

He is the source.  
He is the root.  
He is the core of our being.  
We need nothing else.  
We need no one else.  
Christ is All in all.



# Just Jesus

a study of Colossians

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS STUDY OF THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS originated as my prepared notes for teaching our local ABF (Adult Bible Fellowship) class on Sunday mornings. As with the other resources at our web site, we make it available to others simply because it already exists. I make no claim to scholarship, special insight, or extraordinary understanding of God's holy word. I have been called, in the local assembly, to teach (predominantly) senior adults from God's word. Following the example of the early churches, those of us in the kingdom are encouraged to "[share our possessions] with all, as anyone might have need." (Acts 2:45) If others can benefit from this study, then all the better.

Different from some of our earlier published studies, this study of Ezra-Nehemiah has not been overly modified or formatted, but is published in essentially the format of my original notes used in class. Scripture text has not been added after-the-fact; use these notes with your own Bible alongside.

As with all of our resources, we offer this free of charge, to the glory of God the Father, and the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord.

David S. Lampel  
Winterset, Iowa  
October 2015

## EXPLANATIONS

### SCRIPTURE VERSIONS

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Greek and Hebrew citations are from *Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*, and the *NASB Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*.

### ABBREVIATIONS

NASB: *New American Standard Bible*

NKJV: *New King James Version*

KJV: *King James Version*

KJVS: Both *King James Version* and *New King James Version*

NIV: *New International Version*

RSV: *Revised Standard Version*

YLT: *Young's Literal Translation*

ESV: *English Standard Version*

OT, NT: *Old Testament, New Testament*

### PRINCIPAL EXTERNAL RESOURCES

**Vaughan:** Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor. Copyright © 1976, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Moo:** Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary; © 2008, Douglas J. Moo; Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**Bruce:** F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament; © 1984, Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**Hughes:** R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, Preaching the Word; © 1989, R. Kent Hughes; Crossway Books.

### STANDARD CITATIONS (USED OCCASIONALLY)

**Brown:** *Brown's Dictionary of New Testament Theology*; Colin Brown, General Editor; English Language edition copyright © 1975, 1986, The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and The Paternoster Press, Ltd. Exeter, Devon, U.K.

**Grudem:** Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

**Henry:** *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

**Vincent:** Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*.

**Vine's:** W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

## **SESSION 1: COLOSSIANS OVERVIEW**

If you think about it, the typical Christian life consists of bright moments of heavenly wonder and joy interspersed with hour after arduous hour swimming upstream against the things of this earth.

We all have days in which the spirit of *this* world seems stronger than the Spirit of the next. We are bombarded with

- opinions that challenge, even denigrate our faith
- competing philosophies, belief systems, and faiths
- a diluted Christianity; or a super-irrigated, legalistic Christianity; or a so-called “Christianity” built on fine-sounding error
- philosophies that redefine God the Father and Christ Jesus from an earthly perspective

Every day we feel the tug of temporal forces pulling us away from Christ. What is truly frightening to the one who sincerely wants to follow Christ is the cold truth that we are not even consciously aware of much of the opposition. It is so subtle, or so common as to pass by without notice—but, sadly, not without effect. Whether we recognize them or not, the lies of this world do violence to our faith.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians is an antidote to all this. It addresses specifically the lies that we know about—erroneous teachings that corrupt true faith—and it does so by presenting, in certainly the most fully developed, eloquent description of Jesus, the superior alternative to those erroneous teachings: the person of Christ. This is a full and sufficient prescription, for if by placing our faith and trust in the superior Christ we successfully thwart the obvious attacks, we will become better equipped to thwart those *less* obvious—the ones that used to slip by unnoticed.

In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul makes the case for the supremacy and sufficiency of the *real* Christ and explains to us how to live with and for Him—how to acknowledge Him as *Lord of All*. A.T. Robertson calls Colossians a “full-length portrait of Christ.”

### **AUTHORSHIP**

Let’s begin by looking at some of the mechanics of this church and letter. You should know that not everyone agrees that the apostle Paul wrote this letter. In fact, it is estimated by Douglas J. Moo (one of my principal resources for this study) that up to 60% of modern scholars think he did not. However, no early Christian doubted his authorship, nor do any of the contemporary scholars I have included in my research. And we need not. The text claims he did, and we have no good reason to doubt that.

### **THE COLOSSAE CHURCH AND PAUL’S RELATIONSHIP TO IT**

[\[refer to maps on next page\]](#)

Colossae was located on the south bank of the Lycus river in Asia-Minor (present-day Turkey). It was near Laodicea and Hierapolis—all three inland and to the east of Ephesus, which was located on the west coast. At the time of Paul’s letter, Colossae was a fairly insignificant city, but it had earlier been an important trade city, at the crossroads of two well-traveled highways. Colossae had been the center of a thriving textile industry; a certain high-quality dark red wool was known as “Colossian wool.” But, just as happens today, the route of one of those highways was moved to favor Laodicea, and thus Colossae began its apparent decline. (Moo)

The population of Colossae was no doubt predominantly Gentile, but there was also a substantial number of Jews. Located as it was on a major highway, Colossae was a place where many different religious and philosophical viewpoints thrived and intermingled—which helps explain what has come to be termed the “Colossian Heresy,” the addressing of which by Paul being the primary purpose for the letter before us.

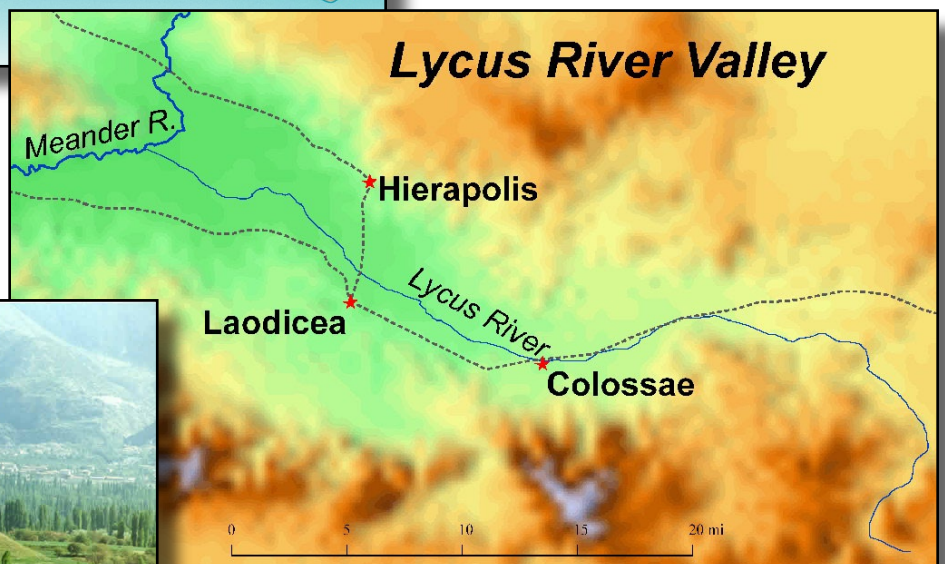
### **Read Colossians 2:8.**

The probable founder, and certainly leader of the Colossae church was Epaphras.

**Read Colossians 1:7** (admittedly the middle of a sentence)

[\[the translations are evenly split on “our”/“your”; both are certainly true\]](#)





Epaphras was a native of Colossae: “..who is one of you [your number]” (4:12)

The evidence is that the apostle Paul never visited the church in Colossae.

### **Read Colossians 2:1**

By my reckoning, this is the only letter Paul addressed to a church he had never visited, much less began. So how did this letter come about? In big chunks, here is how it came about:

- Epaphras was concerned about the situation at his church.
- He journeyed to the imprisoned Paul—probably in Rome—to consult with him about “the presence of heretical teaching at Colossae that was threatening the well-being [integrity] of the church” (Vaughan).
- Because in his letter to Philemon, Paul refers to Epaphras as “my fellow prisoner,” the pastor was unable to carry in person Paul’s letter back to Colossae.
- So Paul commissioned Tychicus [too-khee-kos] for that task:

### **Read Colossians 4:7-8.**

- and sent with him as a companion Onesimus—the ex-slave about whom the brief letter, Philemon, is written.

### **Read Colossians 4:9.**

### ***A Servant’s Attitude***

This situation and the resulting epistle speak highly of both Epaphras and Paul. Here is what Matthew Henry has to say about it.

*Matthew Henry:* One would have thought none would have come to be flourishing churches but those which Paul himself had planted; but here was a flourishing church planted by Epaphras. God is sometimes pleased to make use of the ministry of those who are of less note, and lower gifts, for doing great service to his church. God uses what hands he pleases, and is not tied to those of note, that the excellence of the power may appear to be of God and not of men, 2Co\_4:7. Though Paul had not the planting of this church, yet he did not therefore neglect it; nor, in writing his epistles, does he make any difference between that and other churches. The Colossians, who were converted by the ministry of Epaphras, were as dear to him, and he was as much concerned for their welfare, as the Philippians, or any others who were converted by his ministry. Thus he put an honour upon an inferior minister, and teaches us not to be selfish, nor think all that honour lost which goes beside ourselves. We learn, in his example, not to think it a disparagement to us to water what others have planted, or build upon the foundation which others have laid: as he himself, as a wise master-builder, laid the foundation, and another built thereon, 1Co\_3:10.

### **SEVERAL PATHWAYS THROUGH COLOSSIANS**

As a way to survey the letter to the Colossians, in the remainder of our time this morning I would like to trace several threads through the book.

### ***Summary Statement***

First, we can summarize the primary purpose of the letter. Although a number of topics are addressed by the apostle during the course of this epistle, if we were to whittle it all down to the overriding theme, the purpose of the letter was

- to encourage the Colossians to resist erroneous teaching;
- to counter this, Paul presents to them the centrality and supremacy—the *sufficiency*—of Christ Jesus.

### ***Descriptions of Christ***

How does Paul address or refer to Christ in this letter? Here are some I have gleaned; there are probably more.

King (1:13)	All (3:11)
Lord (2:6)	Peace (3:15)
Alive! (2:12)	Word (3:16)
Ruler & Advocate (3:1)	Channel [to the Father] (3:17)
Life (3:4) [a powerful statement]	Mystery (4:3)

### ***The Sufficiency of Christ***

In Colossians, how is the case for the sufficiency of Christ Jesus made? (from Vaughan)

- He is the object of the Christian's faith (1:4)
- He is God's Son (1:13)
- the Redeemer (1:14)
- the image of God & Lord of creation (1:15)
- head of the church (1:18)
- reconciler of the universe (1:20)
- He is the essence of the mystery of God; in him all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden (2:3)
- He is the standard by which all religious teaching is to be measured (2:8)
- In him dwells the fullness of the Godhead (2:9)
- and under him every power and authority in the universe is subjected (2:10)
- He is the reality of the truth foreshadowed by the regulations and rituals of the old covenant (2:17)
- By his cross he conquered the cosmic powers of evil (2:15)
- and following his resurrection he was enthroned at the right hand of God (3:1)
- Our life now lies hidden with God in Christ, but one day both he and we will be gloriously manifested (3:3-4)

### *Him*

Finally, let's focus in on two passages that in their repetition of a theme dramatically and eloquently illustrate the purpose of this letter. Note the driving, insistent repetition.

**Read Colossians 1:15-22.**

**Read Colossians 2:9-15.**

## SESSION 2: SAINTS AND CORRUPTION

### *Colossians 1:1-2*

In our session today we will run the gamut, from fearful holiness to heretical corruption. (This should be fun.)

