

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 230

Colossians 2:9-10

August 25, 2018

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

As we saw in our previous episode, a lot of theology can be packed into just a handful of verses. Colossians 2:6-8 leads to the focus of this episode, Colossians 2:9-10. These two verses are the pivotal content for Paul's response to the Colossian heresy, the Jewish-mystical elevation of supernatural beings ("angels") as spiritual authorities and points of reference for reverence.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, episode 230, Colossians 2:9-10. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

MH: Pretty good. Still fondly reminiscing about the Naked Bible Conference.

TS: Oh, I know...

MH: That's still sticking with me, just feedback I've been getting, and email, just overwhelmingly a super event. It was awesome.

TS: Yeah, I appreciate everybody's email to me, thanking me, and all the love that I got at the conference and later via email. I think it went as smoothly as it could have gone out of the gate for our first one. I'm pretty happy with how everything turned out. We had a couple of hiccups at the beginning of the livestream, but finished strong. We got the last five hours. That's about as good as it gets. But I learned a ton, and it's only going to be better the next time.

MH: Yeah, and we're already... Obviously, we're not going to say anything now, because really we have nothing substantive to say, but we're having conversations already about next year.

TS: Oh yeah, the planning has already started. [laughter] It started before this one actually ended.

MH: The wheels didn't come to a grinding halt after this one. The wheels are turning.

TS: No, but I crashed and slept for three days straight afterwards. I'm not going to lie.

MH: I'm sure you did.

TS: It was fun, though. Yeah, thank you, everybody, for taking the time and expense to come to our first conference. Hopefully, we'll keep doing it.

MH: Yep. We have good ideas going forward. So, like Trey's saying, thanks to everybody who came and we hope we'll get a lot of new people and a lot of the people who came this year for the next one.

TS: Yeah, I think it was cool that we were able to get some advanced copies of your upcoming *Angels* book. That was a...

MH: Yeah, I feel blessed by Lexham and Amazon and Bookmasters—all the people who were involved in that—that more or less had to say yes and push a button or two and get something into the mail. I was just thrilled that the books actually showed up and that we had them. So, yeah, that was awesome.

TS: And I had so much fun meeting everybody and talking to everybody. Mike, people came over from 34 states, including Puerto Rico, and spread over four countries, and we ended up livestreaming to 12 countries.

MH: That's just crazy.

TS: Pretty good for our first one out of the gate.

MH: Yeah, absolutely. And while we're at it, as far as stuff that we can either congratulate our audience with or offer the audience, I want to bring this up now. It popped into my head. I was notified by Logos this week that they are extending a new discount offer to our audience. So you can get base packages of Logos Bible software for 25% off. That's a significant discount. And they told me (and I'm going to trust them for it, because it's not like I track all this)... but they said it's the best online offer they've ever created for Logos version 7. It's 25% off, and they added to this that you get five free books. So, if you go to the episode page for this current episode, there's going to be a link there. And if you follow the link you get to pick five books. Of course, it'll require you to sign up if you don't already have Logos so that the books will run on your computer. But then there's also a 25% discount there, too.

TS: Yeah, and that URL was www.logos.com/partner/NakedBible, and then you've got to use the coupon code "Naked Bible 7". But I'll put it up on the website.

MH: Yep, get a base package and some free books. Why not? It is a good deal.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, it looks like for this episode we're inching towards the end of chapter 2. [laughter]

5:00

MH: Yeah, inching. [laughs] We had big plans for this episode a week ago, but those plans just sort of crumbled before my eyes. You never know until you actually get into something how long it's going to take to really spend on it. So we're only going to do two verses again. We did three last time. We're going to do two verses (Colossians 2:9-10), but trust me. You're just going to have to trust me. We will get through chapter 2 in the next episode, because most of what's left in Colossians after verse 10... Well, there's verses 11 and 12, but we've actually had episodes on that before, too, because they're about baptism. So basically, after verse 10, that is ground that we have covered before, either with the old episode on baptism or the stuff about the *stoicheia* that we talked about a couple of weeks ago and even a little bit last week. And then the material, actually, from last week... All of that bleeds through the rest of chapter 2, so we will be able to finish chapter 2 next time. But to a significant extent, the stuff we talked about last time and that we'll talk about this time really are the guts, not only of chapter 2, but they are foundational for the whole general flavor of the entire epistle. So this is the dense part of the forest, if you will, going through Colossians.

So let's jump in here. I'm going to include verse 8, because in the last episode I made the comment that verse 8 is this summary statement about the elemental spirits of the world, and that Paul says what he says in verse 8 because of what he's going to say in verse 9. Well, we're here at verse 9, and we're going to be hitting verse 9 and 10 today. So I'm going to read Colossians 2:8 and then add verse 9, and then we'll hit verse 10 momentarily. So Paul says:

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits [*stoicheia*] of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...

Now last time, we wound up with verse 8, and the summary point was that Christ was superior to the *stoicheia* (to these elemental spirits), as we read in verse 8. And we looked at several Second Temple Jewish texts last time that would be classified as Jewish mystical texts, due to their esoteric nature—essentially talking about supernatural powers over the elements of the world. We read a few

examples of that. That this particular strand of Judaism, familiar from books like Enoch and Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls and whatnot... There were Jews at the time that had the notion that spiritual beings—supernatural beings—were assigned to natural processes and phenomena, and Paul’s warning about not being taken in by some “wisdom teaching” (*philosophia*) concerning those ideas and those entities amounts to reminding the Colossians that Christ was superior in all respects.

