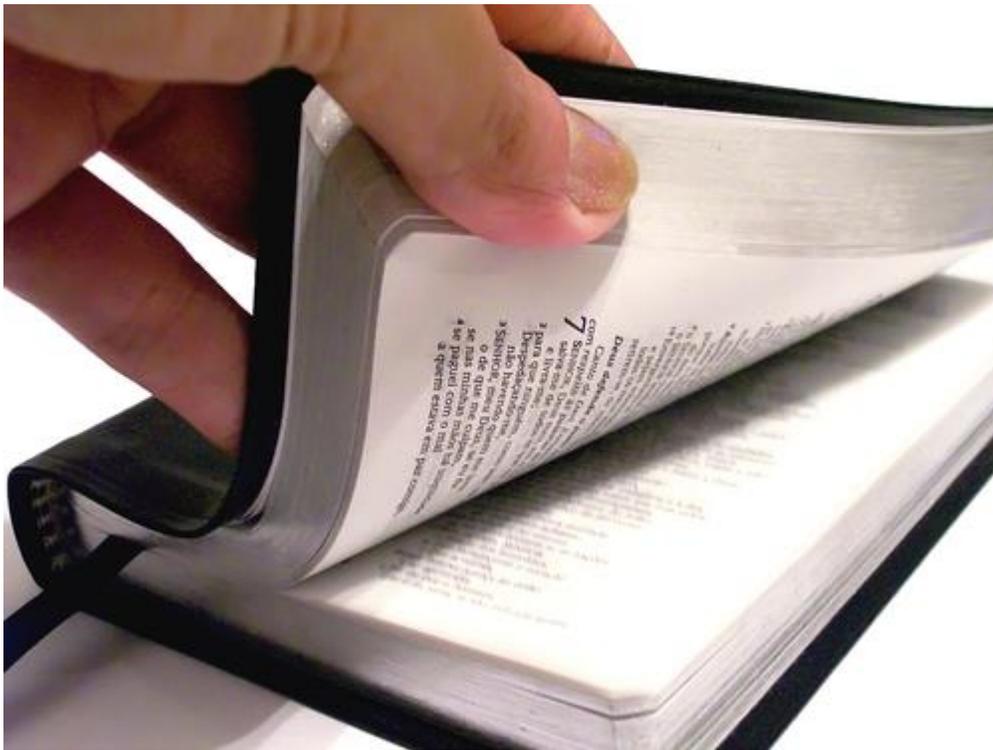


COLOSSIANS

A Study Outline



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October 31, 2014

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I. INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

A. WHO WROTE IT?

1. Apostle Paul
2. Along with Timothy (1:1)

B. TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

1. The letter was written to the church in Colosse (1:2)
2. Paul never visited Colosse so far as is known (2:1)
3. Colosse was known for being one of the clothing and dye centers of the world
4. The church at Colosse was healthy and connected:
 - It was connected to Jesus Christ through faith (1:4; 2:5)
 - It was connected to all Christians through love (1:4)
 - It was connected to others around the world through the gospel (1:6)
5. The church at Colosse was primarily Gentile (1:27)
 - The phrase "*and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior*" is characteristically associated with Gentiles (1:21)
 - The sins listed in 3:5-7 are characteristically associated with Gentiles
6. Epaphras was a Christian preacher who spread the Gospel to his fellow Colossian citizens (Col. 1:7; 4:12). When Paul was a prisoner in Rome, Epaphras came to him with a favorable account of the Church at Colossae. He remained with Paul in Rome and was, in a sense, his "fellow prisoner" (Philemon 1:23).

C. WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

1. The exact date is uncertain, but it was probably around A.D. 60-63
2. The letter was most likely written from Rome by Paul (1:1; 4:10) when he was in prison (4:10)
3. Paul was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus the Ephesian) into the forbidden area of the temple in Jerusalem. It was a lie. His accusers saw Paul walking with Trophimus in Jerusalem and assumed he had taken him into the forbidden parts of the temple (Acts 21—28).
4. Paul was arrested and after a series of trials pointed out that he was a Roman citizen
5. Prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon (AD 60-62)
 - His "prison" was probably a rented house where he could receive visitors (Acts 28:30)
 - Paul had been delivered to the Praetorian Guard to await trial before the Emperor (Nero, AD 54-68)
 - Paul is twice referred to as having been "bound in chains," where the Greek word *halusis* is used (Acts 28:20; Eph. 6:20).
 - The *halusis* was a short length of chain by which the wrist of a prisoner was bound to the wrist of a soldier who was guarding him, so that escape was impossible

D. WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

1. To encourage the church in Colosse to continue in their faithfulness in Christ, and their love for all believers (1:4)
2. To refute heretical teachings about Jesus Christ that had been causing confusion among the Christians in Colosse
 - It attacked the supremacy and deity of Jesus Christ (1:15, 19)
 - It attacked Jesus Christ's role in creation (1:16, 17)
 - It attacked the humanity of Jesus Christ (1:22; 2:9)
 - It attacked Jesus Christ's power over "authorities and powers" (demons) saying that much more than Jesus Christ is needed to defeat them (1:16; 2:10; 2:15)

E. WHAT'S THE MAIN MESSAGE?

1. Christ is Lord over all creation, including the invisible realm
2. He secured redemption for his people, enabling them to participate with him in his death resurrection, and fullness

II. PAUL'S PRAYER AND PETITION 1:1-14**A. INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)**

1. Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus, and his brother in the Lord, Timothy (1:1)
 - Paul would frequently establish his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God since he was not one of the original twelve disciples.
 - *By the will of God* means he was appointed by God, not self-appointed.
2. He addresses the letter to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse, and greets them with grace and peace from God the Father.

B. PAUL'S THANKFULNESS TO GOD (1:3-8)

1. Paul's thankfulness for their faith in Christ (1:4)
2. Paul's thankfulness for their love for all Christians (1:4)
3. Paul's thankfulness for the spreading of the gospel around the world (1:6)

C. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR HIS FELLOW CHRISTIANS AT COLOSSE (1:9-14)

1. He prays that they would know God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9)
2. He prays that they might live a worthy life that pleases the Lord (1:10)
3. He prays that they would bear fruit through good works (1:10a)
4. He prays that they would grow in the knowledge of God (1:10b)
5. He prays that they would be strengthened with power so they might have endurance and patience (1:11)
6. He prays that they would joyfully give thanks to the Father for rescuing them and bringing them into the kingdom of his Son, whom he loves (1:12-14)

III. THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST 1:15—2:23

A. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST (1:15-23)

1. Notice not only what Paul wrote, but also *why* he chose his subjects.
 - Gnostic thinking...Jesus was not God
 - Gnostics believed that salvation is obtained by knowledge, specifically a "secret" knowledge, not through Jesus Christ
 - Salvation provided an escape from evil conditions of fleshly existence by knowledge of the secret incantations by which one could climb through 365 heavens
2. The Person of Christ (1:15)
 - Firstborn: does not mean Jesus was a created being (Gnosticism, Arianism)
 - Firstborn means that Jesus Christ holds the highest position of honor in the universe, much like the firstborn male child in the ANE holds a position of honor; son of a reigning monarch
3. Christ the Creator (1:16-17)
 - False teachers were teaching that Jesus was a created being, not the Creator
 - Three views of creation (no god, a god, the God)
 - Creation View #1: (No God). The world just happened by chance (Humanist View)
 - Creation View #2: (A god). A god did create the world, but he is far off and removed from the world (Gnostic view, close to Deist view)
 - Creation View #3: (The God) God himself created the world in the person of Jesus Christ. All three members of the Trinity were involved in the creation (Christian view)
4. Christ the Head of the Church (1:18-19)
 - The church is an organism, not an organization
 - Cut off the head of a living organism and it dies
 - As head of the church Christ controls it, guides it, and sustains it
5. Christ the Reconciler of All Things (1:20-23)
 - Reconcile = to restore friendship; to make a way for man, who is an enemy of God, to be restored into fellowship with God (Rom. 5:10-11)
 - This truth was in direct conflict with Gnostic views who believed "reconciliation" (becoming super spirits) was through a knowledge of secret incantations

