

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 279 – October 6th – Colossians 2:6-23

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Colossians

Dunn, James D G *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996

Eadie, John *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, Richard Griffin & Co, 1856

Verse 6

Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε,

παρελάβετε Verb, aor act ind, 2pl
παραλαμβάνω receive, accept

A term used of receiving a tradition or a body of teaching. "Paul refers his readers back to their experience of hearing and receiving the gospel (aorist tense), as he had in responding to the equivalent situation in Galatia (Gal 3:1-5). As in Galatians, this first decisive experience provides a norm and a starting point for what should follow: their ongoing life of faith should be in accord with the faith with which they began." Dunn

περιπατέω walk, walk about, live

The commencement of the Christian life is a once-for-all event which marks the beginning of a lifelong walk with Christ. Just as Christ is received *by faith*, so also, that daily walk with him must be marked and maintained by the same faith.

"Ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε here, then, is equivalent to the πνευματι περιπατεῖτε of Gal 5:16... This combination of 'receiving tradition of Christ Jesus as Lord' and 'walking in him' is thus a neat summary of the mutual check and balance between outward guideline and inward motivation which was a feature of the Pauline ethic (as in Gal 5:25-6:2)." Dunn

Verse 7

ἔρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ.

ἔρριζωμένοι Verb, perf pass dep ptc, m nom
πλ ρίζομαι be firmly rooted

Note the perfect participle, a once for all founding on this constant, unshakable ground. "The importance of deep roots was well understood in Jewish tradition (e.g. Jer 17:8; Ezek 31:7; Sir 40:15). Naturally the image is complementary to the 'fruit-bearing' metaphor of 1:10, which follows the same emphasis on a 'walk' determined by reference to 'the Lord'." Dunn

ἐποικοδομεῶ build on, build up

Note the present participle signifying a continuing activity. The prefix ἐπι emphasises the importance of the starting point: not only 'built up' but 'built upon'.

βεβαιόω confirm, strengthen

"βεβαιός and βεβαιόω were commonly used to denote the formal or legal guarantee required in the transfer of property or goods... This technical sense is probably also echoed in Paul's other uses of these words (Rom 4:16; 15:8; 1 Cor 1:6,8; 2 Cor 1:7,21). Here the guarantee or confirmation is τῇ πίστει, 'with reference to your faith'." Dunn

πίστει Noun, dat s πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief

διδάσκω teach

The teaching given to the new community of believers was foundational. They must grow on the basis of such teaching rather than growing out of it. They are not to depart from the apostolic instruction.

περισσεύω increase, abound

εὐχαριστία, ας f thanksgiving

The result of this teaching and growth is thanksgiving. "The implication is that a characteristic and fundamental feature of their relation with Jesus as Christ and Lord should be gratitude for what God has done in and through him. As rootedness and foundation depends on the faith called forth by the gospel, so growing from the root and building up on the foundation can be successful only in an atmosphere of thankfulness to God (see also on 1:12)." Dunn

Verse 8

Βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν·

βλεπῶ see, look, beware of

τις "Paul regularly refers to known opponents in a somewhat diminishing allusion as 'some certain people' (Rom 3:8; 1 Cor 4:18; 15:12, 34; 2 Cor 3:1; 10:2; Gal 1:7; 2:12; Phil 1:15), but here the singular (τις), followed by the future tense (ἔσται), suggests in contrast that a possibility is being envisaged rather than a current state of affairs described: 'take heed! Perhaps there will be someone who ...'" Dunn

ἔσται Verb, fut indic, 2 s εἶμι
συλαγωγέω make a captive of

Here alone in Biblical Greek. "The thought is of some popular rhetorician (2:4) or philosopher captivating (so NJB; REB 'capture your minds') some in his audience by the power of his rhetoric or the impressiveness of his claims. The visual metaphor is of some marketplace preacher gathering together those impressed by his discourse and taking them off for a fuller exposition and induction." Dunn

φιλοσοφία, ας f philosophy (in a bad sense),
human wisdom

Here alone in Biblical Greek. The thought behind these terms is *human* wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-31) – though the term itself is not derogatory.

κενος, η, ον empty, to no purpose,
senseless

"without content, without any basis, without truth, without power" BAGD cf. 1 Cor 15:15; Jas 2:20.