So the backdrop to what Paul was saying that we covered last time was that when you get into this issue of the elemental spirits, apparently at Colossae (this harkens back to our very first episode of the Colossian Heresy) it wasn’t Gnosticism or what we think of as Gnosticism. That’s going to come later. The movements or systematized or fully developed religion that we think of today as Gnosticism—that had not come along. And in our very first episode, we commented about how there are things in Colossians that have prompted some scholars to deny Paul wrote the epistle, because they were thinking that the subject matter of Colossians is dipping into all this Gnostic stuff, which was a century or two later, so Paul couldn’t have written this. We discovered, not only in that initial episode but even last week, that that just isn’t even coherent because you can find these things in Jewish texts from the Second Temple Period. There’s no obstacle there to Paul having written this epistle. And if Paul did write the epistle (which is quite consistent with the Second Temple Jewish material of which Paul was a part and Paul knew well), then there’s no need to deny Pauline authorship, and Paul can’t possibly be talking about the movements that we think of as Gnosticism.

10:00

So we gave a few illustrations last time about what might have been the Jewish context for the Colossian Heresy—this exaltation of angels or worship of angels or just assigning too much power and importance to elemental spirits (other members of the supernatural world that not only aren’t God, but aren’t Christ), and Paul wants to correct that. Paul is building his argument: “Look these entities that you’ve heard about and apparently are getting enamored with at Colossae are *inferior* to Jesus. They’re *inferior* to Christ.” And so he says what he says in verse 8. “Don’t get taken captive by this philosophy and empty deceit—this other teaching. Don’t let that sideswipe you. Don’t let that lead you off the path of following Jesus and the gospel. Don’t let that distract you from my message” (from Paul’s message). Of course, that was important because in Colossians 1 he talks about that very thing—about not being led astray, drawn away from the faith. And so he’s leading up to verse 9, and this is where we’re going to put a lot of emphasis today. He makes the statement, “Basically, I said all that, and here’s the reason. Here’s the basis for it.” Colossians 2:9:

⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...

In other words, Jesus is not beholden to the *stoicheia* or any other supernatural entity. He's so far superior to them. He's so far above them. He is so far preeminent to them. Why? Because the *whole fullness of deity dwells in him bodily*. This is Paul's "punch-in-the-nose" statement. I want to take this apart a little bit, and I'm going to interact with a really... If you've had at least a year of Greek, I would recommend this resource to you. I'm going to interact with it here. It's a book by Murray J. Harris called *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis*. What Harris does in his book is he hits on words that we might assign little importance to, like prepositions, and basically goes through the New Testament showing how significant some of them are and how to do exegesis in light of something as simple as Greek prepositions. And he has a lot to say, not only about Colossians here, but really throughout the New Testament. It's a unique resource. It's actually, I think, better than some Greek reference grammars that I've seen. So I'm going to quote some sections of it and interact with it a little bit, specifically as he talks about some of these verses in Colossians. Now let's just lead off with what he says about Colossians 2:9. Let me just recite that to you and 1:19, so that you have that in your head, as well. Colossians 1:19 said:

¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

And here in Colossians 2:9:

For in him the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

So very, very similar. Harris says:

This verse, like Col 1:19, speaks of Christ himself, not the believer, so ἐν αὐτῷ (en autō) ["in him"] does not have either of its most common meanings, that is, "in union with him" and "incorporate in him." Rather, it means "in his person."

This phrase in this verse refers to Jesus himself. So when we think of "in Christ," just to riff off this a little bit, we tend to hear a lot of preaching or podcasting, or in our own Bible study... "in Christ"... The discussion is usually about our being in him (our being members of the body of Christ, our being members of the Church), so the emphasis becomes about us and our standing or our union with him. What Harris is saying is, that's not in view here. When Paul writes, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily," he isn't saying, "Hey, because you're united to Christ, the fullness of deity dwells in you, the believer." Think about that. That's the kind of thing a New Ager might want to say: "God in you," and all that kind of stuff. And that isn't the point. It's not the point in Colossians 1:19, and it's not the point in Colossians 2:9. There are reasons why Harris is referencing back to Colossians 1:19. He's saying, "in him," here... We have to be thinking about Jesus himself—who *he* is, not who we are because of him, at least in this particular phrase. And he proceeds to take the whole verse apart. For

15:00

instance, he has the word *dwells* (Κατοικεῖ or *katoikei* in Greek). He classifies this as a timeless present. In other words, what's being talked about here is a permanent indwelling—something that permanently dwells, continues to live. Harris adds:

As in [Colossians] 1:19, πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα (*pan to plērōma*) means “all the fullness, the entire fullness,” no aspect of the fullness being excepted [MH: or exempted] (cf. Zerwick §188).

The genitive θεότητος (*theotētos*) may be epexegetic...

I'll just pause there. “Epexegetical” means “explanatory”. That's academese for “something that explains something else.” So he's saying Paul may have used this word or thrown it in to be explanatory.