B. The Minister Who Tirelessly Labors for the Church (1:24-29)

1. Minister: (Gr. *diakonos*), one who serves Jesus Christ
 - Paul used all his energy to bring others to Christ (1:28-29)
 - Minister: Not just professional clergy. God called every believer to be a minister (1 Peter 4:10-11)
 - The mystery now disclosed (1:26-27) is that the gospel was not only for the Jews, but for everyone (Barclay 126)
 - MYSTERY: In a way Paul was countering the Gnostics who claimed to have a "secret knowledge" known only to them

C. The Distinguishing Marks of a Mature Church (2:1-5)

1. They are encouraged in heart

2. They are united in love
3. They have the full riches of complete understanding
4. They know the mystery of God, namely, Christ

D. FREEDOM FROM HUMAN REGULATIONS THROUGH LIFE WITH CHRIST (2:6-23)

1. Heresy is based on human error
 - Hollow and deceptive philosophy¹ (2:8a)
 - Human tradition² (2:8b)
 - Basic principles of this world³ (2:8c)
2. In contrast to deceptive philosophy, Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God (2:9)
3. Christ vs. False Religion (2:11-12)
 - Judaism: Christians must become Jews first; through circumcision, ritual bath, and obedience to the law
 - Gnosticism: Salvation is attained only through a secret knowledge
4. Christ vs. Man's Idea of Sin, the Law, and Evil Spirits (2:13-15)
 - Man's idea of sin and law
 - View #1: You must earn forgiveness through your performance—the law
 - View #2: Sin does not exist
 - Christ's idea of sin and law
 - Fact #1: The law was cancelled, nailed to the cross (Matt. 5:17)
 - Fact #2: He forgave us all our sins
 - Fact #3: In contrast to basic principles of this world, Jesus Christ has victory over powers and authorities⁴
5. Christ vs. Rules, Ritual, and Spiritism (2:16-17)
 - Judaizers were teaching that one pleases God by eating and drinking the right foods and by keeping certain religious rituals and holy days
 - Paul cautions them that in contrast to these heresies, don't let anyone hassle you:
 - Because of what you eat or drink (2:16a)
 - Because you do not celebrate certain religious festivals centered on the New Moon, or a Sabbath Day⁵ (2:16b)
 - Because you know that these OT practices were a foreshadowing of things to come, namely Jesus Christ (2:17)
6. False teachers (2:18-23)
 - Delight in a false humility⁶ (2:18a, 23)
 - Worship angels⁷ (2:18b)
 - Gnostic teachers were claiming that God was far away and could be approached only through various levels of angels which had to be worshipped⁸
 - Jews traditionally believed angels were the mediators who gave the Law to Moses
 - Are arrogant⁹ and are not connected to Jesus Christ as head of the church (2:18c-19)
 - Teach that one must submit to man-made rules (2:20-23)¹⁰ such as don't handle or touch this, or don't taste that (possibly referring to Gnostic stoicism)
 - Practicing a self-imposed worship¹¹ (2:23a)

→ Treating your bodies harshly¹² but still not able to restrain sensual appetites (2:23b)

IV. THE POSITION AND PRACTICE OF THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST 3:1—4:18

A. THE BELIEVER'S NEW POSITION (3:1-4)

1. The believer is positioned in God's eyes as being raised with Christ and is, therefore, to be upward focused¹³ (3:1-2)
 - "Have been raised" (past tense). God considers believers as having died and risen with Christ.
 - Example: It is like David who was already king of Israel (past tense) even though he was hiding from Saul and not yet on the throne.
 - Example: The football game score is 75 to 0 with only 5 seconds to play. Even though the game is still in process the winning team can celebrate victory.
 - God reckons, credits, and counts it so.¹⁴
 - Because of Christ, up from the grave we arose.
 - Upward focused: no longer concerned with trivial passing things of earth.
 - The Christian is to view everything from the background of eternity, and no longer live as if the world was all that mattered (e.g. giving rather than getting, serving rather than ruling, forgiving rather than avenging).
2. The believer is positioned as being hidden in Christ (3:3)
 - Hidden: concealed, safe.
 - Like something protected and secure in a Swiss bank safe deposit box.
3. The believer is positioned in readiness for Christ's return (3:4)
 - From God's view, believers are already "cleared for take-off" (1 Thess. 4:16-17)
 - We are to act in the present so we are fully prepared for Christ's future return (see 1 John 2:28)