ἀπατη, ης f deception
παραδοσις, εως f tradition

Eadie thinks that this may refer particularly to *Jewish* traditions. Cf. Mk 7:3-13/Matt 15:2-9.

στοιχία, ὧν n elements (of which the
world is made), basic principles

Dunn Comments, "It is particularly interesting that precisely the same phrase is used in Gal 4:3 and 9 (as again in Col 2:20). There it is clearly linked into the Jewish law, understood as itself a kind of power set in charge over Israel like a slave-custodian or guardian (Gal 3:23-25; 4:1-3, 9-10) and given 'through angels' (3:19). The close association of the thought here with talk of Jewish festivals (Col 2:16; cf. Gal 4:10) and 'worship of angels' (Col 2:18) strongly suggests that we are moving in the same realm of thought and association as with the same phrase in Galatians." He thinks that the reference is to essentially Jewish 'philosophy' which drew on astrological teaching as a way of commending their religious practices to their fellow citizens. He concludes, "The key test of such systems for the letter writer(s), however, was whether they accorded with Christ (κατα Χριστον)... It was precisely the failure of such speculation to grasp the significance of Christ and of his death that demonstrated their emptiness and deceitfulness."

Verses 9-15

Some have suggested that behind 2:9-15, or at least the latter part of these verses, there may lie a Christian hymn or hymnic confession. The suggestion has not gained much support.

Verse 9

ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς,

"The force of κατα Χριστον is explained (ὅτι) by a sequence of 'in him' clauses (2:9-12) which build into a powerful exposition of the cross. Initially, however, these clauses pick up the theme of the hymn in praise of Christ, recalling first the hymn's second strophe (1:19) in very similar words ('in him,' 'all the fullness,' 'dwells'), and then (2:10) the thought of the first strophe (1:18a – 'head'; 1:16 – 'rule and authority')." Dunn

κατοικέω live, inhabit
πλήρωμα, τος n fulness, completeness
θεοτης, ητος f deity, godhead

Here alone in biblical Greek.

σωματικῶς adv in bodily form, in human
form

Here alone in biblical Greek. "As the human σωμα is what enables a person to be in relationship with other persons, so the somatic character of this indwelling meant that God could be encountered directly in and through this particular human being, Christ." Dunn. But note the present tense which underscores the continuing humanity of Jesus Christ.

Verse 10

καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας,

πεπληρωμένοι Verb, perf pass ptc, m nom pl
πληρωω fill, make full

"It is because that fulness [all the fulness of the Godhead] dwells in Christ that they are filled up in Him. Being in Him, they are brought into contact with what is in Him." Eadie

"Any thought of seeking out higher or more fulfilling experiences is fanciful and self-delusive... The tense ('to be' + perfect passive participle) indicates a state of fulness accomplished in the past and sustained since then. The implication, therefore is that in receiving the tradition of Jesus as Christ and Lord and believing in(to) him (2:5-7), the Colossian Christians already had all that is necessary for fulness of life, unrestricted access to the divine power which will shape them, too, into the divine image (3:10)." Dunn

κεφαλὴ, ἡς f head

ἀρχὴ, ἡς f beginning, origin, power

ἐξουσία, ας f authority, power

The apostle seems to allude to false teaching being touted at Colossae which elevated angels or other heavenly beings.

Verse 11

ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός, ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

"2:11-15 were probably intended as an elaborate attempt to describe the importance of what Christ accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection by means of a sequence of vivid metaphors (circumcision, burial and resurrection, death and giving life, forgiveness and cancellation of legal bond, public triumph)." Dunn

περιετμήθητε Verb, aor pass indic, 2 pl

περιτεμνω circumcise

περιτομῆ, ἡς f circumcision

ἀχειροποιήτος, ον not made by human hands

Reinforces the suggestion that the threat was from *Jewish* teachers.

ἀπεκδύσις, εως f putting off, setting (oneself) free from

σῶμα, τος n body

σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, human nature

Dunn thinks the reference is to death and hence, in the light of the last phrase, the death of Christ. Believers have shared in Christ's death.

Verse 12

συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν·

The sequence of συν compounds is characteristically Pauline.