...“all the fullness, namely, the Godhead,” but is more probably possessive, “all the fullness that constitutes/characterizes deity,”

I would tend to agree. There are other translations that take the wording here... I grew up in the King James. I'm not going to look at King James at this point, but I think the King James does say something about the fullness of the Godhead. I suspect that Harris is correct, that what he's really talking about is the fullness of deity—the whole concept of deity, everything that you could think of in its entirety. That's who Jesus is. “The full measure of deity” is the way *BDAG* puts this phrase. (*BDAG* is the Greek Lexicon that is the standard for scholarship, at least today, anyway.) So “the Godhead in all its fullness” or “the full measure of deity”—however you want to understand that... It's every drop of this concept we have of deity indwells Jesus bodily. That alone sets him as utterly superior to the *stoicheia*, utterly superior to any other supernatural being that anybody could imagine.

So what Paul is saying is, “Look. Don't get led astray by all this talk about exaltation of angels and what you can do with angels and all this other stuff—the mystical relationship you can have with angels and your connectedness to what's going... Don't get led astray. Don't hand over Jesus for that stuff. Don't trade. It's a *bad trade*. It's a stupid trade, because in Jesus all the fullness of deity dwells bodily. That last word, “bodily,” is Σωματικῶς (*sōmatikōs*). It describes the permanent (and this is an interesting point that Harris makes, that if you think about it, it's one of those things that might just not even be present in your thinking—in your mind)... He says this bodily reference describes the permanent *postincarnational* state of Christ. You know, when we think of Christ and a term like “bodily,” we think of the incarnation. We think of Jesus' ministry when he's out walking around with the disciples—the incarnation, God become man, that sort of thing. But in this context, Paul's talking about a permanent indwelling of all that the deity is, which is still indwelling Jesus bodily. It's post-crucifixion. It's

(using Harris' word) *postincarnation*, because incarnation refers to the birth—the thing that characterized the life and ministry of Jesus while he was on earth before the cross. Just the wording here points out that Paul's actually talking about the state of Jesus now. It's just an interesting observation. It's easy not to think about, easy to read over it, and not have it pop into your head. Harris adds:

20:00

The separation of κατοικεῖ [the verb for “dwelling”] from σωματικῶς suggests that two distinct affirmations are being made: that the total plenitude of the Godhead dwells in Christ eternally, and that this fullness now permanently resides in Christ in bodily form. It is true that before the incarnation the πλήρωμα [“fullness”] did not reside in Christ σωματικῶς...

Sōmatikōs: “bodily.” Because before the incarnation, Christ didn't have a body. He had to be born of a woman, right?

...it is not true that before the incarnation the πλήρωμα [plērōma] did not reside in him at all.

See, that's where a lot of cults want to go. They want to have Jesus be a created being and something lesser than God. And what Harris is saying is, “Look, the language here... Since we have *katoikei*, we have this present idea—this notion that whatever's being described in terms of this indwelling is ongoing. It's ongoing, it's not a snapshot. It's an ongoing kind of thing, an ongoing kind of reality. And that reality is *bodily*, and we're talking about Jesus *after* the resurrection.” He's saying, “Look, there's really only one way to parse this. It has to mean that the characteristics of Godhead were with Jesus bodily both in the incarnation and also after the incarnation (this postincarnational state), and that, by virtue of this quality's transcendence of the incarnation, it exists after the incarnation.” Harris is saying, “We really need to realize that, for Paul, this indwelling of all the fullness of God in Christ is transcending time. It transcends these stages in what we think of as the life of Jesus. It's an eternal sort of situation. And that has to mean that even prior to the incarnation, apart from the incarnation, the *plērōma* (the fullness of God) *did* dwell in Christ in some way. It wasn't bodily before the incarnation, but the fullness of who God is was in Christ even before the incarnation.”

So Harris is angling here for the logic of Paul's language—the way Paul is expressing this—as telegraphing the notion that Christ is one with God. It's not incremental. He doesn't get it in stages. He's not a lesser being. In him dwells the fullness of deity bodily (again, “dwells” being in the present tense, and the context for that present tense being postincarnation). So Harris is making a very simple observation. If this status of the fullness of God isn't dependent on what we think of as Christ's earthly ministry, it transcends that and it's enduring—it's eternal. If it's eternal, then we have to apply it to all parts of Christ's existence, so to speak. So back to Harris, he says:

Thus Paul implies both the eternal deity and the permanent humanity of Christ.

Now, there's another wild thought. I'm going to read that again:

Thus Paul implies both the eternal deity and the permanent humanity of Christ.

In other words, Christ didn't lose his humanity in the resurrection. He still has some sort of body. Now Paul makes this clear. He links Jesus' body with the bodies we will receive in 1 Corinthians 15—the celestial flesh idea. We've spent a whole episode on that with David Burnett before. But you realize that it's not like flesh. It's a body; it's celestial flesh. That doesn't mean it's *nonhuman*; that means it's *more* than human. We spent a whole episode on this in 1 Corinthians 15. But if you're going to say that, that means that Christ is not divorced now from his humanity. And neither will we be. We will be in a new body but it will still be human in some way. It just transcends the humanity that we know, that we can grasp, or that we experience. It's the same with Jesus, which is kind of a neat thought, because he never loses the status of being our brother. He never loses that status, that human connection. Harris says:

25:00

Moreover, κατοικεῖ ... σωματικῶς [MH: *katoikei... somatikos*, that combination, the *dwelling* and then *bodily*] implies that both before and after his resurrection Christ possessed a σῶμα [body] (cf. 1 Co 15:44; Php 3:21; Col 1:22).

