

The Colossian believer's were being strangled by a combination of many things:

Jewish legalism, Oriental philosophy, pagan astrology, Mysticism, asceticism, and then there was the gospel according to Paul.

1. Gnosticism - was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism
2. Gnosticism is a very abstract mystery religion, it grew out of the philosophical question, **"why is there evil in this world if creation was made by a holy God?"**
Basic tenants - * Matter is evil.
*A holy God could not come into contact with evil matter.
*So there had to be a series of "emanations" from God to his creation.
*There is a powerful spirit world that used material things to attack mankind.
3. Gnosticism is from the Greek word *gnosis*. The Gnostics were the people who were **"in the know"** when it came to the deep things of God. (an agnostic is one who does not know.)
4. **Gnosticism promised people such a close union with God that they would achieve a "spiritual perfection."**
5. Spiritual fulfillment could be theirs only if they entered into the teachings and ceremonies prescribed.
6. **There was also a "full knowledge" a spiritual depth, that only the initiated could enjoy.**
7. This "wisdom" would release them from earthly things and put them in touch with heavenly things.
8. **They also believed in a form of astrology, believing that angelic beings ruled heavenly bodies and influence affairs on earth. (Grk mythology)**

Added to these eastern speculations was a form of Jewish legalism-

- The rite of circumcision was helpful to spiritual development.
- The Old Testament law, especially the dietary laws, were useful in attaining spiritual perfection.
- Definite rules and regulations told them what was evil and what was good.

Since matter was evil, they had to find some way to control their own human natures in this pursuit of perfection.

Two lines of thought were adopted.

- Control the human nature through rigid discipline and asceticism.
- The second school of thought was that since matter is evil. It was permissible to engage in all kinds of sin.

All this resulted in the belief and teaching that...

- Jesus was merely one of God's many "emanations" and not the very son of God.
- Jesus was holy therefore he didn't really have a body made of matter
- The incarnation didn't really happen, God had to keep his distance from us.
- Many of these false teachers claimed that they were not denying the Christian faith, but only lifting it to a higher level.
- They didn't deny the prominence of Jesus Christ in the religious scene-the Christian revelation of Jesus Christ was a part of a total religious system or philosophy, but not the center of it. He was not preeminent.

In Colossians 1:1 - 2:3 Paul has gone to great lengths to remind us (the Colossians) of the nature and work of Jesus Christ, and it's implications to us today as well as in our future. We can have great hope because our life is hid in Christ. His work has secured our present and future. He now lives in us. This changes everything! We can live in freedom, joy, hope and abundance because of Jesus Christ.

At this point in his discussion (2:4-15) Paul says... Col. 2:3 **I say this in order that (*I'm telling you this so that*)** Paul is about to explain why he has gone to such great lengths to establish Christ's identity, work and preeminence in all that has preceded this passage...

That no one may² delude, deceive you with [to cheat /deceive by false reasoning or reckoning= calculation]

³persuasive fine-sounding argument. [this is a rare word which means - speech adapted to persuade then deceptively lead astray (contrast with what Paul didn't do -see I Corinthians 2:4)]

Understand this... The hope and actual life we can experience in Christ will not be easily realized. Not because we have to work for it, but because someone or thing is going to try to deceive you and steal it from you. We will have to stand strong in what is true!

The battle to believe who you are in Christ will come in the form of “persuasive fine-sounding argument.” Yes, it will be subtle. Just as the Colossians, you will not be exempt from such attacks. Paul uses military language in verse 5 in cheering for them...

[5] For even though I am absent from you in body, nevertheless I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing (delighted) to see your good ⁴discipline [=⁴your order; Paul pictures a war going on and they are holding “the line”; *discipline* here refers to a military line that was unbroken and still intact. A few stragglers had gone over to the Gnostics, but there had been no panic, no breach in the line]

and the ⁵stability (firmness, steadfastness) of your faith in Christ. [⁵the solid part of the line which can and does stand the attack of the Gnostics is our faith— see 1 Peter 5:9; 1 John 5:4-5]

So Paul will ^a)challenge us to action (6-8), as well as try (again!) to ^b)put some substance and clarity into what Christ has done in and for those who trust in Him (9-15).