συνταφέντες Verb, 2 aor pass ptc, m nom pl
συνθαπτομαι be buried together with

Cf. Rom 6:4-6. "The imagery is forceful, of sinking below the waters of baptism as a kind of burial. Baptism, presumably by immersion, represented mimetically the commitment to enter the tomb with Jesus after he had been taken down from the cross. Since burial was understood as the conclusion of the event of dying, this commitment meant the enacted willingness to identify oneself with the complete event of Jesus' death." Dunn

βαπτισμός, ον n baptism

The less common term is replaced by the more usual βαπτισμα (βαπτισματι) in many MSS.

συνηγέρθητε Verb, aor pass indic, 2 pl

συνεγειρω raise together with

Dunn thinks this marks a development in Paul's theology and that previously he saw sharing in Christ's resurrection as belonging to the future, part of the 'eschatological not-yet'.

ἐνεργεία, ας f (supernatural) working, power
ἐγείραντος Verb, aor act ptc, m gen s
ἐγειρω raise

νεκρός, α, ον dead

"'God who raised him from the dead' is a piece of confessional formula regularly echoed in Paul (Rom 4:24; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 1:10; Eph 1:20...). As such it reminds us how fundamental belief in the resurrection of Christ was to the first Christians." Dunn

Verses 11 & 12 deserve detailed comment, but here note simply the way in which circumcision is linked with Christ's death (his death was his circumcision?) and that this is the Christian's circumcision. All of this is set forth in Christian baptism.

Verse 13

καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, συνεζωοποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ· χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα,

On this verse, compare Ephesians 2:1,5

νεκρός, α, ον dead

The ὑμᾶς refers to Gentiles and their 'being dead' refers to their status outside the covenant made by God with Israel (cf. Eph 2:12), as the following phrase shows.

παραπτώμα, τος n sin, wrongdoing
 ἀκροβυστία, ας f uncircumcision
 σαρξ, σαρκος f see v.11

The phrase simply refers to their Gentile status, cf. Gen 17:11-14.

συζωοποιεω make alive together (with)

A number of MSS read ἡμας rather than ὑμας conforming the person to the following ἡμιν. One or two MSS, followed by the TR change the latter to ὑμιν.

χαρίζομαι be gracious to, forgive

"The awkward transition to 'us' ... is characteristically Pauline, betraying here (as in Eph 2:5) an element of self-correction: it constitutes not a denial that such transgressions are to be attributed to Gentiles but rather a recognition that all, Jews as well, are equally guilty of such transgressions and equally in need of forgiveness. The point is not developed here, but behind it we can see the fuller argument of Rom 1:18-3:20; 5:12-21 (where 'transgression' occurs six times); 7:7-12." Dunn

Verse 14

ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ·

ἐξαλείψας Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s
 ἐξαλειφω wipe away or out, remove, cancel

Denotes erasure of an entry in a book, cf. Ex 32:32-33; Ps 69:28; Rev 3:5.

χειρογραφον, ου n record of one's debts

Here alone in the NT. "The metaphor is probably adapted to the earlier Jewish idea of a heavenly book of the living (Exod 32:32-33; Ps 69:28; Dan 12:1; Rev 3:5) as developed in apocalyptic circles into that of books wherein deeds of good and evil were recorded with a view to the final judgment (Dan 7:10?; 1 Enoch 89:61-64, 70-71; 108:7; *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 7:1-8; *Testament of Abraham* (A) 12:7-18; 13:9-14; (B) 10:7-11:2; 2 Enoch 53:2-3; Rev 20:12)... This is most obviously the background of thought here, with καθ' ἡμῶν ('against us') confirming that the document in question was one of condemnation, that is, presumably the record of their 'transgressions' (repeated for emphasis in the following relative clause), 'which was opposed, hostile (ὑπεναντίον, another Pauline *hapax*) to us.'" Dunn

δογμα, τος n rule, law, decree

The decrees of the law giving the χειρογραφον its condemnatory force, cf. Eph 2:15.

ὑπεναντιος, α, ον against, opposed to
 ἤρκεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s αἰρω take,
 take away

μεσος, η, ον middle

προσηλωσας Verb, aor act ptc, m nom s

προσηλω nail to

σταυρος, ου m cross

"There may be a play on the practice of attaching a crucified man's indictment to his cross to indicate to onlookers what his crime was (cf. Mark 15:26...). But that would hardly be described as 'removing' the indictment. The thought is rather of the indictment itself being destroyed by means of crucifixion, as though it was the indictment which was itself nailed to the cross in execution. The play, then, is rather with the thought of Christ as himself the condemnatory bond and his death as its destruction. The metaphor is convoluted, but presumably reflects again the idea of Christ's death as a sin offering and thus of Christ as embodying the sins of the offeror and destroying them in his death." Dunn

Verse 15

ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγματίσεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ.