We'll pick a few more things from Harris as we go. But just in that one verse, there's just a lot of theology packed in to that. And not only is Christ shown to be preeminent over these exalted, supernatural beings that we talked about last time (the *stoicheia* and stuff that we're going to encounter as we proceed, as we keep going through the epistle)... Not only is he preeminent to *them*, but this lays the foundation for his preeminence in other ways, as well. And you get that just from this one statement in this one verse. That's why a lot of people look at Colossians 2:9 as the climax (and we're only in chapter 2) of what Paul wants to say about Jesus.

Now, the next thing that we want to do (we're going to get back into Harris here) is elaborate a little more on "in him" of Colossians 2:9. So we've noted that the verse is packed with theology, but we want to drill down on this phrase, because this is a phrase ("in him" or "in Christ")... There are different variations of this in the New Testament. You have "in him," you have "in Christ," you have "in Christ Jesus." In Greek, it could be Ἐν (τῷ) Χριστῷ (Ἰησοῦ) (*en tō christō lēsou*); the definite article doesn't have to be there. Sometimes it's just "in Christ," not "in Christ Jesus." But you get a whole range of these that all say the same thing—have the same idea in view. And the "in Christ" idea (the "in him" idea) is a big deal theologically because it occurs so frequently, especially in Paul's writings, but it has different contexts. So Paul doesn't always use it the same way, even

though he uses it a lot. So we need to drill down here a little bit just because a lot of people in the audience are going to be familiar with this whole discussion. And Harris says this. He starts off his discussion of “in him,” and in that discussion you can also be thinking of “in Christ” or “in Christ Jesus”—these similar phrases. He says:

This is a distinctly Pauline expression, with about 170 examples [MH: that’s a lot] in the Pauline corpus if we include the phrases ἐν αὐτῷ (*en autō*) and ἐν ᾧ (*en hō*) when they refer to Christ.

Ho is a relative pronoun, so “in him” or “in who which,” something like that. So you’ve got 170 times that Paul uses this sort of expression, even though he uses different words in some points to communicate it. But there 170 of these.

From a theological viewpoint, Paul’s uses of ἐν [τῷ] Χριστῷ fall into two classes.

So when Paul uses this phrase, and phrases that overlap with it, there are two categories:

1. where Christ is an individual person, distinct from others, e.g., Eph 1:10; 2:15–16; Php 2:5 (see below); Col 1:19; 2:9
2. where Christ is a corporate person (cf. ὁ Χριστός in 1 Co 12:12), including others, e.g., Ro 8:1; 12:5; Gal 1:22

So just a couple of examples here. Using it when Christ is an individual person, distinct from other people, we go to Philippians 2:5:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...

So Paul is specifically referring to the man—the person—Jesus Christ of Nazareth. But Paul uses it another way. The second category is Christ as a corporate person. That includes others. So Romans 8:1:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So he’s not talking about the man, per se—the person who went to the cross. He’s talking about the Body of Christ and our inclusion in that corporate body. So Paul will use the phrase “in him” (“in Christ”), but you can put those occurrences into one of those two big buckets. But Harris says:

In the former case [using it of Christ as an individual person], ἐν Χριστῷ (*en christō*) [“in Christ”] often bears the sense “in personal, intimate fellowship

with/joined closely to the exalted Christ” [MH: Still referring to a person, but even in his exaltation]; in the latter case, “in/part of the [spiritual] body of Christ.”

30:00 Now, Harris proceeds from that point on... Remember his book is about prepositions and their theology. So this phrase, *en Christo* (“in Christ,” or “in him”)... He devotes a lot of attention to that in the book. There is a range of uses, even though you’ve got two basic categories (referring to Jesus as a person—an individual—and referring to Jesus corporately). He writes:

From a grammatical standpoint, the uses may be conveniently, even if somewhat arbitrarily, grouped into the following six categories. A paraphrase will bring out the import of ἐν [the Greek preposition *en*] in the examples cited. There is no rigid division between the categories; some instances could appropriately be classified in another category.

He has six semantic categories. And this is what scholars do. If you take Greek, in your first year of Greek you’re not going to get into this so much, but in second year of Greek it’s about how you use Greek for interpretation. And a lot of it is taking a preposition (in this case, *en*) and an object noun (*en christo*) and looking at the usage of that and wondering about, semantically speaking, what might this phrase mean? And you very quickly learn, especially in this case, that “in Christ” doesn’t always telegraph the same idea or the same information. And if this were a class in second year Greek, as your professor I would have you look up all of these instances (170 of them, or maybe just “*en christo*” to make your homework assignment shorter) and try to describe them using whatever words that you want. Tell me how you would describe what Paul is getting at, what he’s trying to telegraph, with this phrase. And that’s what Harris is doing here in his book. So he has six usage categories for “in Christ.” And I’m going to read you the six, and I’m going to give you one example for each. As you pay attention, you’ll be able to sort of see how they’re different. So one he calls:

(1) Incorporative Union

He’s using the phrase “in Christ” to describe our incorporation in a union relationship. One of his examples would be 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Consequently, if anyone has been incorporated into Christ...

Now the Greek text is going to say, “Consequently, if anyone is in Christ...” Harris told you he’s going to amplify and paraphrase to communicate the semantic idea that the phrase really is getting at. So this is how he renders 2 Corinthians 5:17, to bring out the idea of Incorporative Union:

Consequently, if anyone has been incorporated into Christ, there is a new creation.