#### **Read Colossians 1:1-2.**

#### **FROM...**

Although his tone is different—softer, less accusatory—in this letter, I am reminded of Paul's opening words to the Galatians, where, by v6, he is already laying into them.

#### **Read Galatians 1:6.**

In Galatians Paul wasted no time or ink before he got right to the point. It is true that vv1-2 (and v3) in Colossians comprise a rather standard greeting for one of Paul's letters, but when one reads all of Chapter One and even into Chapter Two, one can see that by the first few verses he is off and running with his primary message to the church at Colossae. By v3 he is already laying the groundwork for his main argument.

#### *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*

No one wakes up in the morning and says, "Hey, I think I'll be an apostle. Yesterday I wanted to be a fireman. The day before that I wanted to be a cowboy. But now I think I'd like to be an ex cathedra messenger for Christ."

And if one did, it wouldn't take. One is (was) a true "apostle of Jesus Christ" only "by the will of God." One does not *apply* to be an apostle; one is *called* to be an apostle. And while I have stated some of this in the present tense, we believe there are no literal, modern apostles.

**apostle** = *apostolos* = from <G649> (apostello); a *delegate*; specially an *ambassador* of the Gospel; officially a *commissioner* of Christ ["*apostle*"] (**with miraculous powers**) :- apostle, messenger, **he that is sent**; "delegate" implies speaking *ex cathedra*, for Christ without error.  
[*ex cathedra* = Latin phrase for "from the chair," meaning infallible teaching.]

God's word is closed; His revelation is complete.

#### *an apostle..., and Timothy our brother.*

Note how the sentence is organized. Timothy is a faithful disciple and helper of Paul's, a great guy and integral to the work of ministry—but he is *not* a fellow apostle.

#### **TO...**

#### **Read v2.**

#### *Grace to you and peace...*

R. Kent Hughes makes an excellent point about this:

Paul created a Christian blend of Hebrew and Greek greetings. The customary greeting in the ancient Greek world was *chairen*, a form of "grace" meaning "greetings." But in Paul's hands it became the freshly minted Christian salutation *charis*, "grace." Greeting fellow-believers with this word celebrated the work of grace in their lives.

The other half of the greeting, "peace," came originally from the Hebrew *shalom*, which meant more than simply the absence of trouble, but well-being which springs from the presence of God.

There must be grace before we experience the *shalom* of God. Grace (God's work) comes before peace (our new relationship). Among the tragedies of our time is humanity's pursuit of personal peace apart from God's enabling grace.

#### *to the saints and faithful brethren*

Reading again the definition of this word translated "saints," I was reminded of the typical first words out of the mouth of a visiting angel.



The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

Luke 1:30

The angel said to the women [at the tomb], “Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.”

Matthew 28:5

Holy angels were often frightful visitations; remember Isaiah’s reaction when in his vision he stood before the throne of Almighty God: he was scared out of his wits. This is the root source of the word translated “saints.”

**saints** = *hagios* = from **hagos** (an *awful* thing) [compare <G53> (hagnos), <H2282> (chag)]; **sacred** (physical *pure*, moral *blameless* or *religious*, ceremony *consecrated*) :- (most) **holy** (one, thing), saint.

We are “saints” not because we attend church, not because we are perfect. We are saints because in every believer there is an almost symbiotic relationship with the person and spirit of Christ Jesus. Symbiosis implies *mutual* benefit, and for that reason it is not quite accurate, since we contribute nothing to the perfection of the Godhead beyond our devotion and praise. But it does describe reasonably well the level of *intimacy* in the relationship—something that it is hard for the temporal mind to grasp.

I wonder if we too often forget that we, as believers **in Christ**, are made sacred, consecrated, *awful* things. Paul addresses this letter to “saints and faithful brethren **in Christ**.” Believers are *in Christ*—*inside* Him—a mystical relationship that goes beyond the necessary “faith in” (v4). We are in Him and He is in us, as Paul states in Chapter Three, taking it a degree further:

When Christ, who **is** our [or your] life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4 (emphasis added)

Paul states the same thing in a slightly different way in Philippians.

**Read Philippians 1:21.**

In Romans 6 Paul goes into this in finer detail, but certainly the most eloquent version of this truth is found in Galatians 2.

**Read Galatians 2:20.**

So on a surface level, Paul greets those who are, like him, “in Christ”—that is, those of his ilk, those in the same belief system. He is not writing to unbelievers; he is not writing to those who are *not* “in Christ.” He is writing to family. But the small word “in” goes far beyond this when the belief system is “in Christ.”

It requires an atypical thought process for us to think of ourselves as “holy,” “sacred,” “consecrated.” Such a perspective goes against everything we know about ourselves. But Paul uses a word that reminds us that we are, indeed, holy things because we are in Christ.

For this reason we can easily see this as far more than just an obligatory greeting—just a few polite words with which to open a letter. Paul has already begun addressing the problem in Colossae. He wants the Colossians to see themselves as God sees them: sacred, holy, even awful things—saints who have no business trafficking in heretical belief systems that seek to supplement Christ Jesus.

Look at how Chapter Two begins.

**Read Colossians 2:1-4.**

**Read v6.**

**Read vv9-10a.**

**complete** = *pleroo* (play-rah'-oh) = from <G4134> (pleres); **to make replete**, i.e. **(literal) to cram** (a net), **level up** (a hollow), or (figurative) to *furnish* (or *imbue, diffuse, influence*), *satisfy, execute* (an office), *finish* (a period or task), *verify* (or *coincide* with a prediction), etc. ∴ accomplish, × after, (be) complete, end, expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, make) full (come), fully preach, perfect, supply.

*You are crammed full of Christ! What are you doing playing around with all this stuff that seeks to add to what He already is? You are already full; you don't need anything else!*

## THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

All right. Just what was going on in Colossae? What was this heretical philosophy—or, perhaps more accurate, false teaching—threatening the integrity of the church?

You may recall that in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches he addressed a similar situation—similar, but not identical. In Galatia the attack on the churches came from Jews seeking to amend the gospel of Christ with some of the regulations of Judaism. That is, righteousness and justification could not be by faith alone, but must also include circumcision, observance of certain feasts and holy days, adherence to dietary laws, etc. In other words, in Galatia the Judaizers were saying that the gospel must include adherence to the Mosaic Law.

The situation in Colossae is more confusing. It is similar to Galatia (a region, not a city) in that the gospel is being corrupted by outside influence. But in Colossae the corrupting influence was a mish-mash of philosophies coming from several directions. Scholars call this *syncretistic*—i.e., “a mix of two or more religious and/or philosophic traditions” (Moo). And, once again, not everyone agrees what these were. But there is a reasonable consensus. Let's first look at the clues Paul leaves in the letter itself—all in Chapter Two:

2:8	a hollow and deceptive philosophy
2:11, 16-17	emphasis on ritual circumcision, diet, observance of holy days
2:15, 18	mixing in various supernatural powers that should be worshiped, thus diminishing Christ
2:18, 20-23	asceticism [rigorous self-denial; austerity; disciplining the body]
2:4, 8	heretical teachers calling themselves “Christian”

Now, based on these and other references in the text, can we deduce the sources of the corrupt teaching in Colossae? Just what was going on?

The important thing to keep in mind is that each of the corrupting influences in the church at Colossae was *itself* a mish-mash.

1. There was indeed **a Jewish element**—but it was not the the same strict Pharisaic element seen in Galatia. There was some of that, but mixed into it was a certain Jewish mysticism that included among other things (perhaps) worship of angels or (perhaps) participation with angels in the worship of God.
2. There was **a pagan element**: an early form of **Gnosticism** (codified as a coherent system only in the second century, later than this letter). More on this later, but for now Gnosticism included such beliefs as
  - the evil of matter, flesh [belief in the inherent evil of matter made it impossible for Gnostics to accept the real incarnation of Christ];
  - mediating beings;
  - Salvation through knowledge [hence the term; the Greek *ginosko* means “to know”].  
**(Is it any wonder Epaphras went to Paul?)**
3. Finally there was **a corrupt “Christian” element** that seemed to be a blend of Judaism and paganism that did not deny Christ, but dethroned Him; it gave Christ a place, but not the supreme place.

No explanation for the false teaching in Colossae is perfect; problems can be found in each one of them, but perhaps Clinton Arnold summarizes it best:

The Colossian “philosophy”... represents a combination of Phrygian folk belief, local folk Judaism, and Christianity.

The local folk belief has some distinctive Phrygian qualities, but it also has much in common with what we could also describe as magic or ritual power.

As we progress through the letter we will address some of this more fully. For now, in my opinion, the situation in Colossae is far more pertinent to ours today than the situation in Galatia. After all, when was the last time you were compelled to add in circumcision and observance of Passover or Yom Kippur to your faith? But when was the last time someone tried to offer a harmless-sounding variant of Christianity to your faith? Yesterday? [*“Sure, Jesus was a great prophet, but no better than, say, Moses, or Mohammad.”*]

We will address much of this in greater detail as we progress through the text, but for now this gives us a brief overview of the situation in Colossae.

### **SESSION 3: LIVES BUILT ON HOPE**

#### ***Colossians 1:3-8***

This morning we will look at one very long sentence that speaks of believers living a life of faith and love based on the hope they have in Christ.

#### **Read Colossians 1:1-3**

v3

*We give thanks to God,*

First Paul gives thanks—and note: he does not thank *them*, the Colossians, but God. After all, wouldn't that sound a bit weird: *We thank you for your faith...*? That makes it sound as if Paul has inserted himself between God and man.

Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 11.

#### **Read Romans 11:33-36.**

For believers, God is both the source and the recipient of everything we are and hope to be. Our thanksgiving and praise go to Him in all things, for God is responsible for anything due that response.

Then there are two rather unique (for Paul) aspects of this expression of thanksgiving in vv2-3. Neither are accidental, but are used by Paul to continue toward his main thesis on the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ Jesus.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*

Every letter of Paul's contains in its greeting his standard formula of "grace and peace," which we discussed last week (v2). And in every other instance he expresses grace and peace "from God our Father **and** the Lord Jesus Christ." That is, from both God the Father *and* God the Son. Only in Colossians does he say "from God our Father"—leaving out Jesus Christ.

*We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

In v3 Paul, only here, gives thanks not to God *our* Father, nor to God the Father *and* Jesus Christ, but to God alone, who is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Only in Colossians does he state it this way.

This leaves us with the obvious question: Why? We might think that if his purpose is to exalt Christ, to declare His sufficiency, His preeminence, then shouldn't he be mentioning Jesus at every opportunity, rather than marginalizing Him, as Paul seems to be doing here? Well, the apostle Paul is nothing if not systematic, and what he is doing here is laying the groundwork for what will follow. To wit: One good way to defend the debatable is to associate the debatable with that which is *not* debatable (certainly no one on the other side of the argument questions the existence of God).

Paul's argument will be against those who seek to demote Jesus Christ. The best way to ensure Jesus remains where He should be in their minds is to associate Him with God the Father. He begins this at the end of v2—*your grace and peace come from God our (mutual) Father*. No argument there; no disagreement. *All right, if that is true, then what makes Him our Father? "Your faith in Christ Jesus" (v4). And who is Jesus? God the Father's Son.* So, again, in an almost ordinary greeting and initial expression of thanksgiving, Paul remains on-track toward his thesis: the sufficiency of Christ Jesus.