B. THE BELIEVER'S NEW PRACTICES (3:5—4:6)

1. Definition: To practice is to perform an activity or exercise a skill repeatedly or regularly in order to improve or maintain one's proficiency.
2. The practice of putting off the harmful desires of the old self (3:5-11; cf. Eph. 4:22)
 - Putting off the sins of sexual attitude and behavior:¹⁵ These include sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed (3:5-7)
 - Putting off sins of speech: Rid yourselves also of anger, rage, malice (vicious of mind¹⁶), slander, filthy language, and lying to each other (3:8-9)
3. The practice of putting on the new self (3:10-14; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24)
 - The new self is being continually renewed as one learns more of Christ and his work (3:10-11)
 - The new self is to be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness (3:12-13)
 - The most important of these virtues is the kind of love that brings unity among believers (3:14)
4. The practice of thriving within the church (3:15-17)

- By making choices that promote peace (3:15)
 - By using God's Word as your standard (3:16a)
 - By singing hymns and spiritual songs to show gratitude to God (3:16b)
 - By always giving thanks to God (3:17)
5. The practice of maintaining a healthy household (3:18-4:1)
- When wives submit to their husbands (3:18; See also Eph. 5:22-23; Gal. 3:28). This does not mean that wives are to become a doormat. In a marriage relationship, both husband and wife are called to submit. For the wife, this means willingly following her husband's leadership in Christ.¹⁷
 - When husbands love their wives and are not harsh with them (3:19). This means the husband is to put aside his own interests in order to care for his wife. Submission is rarely a problem in homes where both partners have a strong relationship with Christ and where each is concerned for the happiness of the other.¹⁸
 - When children obey their parents (3:20)
 - When fathers don't exasperate or frustrate their children (3:21)
 - When slaves genuinely obey their masters (3:22)
 - When whatever is done, is done as working for the Lord Jesus Christ who shows no favoritism (3:23-25)
 - When masters treat their slaves fairly, knowing that they themselves are accountable to God in heaven (4:1)
6. The practice of devoting yourselves to prayer-- that God would open doors to the gospel message, and that it would be proclaimed clearly (4:2-4)
7. The practice of making the most of opportunities to share the gospel (4:5-6a)
8. The practice of gracious speech which brings out the best in others (4:6b Msg.)

C. FINAL GREETINGS (4:7-18)

1. Tychicus and Onesimus will bring news to you (4:7-9)
- Tychicus, a faithful friend of Paul, and a man distinguished for his integrity and fidelity and who traveled with Onesimus back to Colosse carrying Paul's letters
 - Onesimus was most likely a runaway slave who belonged to Philemon of Colosse
2. Greetings from Paul's fellow companions (4:10-18)
- Aristarchus was one of Paul's traveling companions
 - Mark also called "John Mark"-- John (Jewish), Mark (Marcus-Roman), author of the Gospel of Mark
 - Justus, about which not much is known
 - Epaphras probably founded the church in Colosse
 - Timothy (1:1) Paul's son in the Lord (1:1)
 - Luke a faithful friend to Paul, being a physician he may have provided medical care to Paul
 - Demas, a friend of Paul who eventually deserted him and returned to Thessalonica because he loved the things of the world more (II Tim 4:10)
 - Nympha hosted a house church, probably in Laodicea

→ Encourage Archippus--a Christian in Colosse, and a champion in the Gospel whom Paul encourages him to remain strong in his zeal and fidelity

V. APPENDIX: HERESIES OF THE EARLY CHURCH PERIOD

Scholars have long been puzzled over the precise nature of destructive teaching facing the Colossians. Following is a brief description of those heresies that plagued the early church during the first three centuries. Some of these may have been in ascendancy during the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians.