So you become a new person, because now you've been identified with—incorporated into—the Body of Christ, identified with Christ.

(2) Agency

Be kind to one another, tenderly affectionate, and forgive each other, just as God through Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

The Greek text would say, “just as God *en christo*, just as God *in Christ* forgave you.” What does he mean by, “*God in Christ* forgave you?” Harris says that Paul’s really describing Agency—the means by which or the means on account of which God forgave you. “Just as God *through* Christ forgave you.” So Christ was the means by which you were forgiven by God. Just paraphrasing it to bring the idea out.

(3) Mode

This has to do with the mode of something happening. When Paul uses the phrase *en christo* (“in Christ”), he’s actually describing something that has to do with the mode or the means of how it happens, or describing (kind of awkwardly) what it looks like. So Romans 12:5 literally would say, “In Christ, we form one body, though we are many.” And Harris expands that to communicate the idea this way. He says:

By our union with Christ we form one body, though we are many.

So how do we form one body? Well, what happens is we are united to Christ. That is the mode by which the other statement can be made—that we form one body.

(4) Cause

35:00 Right away, you’re going to think that Cause could have been used for one or two of the other earlier ones, and Harris admits that. Some of these could be one or the other. And again, in second-year Greek class, this is the kind of thing that you do. You experiment with the text interpretively, and then... It’s not just, “Oh, I like this one and not that one.” As your professor, I would say, “Well, that’s an interesting choice. Does Paul use that phrase in connection with some of the other things in the verse elsewhere? And if he does, does your choice here align with that one there? Does that disqualify it? Is Paul talking about two different

things? If he's talking about two different things, why would he couple the same words with that phrase in two places, if he meant something different?" Getting to probe where you land, testing it for its coherence—this is what you do in an exegesis class. This is what you do in a Greek class. You're *thinking* about the text. So Harris' fourth category is Cause, and here's the verse I'll reference for it:

In the same way, consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God because of your union with Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11

"Consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God *en christo*..." What does that mean? That's what Harris is trying to say. We need to think about what that might mean. He thinks it describes a causal event. Now, by the way (and I'll come back to this), that category (Cause) is where he puts Colossians 2:10. But we'll come back to that.

(5) Location

In your relations with one another, adopt this attitude that was also displayed in Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:5

Here's how Harris would render it. Now he has this labeled as Location, and here Harris' argument is that Paul is thinking of Jesus as a person here. Jesus lived out... He displayed the kind of relationships that we should have. So he modeled them for us. That set of relationships is perfectly exemplified and modeled in this one person—his identity, who he was, and how he lived. So that's why he labels it Location.

(6) Sphere of Reference

In this usage, ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ] is equivalent to the adjective χριστιανός (*christianos*) -ή, -όν, "Christian."

I know a Christian man... 2 Corinthians 12:2

In Greek, it would be, "I know a man *en christo*..." And if you read the rest of the passage (we did a whole episode on this, too), Paul was really referring to himself. And so it's appropriate to translate this, "I know a man who's a Christian..." speaking of himself. So that's Sphere of Reference. So you've got six categories. If you want deep literature on this, I'd say go read Harris' book. But Harris actually references the work of J. D. G. Dunn in a book called *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. It's a 1998 title. So if you want a reference, you can go to that.

Now, recall that Harris had said earlier, in relationship to Colossians 2:9, that we need to interpret this in light of Colossians 1:19 because they're very similar. So Colossians 2:9:

⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells...

This verse, like Col 1:19, speaks of Christ himself, not the believer, so ἐν αὐτῷ (en autō) does not have either of its most common meanings, that is, "in union with him" and "incorporate in him." Rather, it means "in his person."

It's speaking of Jesus himself. Of his six usage categories, Harris lands on "Cause" for Colossians 2:10 and brings out that choice by the following rendering. Harris has already talked about how if you go to Colossians 2:9 (just to re-reference that)... this fullness of deity idea, that in him—in the person of Christ, in Christ himself—the whole fullness of deity dwells. That's Colossians 2:9. And then we turn to verse 10. And Harris thinks that we should think of this causally. So, "...in him the fullness of deity (everything that is God, nothing lacking) dwells bodily."

40:00

You have your completeness as a result of being in him. Colossians 2:10

Now I'm going to read you Colossians 2:10 in ESV:

¹⁰You have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority."

Harris is saying he prefers this kind of rendering [the first one]. I kind of like it too. It makes good sense to me. Verse 9 is about Jesus himself:

⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...

Now he turns his attention to the Colossians:

¹⁰You have your completeness as a result of being in Christ who is the head of all rule and authority.

So in other words, what Christ did is the cause of your completeness. Your completeness is a result of what he did. He is the cause of your own completeness. He is the cause of your filling. That is, this one who is superior to the *stoicheia*... Follow his arguments to the Colossians. He's shooting at their exaltation of other supernatural beings. He's saying, "The one who is superior to the *stoicheia*, he's the one who is the head of every ruler and authority. That one has completed you." This means on one hand you lack nothing with respect to your spiritual status because of what Jesus did and your inclusion in him—his corporate body. Which, by virtue of him being entirely filled (individually) with the

fullness of deity, means that your status is that of belonging to God, belonging in his family.