V3 is the first bookend of prayer; the closing bookend is v9. In the space between the bookends Paul speaks of the content and reason for his prayers.

In v3 the word "always" moves about, depending on your translation, without changing the essential meaning of the verse. In some it modifies his "thanks to God," in others it modifies "praying." I favor the ESV and NIV:



We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

Even though Paul did not start this church, and had never met these people, he writes, *Every time we pray for you* (and v9 makes it clear that that is repeatedly) *we thank God for you*.

### *Application*

What a very personal, even intimate and warm thought. Do you do that? When you pray for someone by name, do you give thanks to God for them? It is not just a cliché that “there is power in prayer.” Is there someone you dislike, or have problems with? Pray for them. Earnestly, genuinely pray for them and thank God for them—and just see how your feelings change.

### **v4-5**

The paragraph of vv3-8 is one, long-winded sentence. Some translations [ESV, NIV, KJV] begin a new sentence around v7, and that does make it easier to read. Nevertheless, we must break up this long sentence into manageable chunks for study.

### **Read Colossians 1:3-8.**

Just the way that long sentence is constructed can make it a challenge to digest what he is saying. I think the best way to understand this paragraph is to slightly paraphrase it with a *re-ordering* of the words: [\[see next page\]](#)

Ever since we received the report of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which you have for all the saints, we have been praying for you, and always thanking God—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—for you. All of this—your faith and love for the saints—has come about because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You learned of this hope from the word of truth—that is, the gospel—which you learned from Epaphras your teacher, our beloved fellow bond-servant and faithful servant of Christ, who has also informed us of your love in the Spirit. This same gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing in all the world, even as it has been doing in you since the day you first heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.

That helps us understand the flow of Paul’s thoughts in the entire paragraph—but, of course, our study will be of the actual text.

*since we heard of...*

We can safely assume that Paul “heard of” their faith and love from Epaphras—which would commend the character of their leader—but it is also quite possible that Paul had received reports from others through the grapevine of The Way.

vv4-5 contain the familiar triad of **faith**, **love** and **hope** used in a slightly different way—i.e., their faith and love are *because of* their hope.

### *faith*

Last week I landed pretty heavy on the word “in” (from v2), and I need to return to it for a moment. The Greek in this passage for “faith in Christ Jesus” makes it clear [\[for most scholars\]](#) that Paul is not speaking of their faith in the person Jesus—i.e., their belief in Him, their trust placed in Him as Son of God—but (as referenced last week) their life of mutual indwelling with Him.

Curtis Vaughn: ...Christ as the sphere in which faith operates

Bruce: ...He is the living environment within which their faith is exercised.

It is the difference between simple faith that Jesus is the Son of God, and the sort of faith described in Galatians 2:20—

...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,

That is the brand of faith the Colossians possessed, as reported to Paul.

## Colossians 1:3-8

### NASB

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

### ESV

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

### Lampel Paraphrase

Ever since we received the report of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which you have for all the saints, we have been praying for you, and always thanking God—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—for you. All of this—your faith and love for the saints—has come about because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You learned of this hope from the word of truth—that is, the gospel—which you learned from Epaphras your teacher, our beloved fellow bond-servant and faithful servant of Christ, who has also informed us of your love in the Spirit. This same gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing in all the world, even as it has been doing in you since the day you first heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.

## love

**agape:** the highest form of love; “caring love, the love that counts no sacrifice too great for the one loved” (Vaughn) One might expect to see *philadelphia* (fil-ad-el-fee’-ah)—brotherly love, fraternal love—here, but no, it is *agape*. This is the sort of love the Colossians had for and demonstrated toward *all* believers.

## hope

The depth of their existence in Christ Jesus, and their deep love for all the saints, were both products of their hope.

Moo: Paul often uses “hope” to refer to the attitude of hope [as seen in the definition of the Greek word:

**hope** = *elpis* (el-peece’) = from a primary *elpo* (to anticipate, usually with pleasure); **expectation** (abstract or concrete) or **confidence** :- faith, hope.]

Here, however, it pretty clearly denotes that which Christians hope for: “the totality of blessing that awaits the Christian in the life to come.”

That is, not the *emotion* of hope, but *the thing hoped for*. This hope—eternal life, the presence of God the Father and Christ Jesus, et al—was “laid up for [them] in heaven.”

**laid up, stored up**<sup>niv</sup> = from <G575> (apo) and <G2749> (keimai); to **be reserved**; figurative to **await** :- be appointed, (be) laid up. [Used, for example, of a coin put away for safekeeping (Luke 19:20), and the reward (award) of “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).]

## vv6-8

From where did they get this?

v5: ... of which you previously heard in the word of truth  
that is,

v5b-6: ... the gospel which has come to you  
Who brought that gospel to them?

v7... just as you learned it from Epaphras...

This is the same gospel that is being carried, is spreading, and is bearing fruit all around the (known) world (v6). Here Paul emphasizes the universality of the gospel. Soon he will be taking up the battle against the false teaching taking place in Colossae—spurious, deceitful teachings meant to weaken the gospel of Christ. Here, with an opening volley, he establishes in the minds of the church the strength, the growth, the ever-expanding, far-reaching impact of the world-wide gospel of Christ. It is as if he is already saying in these early verses, *How can you compare those silly myths and irrelevant regulations to this “grace of God in truth”?*

So when we put all this together, the bottom line is that for the Colossians there was a tangible, practical effect from their hope. It wasn’t just some ephemeral state of bliss that warmed them on cold nights. It literally changed them into loving, caring, other-worldly human beings who were displaying Christ to each other and people around them.

## Application

- Is that what your hope has done for you?
- Does this report of the Colossians accurately describe *your* life?
- Has your hope matured into a mystical but very real life of faith in Christ, evidenced by the love you have and show to all the saints?
- That is how Paul ends this paragraph, this very long sentence: “and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.” Does that describe your relationship with “all the saints”?

Let’s close by reading a passage from Romans that summarizes the points in this Colossians passage from a slightly different perspective, but also closes in much the same way.

**Read Romans 5:1-5.**

## SESSION 4: KNOWLEDGEABLE CONDUCT

Colossians 1:9-14 — Part One (vv9-10a)

### PREFACE/OUTLINE

Our passage this morning is one that benefits from a simple outlining. [\[see next page\]](#)

### Read Colossians 1:9-14.

## Colossians 1:9-14

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask **that you** ↓  
may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, **so that you will** ↓  
walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects,

pleasing to Him {

- bearing fruit in every good work and
- increasing in the knowledge of God;
- strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, **for** ↓
  - the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;
- joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14 NASB

### KNOWLEDGE

The first element of Paul's repeated prayer for the church in Colossae—again, our text is not “a prayer,” but Paul's telling the church how and what he has *been* praying on their behalf—was that they would be filled with knowledge—but a rather focused knowledge.

### Read v9.

**knowledge** = *epignosis* (ep-ig'-no-sis) = from <G1921> (epiginosko); *recognition*, i.e. (by implication) *full discernment, acknowledgment* :- (ac-) knowledge (-ing, -ment).  
[“epignosis” “gnosis” “Gnosticism”]

It is important that we understand what Paul means by this. Recall that in an earlier lesson we discussed that one of the rhetorical battles in which Paul was going to have to engage was against the philosophy called “Gnosticism.” One aspect of this was a “salvation through knowledge”—that flesh was inherently evil (and worthless) and that all that mattered was knowledge. That, of course, is a grossly simplified description; countless volumes have been written about Gnosticism and its relation to the gospel. But for our purposes it should suffice for now.

But how does Paul use this? What does he mean by the term *epignosis*?

**Illustration:** Let's say the water pump in my car needs replacing. Being stingy with my brass, I decide to do the work myself. One problem: I've never done it before. So I go to the library and read all I can find about changing a water pump in a Jeep. I watch one or two YouTube how-to videos, and I stop by my mechanic's garage to pump him for as much free advice I can get away with. So after all of this, I am reasonably confident the day I open my toolbox and get to work on replacing the water pump. I have filled my head with the “knowledge” of how to replace a water pump in a 1997 Jeep Cherokee.



By this *gnosis* I accomplished “salvation”—a fully functional motor vehicle.

To understand what Paul means here is **not** to simply spiritualize the illustration above. He is not praying that the Colossians will spend more time reading their Bibles, reading more Christian self-help books, watching videos about how to be a better Christian, or studying more commentaries by the leading scholars. And this is not something new to the NT.

*E. D. Schmitz* (in Brown): Knowledge of God is always linked with God’s acts of self-revelation... While the Greeks were concerned with detached knowledge and a speculative interest in the metaphysical nature of things, the OT regards knowledge as something which continually arises from personal encounter.

We do not obtain knowledge of God by going to the library and reading about Him; we obtain knowledge of God by *living with Him*. By receiving *from Him*. Look at how Paul states it:

**that you may be filled with the knowledge of...**

Douglas J. Moo refers to this as the “divine passive.”

What Paul prays for is that the Colossians “might be filled with the knowledge of His will.” The verb *plerothete* [be filled] is a “divine passive,” with God as the implied agent.

We see this reflected in the NIV:

**...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will...**

So while it is true that in many respects the believer is an active participant, the fundamental point of this is that ***we receive our knowledge of God from Him***—

- in communion with Him;
- in not just reading His word but *meditating* on His word, understanding what He is saying;
- in worship of Him;
- in acknowledging His lordship over our lives, so that we know God as an active, vital participant in our life

We see this in the cultic imagery of Romans 12.

### **Read Romans 12:1-2.**

We give ourselves wholly and unreservedly to God, and thereby have our minds renewed and filled (implied, by Him) with “that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Proverbs 1:7 puts it more succinctly:

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;**

**Fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)**

**v9**

At the moment of this writing, Paul is probably of two minds. He is encouraged by the generally positive report he has received from Epaphras, but he understands as well that there exists in Colossae serious threats to their faith. So we can see this paragraph as both an affirmation of their progress in the faith and a reminder of how they will need to gird themselves for the battle ahead.

Paul knows that the essential foundation for their victory over the encompassing threats to their faith *must* be that they

**be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (emphasis added)**

It is critical that they approach this battle not girded with the wisdom [*sofia*] of flesh, but girded with wisdom from above. It must be *spiritual* wisdom.

**spiritual** = *pneumatikos* = from <G4151> (pneuma); **non-carnal, i.e. (humanly) ethereal** (as opposed to gross), or (dæmoniacally) a *spirit* (concretely), or (divinely) **supernatural, regenerate, religious** :- spiritual.

Not from a mindless, ecstatic, trance-like perspective, but one based on reason and understanding.

**understanding** = *synesis* (soon'-es-is) = from <G4920> (sunemi); **a mental putting together, i.e. intelligence or (concretely) the intellect** :- knowledge, understanding. [think, synergy]

Faith is not devoid of reason. Our hope is based on Spirit-informed truth. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with a supernatural perspective, the gospel of Christ is sensible, logical.

## v10

This is not simply an intellectual exercise: Our conduct *flows out of* this knowledge. Verse 10 begins,  
so that you will...

And then what follows is a bullet-list of Spirit-empowered behaviors or attributes, all designed to equip the Colossians—and us—for battle against (as Paul describes them in 2:8) “the elementary principles of the world.”

*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,*

First, this knowledge will affect our daily life—our deportment, our behavior.

