

CHAPTER 2

- I.** The apostle expresses concern for the Colossians (v. 1-3).
- II.** He repeats it again (v. 5).
- III.** He cautions them against false teachers among the Jews (v. 4, 6, 7), and against the Gentile philosophy (v. 8-12).
- IV.** He represents the privileges of Christians (v. 13-15). And,
- V.** Concludes with a caution against the judaizing teachers, and those who would introduce the worship of angels (v. 16-23).

COLOSSIANS 2:1-3

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE COLOSSIANS

We may observe here the great concern which Paul had for these Colossians and the other churches which he had not any personal knowledge of. The apostle had never been at Colosse, and the church planted there was not of his planting; and yet he had as tender a care of it as if it had been the only people of his charge (v. 1): *For I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.* Observe,

1. Paul's care of the church was such as amounted to a conflict. He was in a sort of agony, and had a constant fear respecting what would become of them. Herein he was a follower of his Master, who was in an agony for us, and was *heard in that he feared.*

2. We may keep up a communion by faith, hope, and holy love, even with those churches and fellow-christians of whom we have no personal knowledge, and with whom we have no conversation. We can think, and pray, and be concerned for one another, at the greatest distance; and those we never saw in the flesh we may hope to meet in heaven. But,

I. What was it that the apostle desired for them? *That their hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love,* etc., v. 2. It was their spiritual welfare about which he was solicitous. He does not say that they may be

healthy, and merry, and rich, and great, and prosperous; but that their *hearts may be comforted*. Note, The prosperity of the soul is the best prosperity, and what we should be most solicitous about for ourselves and others. We have here a description of soul-prosperity.

1. When our knowledge grows to an understanding of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, — when we come to have a more clear, distinct, methodical knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, then the soul prospers: *To understand the mystery*, either what was before concealed, but is now made known concerning the Father and Christ, or the mystery before mentioned, of calling the Gentiles into the Christian church, as the Father and Christ have revealed it in the gospel; and not barely to speak of it by rote, or as we have been taught it by our catechisms, but to be led into it, and enter into the meaning and design of it. This is what we should labour after, and then the soul prospers.

2. When our faith grows to a full assurance and bold acknowledgment of this mystery.

(1.) To a full assurance, or a well-settled judgment, upon their proper evidence, of the great truths of the gospel, without doubting, or calling them in question, but embracing them with the highest satisfaction, as faithful sayings and worthy of all acceptance.

(2.) When it comes to a free acknowledgment, and we not only believe with the heart, but are ready, when called to it, to make confession with our mouth, and are not ashamed of our Master and our holy religion, under the frowns and violence of their enemies. This is called the *riches of the full assurance of understanding*. Great knowledge and strong faith make a soul rich. This is being rich towards God, and rich in faith, and having the true riches, ^{<402>}Luke 12:21; 16:11; ^{<405>}James 2:5.

3. It consists in the abundance of comfort in our souls: *That their hearts might be comforted*. The soul prospers when it is filled with joy and peace (^{<453>}Romans 15:13), and has a satisfaction within which all the troubles without cannot disturb, and is able to joy in the Lord when all other comforts fail, ^{<487>}Habakkuk 3:17, 18.

4. The more intimate communion we have with our fellow-christians the more the soul prospers: *Being knit together in love*. Holy love knits the hearts of Christians one to another; and faith and love both contribute to

our comfort. The stronger our faith is, and the warmer our love, the greater will our comfort be. Having occasion to mention Christ (v. 2), according to his usual way, he makes this remark to his honour (v. 3): *In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* He had said (^{<SIB>}Colossians 1:19) *that all fulness dwells in him:* here he mentions particularly the *treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* There is a fulness of wisdom in him, as he has perfectly revealed the will of God to mankind. Observe, The treasures of wisdom are hidden not from us, but for us, in Christ. Those who would be wise and knowing must make application to Christ. We must spend upon the stock which is laid up for us in him, and draw from the treasures which are hidden in him. He is the wisdom of God, and is *of God made unto us wisdom,* etc., ^{<412>}1 Corinthians 1:24, 30.