Now Harris actually comments a little bit on this. Here's how he explains his thinking and the way he nuances Colossians 1:19 and Colossians 2:9, and then this thought with Colossians 2:10 about the fact that the Colossians also have their completeness because of this one "in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily." That's why we're complete. Our status is a result of who he is, and who he is is everything God is. And that means, by definition, that he is superior to every other supernatural being. That one did something (i.e., the cross), the result of which was our status—our standing, our inclusion—in the family of God.

You see, Paul is leaving no room at all for a contribution of any other supernatural entity. Unneeded. Unnecessary. Superfluous. Just not even on the table. Harris (just to pick up a few more of his comments) points out in his discussion just some interesting things here. He goes back to Colossians 1:19. The verse is:

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...

That's what this verse literally says. So you have to ask, "Whose fullness?" In our English Bibles, we'll have something like, "In him was all the fullness of God pleased to dwell." The word *God* doesn't actually appear in Colossians 1:19. You get it from some of these other verses. You get what Paul's talking about. And that's what Harris discusses. He's like, "Don't be fooled here, either, because we know he's talking about God because of what happens later in chapter 2." This is the kind of passage that can be twisted. If we're thinking of "in him" corporately, then a New Ager who actually knows a little bit of theology (enough to be dangerous) can say, "Paul's talking about how we're all deity now. We're all God." No, he's actually not. Or he could turn around and say, "Well, God's not really in this one verse, so 'In him all the fullness was pleased to dwell...' Fullness of what?" And he could go off on another tangent and say, "Well, Jesus wasn't really filled with *deity*, he was filled with something else, maybe virtue or wisdom, or something like that." And so, no—no. You have to take Colossians 1:19 and Colossians 2:9 in tandem. You've got to let scripture interpret scripture. You don't go off into Crazytown, where Jesus is something less than what Colossians 2:9 says he is. You fixate on Colossians 1:19 and try to make him something less than what Colossians 2:9 says. And you also don't want to make *yourselves* (individual humans) more than you are. We're not gods. That's not the case. We are who we are as a result of what God—the one in whom all the fullness of God dwelled bodily, and still dwells bodily... We are who we are because of something *he* did. We get the result of that. He is the cause; our status is the result. Again, it's a lot of theology just packed into just two verses here. Harris has a few of these summary statements here. (Colossians 1:19)

45:00

In him [Christ] the personal God in all his fullness was pleased to dwell comprehensively -- not just at the incarnation.

And Colossians 2:9:

In him there dwells the whole fullness of deity in bodily form.

There's a completeness aspect of it, there's a permanence aspect of it, there's an eternal aspect of it. All these are things that Jesus is, and because of who Jesus is, we reap the result of him doing something for us on our behalf.

Hopefully, you get to a point like this where you see the cosmic significance in Paul's head of what happened at the cross. It's just utter stupidity to think that our works contribute to that. "Oh, it's good you came along and did that thing, or didn't do that other thing, because all this stuff about Jesus... Your works just tipped the scales in your favor—*just* tipped it right over the edge there. You made it because you pitched in." It's just nonsense. It is so foreign to New Testament theology. It's hard to even find words for how nonsensical the idea is, that what we do somehow supplements this person who lacks nothing of what God is. [laughs] It's just absurd. At the end of the day, it's just absurd. We've devoted a lot of time on this podcast to talking about how Christians struggle with it, and they do... they do.

So Colossians 2:10 (so that doesn't get lost here)... Harris is viewing that as this cause-and-effect kind of thing: "You Colossians have your completeness as a result of being in him." Being in Christ. What Christ did was the cause of your completeness and your filling, and he's superior to everything.

I want to take a bit of a rabbit trail. It's not really a rabbit trail. But I want to focus here on one term to wrap up the episode, and that is the term *pleroma*. Now this term, as you've already heard me use it in relation to Colossians 2:9-10 ("in him dwells the fullness—the *pleroma*—of the Godhead bodily"). This term was what led a number of people to say that Colossians was written later (after the time of Paul), to situate the book in the era when Gnosticism as a sect or as a theology or school of thought (however you want to put that)... This term, *pleroma*, was what prompted a lot of people to move that direction, to situate Colossians in that era, and therefore divorce Paul as the author from it. And the reason for that is because this term, *pleroma*, shows up in the Nag Hammadi—not just the Nag Hammadi gospels, but the Nag Hammadi texts that are the core scripture writings of Gnosticism (the Gnostic movement, if you will). And so when those texts were discovered and we get the Gnostics talking about the *pleroma* all over the place (the term occurs here in Paul and it occurs other places in the New Testament, too), people were just led to think, "We've got these Gnostic texts and they're in Coptic (at least the Gospel of Thomas). There's fragments in

50:00

Greek, and they date Carbon-14-wise to the 2nd and 3rd Century (for the Nag Hammadi stuff, anyway), and the Greek stuff would move it back even a little further because now we have the Coptic as a translation of Greek... So they're thinking, "[inaudible] lived in the next century when this stuff we know existed, so Paul couldn't have written this stuff. Somebody else did. And therefore, somebody else wrote Colossians."

Think back to our first episode on Colossians, where we talked about the context for the book and the Colossian Heresy. If somebody besides Paul wrote this later, that means its christology is later than Paul. It's christology is later than the book of Acts. It's christology is later than the disciples. And that allows scholars to say, "Well, the historical Jesus... at the time, nobody thought he was God. Nobody thought this stuff about Godhead and Trinity, and... All that stuff comes later, when the Christians have to respond to what the Gnostics are saying and then they come up with this Jesus-deity stuff." See, it's kind of an insidious path of thought. You have to realize where these ideas come from and what they mean.