"The fifth and final metaphor to describe the significance of the cross is a complete reversal of the imagery of the cross in the preceding verse. From the idea of the cross as a symbol of destruction, the thought is transformed into the image of public triumph." Dunn

ἀπεκδυομαι disarm

Dunn says that the sense 'disarm' or 'despoil' for this verb is not attested until the fourth century. The basic meaning of the verb is 'strip off'. He suggests that the picture may be of the elemental powers which once clothed the cosmos being stripped away. He concludes, "Perhaps we should not press the detail and simply allow the powerful imagery of old and wasted garments being discarded to work its effect. For the Colossians at any rate the point would be clear: the spiritual powers, including the elemental forces (2:8), should be counted as of no greater value and significance than a bunch of old rags." Dunn

ἀρχη, ἐξουσια see v.10

Eadie, and most other commentators, see here a reference to hostile spiritual powers.

δειγματιζω disgrace (δ. ἐν παρρησιᾳ make a public spectacle of)

Cf. Matt 1:19.

παρρησια, ας f openness

θριαμβεῶ lead (someone) in a victory procession (either as prisoner or as a victorious soldier), triumph over

Cf. 2 Cor 2:14. The picture is that of the victorious general leading behind him his chained and defeated enemies. "The cross on which Christ died is compared to the chariot in which the victor rode in triumph" Scott

"It is clear ... that Paul and Timothy wanted to end the sequence of metaphors on a note of triumph and to build up to this climax as a way of preparing the ground for the practical advice to follow. The force of the sequence of images of what happened on the cross is powerful: a spiritual circumcision achieved and body of flesh stripped off, a burial with Christ and resurrection with Christ, a being made alive with Christ from a state of death and a wiping out of the record of transgression and destruction of that record. But the final one is boldest of all: a stripping off of the rulers and authorities as discarded rags, putting them to public shame and triumphing over them in him. This is a piece of theological audacity of the same order as deuterio-Isaiah's proclamation of the God of a small, devastated nation as the one and only God.

"To treat the cross as a moment of triumph was about as huge a reversal of normal values as could be imagined, since crucifixion was itself regarded as the most shameful of deaths... But in this letter it is simply of a piece with the theological audacity of seeing in a man, Jesus the Christ, the sum and embodiment of the divine wisdom by which the world was created and is sustained (1:15-20). The key can only be to recognise that for Paul, as for the first Christians generally, the cross and resurrection of Christ itself constituted such a turning upside down of all that had previously determined or been thought to determine life that only such imagery could suffice to express its significance. The unseen powers and invisible forces that dominated and determined so much of life need no longer be feared. A greater power and force was at work, which could rule and determine their lives more effectively – in a word 'Christ.' Triumph indeed!" Dunn

Verse 16

Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει ἢ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νομιμίας ἢ σαββάτων,

"Clearly what is envisaged is a situation where the Colossian believers were being (or might be) criticised for their conduct in respect of dietary rules and festival days. Equally clearly the line of reply is that a proper understanding of the significance of Christ's death would render such criticism unnecessary, irrelevant, or wrong. By implication those who made such criticism were themselves failing to grasp the significance of the cross." Dunn

κρινῶ pass judgement on, condemn
βρωσις, εως f food, eating
ποσις, εως f drinking, a drink

Jews were concerned to eat only food that was from *clean* animals, that had properly been slaughtered so that the blood was drained, and that had not been offered to idols. The concern over drink probably relates primarily to this last point, cf. Rom 14 and particularly vv. 17,21.

ἢ or

μερος, ους n part, piece, in part, partly

Eadie says μέρος here means 'particular matter'. "The phrase, ἐν μέρει, as in classic use, signifies not simply in respect of ... It gives a speciality to the theme or sphere of judgement, by individualizing the topic or occasion."