[6] As you therefore ¹have received ²Christ Jesus the Lord,

Paul is about to encourage them to continue on in “**faith** in Christ”. Their **faith** has protected them and enabled them to experience Christ’s power and grace in their lives. But that faith is not just “blind faith” or “faith without substance”; its faith in Jesus Christ. So he prefaces this encouragement to continue growing in their faith in Christ by reminding them a)How they received Christ and b)what about Him they were believing and trusting in (believing and trusting is what “receiving” is).

1 How did they receive (learn) Christ Jesus the Lord?

Meaning, what were they taught about him?

“you received (learned) the Christ (the Messiah), who was Jesus the Lord^{v6}.

You were taught right(just as you were instructed) 2:7.” To learn (see also 1:7) from Epaphras and others; same sense as in 1 Thess 4:1; Phil 4:9 They were taught all these things about Christ from others who had reached them. But it would be challenged constantly.

Paul counters the two forms of Gnostic heresy about the person of Christ:

To the Docetic Gnostics he recognizes the historical Jesus in his actual humanity **he was 100% man with a body.**

To the Cerinthian Gnostics he recognizes this historical Jesus as the **Lord and prince, the messiah – from God and God.**

2 How did they receive Christ Jesus the Lord?

Meaning, in what manner did you receive him?

By faith. Implied as he continues on...

go on ³walking in Him (continue to live in him), [7] having been firmly ⁴rooted and now being ⁵built up in Him and ⁶established, strengthened in (or by) your faith,

⁷just as you were instructed, and overflowing with ⁸gratitude (thanksgiving). They were filled with gratitude or Thanksgiving, specifically because they did not have to live in confusion to the Gnostic

teachers because of what they were instructed about Christ. They were grateful, full of hope and thanksgiving because they had been instructed correctly (in truth) concerning the reality of Jesus Christ.

[8] **See to it** ¹(forewarning - take heed, beware, look out, watch out, cuidado!)

that no one ²**takes you captive** [carries you off like spoils of war – How would that happen?]

through his ³**philosophy** [³*dia tes philosophias* the only use of the word in the New Testament and employed by Paul because the Gnostics were fond of it.

SEE 1 Timothy 6:20-21 “ O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-- [21] which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.”]

and ⁴**empty deception** [trickery - The philosophy is bad because it is intended to deceive]

according to the ⁵**tradition of men**, [*that which is passed on*. Colorless word may be good or bad. Here it is referring to the foolish theories of the Gnostics.]

according to the ⁶**elementary principles of the world**, [*rudiments*= essentials, fundamentals - a word for anything in a row or series, like the letters of the alphabet, the materials of the universe(2 Peter 3:10, 12) periodic tables etc. Most likely referring to the elements of Jewish ceremonial training(Acts 15:10; Galatians 4:3, 9), and the unfounded arguments of the Gnostic philosophers with all their rules of life.

⁷**rather than according to Christ.** (The Message - **which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.**) Christ is the yardstick by which to

measure philosophy, and all phases of human knowledge.

The Gnostics were measuring Christ by their philosophy as many people are doing today. This is backwards. Christ is the measure for all human knowledge since he is the creator and the sustainer of the universe.

[9] **For** ⁸**in Jesus Christ all the fullness of Deity dwells(lives) in bodily form**, [this is the reason for the preceding claim for Christ as the measure of human knowledge. Paul here asserts that “all the fullness of the Godhead”, not just certain aspects, dwell in Christ in bodily form. The fullness of the Godhead was in Christ before the incarnation(John 1:1, 18; Philippians 2:6) and during the incarnation(John 1:14, 18; 1 John 1:1-3). It was the son of God who came in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7).

Paul here disposes of the Docetic theory that Jesus had no human body

Paul here disposes of the Cerinthian theory that there was a separation between the man Jesus and the ageless Christ.

Paul asserts plainly the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, in bodily, physical form.]