A. GNOSTICISM

One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed several important errors:

1. The human body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good.
2. Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge (the Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnosis*, hence Gnosticism).
3. Christ's true humanity was denied in two ways:
 - Some said that Christ only seemed to have a body, a view called Docetism, from the Greek *dokeo* ("to seem")
 - Others said that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died, a view called Cerinthianism, after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus. This view is the background of much of 1 John (see 1:1; 2:22; 4:2–3 and notes).
4. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the Colossians (see Col 2:21,23 and notes).
5. Paradoxically, this dualism also led to licentiousness. The reasoning was that, since matter—and not the breaking of God's law (1 Jn 3:4)—was considered evil, breaking his law was of no moral consequence.
6. The Gnosticism addressed in the NT was an early form of the heresy, not the intricately developed system of the second and third centuries. In addition to that seen in Colossians and in John's letters, acquaintance with early Gnosticism is reflected in 1,2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter and perhaps 1 Corinthians.¹⁹
7. William Barclay outlines at least four contrasts between Gnostic tenets and true Christianity²⁰
 - Jesus was hostile to God. In the Gnostic view, the creator was not God but someone who was in opposition to him, and the world did not belong to God but to that being who opposed him. In contrast, Paul emphasizes that God did create the world, and that his agent was not a hostile emanation, but Jesus Christ his Son (Col. 1:16)
 - Jesus was not unique. According to Gnostic beliefs, Jesus was not unique. Instead they saw Jesus as one of many emanations between a holy God and evil matter. Paul, in contrast, stresses that in Jesus all the fullness of God dwells (Col. 1:19); that in Jesus Christ there is the fullness of the godhead in bodily form (Col. 2:9). Jesus is, therefore, completely unique and that in him is there is the whole of God.
 - Jesus did not have a physical body. Some forms of Gnosticism held that Jesus could not have had a physical body because matter was altogether evil. Jesus must have been a spiritual phantom. See *Docetism*. In contrast, Paul states that *God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body* (Col. 1:22).
 - Man must get pass barriers in order to get to God. Gnostics taught that man must find his way to God. Before the spirit could rise to God it had to get the barrier of each emanation

using special knowledge and special passwords. In contrast, Jesus is supreme because through him reconciliation (reuniting) is made possible (1:20-23).

B. DOCETISM

1. Docetism, taken from the Greek word *dokein*, means "to seem."
2. An opinion especially associated with the Gnostics that Jesus had no human body and only seemed to have died on the cross.
3. They would say that in reality Jesus cast no shadow and left no footprints; he was God but not man. They implied that Jesus was never hungry, or thirsty, nor did he suffer and die.

C. ARIANISM

1. While this fundamentals of view may have been developing in the first century it was vaulted into popularity by Arius (ca. 256-336), a Greek who was a Christian theologian active in Alexandria and who was declared a heretic for his doctrines about God, which came to be known as Arianism.
2. The doctrines of Arius, denied that Jesus was of the same substance as God and holding instead that he was only the highest of created beings, was viewed as heretical by most Christian churches.
3. Arians taught that Jesus was somehow created by the Father as the first and highest human being, but not as God.

D. ASCETICISM

1. From the Greek: *áskēsis*, "exercise" or "training" describes a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from various sorts of worldly pleasures often with the aim of pursuing religious and spiritual goals.
2. Some forms of Christianity and the Indian religions (including yoga) teach salvation and liberation and involve a process of mind-body transformation effected by exercising restraint with respect to actions of body, speech, and mind.
3. The founders and earliest practitioners of these religions (e.g. Buddhism, Jainism, and the Christian desert fathers) lived extremely austere lifestyles, refraining from sensual pleasures and the accumulation of material wealth.
4. This is to be understood not as an eschewal of the enjoyment of life, but a recognition that spiritual and religious goals are impeded by such indulgence.

E. ANTINOMIANISM²¹

1. A term later coined by Martin Luther, maintains that Christians are freed from the moral law by virtue of grace as set forth in the gospel.
2. As such they are free to indulge in any of the physical appetites to any degree. They therefore gave license to bodily abuse, whether gluttony, adultery, homosexuality, or drunkenness.
3. Some even encouraged such acts of indulgence to stress the freedom one has in grace.
4. Contemporary Evangelical theologian J.I. Packer defines five strains of Antinomianism:²²
 - Dualistic Antinomianism (Gnostic). This view sees salvation as for the soul only, and bodily behavior as irrelevant both to God's interest and the soul's health.
 - Spirit-centered Antinomianism. Puts such trust in the Holy Spirit's inward prompting as to

deny any need to be taught by the law how to live. Freedom from the law as a way of salvation is assumed to bring with it freedom from the law as a guide to conduct.