ἑορτη, ης f festival, feast

νεομηνια, ας f new moon festival

σαββατον, ου n (often in pl) the seventh day, Sabbath

For these three together cf. 1 Chron 23:31; 2 Chron 2:3; 31:3; Neh 10:33; Isa 1:13-14; Ezek 45:17 and Hos 2:11. "We must conclude, therefore, that all the elements in this verse bear a characteristically and distinctively Jewish colour, that those who cherished them so critically must have been the (or some) Jews at Colossae, and that their criticism arose from Jewish suspicion of Gentiles making what they would regard as unacceptable claims to the distinctive Jewish heritage without taking on all that was most distinctive of that heritage." Dunn

Eadie writes, "Sensations of spiritual joy are not to be restricted to holy days, for they thrill the spirit every moment, and need not wait for expression till there be a solemn gathering, for every instant awakes to the claims and raptures of religion."

Verse 17

ἃ ἐστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

σκια, ας f shadow, foreshadowing

Dunn writes, "The language is ultimately Platonic, but here is probably drawn from the Hellenistic Judaism which we find most clearly expressed in Philo." But the Platonic framework is subverted by:

- i) The phrase τῶν μελλοντῶν which is "a reflection of Jewish eschatology ... An essentially static Platonic dualism (between heaven and earth) has been transferred into an expression of Jewish eschatological hope." cf. Heb 1:10.
- ii) The christological focus. "In contrast to Platonic-Philonic thought, it is the Christ in all the concrete bloodiness of the cross who is the true reality. The amalgam thus echoes the christology of the earlier hymn (1:15-20): Christ embodies the heavenly reality which lies beyond and sustains the perceptible cosmos. But, as in Hebrews, it also confirms that Christ is the substance to the shadow of Jewish food laws and feasts: he is the reality which casts its shadow backward in time; they are the provisional, inferior copies whose inadequacy is now evident in the light of the real. The claim is again bold and, it should be noted, only makes sense as a response to and rebuttal of essentially Jewish claims. Only as a claim that Christ is the fulfilment of Jewish eschatological expectations, which provides a Jewish answer to a Jewish alternative, does the rebuttal make sense."

μελλω (ptc. without infin) coming, future
σωμα, τοσ n body

Verse 18

μηδεις ὑμᾶς καταβραβευέτω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεῶν, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοδὸς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,

μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν no one, nothing
καταβραβευω cheat (lit. rule against)

"βραβευω has the primary meaning of 'award a prize (a βραβειον)' in a contest (see 3:15); hence καταβραβευω (only here in biblical Greek and not much attested elsewhere) means 'decide against' as an umpire, 'deprive of the prize' (BAGD), or simply 'disqualify'." Dunn

θελω wish, will

Eadie believes this should be understood as "wishing to do so by means of ..."
Dunn follows Lightfoot and Bruce in taking the verb to refer to the person who is seeking to influence the Colossian Christians, he is the one who 'delights in ...'

ταπεινοφροσυνη, ης f humility; false
humility

The verb is used in the LXX of self-mortification (Lev 16:29,31; 23:27,29,32) or more particularly of fasting (Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3,5 also Ps 69:10). "This suggests a fair degree of ascetic practice as part of the Colossian 'philosophy' (see also 2:21,23; cf. 1 Tim 4:3)." Dunn

θρησκεια, ας f religion, worship

The 'worship of angels' could indicate either that the false teachers worshipped or venerated angels or that they enthused about the worship offered by angels. Dunn says it reflects "a desire particularly within apocalyptic and mystical circles of first-century Judaism to join in with the worship of angels in heaven." There is similar evidence from the Qumranic community. "It is possible, therefore, to envisage a Jewish (or Christian Jewish) synagogue in Colossae which was influenced by such ideas and which delighted in their worship sabbath by sabbath as a participation in the worship of the angels in heaven (cf. 1 Cor 11:10). In this case the 'humility' associated with this worship could very well denote the spiritual discipline and mortification (particularly, but not only, fasting; see above) regarded as essential to maintain the holiness required to participate with the holy ones and holy angels (see also 1:12)." Dunn adds, "It is not so much interest in angelic worship which Paul finds 'reprehensible' as the attitude of dismissive superiority which it evidently engendered among its practitioners (μηδεις ὑμας καταβραβευετω ...)."

ἑώρακεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s ὄραω trans
see, observe

Textual sources are divided over whether or not to include μη before ἑώρακεν (compare AV and NIV). Either reading makes sense here.