**walk, live**<sup>niv</sup> = *peripateo* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G3961> (pateo); **to tread all around**, i.e. **walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); figurative **to live, deport oneself, follow** (as a companion or votary) :- go, **be occupied with**, walk (about).

Implicit in this statement is the hard fact that *without* this knowledge, we will *not* “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” What does your “walk” look like to others? What are you occupied with?

**Sidebar:** I confess that I initially got hung up on the word translated “worthy,” for one could read that to mean *conduct yourself in a way that will make you worthy of the privilege of having Christ Jesus as your Lord*. That is, *live a life that earns a relationship with Christ, or a life that deserves Christ*. Since that can’t be what Paul means, I dug deeper.

**worthy** = *axios* (ax-ee'-ose) = adverb from <G514> (axios); **appropriately** :- as becometh, after a godly sort, worthily (-thy). “Worthy” is used here in the sense of something fitting, in accord with, appropriate. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:27 Paul warns against celebrating the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner (anaxios). He is not requiring moral quality in the participants, but looking for a manner of life which accords with the gospel. (E. Tiedtke in Brown) Or it could be thought of (as Curtis Vaughan puts it) “live a life that is commensurate with what the Lord has done for us and is to us.”

Another way to express this is that we are...

*to please Him in all respects.*

The KJV is the most literal translation, most faithful to the original Greek: “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing”—but also the least understandable. The “Him” is implied by the context; that is, Paul is not suggesting we live a life pleasing to everyone or anyone, but a life pleasing *to our Lord*.

Vaughan explains that “in classical Greek this word [‘to please’] had a bad connotation, denoting, as H.C.G. Moule observes,”

a cringing and subservient habit, ready to do anything to please a patron; not only to meet but to anticipate his most trivial wishes. But when transferred to the believer’s relations to his Lord, the word at once rises by its associations. To do anything to meet, to anticipate His wishes is not only the most absolutely right thing we could do. It is His eternal due; it is at the same time the surest path to our own highest development and gain.

That is, pleasing God and living in obedience to Him always—*always*—pays dividends. Unlike the cringing slave who obeys just to survive another day, or the obsequious servant who just hopes that his pay won't be docked, believers are showered by the Lord's blessings when our life pleases Him. In fact, it has been my experience that the Lord is so gracious as to pour blessings even into a life *not* always in obedience to Him.

Unlike the servant or slave, our obedience rises out of our love for, our devotion to Him—and our gratitude for what He has *already* done for us.

## **DEFINING A LIFE**

What follows this call to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects” is a number of behaviors that constitute such a life. We will dig into these next week, but for now let's just note them.

*bearing fruit in every good work and  
increasing in the knowledge of God;*

These could be read together, as one item, but I have separated them for a more thorough study. A life pleasing to God will every day be growing and maturing deeper into *His* life. It will be a productive, fruitful life.

*strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for  
the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;*

A life pleasing to God will receive its power from above—not from this temporal plane. And it will be that supernatural power which will supply the necessary stamina, the forbearance, the peace.

*joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.*

Far from being a laborious burden, such a life is filled with joy, with thanksgiving, with praise to God for this free gift through Christ Jesus.

Let's close with a brief verse in Proverbs that more succinctly describes a life pleasing to God.

**Read Proverbs 4:18.**

**SESSION 5: POWER FOR PATIENCE**  
*Colossians 1:9-14 — Part Two (vv10b-11)*

**PREFACE**

Last week we opened this passage, beginning at v9, in which the apostle Paul expands on his repeated prayers—his desire—for the church at Colossae. Paul is continuing to set the table for what will come later in this letter: more direct and specific references to the problems in Colossae.

It is clear that what Paul is expressing here in Chapter One is important to him, for he repeats it later at the beginning of Chapter Two.

**Read Colossians 2:1-3.**

And then he immediately tells them why this is so important to him.

**Read v4.**

What is also clear is that this should be important to us. Read v4 as if Paul himself were standing before you, poking his finger in your chest: *"I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument!"* or as J. B. Phillips paraphrases it,

I write like this to prevent you from being led astray by someone or other's attractive arguments.

Every day we are bombarded by "attractive" benign-sounding arguments that would covertly or overtly pull us away from the eternal truth of holy God. We must take to heart, and take into our daily life, the words of that same God, recorded by the pen of the apostle, intended to buttress *our* defense against such things.

Whenever there is this sort of repetition and emphasis in God's word (as we have in both chapters), the light bulb in our brain should switch on; we are to pay special attention to what He is saying to us. So let's return to our passage in Chapter One, and read through it again.

**Read Colossians 1:9-14.**

Paul has been steadily praying for the Colossians. What specifically has he been praying for? That God would fill them with the knowledge of His will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Why? To what end? So that they would walk, would live, in a manner worthy of—in accord with—the Lord, thereby pleasing Him in all respects. And just what does such a life look like? That is what we are going to look at in this session.

**v10B**

In v6, above, Paul wrote that the *gospel* was "constantly bearing fruit and increasing." And now he writes, in v10b, that he has been praying that their lives would do the same: bear fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God.

In a manner of speaking the relationship of these two statements is similar to what Jeff was saying last week—the importance of our being a *channel* of the knowledge we gain. Here Paul says (v6) that the gospel is already being fruitful in their lives, so they are to let that flow through them to others, so that *they* would now bear fruit in others as the gospel has been bearing fruit in them. (Moo)

*bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

I originally wanted to consider these separately, but upon further study realize that they are inexorably bound together.



This passage naturally follows the previous, for even just the word translated “walk” (v10a) implies progress (Hill/Archer), which is continued in the idea of “bearing fruit” and “increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Many people are accustomed to thinking that whenever the Bible refers to “bearing fruit” it is code for winning souls—sort of like the *Amway* salesperson who has his or her quota of converts to win, to expand the sales force. And the tie-in with the previous mention of the spread of the gospel might encourage that thought. Certainly sharing with others the Good News that saved us is *part* of “bearing fruit,” but we must not make the mistake of limiting it to that.

The word picture being painted here [vv9-12] by Paul is one of **movement forward**—growth, maturing, developing, improving. My personal philosophy has always been that regarding my chosen craft I should be better at it today than I was yesterday. Something is terribly wrong if my skills today are the same as they were ten years ago. I should be constantly growing, improving, developing my skills, improving my product. And it is the same for our life in Christ.

This is what Paul desires for the Colossians: that their faith (and the resulting actions) would not remain static, but constantly moving forward. And we see this in the totality of the phrase: bearing fruit *in every good work*.

**Sidebar:** Note the totality of scope of these exhortations:

v9: in **all** spiritual wisdom and understanding

v10: to please Him in **all** respects

v10: bearing fruit in **every** good work

v11: strengthened with **all** power

v11: for the attaining of **all** steadfastness and patience

**every** = *pas* = **all, any, every, the whole** :- all (manner of, means), always (-s), any (one), × daily, + ever, every (one, way), as many as, + no (-thing), × thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, whosoever.

**good** = *agathos* = a primary word; “good” (in any sense, often as noun) :- benefit, good (-s, things), well. Compare <G2570> (kalos).

The concept of “good” in the OT “is indissolubly [i.e., cannot be dissolved] linked with personal faith in God. An idea of the good, freed from the concept of God as personal...is inconceivable.” In the NT, “natural man is irretrievably in bondage to the powers of sin and death, and has no right to claim the attribute ‘good’ for himself. But through the redemption which has taken place in Christ goodness overflows the believer” (E. Beyreuther in Brown).

Whatever “goodness” we have comes from God. We see this throughout the Bible, but let’s read it in the benediction with which the writer of Hebrews closes his letter.

### Read Hebrews 13:20-21.

**work** = *ergon* = from a primary (but obsolete) ergo (to work); **toil (as an effort or occupation)**; by implication **an act** :- **deed**, doing, labour, work.

We are not just *able* to perform good works through Christ Jesus; we have been *created* for them.

### Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

Our “good works” include...

*increasing in the knowledge of God;*

This is a multifaceted thought. If we first just interpret the text as it is on the page, we see that,

- Following the translations other than the NIV, it describes *progress in knowing* God
- The NIV translates this *growing in* the knowledge of God—which is not terribly different. Philosophical and applicational increase is often synonymous with growth—that is, maturing.

- So at a rudimentary (if not quite accurate) level, we can interpret this to mean *learning more about God*.

However, the Greek preposition translated “in” in all our common translations can also be translated “by”: “growing by the knowledge of God.”

- With this, we would interpret Paul’s statement to mean that our increase, our growing, takes place *by means of* our knowledge of God—which, of course, can be very true. But is that what Paul is saying?

Probably the best interpretation is to go back to the preferred translation (“in”) but understanding this in a way similar to when we say—and God’s word says—that we are “in Christ.”

- That is, knowledge of God is the *sphere* or realm in which spiritual growth takes place. Field corn grows best in the sphere, the climate, of heat and humidity. Children grow and mature best in the sphere of a loving and complete family. And Christians advance, progress, in spiritual maturity best when enveloped in the knowledge of God. If we live in the sphere of this world, our growth will be in the things of this world; if we live, if we abide in the sphere of the knowledge of God, our growth will be in that.

I like how F. F. Bruce puts this all together.

If pagans appreciated the importance of rendering worship which was worthy of the deities whose votaries they were, much more should Christians render the spiritual service of obedient lives to the living and true God and to His Son Jesus Christ. Thus the fair fruit of good works would spring in greater abundance from the divine seed which had been sown in their hearts, and at the same time they would make ever increasing progress in the knowledge of God. For obedience to the knowledge of God which has already been received is a necessary and certain condition for the reception of further knowledge.

## v11

*strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might,  
for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;*

In v11 Paul answers the question, “How is all this wonderful stuff to be accomplished? How do we achieve it?” Just as in vv9-10, the qualities and behavior Paul prays will be instilled in and demonstrated by the Colossians all come from above:

- v9: God fills us with knowledge, and our wisdom and understanding are *Spirit-fed*;
- v10: our walk of faith is to be pleasing to the *Lord*, and our growth and the fruit we bear are to take place within the realm of the knowledge God has poured into us.

In a similar vein, Paul has been praying that they would be strengthened—but a holy strength defined by the glory of God.

**strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience**

God remains the standard and source.

There are some interesting things going on in the words of this verse. “Strengthened” is the verb form of the noun “power” (or “might” in the KJVs)

**dynamis** = from <G1410> (dunamai); **force** (literal or figurative); specially **miraculous power** (usually by implication a **miracle** itself) :- **ability**, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

“Might” (or “power” in the KJVs) is a different word.

**kratos** = perhaps a primary word; **vigor** [“great”] (literal or figurative) :- **dominion**, might [-ily], power, strength.

The “all” in “strengthened with all power” is not used to denote a number—he picked up *all* the marbles—but denotes a “marker of the highest degree; complete, unlimited” power. Douglas J. Moo paraphrases this, “strengthened by God with the greatest strength imaginable.”

As if that were not sufficient to describe this power, Paul goes on to say that it is “according to His glorious might.” I prefer the word order of the original Greek: “the might of His glory.” God’s glory is not just some bright light that tells us He is something special. God’s glory is not just resplendent, but strong, powerful, mighty. To what end? How do we put this power to use? Moving mountains? Evangelizing the population of the whole world?

*...for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;*

**Sidebar:** The KJVs and ESV associate the “joy” with this phrase, while the NASB and NIV associate it with the following verse. Both can be true and neither is utterly wrong. The NASB includes the alternate rendering in a margin note.