II. His concern for them is repeated (v. 5): *Though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying, and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.* Observe,

- 1.** We may be present in spirit with those churches and Christians from whom we are absent in body; for the communion of saints is a spiritual thing. Paul had heard concerning the Colossians that they were orderly and regular; and though he had never seen them, nor was present with them, he tells them he could easily think himself among them, and look with pleasure upon their good behaviour.
- 2.** The order and stedfastness of Christians are matter of joy to ministers; they joy when they behold their order, their regular behaviour and stedfast adherence to the Christian doctrine.
- 3.** The more stedfast our faith in Christ is, the better order there will be in our whole conversation; for we live and walk by faith, ^{<412>}2 Corinthians 5:7; ^{<SIB>}Hebrews 10:38.

^{<SIB>}COLOSSIANS 2:4-12

THE GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN ECONOMY

The apostle cautions the Colossians against deceivers (v. 4): *And this I say lest any man beguile you with enticing words;* and v. 8, *Lest any man spoil you.* He insists so much upon the perfection of Christ and the gospel

revelation, to preserve them from the ensnaring insinuations of those who would corrupt their principles. Note,

1. The way in which Satan spoils souls is by beguiling them. He deceives them, and by this means slays them. He is the *old serpent who beguiled Eve through his subtlety*, ^{<4113>}2 Corinthians 11:3. He could not ruin us if he did not cheat us; and he could not cheat us but by our own fault and folly.

2. Satan's agents, who aim to spoil them, beguile them with enticing words. See the danger of enticing words; how many are ruined by the flattery of those who lie in wait to deceive, and by the false disguises and fair appearances of evil principles and wicked practices. *By good words, and fair speeches, they deceive the hearts of the simple*, ^{<4508>}Romans 16:18. "You ought to stand upon your guard against enticing words, and be aware and afraid of those who would entice you to any evil; for that which they aim at is to spoil you." *If sinners entice thee, consent thou not*, ^{<4110>}Proverbs 1:10. Observe,

I. A sovereign antidote against seducers (v. 6, 7): *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him, rooted and built up*, etc. Here note,

1. All Christians have, in profession at least, *received Jesus Christ the Lord*, received him as Christ, the great prophet of the church, anointed by God to reveal his will; as Jesus the great high priest, and Saviour from sin and wrath, by the expiatory sacrifice of himself; and as Lord, or sovereign and king, whom we are to obey and be subject to. — *Received him*, consented to him, taken him for ours in every relation and every capacity, and for all the purposes and uses of them.

2. The great concern of those who have received Christ is *to walk in him* — to make their practices conformable to their principles and their conversation agreeable to their engagements. As we have received Christ, or consented to be his, so we must walk with him in our daily course and keep up our communion with him.

3. The more closely we walk with Christ the more we are *rooted and established in the faith*. A good conversation is the best establishment of a good faith. If we walk in him, we shall be rooted in him; and the more firmly we are rooted in him the more closely we shall walk in him: *Rooted and built up*. Observe, We cannot be built up in Christ, unless we be first

rooted in him. We must be united to him by a lively faith, and heartily consent to his covenant, and then we shall *grow up in him in all things*. — *As you have been taught* — “according to the rule of the Christian doctrine, in which you have been instructed.” Observe, A good education has a good influence upon our establishment. We must be *established in the faith, as we have been taught, abounding therein*. Observe, Being established in the faith, we must abound therein, and improve in it more and more; and this with thanksgiving. The way to have the benefit and comfort of God's grace is to be much in giving thanks for it. We must join thanksgiving to all our improvements, and be sensible of the mercy of all our privileges and attainments. Observe,

II. The fair warning given us of our danger: *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*, v. 8. There is a philosophy which is a noble exercise of our reasonable faculties, and highly serviceable to religion, such a study of the works of God as leads us to the knowledge of God and confirms our faith in him. But there is a philosophy which is vain and deceitful, which is prejudicial to religion, and sets up the wisdom of man in competition with the wisdom of God, and while it pleases men's fancies ruins their faith; as nice and curious speculations about things above us, or of no use and concern to us; or a care of words and terms of art, which have only an empty and often a cheating appearance of knowledge. *After the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world*: this plainly reflects upon the Jewish pedagogy or economy, as well as the Pagan learning. The Jews governed themselves by the traditions of their elders and the rudiments or elements of the world, the rites and observances which were only preparatory and introductory to the gospel state; the Gentiles mixed their maxims of philosophy with their Christian principles; and both alienated their minds from Christ. Those who pin their faith on other men's sleeves, and walk in the way of the world, have turned away from following after Christ. The deceivers were especially the Jewish teachers, who endeavoured to keep up the law of Moses in conjunction with the gospel of Christ, but really in competition with it and contradiction to it. Now here the apostle shows,