ἐμβατεω (doubtful meaning) perhaps take one's stand on (what one has seen in a vision) or claim special powers because of (what one has seen in a vision)

Dunn says that the basic meaning of this term is 'to enter' and that it is used in the LXX of entry into possession of the promised land (Josh 19:49,51). He concludes, "When we add the echo of Josh 19:49,51 in Col 1:12, the inference becomes strong that there was a prominent strand among the Colossian Jews who thought of heaven either (or both) as a promised land into which they should aspire even now to enter, or particularly as the temple of God into which they could now enter by means of appropriate spiritual disciplines in order to share the worship of the angels in heaven. It was their delight thus to 'enter' sabbath by sabbath (note the present tense). This would also make the best sense of the other part of the phrase (ἀ ἐοράκεν) ... for it is precisely the characteristic of the apocalyptic and mystical Jewish traditions documented above to give prominence to 'the things seen'." Dunn links the reference back to the 'worship of angels' and translates 'which things he has seen on entering ...'

εἰκη adv. in vain, for nothing
 φουσιῶ cause conceit/arrogance; pass be
 conceited/arrogant

νοῦς, νοός, νοί, νοῦν m mind, thought
 σαρξ, σαρκός f flesh, human nature

Here, as frequently the reference is to fallen human nature or to a merely human way of thinking.

"The most stinging part of the rebuke ... would have been the final phrase, 'by his mind of flesh.' For in a Hellenistic context, as Philo again well illustrates, it was precisely the 'mind' which would have been the medium by means of which the person could enter the higher realms, the *logos* of human rationality, itself part of the medium of the divine Logos that interpenetrated the cosmos... In such a scheme 'mind' and 'flesh' were quite antithetical since it was impossible for the divine substance to mingle with the material. To speak of the 'mind of flesh' was therefore in effect to deny that this Colossian worshiper with angels could ever have 'lifted off' from earth: even his mind was 'flesh', fast bound to earth." Dunn

Verse 19

καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ
 σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων
 ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβασζόμενον αὐξῆι
 τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ θεοῦ.

κρατεῶ hold, hold fast, seize

Suggests that the one seeking to lead the Colossians astray considered himself a part of the Christian community.

κεφαλῆ, ἡς f head
 σῶμα, τος n body

On the following, cf. Eph 4:16

ἀφῆ, ἡς f ligament
 συνδεσμος, ου m that which binds
 together, ligament
 ἐπιχορηγεῶ supply
 συμβιβάζω bring together, unite, hold
 together
 αὐξάνω and αὐξῶ grow, increase, reach
 full growth
 αὐξήσις, εως f growth

"The church can enjoy neither life nor growth, if, misunderstanding Christ's person or undervaluing his work, it has no vital union with Him." Eadie

"It was presumably the failure of the individual who had let go of Christ that he had gone in for flights of individual mystical experience, glorying in the company of angels, without regard to the other members of the body. And his advocacy of such experiences, criticising and disqualifying those who saw their spirituality in more humdrum terms, must have been the very opposite of supportive of the Christian community." Dunn

Verses 20-23

"The reversion in a single compact sentence to talk of 'dying with Christ' (cf. 2:12), 'elemental forces' (cf. 2:8), regulations (cf. 2:14), food taboos (cf. 2:16), human traditions (cf. 2:8), and 'self-chosen worship and humility' (cf. 2:18) indicates both that the teaching in view in Colossae was an integrated 'package' and that this sentence functions as a conclusion to the section 2:6-23. The double emphasis of 2:12 ('buried with him ... and raised with him') is now divided into two sections (2:20 – 'if you died with Christ ...'; 3:1 – 'if you were raised with Christ ...'); this suggests that the intention is to round off the critique of the Colossian 'philosophy' by emphasising what the Colossians have been rescued from (2:20-23) before going on to spell out what is involved in their new way of life (3:1-4:6)." Dunn

Verse 20

Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων
 τοῦ κόσμου, τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ
 δογματίζεσθε·

ἀπεθάνετε Verb, aor act indic, 2 pl
 ἀποθνήσκω die, face death

Cf. Rom 6:8.

στοιχεῖα, ὧν n elements (of which the
 world is made), basic principles

Eadie thinks that this refers to Jewish law.

ζῶω live, be alive

δογματιζομαι obey rules and regulations

Hooker suggests that the force is 'Why submit to regulations?' rather than 'Why do you submit to regulations?' – warning rather than rebuke.