If there is any special distinction to the way Paul uses these two words—and, as above, the KJVs flip them—it could be as N. T. Wright states:

Endurance or steadfastness [the first word: hypomone] is what faith, hope and love bring to an apparently impossible situation; patience [the second word: makrothymia] what they show to an apparently impossible person.

Isn’t that a fascinating and non-intuitive use of the immense, unlimited power of God’s glory?

## SESSION 6: A NEW KING!

*Colossians 1:9-14 — Part Three (vv12-14)*

### PREFACE

For one more time let's read through our paragraph to get the whole context.

#### Read Colossians 1:9-14.

So far, as Paul has detailed to the Colossians the content of his ongoing prayers for their well-being and continued maturing in the faith, we have discussed his desire that they

- be filled with the knowledge of His will;
- that this knowledge would be based not on earthly, but spiritual wisdom and understanding;
- that their daily walk of faith would be in accord with the Lord, pleasing Him by being productive and maturing within the sphere of *His* knowledge;
- so that they might attain steadfastness, or endurance in every situation placed before them, and patience with everyone around them.

Now Paul places the capstone on this list with v12.

### v12

Last week I pointed out how some translations place the "joy" with v11, and others use it to modify v12. It is a fair toss-up, but to my ears it seems to flow with greater ease with v12. But one way to have the best of both is to combine the thoughts in vv11-12:

*The Lord strengthens us with a power based on the incredible might of His glory so that in every trial we would not just endure patiently, but even be filled with joyful thanksgiving to the Father.*

Isn't this what James speaks of at the beginning of his letter?

#### Read James 1:2-4.

*joyously giving thanks to the Father*

Few things set apart believers from the rest of the world more than this characteristic. To be honest, it often remains a sporadically attained goal in the individual, but just the fact that we *want* to live this way—*joyously* giving thanks when faced with trials and trying times—and believe that it is possible, marks believers as dwelling outside the philosophies of this world. Indeed, what better way to demonstrate that we are living by "spiritual wisdom and understanding," walking "in a manner worthy of the Lord" (vv9-10) than to rejoice in circumstances that require patience and endurance and give thanks for them.

In v12 Paul turns a corner. Note the pronouns earlier in this passage:

- v9: that **you** may be filled
- v10: so that **you** will walk

From v9 through the beginning of v12 Paul has been itemizing his desire for the Colossians. I don't want to put too fine a point on this, since manuscripts and translations differ, but look at the pronouns now.

- v12: who has qualified **us** [exception: **ESV** ("you")]
- v13: He rescued **us** and transferred **us**
- v14: in whom **we** have redemption

Why the change in pronouns? V12 is a transition from how Paul wants the Colossians to live (future expectation) to what God the Father has already done for them (past, present, and ongoing). So, of course, Paul includes himself, because what the Lord has done for the Colossians He has also done for the apostle.



...who has qualified us...

We give thanks to the Father because He is the one making all this possible. He has *qualified* us:

**qualified** = *hikanosanti* = from <G2425> (*hikanos*); to **enable**, i.e. *qualify* :- **make able** (meet); make sufficient or competent.

The tense of this verb means that it was accomplished once, in the past; it is done, finished—i.e., at conversion. And now we need not read between the lines; Paul is explicit that the Father did this for us—*because we could not do it for ourselves*. To what purpose?

*to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.*

My parents were of modest means to begin with, and by the time Mom died, after five years in a nursing home, there was nothing monetary left to inherit. But I of course did inherit *some* things:

- from my dad a disinterest (to say the least) in hunting and fishing—and a thinning pate;
- from Mom a certain rotundity;
- not salvation, but a love for the Lord and His church;
- not least, life itself.

None of these things are necessarily mine by choice, and I did nothing to merit them. But they have been my portion—my inheritance—from the union of their lives.

We have no sufficiency of our own before God. We cannot earn, we cannot buy our way into His family. To put a fine point on it, we cannot even *believe* our way into His family: It is not our belief that saves us; it is the work of God and the sacrifice of Christ Jesus that brings us into His family. *He* is responsible for our birth—our rebirth in Christ. Once there, we have a share in our heavenly Father's inheritance. We join with, and have a share in the inheritance enjoyed by the "saints [holy ones] in Light."

The Greek word translated "inheritance" hearkens back to the bits of wood or stone used to cast lots—to determine the will of the gods (in secular Greek) or God in the Bible. Remember, the settlement of Israel's tribes in the Promised Land—their "inheritance"—was determined by casting lots. We hear this echoed in one of David's psalms.

### **Read Psalm 16:5-6.**

So this is ancient, yet meaningful imagery employed by Paul in v12.

And by the way, don't let the word "inheritance" throw this into the future for you. He—God the Father—has done this already. The actions, the benefits accrued to us are already in place. This is not a matter of waiting, of hope; this is a matter of living *right now*.

### ***Light***

Out of all the translations, only the *Updated* NASB—but not the original NASB—capitalizes "Light." I could find no explanation for this, but we might conjecture that

- the translators did this to suggest that Paul was using "in Light" as he would "in Christ"—i.e., in the sphere or realm of; or
- since the "the" before light is in the text, but optional, perhaps the NASB scholars, interpreting "the light" to be a reference to Christ, left out "the" but covered it by capitalizing—i.e., [the one and only] "Light."

However, the NIV insertion of "kingdom" is *not* in the text, and has been added by its editors.

The reason the *apostle Paul* used the word "light," however, is obviously to set up and contrast it to his mention of "darkness" in v13—which, with v14 is a preface to one of the most eloquent and other-worldly descriptions of "His beloved Son" in all Scripture.

### **vv13-14**

### **Read Colossians 1:13-14.**

In writing this passage, Paul could have had in mind Israel's exodus—their deliverance from the dark bondage of Egypt to the light of the promised land. (Several key words here in vv12-14 are the same used in God's promise to the Israelites in the Septuagint [[Greek translation of OT](#)]). Or he could have had in mind the Jew's return to the light of Jerusalem from the darkness of Babylon.

But I favor the connection with a scene that would have been fresher in Paul's mind, one in which he narrated for King Agrippa his moment of conversion on the Damascus road. [Please turn to Acts 26](#). V13 in Colossians reads,

He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

### Read Acts 26:13-18.

...at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

"And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; **rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God**, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and **an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me**.'

And we will benefit by digging a little deeper, beneath the print on the page of this sentence, for there is some strong imagery buried there.

**rescued**<sup>nasb,niv</sup>, **delivered**<sup>kjvs,esv</sup> = *rhyomai* (rhoo'-om-ahee) = middle of an obsolete verb, akin to <G4482> (rheo) (through **the idea of a current**; compare <G4511> (rhusis)); **to rush or draw** (for oneself), i.e. *rescue* :- deliver (-er).

And from what did He rescue us?

**domain**<sup>nasb,esv</sup>, **power**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **dominion**<sup>niv</sup> = *exousia* = from <G1832> (exesti) (in the sense of **ability**); *privilege*, i.e. (subject) **force, capacity, competency, freedom**, or (object) **mastery** (concrete *magistrate, superhuman, potentate, token of control*), delegated *influence* :- **authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength**.

I think for most people the word "domain" conjures the idea of a space, an area, real estate. That can be true in this context—although, don't we, in fact, physically remain in the domain of darkness even though we have been redeemed?

- This word was used by Matthew, in stating that Jesus "was teaching as one having **authority**, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29).
- In John's vision of the end times he writes, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no **power**..."
- In the KJV it is more often than not translated "power"; in the NASB, "authority" or "authorities."

And here, explicitly, it is the domain of

**darkness** = *skotos* = from the base of <G4639> (skia); **shadiness, i.e. obscurity** (literal or figurative) :- darkness.

Throughout the Bible—both OT and NT—darkness represents evil and/or sin, while light represents righteousness, purity, holiness.

Even though we physically remain in Satan's "domain" (i.e., sphere of influence), his influence over us has been if not neutered, greatly diminished. John writes,

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Believers are no longer under Satan's authority, under his power, because we have been delivered from it. This thought in v13 is expanded in Chapter Two, using the same word.

**Read Colossians 2:13-15.** ["authorities"]

Then God the Father transferred us to the kingdom of His Son.

**transferred**<sup>nasb,esv</sup>, **conveyed**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **translated**<sup>kjv</sup>, **brought**<sup>niv</sup> = *methistemi* = or (1 Cor. 13:2) **methistano**, meth-is-tan'-o; from <G3326> (meta) and <G2476> (histemi); **to transfer, i.e. carry away, depose** or (figurative) *exchange, seduce* :- put out, remove, translate, turn away.

The translation "transferred" is helpful (as is the KJV "translated" for the same reason) because it emphasizes that we were previously under a *different* authority, and God moved us from there to *His* authority. Whether we realized it or not, before our conversion we were under the thumb of Satan.

And the Lord God reached down into the rushing river of Satan's horrible might, snatched us by the collar and pulled us up out of that torrent of certain death, lifted us up and graciously set us down in the kingdom of light and life—the kingdom of, literally, "the Son of His love."

And it doesn't stop there.

We were not just moved from one place to another, from one kingdom to another. We were moved into a kingdom like no other.

*...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

In this kingdom we have been ransomed in full. When a firstborn male child was born in Israel, that child belonged to the Lord. But so that the temple would not be bursting at the seams with firstborns, the parents would "redeem" the child—make an offering, a sacrifice on his behalf.

...you shall devote to the Lord the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the Lord. But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. (Exodus 13:12-14)

We have been redeemed by that once and final sacrifice of Christ on the cross. When God the Father lifts us from Satan's authority and places us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, our redemption is immediately covered by the blood of Christ.

And, Paul goes on to say, we also receive forgiveness of sins.

**forgiveness** = *aphesis* = from <G863> (aphiemi); **freedom**; (figurative) *pardon* :- **deliverance**, forgiveness, **liberty**, remission.

"Rescue" indeed.

## SESSION 7: WHO IS THIS BELOVED SON?

*Colossians 1:15-20 (Part One: v15)*

### PREFACE

Like the previous paragraph in Chapter One, our understanding of the one before us—vv15-20—benefits from an outlining of the structure. The predominate reason for doing this is to reveal those things that the apostle Paul emphasizes.

## Colossians 1:15-20

[*Who is this “beloved Son”?*]

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**

[*Why is He referred to as “the firstborn of all creation”?*]

For by Him **all** things were created,

*both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—

**all** things have been created through Him and for Him.

**He is before all things**, and **in Him all things hold together**.

**He is** also **head of the body, the church**; and

**He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead**, so that He Himself will come to have first place in **everything**.

For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for **all** the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile **all** things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:15-20 NASB

The syntax Paul uses in vv15-20 sets this passage apart from the surrounding text. Still, this eloquent “hymn”—as most scholars refer to it—answers the implied question trailing off from the previous paragraph: *Just who is this “beloved Son”?* And Paul answers: *I’m glad you asked. Let me tell you.*

The hymn was either borrowed by Paul, or written by him for this purpose. An agreeable (and more probable) position is that he borrowed some elements, some thoughts from an extant hymn that was familiar to the first-century church, but adapted it to his purpose in addressing the situation in Colossae. He will use this as his fullest, opening argument for the preeminence of Christ.

### Read Colossians 1:15-20.

### v15

A proper understanding of v15 hinges on the meanings of two key words: “image” and “firstborn.” To determine what is meant by Paul, we must go beyond the dictionary meaning of each word—indeed, not just to the immediate context, but the context of God’s word as a whole. This is critical because many in the world today choose to use this verse as concrete evidence for their heretical positions. Cults have perpetrated much mischief—and much ignorance about the true nature of Christ—by their misuse of this verse.