This is why, in this case, something like authorship is a big deal. It's really why Second Temple literature is a big deal, because if you didn't have Second Temple literature to show that basically everything that Paul is talking about in Colossians comes from *Jewish* texts, not Gnostic texts out in the desert of Egypt somewhere... But it comes from *Jewish* texts that predate Paul by a couple of centuries. Unless you have that material, then it's just his word against her word. It's just one opinion over against the other. The Second Temple stuff is really important data. These are really important data for establishing the fact that you do not have to divorce Paul from writing this book. And that is significant because, therefore, you don't have to divorce his christology from the original New Testament era. It's really important. And so this word, *pleroma*... The presence of this word in Gnostic texts and the New Testament, it was part of this discussion.

Now, I'm going to reference an article for you. This isn't something we can just post on our episode page. Serious New Testament scholarship (and serious Gnostic scholarship, for that matter) has shown that the presence of the word *pleroma* in Colossians is *not* a coherent argument for pushing the date of Colossians forward in time to the Gnostic era. That is *not* a good argument. It is *not* the case that Colossians has to be situated in and among Gnostic movements because this word appears. There's a major study on that. It's by a guy named P. Derek Overfield. The article is entitled "Pleroma: A study in Content and Context." It's from the journal *New Testament Studies*, Volume 25.3 (1979). So all of the people out there pumping YouTube videos about Gnosticism, Paul, and denying the christology of the New Testament... If they weren't dim bulbs or weren't uninformed, they could've read this article and known that they were wrong. But that's not what happens on YouTube and the internet. We all know that. This is why I try to alert you to things—alert you to

scholarship. So you can get this article. I have to put it in a protected folder; I can't just post it online willy-nilly. If you subscribe to the newsletter, you'll have access to this folder and this article. So if you're interested in this subject, please go take a look at it. Don't post it somewhere else. Just use it for your personal study, just like you would do if you were in a classroom situation here. But it's an important article. Now I'm going to read you the first couple of paragraphs of this particular article, just so that you know where he's going. The author writes:

The object of this paper is to show, from both a study of content and context, that there is no integral relationship between the so-called technical or gnostic use of the word *pleroma* as it is found in the second-century Christian heretical sects and the use of the word in the New Testament.

The method employed in this essay is as follows. Firstly an attempt will be made to define and explain the technical use of the word. This will involve us in an examination of some of the extant material of the second century Gnostic sects. Secondly, by means of a brief examination of sources that both pre- and post-date the first Christian century, we shall demonstrate that there is a non-technical use of the word that was fairly widespread in this period. In the third section of the essay we will expound all the NT verses which contain the substantive *Pleroma*. The fourth and final section will be concerned with the use made by the Gnostics of the actual verses examined in the third section of the essay. In this fourth section we will attempt to prove what we believe the second part of the essay will suggest, and the third part will offer as at least a quite acceptable alternative explanation, that the use of the term *Pleroma* in the NT is not in any way related to the use of the same term by the heretical sects.

This is a significant study of this issue. It's going to run quite contrary to a lot of the nonsense that you get online about Paul and *pleroma* and Gnosticism in Colossians and all that. So you need to be aware that this data—this material—exists.

Now, just to wrap up here, just a few statistics, a few short comments about *pleroma* in the New Testament and its immediate context, not drawn from this article but drawn from the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* edited by Silva. It's a resource that you should all have. It's a major work (and a pretty current work) on New Testament word studies. If you look at the Septuagint, for instance, the Septuagint and the New Testament use *pleroma* in a nontechnical sense. In other words, when you find the Septuagint, which obviously predates the New Testament period, and of course predates the Gnostic period... When you see *pleroma* used there and in the New Testament, it's not used in the way that Gnostic literature would be using it. You say, "Well, I would understand that if you tell me how Gnostic literature uses it."

Well, *pleroma* in Gnosticism... If you want a visual presentation of this with some slides, you can go to YouTube and put my last name in there, Heiser, and maybe Da Vinci Code, and Gnostic cosmology. Years ago (it's probably pushing 10... well, it's not 10 years... maybe 7, 8 years ago), I did a lecture series on Gnosticism and one of the lectures was Gnostic cosmology.

In a nutshell, when a Gnostic thought of the *pleroma*... You have to realize in Gnostic theology, the God of the Bible is not the true God—like the ultimate God. The God of the Bible is an evil entity, an evil guy. The higher, ultimate god is the good one. The God of the Bible is a bad guy. So that's a fundamental item. Now, the ultimate "good god" supposedly either pinched off pieces of himself, or dispersed parts of himself into the universe and created other supernatural beings called aeons. There are lots of aeons. Sophia was one, the Logos was one, the Christos was one—all these terms. They're different supernatural entities, but they are derivative from this nonpersonal force or something like that—the ultimate god in Gnosticism. If you put all the aeons in the same room, so to speak, if they rejoin themselves collectively, they would form the fullness... They would form the *pleroma*. They would reunite and reassemble themselves into the ultimate god: this god-force thing in Gnosticism. That's what Gnostics mean by *pleroma*. That's a very technical, specific field, specific sect, specific meaning of the term. And what the author of that article said and what the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* says is, "Look, *pleroma* was a common term. It meant lots of normal things. Just because it was used doesn't mean that the writer is thinking about this aeon thing—the aeon meaning of the ages. That's not what he's thinking." So if you go look in the Septuagint, in the New Testament, just to read a little bit from that dictionary:

1:00:00

In LXX the noun πλήρωμα [pleroma] is found only 15× (incl. 5× in Psalms), almost always for מֵלֵךְ [melo, which means full or fullness]; and the alternate noun πλήρωσις (plerosis) occurs 9× (for several Heb. terms)... The Qumran writings mainly use the Heb. מֵלֵךְ [melo] to denote the completion of a period of time [time is up, time is full] (cf. 1QS VII, 20, 22) and also in the pregnant eschat. sense that all existence and events are fulfilled acc. to a firm plan that is already fixed by God (1QS III, 16; cf. 1QM XVII, 9). In the time of salvation expected at the end, God will fill his land with the rich bounty of blessing, and all the wealth of the nations will be brought together at Jerusalem (1QM XII, 12–13).

And then he quotes a few Dead Sea Scrolls to that effect.

The noun πλήρωμα [in the New Testament] is found 17×, mainly in the Pauline corpus (12×; otherwise 3× in Mark; also Matt 9:16; John 1:16); this term is used with a variety of senses (see BDAG s.v.). [MH: As any lexicon would show you.]

Paul uses it to speak of fulfillment [MH: things being brought to fruition; we use the expression “come full circle”—everything is complete now] in certain contexts:

But when the set time had fully come...

The “fullness of time” passage in Galatians 4:4-5... The word *pleroma* shows up in there. He’s not talking about a bunch of aeons getting together. It’s not a Gnostic use.

But when the set time had fully come [ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου], God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship” (Gal 4:4–5). The apostle does not mean merely that a partic. period of time has expired or that an appointed time has arrived. Rather, he indicates that in the divine economy of salvation human time has reached its full measure. In Eph 1:10, likewise, he links the divine οἱ κονομία G3873 (“administration, plan”) with the πλήρωμα τῶν καιρῶν.

It just gives you an idea of how Paul is using this. Now, Paul also uses it of the fullness of Christ, like we just said. We just spent time in Colossians 2:9.

The fullness of Christ. According to Col 2:9, “all the fullness of the Deity [πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος] lives in bodily form” in Christ (sim. 1:19). What is in view here is entirely related to Christ’s death and resurrection (1:18–22).

It has nothing to do with a bunch of aeons, floating around in outer space, or wherever, and if you did roll-call, you had the *pleroma*. It has nothing to do with that.

What is in view here is entirely related to Christ’s death and resurrection. For this reason believers “have been brought to fullness [πεπληρωμένοι] in him (2:10), being reconciled through faith, renewed, and made to participate in his triumph (2:11–15). Many have thought that these comments are Paul’s answer to the specifically gnostic features of the Colossian heresy. It is true that πλήρωμα was a technical term in later Valentinian Gnosticism, but various scholars (e.g., C. F. D. Moule, “‘Fulness’ and ‘Fill’ in the New Testament,” *SJT* 4 [1951]: 79–86) have shown that the expression in Col 2:9 cannot be equated with the gnostic’s hierarchy of beings lying between God [MH: the ultimate god] and the world. It must mean the sum total of divine attributes. (To be sure, a sweeping rejection of any relation to Gnosticism would be erroneous as well...)

The Gnostics are going to pick up this term. So by virtue of them picking up the term and other mystical schools picking up the idea, it’s not that you can completely divorce everything, but Gnosticism as a school of thought does not

exist yet. Its strands (as we said in our first episode)—the ingredients in the recipe that will produce Gnosticism... There's this kind of language. But you don't have the Gnostic cosmic hierarchy in view.

So I just wanted to throw that out about the word *pleroma*. If you want to do more research on that, you can access the article. Please subscribe to the newsletter. And again, what we're trying to do here on the podcast (and I think this episode was illustrative, just like the last one was)... There's a lot going on in any given verse in the New Testament (and in the Old, of course, for that matter), but this is a good test case, as were the preceding verses. There's just so much going on that's below the surface that I think it's useful to illustrate how scholars take something apart and the discipline of how things are thought about. So I think that's useful for us in this audience. We're not going to do this in every podcast episode.

1:05:00

We're going to finish chapter 2 next time, which means we'll be going through a lot more material in one episode than just camping on two verses or a couple of phrases. But it's useful to realize that the different layers—the depth that scholars can and do work in to try to produce relevant, useful material. So we want to expose you to their method, what you do when you're in seminary, you're in graduate school, and then also the resources that emerge from that kind of work—the resources that emerge from all of that labor to work in the text. So Paul is leading up to these two verses very intentionally, and I think we can see for good reason.

TS: Okay, Mike, I don't think anybody's complaining that we're spending entire episodes on two or three verses. Trust me. I'll bet that if everybody could get one hour on each verse individually, they'd probably prefer that.

MH: They might want that, you're right.

TS: Absolutely. Good deal. I'll look forward to finishing up chapter 2 next episode, and still coming off the high of the conference. Again, I can't thank everybody enough for coming to that. It's very humbling. Mike, it was a thrill to be a part of it.

MH: Yep, it was fun.

TS: Yeah, it was. Well, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.