1. That we have in Christ the substance of all the shadows of the ceremonial law; for example,

(1.) Had they then the Shechinah, or special presence of God, called the glory, from the visible token of it? So have we now in Jesus Christ (v. 9): *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.* Under the law, the presence of God dwelt between the cherubim, in a cloud which covered the mercy-seat; but now it dwells in the person of our Redeemer, who partakes of our nature, and is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and has more clearly declared the Father to us. It dwells in him bodily; not as the body is opposed to the spirit, but as the body is opposed to the shadow. The fulness of the Godhead dwells in the Christ really, and not figuratively; for he is both God and man.

(2.) Had they circumcision, which was the seal of the covenant? In Christ we are *circumcised with the circumcision made without hands* (v. 11), by the work of regeneration in us, which is the spiritual or Christian circumcision. *He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart,* ^{<812>}Romans 2:29. This is owing to Christ, and belongs to the Christian dispensation. *It is made without hands;* not by the power of any creature, but by the power of the blessed Spirit of God. We are *born of the Spirit,* ^{<815>}John 3:5. And it is *the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit,* ^{<818>}Titus 3:5. It consists *in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh,* in renouncing sin and reforming our lives, not in mere external rites. It is not the *putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,* ^{<821>}1 Peter 3:21. And it is not enough to put away some one particular sin, but we must put off the whole body of sin. *The old man must be crucified, and the body of sin destroyed,* ^{<824>}Romans 6:6. Christ was circumcised, and, by virtue of our union to him, we partake of that effectual grace which puts off the *body of the sins of the flesh.* Again, The Jews thought themselves complete in the ceremonial law; but we are *complete in Christ,* v. 10. That was imperfect and defective; *if the first covenant had been faultless, there would no place have been sought for the second* (^{<827>}Hebrews 8:7), and the *law was but a shadow of good things, and could never, by those sacrifices, make the comers thereunto perfect,* ^{<830>}Hebrews 10:1. But all the defects of it are made up in the gospel of Christ, by the complete sacrifice for sin and revelation of the will of God. *Which is the head of all principality and power.* As the Old-Testament priesthood had its perfection in Christ, so likewise had the kingdom of David, which was the eminent principality and power under the Old Testament, and which the Jews valued themselves so much upon. And he is the Lord and head of all the powers

in heaven and earth, of angels and men. *Angels, and authorities, and powers are subject to him,* ^{<4182>}1 Peter 3:22.

2. We have communion with Christ in his whole undertaking (v. 12): *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you have risen with him.* We are both buried and rise with him, and both are signified by our baptism; not that there is anything in the sign or ceremony of baptism which represents this burying and rising, any more than the crucifixion of Christ is represented by any visible resemblance in the Lord's supper: and he is speaking of the *circumcision made without hands*; and says it is *through the faith of the operation of God*. But the thing signified by our baptism is that we are buried with Christ, as baptism is the seal of the covenant and an obligation to our dying to sin; and that we are raised with Christ, as it is a seal and obligation to our living to righteousness, or newness of life. God in baptism engages to be to us a God, and we become engaged to be his people, and by his grace to die to sin and to live to righteousness, or put off the old man and put on the new.

^{<5113>}COLOSSIANS 2:13-15

THE GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN ECONOMY

The apostle here represents the privileges we Christians have above the Jews, which are very great.

I. Christ's death is our life: *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him,* v. 13. A state of sin is a state of spiritual death. Those who are in sin are dead in sin. As the death of the body consists in its separation from the soul, so the death of the soul consists in its separation from God and the divine favour. As the death of the body is the corruption and putrefaction of it, so sin is the corruption or depravation of the soul. As a man who is dead is unable to help himself by any power of his own, so an habitual sinner is morally impotent: though he has a natural power, or the power of a reasonable creature, he has not a spiritual power, till he has the divine life or a renewed nature. It is principally to be understood of the Gentile world, who *lay in wickedness*. They were *dead in the uncircumcision of their flesh, being aliens to the covenant of promise, and without God in the world,* ^{<4111>}Ephesians 2:11, 12. By reason of their uncircumcision they were