*He is the image of the invisible God...*

**image** = *eikon* (ay-kone’) = from <G1503> (eiko); a *likeness*, i.e. (literal) *statue, profile, or (figurative) representation, resemblance* :- image; we get the word “icon” from this.

If we struggle to understand what it means that Jesus is the “image” of God, it may be because the writers of the NT—as well as the translators and commentators and scholars of Scripture—struggle so in finding the right words to explain it to us.

In the words of the writer to the Hebrews, Jesus “is the radiance of [God’s] glory, and the exact representation of His nature” (1:3). John writes in his gospel that “No one has seen God at any time” but the Son “has explained Him”—or declared Him, or made Him known (1:18). Jesus Himself put it directly in John 14.

### Read John 14:8-9.

Was Jesus saying that God the Father *looks like, has the identical appearance of* the earthly Jesus of Nazareth. No, as Curtis Vaughan puts it,

Christ always has been, is, and always will be the image of God. His incarnation did not make Him the image of God, but it did bring Him, “as being that Image, within our grasp.”

The word translated “image” does mean *likeness*, in the sense of an image on a coin has the likeness of the emperor, or like a reflection in a mirror. But it also includes the idea of *manifestation*. This is what John 1:18 is saying: It isn’t so much that if Jesus of Nazareth had a mole on his right cheek this means God the Father has a mole on *His* right cheek. No, it is that the earthly Jesus perfectly revealed to man the nature and being of God. It is as if collective man asked God, “What are You like?” And God’s answer to that was, in full, the incarnated Son: Jesus.

And this is related to how the first man was originally made “in the image of God.” Douglas Moo writes that

The opening line of our hymn may identify Christ as that original image in accordance with which human beings were created.

That is, just as Christ is the image of God, man was made in the image of Christ. Christ is what we would “look like” had we not the heavy woolen cloak of sin, and the accumulated strata of depravity. But there will come a day when all that will be sloughed off, when we will stand before our Lord as if in a mirror; we will see Him as He truly is, and He will see us as we were always meant to be: like Him.

### Read 1 John 3:2.

Douglas Moo cites Stettler, “who rightly distinguishes between Christ, who *is* the image of God, and human beings, who are created *according to or in* that image.”

So if you want to know what the invisible God looks like—His nature, His character, His personality—just look at the nature, the character, the personality of Jesus in Scripture.

**For example**, there have been times in the past when, for one reason or another, I would find myself flat on my face in my prayer closet, pleading for God’s forgiveness. In such moments of abject confession and misery, invariably it would be the presence of Christ Jesus—not the Spirit, not Father God—who came to me with His consolation and mercy. It was unmistakably *His* arms that embraced me and comforted me. Yet, did I imagine it was Christ doing this because the other two members of the Trinity didn’t feel the same way? No, I was sure that Christ Jesus was in that moment the hands and heart of very God. God was revealing Himself to me through the person of my Savior.

*...the firstborn of all creation.*

Even more troublesome and problematic is the second half of v15. If the church has struggled to grasp the first half—“He is the image of the invisible God”—then the world has clung tenaciously to the second half—“the firstborn of all creation”—as the basis for demoting, for stripping away Christ’s deity.

This verse, along with several others in the NT that refer to Jesus as God’s “only begotten” Son, have been the “proof texts” used by various sects to show that the Son was a created being. This errant belief system has its roots in “Arianism.”

*Wayne Grudem:* The term Arianism is derived from Arius, a Bishop of Alexandria whose views were condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, and who died in A.D. 336. Arius taught that God the Son was at one point created by God the Father, and that before that time the Son did not exist, nor did the Holy Spirit, but the Father only. Thus, though the Son is a heavenly being who existed before the rest of creation and who is far greater than all the rest of creation, he is still not equal to the Father in all his attributes—he may even be said to be “like the Father” or “similar to the Father” in his nature, but he cannot be said to be “of the same nature” as the Father.

The Arians depended heavily on texts that called Christ God's "only begotten" Son (John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). If Christ were "begotten" by God the Father, they reasoned, it must mean that he was brought into existence by God the Father (for the word "beget" in human experience refers to the father's role in conceiving a child). Further support for the Arian view was found in Colossians 1:15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." Does not "first-born" here imply that the Son was at some point brought into existence by the Father?

Jehovah's Witnesses are modern-day Arians. So how are we to answer this?

**firstborn** = *prototokos* = from <G4413> (protos) and the alternate of <G5088> (tikto); *first-born* (usually as noun, literal or figurative) :- firstbegotten (-born).

It is true that this word means the first offspring of a parent—"the first to come from the womb" (Moo)—and in this sense it can be said that the parents "made" or created the child.

**Sidebar:** Here's a question I would put to the JW's: *Who was the mother of the "beloved Son"? Who did God the Father mate with to produce this "firstborn"?*

But the word is also used to denote "the ancient attribution of preeminence to the first to be born" (Moo). Example: Yahweh used this to describe His beloved Israel.

### **Read Exodus 4:22-23.**

So in that passage "firstborn" is used in both senses: Israel was, in the Lord's eyes, preeminent among the nations of earth, and if Pharaoh did not let Israel go, the Lord would kill everyone's child who was the first from the womb.

But there is a psalm that gives us an even better example. Psalm 89 is already rich with messianic allusions, and in v27 this word is used to describe King David.

### **Read Psalm 89:26-29.**

Now of course, the psalmist Ethan the Ezrahite did not mean by this that David was literally God's firstborn—if for no other reason, even by Arianism standards, that place was given to Christ, God's Son, and you can't have more than one firstborn. So the psalmist must mean something else—and it is clear from the context; he spells it out in the next line: "The highest of the kings of the earth." That is, with a messianic allusion, the preeminent king over all other kings.

And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:16)

Here in v15 the NIV helps us out.

...the firstborn **over** all creation.

Jesus Christ was not the first created thing of all created things; He has preeminence *over* all created things.

In our next session we will examine the extent to which Christ is supremely Lord over all creation. For now, let us close with the glorious passage we find in the first chapter of Hebrews.

In all these passages we hear the struggle of the NT writers, and then the scholars who interpret them for us, to find just the right words to describe Christ's relationship to Father God, then to creation itself. They struggle to put into *human* language the unutterable language and mysteries of heaven. My guess is that all human words fall short when describing such.

In the first chapter of Hebrews the writer gleans from the Psalms and 2 Samuel the wonder and glory that is the Son of God—and how far from being just another of Father God's angels, the Son is worshiped *as God* by those angels.

### **Read Hebrews 1:5-10.**

And who is this we are talking about?

### **Read Hebrews 1:1-4.**



## SESSION 8: THE ONE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

*Colossians 1:15-20 (Part Two: vv16-17)*

### PREFACE

The church in Colossae is being systematically coaxed away from the supremacy of Christ Jesus by false teachers that would seek to diminish Him, relegating the “firstborn” of God to the company of lesser created beings, and emphasizing the importance of pure knowledge over faith. In these two verses—vv16-17—Paul continues and expands on his thesis that Christ is all in all, and superior to *any* created thing.

And I think it is helpful to keep in mind something that A. W. Tozer once wrote. His thesis was on the attributes of God—specifically, in this quote, the holiness of God—but his remarks apply as well to this context where we are considering the supremacy of Christ Jesus.

We cannot grasp the true meaning of holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God’s holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is. Because He is holy, His attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy.

For us it is important to remember that Christ is not just the best of the best, one degree higher than the highest archangel. No, He is supreme over all creation in ways beyond the mind of man to comprehend. [\[as in a SciFi movie, in which the one critical element is removed and the universe collapses in on itself, remove Christ, and the universe collapses—ceases to exist.\]](#)

If this paragraph [\[vv15-20\]](#) answers the previous paragraph [\[vv9-14\]](#), these two verses answer v15. *Paul, what do you mean when you say that Christ is the “image of the invisible God” and “the firstborn of all creation”?*

### Read Colossians 1:15-17.

### v16

*For **by** (in) Him...*

In this study I am coming to appreciate prepositions, for they play an important role in Paul’s (and others’) efforts to explain Christ. There are three in this verse, each of which expresses subtly different aspects of His relationship with creation.

**For by** Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created **through** Him and **for** Him. (Colossians 1:16)

Most popular versions except the ESV translate this word “by”; the NASB adds the margin note, “Or ‘in.’” It makes sense that the translators would harmonize this with how the verse ends: “all things have been created *through* Him...”—that word [\[dia\]](#) meaning “the channel of an act.”

This word is *en*, and translating it “by” expresses Christ’s relationship with creation in an *instrumental* sense: How did I trim the oak trees? *By [means of]* a chain saw. How did God create the universe? *By [means of]* His firstborn.

This responsibility of Christ in the act of creation—the *instrument* of creation, or the One who actually did it—can of course be substantiated elsewhere in Scripture. This is what is expressed in the familiar passage that opens the gospel of John.

### Read John 1:3

In John 1:3 the “through” is the same word translated that way in the next preposition in Colossians 1:16: *dia*.

Most commentators, however, prefer to think that Paul is saying something else here, and that “*in Him*” is the appropriate translation. Remember our discussion on the phrase in v10: “increasing in the knowledge of God”—that is, knowledge of God is the *sphere* or realm in which spiritual growth takes place.

If we apply that interpretation here in v16 we arrive at a marvelous, mystical thought that expresses the centrality of Christ to all things: all of creation took place—and is still taking place—within the sphere of Christ. Or “in reference to” Christ.

Vincent’s Word Studies: ...putting the fact of creation with reference to its sphere and center. In Him, within the sphere of His personality, resides the creative will and the creative energy, and in that sphere the creative act takes place. Thus creation was dependent on Him.

The beloved Son is the nucleus, the navel, the reason for everything that exists! If so—and this is why Paul is declaring this—how is it possible that the Colossians are entertaining teaching that would not just fail to exalt Christ Jesus, but actually *diminish* Him?

*all things were created*

What did He create? There is nothing He *didn’t* create.

**all things** = *ta panta* = the entire universe

*...both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible,*

**heavens and earth** = everything in the entire universe (cf. Genesis 1:1)

**visible and invisible** = perhaps a restating of “heavens and earth,”

i.e., visible = earth, invisible = heavens. On the other hand, there are visible things in the heavens: stars, constellations, planets; and there are invisible things on earth: energy, oxygen, the souls of men. So maybe the best way to read this is, *He created everything above and below, whether we can see it or not.*

*whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*

It follows that if Christ created everything that is, that would include even the supernatural, angelic creatures—all part of the “invisible.”

In our second session I described the various heretical teachings being presented to the church in Colossae, a part of which was a certain Jewish mysticism that included among other things (perhaps) worship of angels or (perhaps) participation with angels in the worship of God. Gnosticism also contributed to this in its philosophy of “mediating beings.”

Although the four categories mentioned in this verse can be applied to human, earthly institutions, the consensus is that this refers to categories—a hierarchy—of spiritual, angelic beings. Paul addresses this head-on in Chapter Two.

**Read Colossians 2:9-10.**

**Read Colossians 2:15.**

**Read Colossians 2:18.**

The emphasis in Chapter Two is on Christ’s demonstrated *power* over these authorities. But in Chapter One Paul sets the stage for this by pointing out that Christ was the one who created them in the first place. Of course He has power over them; He *made* them.

