature.

He has 100% of God the Father's nature. This means He is 100% holy.

His holiness is transferred to our account when we accept His payment.

We can live holy lives here on earth because Jesus has defeated Satan and his angels.

Jesus disarmed and stripped Satan and his angels of their power. 2:15

When we accepted His payment, we were disconnected from Satan's power.

We are now connected to the power of the Holy Spirit. His power is greater.

## EXPLANATION OF COL. 1:23-25

There are 3 verses near the end of chapter one that are confusing, raise questions and have sometimes been misused.

**1:22** says God the Father's plan that Jesus make payment for sin, was...

*in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him,*

**Verse 23** continues the sentence,

**if** indeed you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the **hope** of the gospel...

This sounds like God's declaration of our holiness is on the condition that we do not fail – on our faithfulness.

However, this is not what Paul is saying. Remember, Paul did not write in English. He wrote in Greek.

In Greek, there are 4 meanings for "if."

If and it is true

If and it is not true

If and it may or it may not be true

If and it is only a wish

Each of the meanings is written in a different way in the grammar, so we know what the writer means.

### 4 GREEK MEANINGS FOR "IF"

**If and it is true**

**should be translated "since, because"**

**If and it is not true**

**If and it may/may not be true**

**If and it is only a wish**

**"If"** in verse 23 means - *if and it is true. It is a fact.*

To show this meaning in English, it should be written, *since* or *because*.

The word **"hope"** in the Bible, always means *certainty*.

In fact, up until the late 1800's, even in English, the word *hope* meant *certainty*.

**Verse 23**, based on the Greek, should read...

*... holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, **because** you possess and continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the **certainty** held out in the gospel.*

Paul did not write this verse to scare us and make us think we might not make it to heaven. It is a verse to give believers reassurance, confidence and joy. **In Jesus** is where God the Father sees us until the day we are in His literal presence.

**1:24** is about a different topic and is very confusing.

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am **filling up** what is **lacking** to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His Body, that is, the Church.*

This is not talking about the suffering of Jesus in His payment on the cross. That was complete. There is nothing lacking or unfinished in our salvation. Jesus paid it all.

What Paul is talking about is the **suffering of Jesus in His life and ministry**.

When He said He was deity or He was the only way to the Father, He was mocked and ridiculed.

When He spoke truth about Himself, He suffered rejection.

When Jesus went back to heaven, that suffering for speaking the truth about Him did not end.

Paul was told what great things he was to suffer for Christ.

From the time of the apostles to this present day, this suffering is on-going or unfinished.



We today, experience ridicule or rejection when we say Jesus is deity or He is the only way to God the Father. That suffering will only end, be finished or filled up when Jesus returns and destroys the evil that opposes the truth about Him.

To put these concepts together, I have paraphrased Paul's verses in 1:24-25.

*I do not regret the physical sufferings I experience in order to give you Colossians the truth about Jesus. As Jesus experienced sufferings of persecution and rejection in His life and ministry for speaking truth, now it is my turn to experience that same kind of suffering. This is the way His body, the Church is developed - based on the truth about Jesus. God appointed me to have a special ministry in this development so you Gentiles could be included.*

## WHAT THEY SHOULD KNOW

### Chapters 1 - 2

About Jesus as Head of the Universe. He is not some inferior spirit being.

About Jesus as Head of the Church.

Jesus is not just the One they should start with.

He is the One they should also finish with. He is the author and finisher of their faith.

## HOW THEY SHOULD LIVE

### Chapters 3 - 4

God the Father has chosen to **always** see us believers in Jesus - in His holiness. That is our **legal** position.

**We** are to keep seeking that holiness in our **daily experience**.

*Since then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above - that holiness. 3:1*

### Holiness in our personal life

- ◆ Direct the mind to seek God's viewpoint, not the viewpoint of the world - of this culture.  
*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 1:2*
- ◆ Using God's viewpoint, turn away from wrong desires of the sin nature –  
from immorality, lust, wanting to do evil and always wanting more - greed.
- ◆ Turn from wrong attitudes and wrong speech.
- ◆ Allow the fruit of the Holy Spirit to keep developing the qualities of...  
compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness.
- ◆ Have peace and thankfulness.  
This is possible by remembering God is in control. He knows about the situation, He cares.  
And He has the power to do something, if He thinks something should be done.
- ◆ Use God's Word as the basis for our choices and attitudes, our teaching and encouragement.

From these verses, I want to give an explanation and then a warning.

The **explanation** is about the last phrase of 3:13, *forgive as the Lord forgave you*.

We are forgiven by God when we meet His conditions.

We must go to Him, admit we are wrong and ask Him to forgive us.

This means we cannot forgive people as the Lord forgave us, until they meet the same conditions.

They must come to us, admit they are wrong and ask us to forgive them.

If they do not admit they are wrong, I cannot forgive them as the Lord forgave me.

Instead, I forgive them by living without their apology in this life. I ask Jesus to collect my apology at His Reviewing Stand in the future.

Forgiveness always requires an admission of wrong, either in this life or in front of Jesus.

The **warning** has to do with the fruit of the Spirit.

We are to allow the fruit of the Spirit to keep developing in our life. When there is abuse, addictions, evil or destructiveness, the fruit of compassion, kindness and patience cannot be used. Showing those qualities enable and encourage the wrong behavior to continue.

The fruit of the Spirit must always be balanced with doing what is right from God's viewpoint.

*And over all these virtues (fruit of the Spirit) - put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 3:14*

Because love is commanded in this verse, it is not talking about emotional love. It means doing what is right from God's point of view. In English of today, we use the phrase "*tough love*." This is love that sets boundaries and holds others accountable.

### **Holiness in our home life**

Instead of competition and power struggles, we need to care about each other.

We should encourage and build each other up.

We need to help each other develop in our abilities and character.

### **Holiness in our prayer life**

We are to have an alert mind and a thankful heart.

### **Holiness in our social life with unbelievers**

Our conversation is to be *gracious, seasoned with salt*. 4:5-6

Salt gives flavor, makes food enjoyable and keeps it wholesome.

This means our conversations with non-believers should be wholesome, helpful, encouraging and cheerful, so people enjoy talking with us. They should not dread seeing us coming, fearful we will be preaching at them, giving them advice or trying to change them.

In the books of Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, Paul has shown us...

The Christian life is not about all the things we have to **do** to be *good Christians*.

It is not about the experiences we should have, in order to show we are spiritual.

The Christian life is about our relationship with God.

The most important part is what God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have done for us **after** salvation.

God the **Father** sees us in Jesus as holy and free from accusation.

**Christ** as Head gives life and direction to us as His Body.

The **Holy Spirit** teaches, guides and corrects us - He gives us the desire to obey and the ability to obey.

God's commands for the Christian life are not to make our life miserable, limited or burdensome.

God's commands are not even to control the sin nature. It is now the Holy Spirit that controls the sin nature.

### **The purpose of God's commands**

To deepen our relationship with Him while we are still here on earth.

To lead us to spiritual maturity.

To lead us to fulfillment - becoming all He created us to be.

To lead us to reflect the qualities of Jesus so others also want to know Him.