dead in their sins. It may be understood of the spiritual uncircumcision or corruption of nature; and so it shows that we are dead in law, and dead in state. Dead in law, as a condemned malefactor is called a dead man because he is under a sentence of death; so sinners by the guilt of sin are under the sentence of the law and *condemned already*, ^{<4188>}John 3:18. And dead in state, by reason of the *uncircumcision of our flesh*. An unsanctified heart is called an *uncircumcised heart*: this is our state. Now through Christ we, who were dead in sins, are quickened; that is, effectual provision is made for taking away the guilt of sin, and breaking the power and dominion of it. *Quickened together with him* — by virtue of our union to him, and in conformity to him. Christ's death was the death of our sins; Christ's resurrection is the quickening of our souls.

II. Through him we have the remission of sin: *Having forgiven you all trespasses*. This is our quickening. The pardon of the crime is the life of the criminal: and this is owing to the resurrection of Christ, as well as his death; for, as he *died for our sins*, so he *rose again for our justification*, ^{<4125>}Romans 4:25.

III. Whatever was in force against us is taken out of the way. He has obtained for us a legal discharge from the *hand-writing of ordinances, which was against us* (v. 14), which may be understood,

1. Of that obligation to punishment in which consists the guilt of sin. The curse of the law is the hand-writing against us, like the hand-writing on Belshazzar's wall. *Cursed is every one who continues not in every thing*. This was a hand-writing which was *against us, and contrary to us*; for it threatened our eternal ruin. This was removed when he *redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*, ^{<4113>}Galatians 3:13. He cancelled the obligation for all who repent and believe. "Upon me be the curse, my father." He vacated and disannulled the judgment which was against us. When he was nailed to the cross, the curse was as it were nailed to the cross. And our indwelling corruption is crucified with Christ, and by virtue of his cross. When we remember the dying of the Lord Jesus, and see him nailed to the cross, we should see the hand-writing against us taken out of the way. Or rather,

2. It must be understood of the ceremonial law, the *hand-writing of ordinances, the ceremonial institutions or the law of commandments contained in ordinances* (^{<4125>}Ephesians 2:15), which was a yoke to the

Jews and a partition-wall to the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus *took it out of the way, nailed it to his cross*; that is, disannulled the obligation of it, that all might see and be satisfied that it was no more binding. When the substance came, the shadows fled away. It is abolished (^{<4783>}2 Corinthians 3:13), and *that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away*, ^{<3883>}Hebrews 8:13. The expressions are in allusion to the ancient methods of cancelling a bond, either by crossing the writing or striking it through with a nail.

IV. He has obtained a glorious victory for us over the powers of darkness: *And, having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*, v. 15. As the curse of the law was against us, so the power of Satan was against us. He treated with God as the Judge, and redeemed us out of the hands of his justice by a price; but out of the hands of Satan the executioner he redeemed us by power and with a high hand. *He led captivity captive*. The devil and all the powers of hell were conquered and disarmed by the dying Redeemer. The first promise pointed at this; the bruising of the heel of Christ in his sufferings was the breaking of the serpent's head, ^{<0085>}Genesis 3:15. The expressions are lofty and magnificent: let us turn aside and see this great sight. The Redeemer conquered by dying. See his crown of thorns turned into a crown of laurels. He *spoiled them*, broke the devil's power, and conquered and disabled him, and *made a show of them openly* — exposed them to public shame, and made a show of them to angels and men. Never had the devil's kingdom such a mortal blow given to it as was given by the Lord Jesus. He tied them to his chariot-wheels, and rode forth conquering and to conquer — alluding to the custom of a general's triumph, who returned victorious. — *Triumphing over them in it*; that is, either in his cross and by his death; or, as some read it, in himself, by his own power; for he *trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with him*.

^{<5126>}COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

CAUTIONS AND EXHORTATIONS

The apostle concludes the chapter with exhortations to proper duty, which he infers from the foregoing discourse.