*all things have been created through, by<sup>kju,niv</sup> Him...*

The second preposition is *dia*, translated “through” except in the KJV and NIV. The word means “the channel of an act,” so “through” is really the better translation. We turn on the lights in a room by flipping the wall switch. When we do that the electricity flows through the wires from the switch to the light fixture. The wires are “the channel of the act” to illuminate a room.

We mustn't forget that there was and is purpose behind all of this. The universe was created through Christ; so what?

### Read Hebrews 2:10.

"Bringing many sons to glory." There is the reason for it all.

*and for (toward) Him.*

The word translated "for" is *eis* (ace), which has as its primary meaning "to or into, indicating the point reached or entered." So, once again, although all the familiar versions translate this "for," the word in this context encompasses far more than we might deduce from that translation. We might interpret "for" to mean

- for Christ's glory
- for His benefit
- for His exaltation

Absolutely true—but there is more. If we think of this as meaning Christ is the "goal" of creation, we get closer to the fullness of the thought. Curtis Vaughan puts it this way:

Creation is "for" Christ in the sense that He is the end for which all things exist, the goal toward whom all things were intended to move. (emphasis added)

Alexander MacLaren writes

All things come from and tend towards Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. All things spring from His will, draw their being from that fountain, and return thither again.

And that's the important take-away from this. Note the flow of this verse, which expresses the totality of Christ Jesus in creation:

- all of creation sprang into being within the realm of Christ;
- He was the channel through which it flowed
- He is the purpose and goal of creation.

He is, indeed, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is all in all.

Listen to how *The Message* paraphrases Ephesians 1:7-12.

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. (Ephesians 1:7-12, *The Message*)

### v17

V17 is a more succinct restating of v16—but also includes a new thought.

### Read v17.

*He is before all things...*

And speaking of tiny words packed with meaning, I love the second word of v17: "is." The "before" of v17 refers to time; Christ *predates* all things. That being the case, wouldn't we expect to see, in an English translation, "He *was* before all things..."? After all, humanly speaking, the time before creation was certainly in the past, so we would expect it to be expressed in the past tense. But this is not humanly speaking; it is God-speaking. So that little two-letter word beautifully expresses the timelessness of the eternal Son of God: He *is* before all things...

This is not unlike what Jesus said to the Jews when they challenged His statement about Abraham being glad to see His day.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."  
(John 8:58)

[The word *pro*, translated "before," can mean "in front of," or "superior," but is rarely used so in the NT, and the apostle Paul always uses it to express time. So here it speaks to Christ's preexistence (Moo).]

*...and in Him all things hold together.*

Note first our familiar yet powerful two-letter preposition: "in"—as in all of creation sprang into being *within the realm of Christ*. *In Christ all things*—seen and unseen, the entirety of the known and unknown universe,

**hold together, consist**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *suneste ken* = from <G4862> (sun) and <G2476> (histemi) (including its collective forms); **to set together**, i.e. (by implication) to *introduce* (favorably), or (figurative) to *exhibit*; intransitive to *stand near*, or (figurative) **to constitute** :- approve, commend, consist, make, stand (with); **to place together and here to cohere, to hold together; sustain.**

Notice how well this rebuts the Gnostic position that matter is evil. A. T. Robertson writes

Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature. The Gnostic philosophy that matter is evil and was created by a remote aeon is thus swept away. The Son of God's love is the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe which is not evil.

As John Lightfoot put it in the 1600s, Christ is "the principle of cohesion" who makes the universe "a cosmos instead of a chaos."

Albert Einstein spent the last 30 years of his life trying to prove a unified field theory—a complete explanation of the universe tying together electricity, magnetism, gravity, and quantum mechanics. His attempts were grounded in the belief that all physical phenomena should ultimately be explainable by some underlying unity.

And, ultimately, he failed.

The unification theory is, essentially, an attempt to explain the entirety of the universe—and everything that occurs within it—by one easily understandable law.

(*Reflections by the Pond* #387, March 23, 2009: "In Everything, God")

Well, we can help them out with this. Here is the unifying law: Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews expresses this in a slightly different way:

**And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.** (Hebrews 1:3a; emphasis added)

Amazingly, by simply "the word of His power" the Son upholds everything that is.

**upholds** = *phero* = a primary verb (for which other and apparently not cognate ones are used in certain tenses only; namely, *oio*, oy'-o; and *enegko*, en-eng'-ko); **to "bear" or carry** (in a very wide application, literal and figurative, as follows) :- be, bear, bring (forth), carry, come, + let her drive, be driven, endure, go on, lay, lead, move, reach, rushing, uphold.

These two verses in Colossians give us a beautiful, eloquent picture of not just the *supremacy* of Christ, but the overwhelming *totality* of His creative and sustaining role in the universe—and proof that He alone is the one, essential element.

## **SESSION 9: CORAM DEO**

### ***Colossians 1:15-20 (Part Three: v18)***

#### **PREFACE**

Based on our text in Colossians One, who is Christ Jesus? He is

- the rescuer (v13a)
- the transport (v13b)
- redeemer (v14a)
- the image of God (v15a)
- the firstborn over all creation (v15b)
- creator (v16)
- eternal, outside of time (v17a)
- sustainer of all things (v17b)

And now in this session we will continue this extraordinary paragraph by looking at

- Christ's relationship to the church;
- His rightful place in every aspect of our lives; and
- how He is not just the one essential element in the universe, but the one essential cog in the gears of God's plan for humanity.

#### **v18**

##### **Read Colossians 1:18.**

*He is also...*

Along with everything itemized earlier, Christ is also...

*head of the body, the church;*

How important is the head to the human body? Well, if I lose my finger it will hurt—but I will live. If I lose an arm or a leg it will hurt—but I will live. If I lose an eye, an ear, my nose, it will hurt—but I will live. But if I lose everything from the neck up I will *not* live. The head is essential to the body; it is the one external component that is required for life. (And even if one could live without a head, what kind of life would it be? Sentience would instantly cease; one would cease to *know* one was alive.)

##### **Read Leviticus 17:11.**

The Lord told Moses that the life is in the blood. The life of the church is the blood of Christ. It is His atonement that makes the church possible at all, and it is His blood—His life—that holds it together. Just as the members of a human family are bound together by their common blood, the members of the spiritual family of the church are bound together by the common, unifying blood of Christ.

But that is just one aspect of Christ as the "head" of the church. Pastor Joshua Moody points out that a synagogue is not a church, a Mormon temple is not a church, a Jehovah's Witnesses gathering is not a church. None of these (and more) are churches because Christ is not their head. [\[The "Jesus" of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints \(Mormons\) is not the Jesus of God's word the Bible.\]](#)

Yes, Jesus is the lifeblood of the church, but more to this point in Colossians is the fact that Jesus is its Chief, its Leader—its Lord. He *rules* the church; it is His. This church does not belong to the pastor, or the elders, or the original members who erected its building. This Sunday School class does not belong to me, or you, or anyone else. It all, lock stock and barrel, belongs to Christ Jesus. He is our one and only Lord. This is why it is so critical, so vital that everything this church (as well as the universal church) does and says squares with Scripture. We do not subscribe to the Mormon position that there are new revelations through prophets today; we have God's completed and inerrant word, added to only by the Holy Spirit moving in believer's minds. But even the moving Spirit cannot work contrary to God's written word.

Here is how F. F. Bruce summarizes it:

So far as the organic relationship is concerned, Christ and His people are viewed together as a living entity: Christ is the head, supplying life and exercising control and direction; His people are His body, individually His limbs and organs, under His control, obeying His direction, performing His work. And the life which animates the whole is His risen life, which He shares with His people.

*and He is the beginning...*

**beginning** = *arche*. Not just present at the start of all things, not just instrumental. He **is** the beginning: the origin, the source of all things.

**Read Revelation 3:14.**

*the firstborn from the dead*

This does not mean that Christ was the first person to be raised from the dead. He Himself did this for Lazarus. But Lazarus' raising from death has no bearing on what happens to others; but that *Christ* was raised from the dead means that those who are in Him will be raised as well.

However, if we take as a whole this context, there is a sense in which Christ *was* the first to be "born" from the dead. Lazarus eventually died—he eventually went the way of all flesh. Christ was truly the first resurrected *to eternal life*. And it was He who became the template for the resurrection of all believers who will be bodily resurrected never to die again.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-24.**

*so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.*

Now we get to the nub of it. *Why* is Christ all of these things—firstborn, image of God, creator and sustainer, head of the church, firstborn from the dead?

**so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

**first place**<sup>nasb</sup>, **preeminence**<sup>kjvs,esv</sup>, **supremacy**<sup>niv</sup> = *proteuo* = from <G4413> (protos); to *be first* (in rank or influence) :- have the preeminence.

**Sidebar:** There is a reason the NASB adds "Himself" ("so that He Himself"). Normally the "He" (*autos*) is implied by the word endings in the Greek. But here it is included as a word in the text, which means it is emphatic: *He alone, He Himself*.

There are two scopes to the statement "so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything."

***Eschatological (end times)***

There "will come" a day when Christ Jesus will have preeminence over all people [*pas can also be translated "all men"*]. There will come a day when absolutely every person and thing will acknowledge Him for who He is. That day is not yet here.

**Read Hebrews 2:7-8.**

As the writer of Hebrews puts it in the next verse, Jesus was made "for a little while lower than the angels," and the earth remains fallen and in the hands of the evil one. But that will not last forever.

**Read Philippians 2:9-11.**

In that moment Christ will literally, physically be "Lord of *all*"—even those who up to that point had denied His lordship. In Colossians it says He "*will come to have*"; that is, it has not yet happened. In The Revelation John sees it happening.



## Read Revelation 11:15. [*“has become”*]

And in his vision John saw also the new Jerusalem, to which all the glory that had previously been apportioned to the rulers of the earth will be given to the glory of the Lamb.

## Read Revelation 21:22-24.

### *Temporal, personal*

That is all some time in the future. The more immediate application of this statement applies to each of us this very day—and while it may be more understandable than the eschatological application, it remains a more difficult challenge to implement.

It is easy enough to nod our heads in agreement, acknowledging that at some day in the future Christ will reign not just over the heavens and earth, but over every heart of man. For the fulfillment of that truth is out of our hands; it is inevitable no matter what we do.

But do we have the courage to ask ourselves,

***Does Jesus Christ “have first place in everything” in my life?***

In my e-mail signature I include a Latin term I got from R. C. Sproul: *coram Deo*, which means literally, “before the face of God.” This is how Sproul summarizes it:

Living *coram Deo* is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.

Here is how Sproul expands on it:

To live in the presence of God is to understand that whatever we are doing and wherever we are doing it, we are acting under the gaze of God. God is omnipresent. There is no place so remote that we can escape His penetrating gaze.

To be aware of the presence of God is also to be acutely aware of His sovereignty. The uniform experience of the saints is to recognize that if God is God, then He is indeed sovereign.

Living under divine sovereignty involves more than a reluctant submission to sheer sovereignty that is motivated out of a fear of punishment. It involves recognizing that there is no higher goal than offering honor to God. Our lives are to be living sacrifices, oblations offered in a spirit of adoration and gratitude.

