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Colossians  
The life situation

I. The Problems

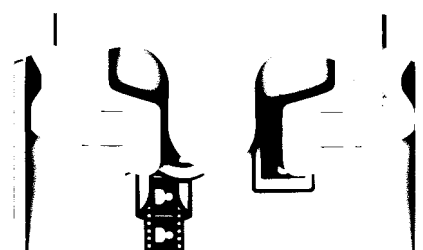
A. Theological error and moral failure.

1. Apparently a syncretistic, theosophical speculation, called by them a philosophy but by Paul a vain deceit, having two basic tenets:
  - (1) The belief in angels as controlling fate.
  - (2) A dualism between matter as evil and spirit as good.
2. The worship of angels or "elemental spirits" (1:16, 19; 2:8, 18). Denial of supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as he was placed in a hierarchy of angels.
3. Ascetic practices affecting food, drink, and sex (2:16-23), with resultant personal pride and moral laxity. Self-mortification was in effect self-exaltation.
4. Ritualism and legalism (2:16f.) along with asceticism as denial of the sufficiency of Christ. Made salvation dependent upon human merit and works.
5. Made salvation become redemption from flesh (asceticism) and from fate (angels) rather than from sin.
6. Substituted sham battles or shadow boxing (2:16-23) for the real struggle (3:5-11).

B. The release of Onesimus, former slave but now brother in Christ (cf. 4:16 and correlation of Colossians with its companion letter, Philemon)

II. Paul's answer

- A. Christ as God manifested: creator and redeemer.
- B. The supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. *against Platonic heresy*
- C. The total man placed under the total claim of Christ. *body & spirit of man.*
- D. Salvation as God's gift and God's demand.
- E. The cross as the victory over sin. *not food laws, sabbath laws, etc.*
- F. Doctrine as instruction for life *not an end in itself*



Colossians: A Constructive Reply  
to Theological Error (A.M. Hunter)

Greetings (1:1-2)

I. The truth of the Gospel (1:3-14).

A. Thanksgiving to God (1:3-8).

1. For their response to the gospel: their faith in Christ, love toward all the saints, hope laid up for them in heaven (1:3-5).
2. With assurance that the gospel preached by Epaphras has vindicated itself as true (1) in being universal (not provincial) and (2) through its fruit (1:6-8).

B. Prayer for further spiritual progress (1:9-14).

1. In the truth that leads to goodness: knowledge of God's will issuing in a worthy life (1:1-10).
2. In being strengthened by God's power unto joyous steadfastness and longsuffering (1:11).
3. In thankfulness for God's work in making them partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, delivering them from the power of darkness and bringing them under the sovereign rule of the Son of his love, in whom they are redeemed through the forgiveness of sins (1:12-14).

II. Christology: the person and work of Christ (1:15-2:7).

A. The preeminence of Christ (1:15-23).

1. As creator of the universe (1:15-17).
  - a. The image of God (God manifested) and firstborn (heir and ruler) of all creation (1:15).
  - b. Agent of all creation, principle of its coherence, its ultimate goal (1:16-17).
2. As head of the Church, his body (1:18-20).
  - a. By his resurrection, the beginning of the new life (1:18).
  - b. The fulness (pleroma) of God: deity not fragmented but fully present in Christ (1:19).
  - c. By giving his life on the cross, the author of reconciliation on cosmic scale (1:20).
3. Redeemer and preserver of the Colossians themselves who are to hold to the hope of the gospel which is to be preached in all creation (1:21-23).

B. The continuing work of Christ in Paul, his minister (1:24-2:7).

1. Christ's sufferings continued in Paul in behalf of his body, the church (1:24).
2. The mystery (open secret): "Christ in you (plural) the hope of Glory," i.e. the hope God offers the world. Fragmented mankind to be made one in Christ. Every man offered the mystery; not for exclusive few (1:25-29).

3. Paul's concern that all know Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that they be instructed and united in love and have the full assurance which comes from understanding (2:1-7).

### III. Christ the Conqueror vs. empty philosophy and ascetic sham battles (2:8-23).

- A. Philosophers with empty promises no substitute for Christ who gives the reality of new life, freedom, and power (2:8-15).
  1. The offered philosophy is but vain deceit based upon human tradition and "elemental spirits" (astrology) and not upon Christ (2:8).
  2. Christ is the fulness of deity and the fulfilment of man (2:1-10).
  3. To Christ alone is owed the destruction of the old life, resurrection to the new life, the forgiveness of sins, release from bondage to the old law, and complete triumph over all cosmic powers (2:11-15).
- B. Shadows of asceticism, legalism, and angel worship no substitute for the realities of life already possessed in relationship with Christ, the head of the body (2:16-23).
  1. Not to be judged by men with respect to shadows (2:16-17).
  2. Not to be robbed by men by worshiping angels instead of Christ who sustains and unites us (2:18-19).
  3. To die with Christ is true freedom from the world; asceticism is but a negative approach to the "worldliness" which it seeks to escape (2:20-23).

### IV. New life in Christ: off with the old, on with the new (3:1-17).

- A. Commitment to the new and true life in Christ (3:1-4).
  1. Gift and demand in salvation: to be "raised together with Christ" carries demand that one "seek the things that are above" (3:1-2).
  2. To die with Christ is to have Christ as one's life and to share in his glory (3:3-4).
- B. The old man and the new (3:5-11).
  1. Sins (personal impurities and enmities) to be overcome in the continuing life of the one who has already "put off the old man" and "put on the new man" (3:5-10).
  2. Where "Christ is all, and in all," old human categories lose relevance (5:11).
- C. Christian graces for those called to be one body in Christ (3:12-17).

### V. The household of God: communion and community (3:18-4:18).

- A. Domestic relations and obligations (3:18-4:1).
  1. Wives and husbands (3:18-19).
  2. Children and parents (3:20-21).
  3. Slaves and masters (3:22-4:1).
- B. Prayer for a proper witness (4:2-6).
  1. In proclaiming the mystery of Christ (4:2-4).
  2. In the Christian walk before the world (4:5).
  3. In persuasive conversation (4:6).
- C. Commendations and greetings (4:7-18).