I. Here is a caution to take heed of judaizing teachers, or those who would impose upon Christians the yoke of the ceremonial law: *Let no man therefore judge you in meat nor drink, etc.*, v. 16. Much of the ceremonies of the law of Moses consisted in the distinction of meats and days. It appears by Romans 14 that there were those who were for keeping up those distinctions: but here the apostle shows that since Christ has come, and has cancelled the ceremonial law, we ought not to keep it up. “Let no man impose those things upon you, for God has not imposed them: if God has made you free, be not you again *entangled in that yoke of bondage.*” And this the rather because these things *were shadows of things to come* (v. 17), intimating that they had no intrinsic worth in them and that they are now done away. *But the body is of Christ:* the body, of which they were shadows, has come; and to continue the ceremonial observances, which were only types and shadows of Christ and the gospel, carries an intimation that Christ has not yet come and the gospel state has not yet commenced. Observe the advantages we have under the gospel, above what they had under the law: they had the shadows, we have the substance.

II. He cautions them to take heed of those who would introduce the worship of angels as mediators between God and them, as the Gentile philosophers did: *Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels*, v. 18. It looked like a piece of modesty to make use of the mediation of angels, as conscious to ourselves of our unworthiness to speak immediately to God; but, though it has a show of humility, it is a voluntary, not a commanded humility; and therefore it is not acceptable, yea, it is not warrantable: it is taking that honour which is due to Christ only and giving it to a creature. Besides, the notions upon which this practice was grounded were merely the inventions of men and not by divine revelation, — the proud conceits of human reason, which make a man presume to dive into things, and determine them, without sufficient knowledge and warrant: *Intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind* — pretending to describe the order of angels, and their respective ministries, which God has hidden from us; and therefore, though there was a show of humility in the practice, there was a real pride in the principle. They advanced those notions to gratify their own carnal fancy, and were fond of being thought wiser than other people. Pride is at the bottom of a great many errors and corruptions, and even of many evil practices, which have

great show and appearance of humility. Those who do so do *not hold the head*, v. 19. They do in effect disclaim Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man. It is the highest disparagement to Christ, who is the head of the church, for any of the members of it to make use of any intercessors with God but him. When men let go their hold of Christ, they catch at that which is next them and will stand them in no stead. — *From which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.* Observe,

1. Jesus Christ is not only a head of government over the church, but a head of vital influence to it. They are knit to him by joints and bands, as the several members of the body are united to the head, and receive life and nourishment from him.

2. The body of Christ is a growing body: *it increaseth with the increase of God.* The new man is increasing, and the nature of grace is to grow, where there is not an accidental hindrance. — *With the increase of God*, with an increase of grace which is from God as its author; or, in a usual Hebraism, with a large and abundant increase. — *That you may be filled with all the fulness of God*, ⁴⁰⁸⁹Ephesians 3:19. See a parallel expression, *Which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, maketh increase of the body*, ⁴⁰⁸⁵Ephesians 4:15, 16.

III. He takes occasion hence to warn them again: “*Wherefore, if you be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances?*” v. 20. If as Christians you are dead to the observances of the ceremonial law, why are you subject to them? Such observances as, *Touch not, taste not, handle not*,” v. 21, 22. Under the law there was a ceremonial pollution contracted by touching a dead body, or any thing offered to an idol; or by tasting any forbidden meats, etc., *which all are to perish with the using*, having no intrinsic worth in themselves to support them, and those who used them saw them perishing and passing away; or, which tend to corrupt the Christian faith, having no other authority than the traditions and injunctions of men. — *Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility.* They thought themselves wiser than their neighbours, in observing the law of Moses together with the gospel of Christ, that they might be sure in the one, at least, to be in the right; but, alas! it was but a show of wisdom, a mere invention and pretence. So they seem to neglect the body, by abstaining from such and such meats, and mortifying their bodily

pleasures and appetites; but there is nothing of true devotion in these things, for the gospel teaches us to worship God in spirit and truth and not by ritual observances, and through the mediation of Christ alone and not of any angels. Observe,

- 1.** Christians are freed by Christ from the ritual observances of Moses's law, and delivered from that yoke of bondage which God himself had laid upon them.
- 2.** Subjection to ordinances, or human appointments in the worship of God, is highly blamable, and contrary to the freedom and liberty of the gospel. The apostle requires Christians *to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ hath made them free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage,* ~~☞~~ Galatians 5:1. And the imposition of them is invading the authority of Christ, the head of the church, and *introducing another law of commandments contained in ordinances,* when Christ has abolished the old one, ~~☞~~ Ephesians 2:15.
- 3.** Such things have only a show of wisdom, but are really folly. It is true wisdom to keep close to the appointments of the gospel, and an entire subjection to Christ, the only head of the church.