[10] ⁹**and in Him you have been made complete** (just as Christ possesses the fullness of the godhead; so you have been given fullness in Christ (John 1:16; Ephesians 1:23); you possess the fullness of Christ),

and He is the head over all rule(power) and authority; There is no other place for Christ. He is first in time and rank. All rule and authority comes after Christ, whether angels, ages, kings, whatever.

The message-

Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. [10] When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.

Well its one thing to claim that Christ expresses all the fullness of God, and quite another thing to claim that I have the fullness of Christ, that I am complete in him.

How'd that happen?

How were we made complete, or how did we come by the fullness of Christ?

Paul attempts to unpack this mystery of “*Christ in you the hope of glory*”, or as we call it

“*Salvation*” (which means so much more than avoiding hell and getting a pass into heaven; it means we have the life of Christ, we are in intimate relationship with the Godhead, we can know God, God not only fully accepts us and is pleased with us, but wants to be one with us as he is with the Spirit and Son (John 17). It also means we will be transformed and glorified.)

He begins by relating to something they are very familiar with, especially the Jewish people, by using the illustration of circumcision. Circumcision was the initiatory rite that placed one into the promise that God made with Abraham (known as the Abrahamic covenant).

Later when he uses baptism to explain how we got “into Christ” he will give the spiritual interpretation to circumcision (which was for descendents of Abraham) see Romans 4:10-12; Galatians 3:25-29.

[11] and in Jesus Christ ¹you were also circumcised with a circumcision ²made without hands, [circumcision is used here as a metaphor to show how we came to be “in Christ” and he in us, as in Romans 2:22-29 “ [28] For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. [29] But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and *circumcision is that which is of the heart*, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

[Although circumcision was a physical act, done by people with their hands, the true significance or meaning of it was not in that physical act. It was to represent a state of the heart- **one of faith, trust and obedience**. Hence “*not made with hands*” means it’s not a physical rite at its core – but rather the kind of circumcision that God/Christ accomplishes, that of cutting off the “flesh” (the old nature) and transforming the heart. See the references to the circumcision of the heart:
Leviticus 26:41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies-- or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,
Deut. 10:16 "Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more.
Deut. 30:6 "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.
Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done-- burn with no one to quench it.
Philip. 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,
Romans 3:28-30 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.]

³in the removal of the body of the flesh (sinful nature) [removal =in the putting off- like taking off an old garment (the fleshly body).]

by the circumcision ⁴of Christ (with the circumcision done by Christ); the kind of circumcision that belongs to Christ, that of the heart!

Stay on track with what Paul is trying to explain...

How were we made complete? or How did we come by the fullness of Christ?

He says its sorta like circumcision to the hebrew- being one of God’s people/children (represented by circumcision) even for Abrahams descendents was always to be an issue of the heart, that of faith/trust resulting in obedience. This is the spiritual interpretation to circumcision: God (in Christ) cut off our fleshly, sinful nature, at the cross, which leaves us holy as he is. And we are placed into his promise of life (another facet of the Abrahamic Covenant)

He tries to explain this mystery again, but in different terms (with another illustration).

This time he uses the illustration of baptism as an initiatory rite into Christ/God (Baptism was another familiar custom to anyone in that time and place -not only Christians, but pagans as well).

Again, as in circumcision, Paul is not saying that the new life in Christ is caused or created by the act of water baptism, any more than it did in circumcision. That is grossly to misunderstand him. The Gnostics and the Judaizers were sacramentalists (=certain rites that we perform required for salvation), but not so with Paul.

[12] ⁵having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him

[used also in *Romans 6:4* “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

Paul creates a vivid picture to help us understand something that happened in the spirit realm by God’s power or work alone (it was done without hands – without our work).

He creates this vivid picture by using the word *baptizo*, from *bapto* (to dip, to wash, plunge, place into).

The image is this – Upon trusting Christ one is placed into (plunged into) Christ – and dies with him, and is buried with him, and is resurrected with him (to newness of life now and glorification later).

The question is asked – How or who baptized me (dipped me, placed me) into Christ?