- Christ-centered Antinomianism. Argues that God sees no sin in believers, because they are in Christ, who kept the law for them, and therefore what they actually do makes no difference, provided that they keep believing.
- Dispensational Antinomianism. Denies that biblical law is God's direct command and affirms that the Bible's imperative statements trigger the Word of the Spirit, which when it comes may or may not correspond exactly to what is written.
- Situationist Antinomianism. Says that a motive and intention of love is all that God now requires of Christians, and the commands of the Decalogue and other ethical parts of scripture, for all that they are ascribed to God directly, are mere rules of thumb for loving, rules that love may at times disregard.

END NOTES

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- 1 The phrase "hollow and deceptive philosophy" was probably referring to Gnosticism which was based in part on the Greek philosophies of dualism. Dualism asserts that physical (material) things are intrinsically evil and spiritual things are intrinsically good. Such philosophies would not accept the fact that Jesus had a physical body, or that he was truly God in the flesh.
 - 2 "Human tradition" was probably referring to Jewish oral law, a tedious system of "fence laws" (gezeirah) designed to prevent Jews from breaking the written Mosaic Law. Such a system resulted in a performance-based religion which put a heavy yoke on Jews. These human traditions implied that a right standing with God is attained only through keeping the oral law, not through Jesus Christ.
 - 3 The phrase "basic principles" in 2:8 is based on the Greek word *stoicheia* which can mean a row of things, or the elemental spirits of the world, especially the spirits of the stars and planets (Barclay, 95-96).
 - 4 "Powers and authorities" could be a phrase referring to: a) demonic powers, b) gods of powerful nations, c) a false view of angels as mediators of the Mosaic Law (2:18), or d) the Roman government.
 - 5 Both Jews and Gnostics drew up lists of days centered on yearly feasts, monthly new moons, and weekly Sabbaths, on which certain things must be done and certain things which must not be done (Barclay, 145).
 - 6 "False humility" (NIV) may also be translated asceticism (ESV), self-abasement (NAU), or self-denial (NLT). This heresy most likely stems from the ascetic view that one must punish the body (evil), and stress the spirit (good), a concept developed from the Greek philosophy of dualism.
 - 7 The worship of angels involves invoking angels for help and protection from evil spirits. Only Jesus Christ can do this (2:15). Gnostics too believed in all kinds of intermediaries.
 - 8 See Revelation 22:8-9 regarding the prohibition of worshipping angels.
 - 9 Gnostics believed they had a special knowledge (gnosis) that caused them to feel superior to others.
 - 10 Man-made rules. See 2:8b.
 - 11 "Self-imposed worship" may be referring to Jewish oral laws (gezeirah) which stipulated how one should, and should not worship. These oral laws eventually became more important than the written law.
 - 12 Probably another reference to asceticism. See 2:18a.
 - 13 Or establish your life's priorities around what is eternal, not what is temporal.
 - 14 Alpha-Omega Ministries, Colossians: The Teacher's Outline Study, p.131
 - 15 Life Application Bible (NIV), Tyndale House Publishers, 1991, p. 2167. Also, Barclay points out that in Paul's day the sexual appetite was regarded as a thing to be gratified, not to be controlled (Barclay, 151).
 - 16 Barclay, 153
 - 17 Life Application Bible (NIV), Tyndale House Publishers, 1991, p. 2139
 - 18 Life Application Bible (NIV), Tyndale House Publishers, 1991, p. 2139. Barclay points out that under Jewish law, a woman was a thing, the possession of her husband, just like his house, or his flock, or his material goods (Barclay, 161).
 - 19 Biblica, 1 John. January 14, 2014. <<http://www.biblica.com/en-us/bible/online-bible/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-1-john/>>. Accessed September 29, 2014.
 - 20 Barclay, 114-115.
 - 21 Also called Libertinism (Acts 6:9 KJV).
 - 22 Antinomianism. Wikipedia quoting J.I. Packer, December 2011. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinomianism>>

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