Verse 21

Μὴ ἄψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης,

ἄψη Verb, aor midd subj, 2 s ἄπτω light;
midd. take hold of, touch

μηδε negative particle nor; μηδε ... μηδε
neither ... nor

γεύση Verb, aor midd dep subj, 2 s γευομαι
taste, eat, experience

θίγης Verb, aor act subj, 2 s θιγγανω touch

"These curt dogmas are not the apostle's own teaching, but the mottoes [sic], or prominent lessons, or watchwords of the false teachers." Eadie

There is considerable discussion concerning the distinction in meaning between the first and last of these terms. Some suggest the first refers to food and the latter to sexual relations. Eadie suggests that all refer to food, but the first is the handling necessary to eating (to feeding oneself), the last includes mere touching, casual contact. This is similar to Lightfoot's translation which has the sequence 'handle, taste, touch'. But Dunn thinks that 'touch' is more appropriate to ἄπτομαι and so prefers the sequence, 'touch, taste, handle.' The main concern however is clearly one of maintaining purity by not even coming into contact with what would defile. Cf. Isa 65:5.

Verse 22

ἃ ἔστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει, κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων;

ἔστιν ... εἰς has the sense 'be destined for,' cf. Acts 8:20; 2 Peter 2:12.

φθορα, ας f decay, corruption, depravity
ἀποχρησις, εως f process of being used

Eadie thinks the phrase implies that these rules and regulations focus on things which perish with use (food destroyed by eating) and which can therefore have little connection with true spirituality. "The echo is of Mark 7:19/Matt 15:7: unclean food should not be a matter of great concern because it goes into the stomach only to be thence expelled into the latrine (cf. 1 Cor 6:13)." Dunn

ἐντάλμα, τος n commandment, rule
διδασκαλία, ας f what is taught, teaching,
doctrine

This latter phrase completes the thought of verse 20, particularly focussing on the added minutiae of Jewish interpretation. There is a close parallel with Mk 7:7/Matt 15:9 in which Jesus quotes from Isa 29:13. Given the unusual wording Dunn concludes, "Almost certainly, then, Paul and Timothy here were deliberately alluding to the rebuke of Isaiah. This at once provides a further confirmation of the essentially Jewish character of the threat to the Colossian Christians: the allusion to a rebuke to Israel would only be effective if it came as a rebuke to those who understood themselves as the people of Israel."

Verse 23

ἅτινά ἐστιν λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας ἐν ἐθελοθηρσκία καὶ ταπεινοφοροσύνη καὶ ἀφειδία σώματος, οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινὶ πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός.

The verse is made difficult by a sequence of unusual and obscure terms and by awkward syntax. Most assume that the terms and phrases used in the Colossian 'philosophy' are being cited. The difficulties have led to a number of textual variants.

ἅτινά pronoun, n nom & acc pl ὅστις, ἴτις, ὅ
τι who, which

σοφία, ας f wisdom, insight

λογον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας 'have the appearance of wisdom' Dunn follows Lightfoot in thinking the sense is 'have a reputation of wisdom.'

ἐθελοθηρσκία, ας f self imposed piety or religion

A term not found anywhere else. Dunn says it could refer to 'delight in worship' cf. 2:18, or could mean 'wished-for-worship,' "implying that participation in angel worship was a figment of an overimaginative desire."

ταπεινοφοροσυνη, ης f humility; false
humility

Cf. v.18

ἀφειδία, ας f severe discipline

Not found elsewhere in the biblical writings. The sense is 'unsparing discipline.'

σωμα, τος n body

τιμη, ης f honour, price, value

πλησμονη, ης f satisfaction, gratification

σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, physical body,
human nature

οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινὶ πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός either 'of no value in controlling physical passions' or 'of no value, except for gratifying physical passions.'

Dunn suggests that 'gratification of the flesh' could be taken "as referring to satisfaction felt by the Colossian Jews in their ethnic (fleshly, *κατα σαρκα*) identification as Jews, the people chosen by the one God to be his own elect...

What is being critiqued here is an assumption on the part of (many of) the Colossian Jews that rules for living and worship practices were ways of expressing (maintaining and marking out) their distinctiveness as Jews.

"In short, the line of criticism at this point is probably to acknowledge much that appears admirable in the religious praxis of the Colossian Jews here in view, but with the added final reminder that severity to the body can be just another form of pandering to the flesh (cf. 1 Cor 13:3)... Such a concern for Jewish identity and Jewish privilege as Jewish is at the end of the day just another form of self-indulgence or national indulgence."