Scripture is clear that it was/is the Holy Spirit that does this work. See John 3:1-15; Mark 1:8; 1 Cor 15:45; Acts 1:5; Acts 10:44-48; Romans 15:16; Eph 1:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:1-2, 12

The next question that arises is – Is this baptism that Paul refers to here in Colossians Water baptism which is symbolic of Spiritual baptism, or is it referring to actual spiritual baptism (which is Salvation, the HS placing us into Christ) ?

My interpretation and belief is yes. It could be both.

1. Water is not mentioned, and as such, the HS could be referencing the work that he does. I believe this is the case in Romans 6 when Paul talks of baptism. And this is clearly what Peter is referring to in 1 Peter 3:18-22.
2. By the same token, baptism is commonly referred to in the context of water and doesn’t necessarily need the clarification of “water”, its often implied by the context. (Hence I lean more to the previous interpretation because I feel the context warrants it more than this view.) Even so it is commonly understood by many that Paul is referring to the symbolic act of Baptism, post believing in Christ, as a picture of a spiritual reality already experienced.

through faith ⁶in the working (power) of God, who raised Him from the dead. *energeia*

God had power to raise Christ from the dead, and he has the power (energy) to give us new life in Christ by faith.

[13] And when you were

⁷dead in your transgressions (sins, wrong doings) and the moral death as in Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2:1,5. A lapse or miss step Hebrews 6:6; Matthew 6:14; Romans 5:15-18; Gal 6:1

⁸uncircumcision of your flesh (sinful nature), He(God). Dead in your trespasses and your alienation from God, of which the un-circumcision of your flesh was a symbol(Abbott). “the uncircumcision” used merely in a metaphorical sense.

⁹ **made you alive together with Him(Christ), having forgiven us all our transgressions,**
found only here and in Ephesians 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us
alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

[14] having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees (the written code, with its regulations) against us and which was hostile (stood opposed) to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

[15] When He (God) had disarmed (*despoiled*) the rulers (powers) and authorities, *gk =*
two problems arise here- Is God or Christ referred to? What is meant by “the principalities and powers”? scholars differ radically, I believe God as still the subject and “the powers” to be angels such as the Gnostics worshiped (this would include Satan and a 3rd of the angles that had rebelled and vied for self rule with Satan. Hence, it would also include the power of the world system propagated by Satan). The verb translated *disarmed* is a verb with differing of opinions as to its meaning – some claim it means “*having put off from himself.*” Ie- at the cross Jesus got the rulers and authorities of his back(pretty loose trans!) Others believe it means “despoil”. That God stripped them of their power (or influence) through His Son Jesus Christ as well as their power or authority over those who are in his Son. In the cross of Christ God showed his power openly without aid or help of angels.

He made a public display (spectacle) of them, *He made a show of them, he made an example out of them.* We would say, “to go public with” - JC didn’t secure our salvation in private, he went public with it for all to see.

¹² **having triumphed over them through Him, JC (by the cross).** ¹²*Triumphing over them on it.*
occurs only twice in the New Testament-“to lead in triumph” 2 Corinthians 2:14. Here in this text it means to celebrate a triumph (which is the usual sense). It is derived from a hymn sung in a festival procession and is akin to the Latin *triumphus* (our triumph), a triumphal procession of victorious Roman generals. God wanted a complete triumph over all the angelic agencies.

The Message [15] He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.

Once again Paul has sought to convince us of the preeminence of Christ and His work; it is our hope, our security, our boast, our marvel and cause for adoration.

Christ is the yardstick by which to measure philosophy, and all phases of human knowledge. The Gnostics were measuring Christ by their philosophy as many people are doing today. This is backwards. Christ is the measure for all human knowledge since he is the creator and the sustainer of the universe.

We will be tempted every day to believe otherwise about who Jesus Christ is, what he has done what he is doing and what he will do. Since we know of Him and his work primarily through the written word, that too will be put on trial over and over in an attempt to “persuade you” to disbelieve the news of Christ.

Will you see to it that no one takes you captive?