To live all of life *coram Deo* is to live a life of integrity. It is a life of wholeness that finds its unity and coherency in the majesty of God. A fragmented life is a life of disintegration. It is marked by inconsistency, disharmony, confusion, conflict, contradiction, and chaos. The Christian who compartmentalizes his or her life into two sections of the religious and the nonreligious has failed to grasp the big idea. The big idea is that all of life is religious or none of life is religious. To divide life between the religious and the nonreligious is itself a sacrilege.

This means that if a person fulfills his or her vocation as a steelmaker, attorney, or homemaker *coram Deo*, then that person is acting every bit as religiously as a soul-winning evangelist who fulfills his vocation. It means that David was as religious when he obeyed God’s call to be a shepherd as he was when he was anointed with the special grace of kingship. It means that Jesus was every bit as religious when He worked in His father’s carpenter shop as He was in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Integrity is found where men and women live their lives in a pattern of consistency. It is a pattern that functions the same basic way in church and out of church. It is a life that is open before God. It is a life in which all that is done is done as to the Lord. It is a life lived by principle, not expediency; by humility before God, not defiance. It is a life lived under the tutelage of conscience that is held captive by the Word of God.

(R. C. Sproul, “What Does ‘*coram Deo*’ Mean?” Ligonier Ministries, <http://www.ligonier.org>)

Let me be clear: I include “*coram Deo*” in my signature not because I have *attained* to such a life, but that I have embraced that philosophy as my highest calling. Every day I fail at it, but every day I also affirm it as my highest purpose while remaining on this earth.

Now, with all this in mind, let’s reread our passage.

## Read Colossians 1:15-18.

## SESSION 10: PRIMAL UNITY

*Colossians 1:15-20 (Part Four: vv19-20)*

### PREFACE

Let's take a moment to get our bearings—to step back and see the overall structure of this passage. In Chapter One, vv13-14 and v20 are the bread portion of a **redemption** “sandwich”—or, put another way, it is Paul using the *circle method* of narrative: of introducing a thesis then returning to it in conclusion. vv13-14 are about redemption.

#### Read vv13-14.

And v20 returns to redemption.

#### Read v20.

In between these two verses are the hows and the whys for this redemption: the qualifications of “His beloved Son,” and the rationale behind His work on our behalf. Note the structure suggested by the prepositions:

vv13-14: **redemption**—God rescued us by His Son (in whom...).

And who is the Son?

v15: He is...

v16: For by Him...

v17: He is... in Him...

v18: He is... He is... so that...

v19: in Him...

v20: **redemption**—through Him...

And taken as a whole this represents an eloquent opening salvo by Paul against the heretical teachings occurring in Colossae. So let's dig into the conclusion of this passage—and, again, note the prepositions.

#### Read Colossians 1:19-20. (not ESV)

### v19: IN HIM

The first thing we need to determine in v19 is the subject of the verb—that is, just who or what was “pleased.” It is not explicit in the Greek text, so translators and commentators have been left to thrash it out. Most modern translations conclude that “the Father” or “God” was the one pleased “for all the fullness to dwell in [the Son].” But listen to v19 in the ESV:

#### Read Colossians 1:19. (ESV)

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

That translation makes the fullness itself the one pleased. This is one of those delicious, other-worldly moments in which we realize *it doesn't really matter!*

Question: Was it God, was it the Father, or was it the fullness of God who was pleased?

Answer: Yes.

*all the fullness*

Now, what is this “fullness”?

With our understandable ignorance of Gnosticism we don't see it right off, but Paul is addressing head-on in v19 one of the Gnostic teachings the Colossians had been hearing—especially when he writes, with apparent redundancy, “*all fullness.*”

**Sidebar:** Remember that 1) we can only make educated guesses about the heresies being taught in Colossae, based on what Paul addresses in his letter; and 2) in the first century Gnosticism was in its infancy. With that in mind...

Part of Gnosticism was the existence of what was called *æons*—*spirit-beings* not unlike angels that served as intermediaries between man and God. Remember, under Gnosticism the material world (including all flesh) was corrupt, evil. To bridge between the purity of deity and the evil of man, supernatural *powers*—*æons*—were envisioned, of which, the Gnostics believed, Jesus was one (among many).

The Greek *pleroma*, translated “fullness” in our text, was a technical term used by Gnostics to refer to the hierarchy of these supernatural beings dwelling between God and the world (Vaughan). These *æons*, “emanations from God,” influenced and controlled men’s lives; in a manner of speaking (Gnosticism is rather mystical and strange) these *æons* comprised “the fullness.” That is, taken as a whole, the *æons* represented, even *possessed*, the fullness of God.

So Paul’s intentional use of the same Greek word *pleroma* is telling—especially that he precedes it with “all.” He is saying to the Colossians, *You’ve been hearing that these mystical intermediaries are the fullness of God, but in fact in only one person has God the Father made all His fullness to dwell: the God/Man Jesus Christ.*

Thus, whenever you hear or read someone utter nonsense such as, “Jesus was just a regular guy who thought himself the son of God,” or “Jesus was just a good teacher,” or “Jesus was just a first-century prophet who said we should love each other”—to any of these and more you can reply, “No, God’s word declares that Jesus was no less than fully and completely everything of God.”

Nor was this a temporary condition. Jesus the Christ was not given the fullness of God simply for the duration of His ministry. The word translated “dwell” is “a verb that suggests permanent residence as opposed to temporary sojourn” (Vaughan). Jesus was, is, fully, completely, eternally the fullness of God.

## v20: THROUGH HIM

Being not unfamiliar with the vast panoply of gods and goddesses worshiped over the millennia in which man has dwelt on this earth, I come to something like this passage and I marvel at the personality of the one true God. If any god had the means and the right to be a tyrant to his people, certainly it would be the one true God and creator of the universe. But the truth is that out of all the thousands of gods man has worshiped only one—only *one*—ever sacrificed *Himself* so that there would be peace between Him and man. That is truly astounding.

### Read vv19-20.

Let’s step back a moment and see how this passage is organized. These two verses comprise one sentence, one statement—not just grammatically, but thematically. Both “in Him” (v19) and “through Him” (v20) are dependent on the verb *eudokesen*—translated (was) “pleased” or (was the Father’s) “good pleasure.” We might break it down this way:

Who did it?	God, or the Father, or the “fullness”
What was the motivation?	good pleasure, pleased
What was accomplished?	the fullness of God to dwell in Christ; peace between God and man by the shedding of Christ’s blood on the cross
Why was this done?	to reconcile all things to God through Christ

So there is one “why” for both v19 and v20: to reconcile all things to God through Christ.

But let’s start with the beginning: it pleased God to do this! The fullness of God was not dragged kicking and screaming into redeeming man; he wanted to do it! He enjoyed doing it. Implied in this is the suggestion that God was not pleased with the situation before the first century—before the incarnation. God was not pleased to

- banish Adam and Eve from the garden
- enslave Israel in Egypt

- force Israel to sojourn in the desert for 40 years
- not permit Moses to enter the Promised Land
- punish Israel for its idolatry and disobedience by sending foreign invaders
- remove His chosen people from their land, dispersing them across the nations
- remove His glory from their presence

God *was* pleased to sacrifice His own Son on a cruel instrument of torture so that His blood would be the one sufficient atonement for all the sins of the world, thus removing all enmity between God and man.

### **Read Ephesians 2:13-18.**

When you whittle this down to the essentials it is breathtaking. It was so important to God to remove all barriers between heaven and earth that He placed Himself—Jesus, the fullness of God—on the altar to die. God killed Himself to save man.

And here, once again, we have an incredible preposition that reveals the mysteries of God's kingdom and plan.

### **Read Ephesians 2:14a.**

Jesus Christ did not just *make* the peace; He *is* the peace.

#### *to reconcile all things to Himself*

This phrase floats around in v20, depending on your translation, but is in all of them. Here is the important "why"—and it's even more interesting than you might think. The word translated "reconcile" is a double-compound word of, apparently, Paul's devising: *apokatalasso*. He uses it in only three places.

The three components of the word are *apo*, *kata*, *allasso*. The operative root of the word—*allasso*—means to change; adding *kata* to this means "to change mutually."

In classical, secular Greek the word *katallasso* "denotes the restoration of the original understanding between people after hostility or displeasure" (Brown). If two people are neighbors and friends, but one day one of them throws a rock through his friend's window and refuses to pay damages, a period of hostility might ensue. Later, after the one who threw the rock writes his neighbor a check for a new window, or after the offended party graciously forgives the offender, the friendship is renewed. They have *reconciled*.

Most commentators say that when Paul added *apo* to the front of *katallasso* he meant it to mean reconcile *fully*, completely. And we see this in the text:

**to reconcile all things to Himself**

And if that isn't clear enough,

**whether things on earth or things in heaven.**

More on this in just a moment. But there is a slightly different way to interpret this word, according to Marvin Vincent in his Word Studies. He keys off the essential meaning of *apo*—which means "away (from something near)"—and that secular Greek definition of *katallasso*. In the KJV *apo* is translated "from" almost 400 times. And we see this connection in v21, where Paul uses one of his favorite words, "alienated," which also begins with *apo*.

### **Read v21.**

Alienation implies a moment in time when one was *not* "from" but near. If someone's affections are alienated, it means that at one time they were not.

There *was* a moment in time when man was not alienated from God and Christ: the Garden of Eden. After Adam, however, we were. So Vincent proposes that here "reconcile" means a "restoration to a primal unity." Reconciled *in* Christ, *to* Christ, we once more enjoy something we once had—speaking anthropologically—not something we (man) never had or experienced before.

Now, back to the more common interpretation. Douglas J. Moo writes about v20,

Since at least the time of Origen...some interpreters have used this verse to argue for universal salvation: in the end, God will not (and often, it is suggested, cannot) allow anything to fall outside the scope of His saving love in Christ. Universal salvation is a doctrine very congenial to our age, and it is not therefore surprising that this verse, along with several others in Paul, is regularly cited to argue for this belief.

But then he points us to something Paul writes in the next chapter.

**Read Colossians 2:15.**

*Moo:* The spiritual beings to which Paul refers explicitly in v20 ["things in heaven"] are not saved by Christ but vanquished by Him... Colossians 1:20 teaches, then, not "cosmic salvation" or even "cosmic redemption," but "cosmic restoration" or "renewal." Through the work of Christ on the cross, God has brought His entire rebellious creation back under the rule of His sovereign power.

Which sounds not very different from Vincent's interpretation of a "restoration to a primal unity."

## **SESSION 11: BALANCED, ESTABLISHED**

*Colossians 1:21-23*

### **PREFACE**

The Christian life is a delicate balance between rejoicing in what we *are*, but at the same time remembering what we *were*. The equilibrium can be lost if we lean too far in either direction.

If we spend our days wallowing in guilt and regret over what we used to be, we are effectively denying the work of Christ's atoning sacrifice in our life. Repeatedly replaying our sins, constantly wracked with guilt, we live as if we had never been redeemed, missing the joy of Christ entirely. But if we spend our days oblivious to what we used to be, forgetting it entirely, we effectively diminish the importance of Christ in our life. In the way of flesh, if we forget the *need* for Christ's atoning sacrifice, we are on our way to forgetting what He did for us, and our joy is not in Him, but in ourselves. Put succinctly, *when we forget what we once were, thus pretending we have always been what we are, we forget that what we are is not of our doing.*

In our passage this morning the apostle Paul continues his theme that Christ Jesus is all in all—that everything is indeed His doing. In this week's passage Paul describes a healthy Christian life, one in which there is a balanced blend of both: one in which the believer's joy is based not just on the pleasure of the sanctified now, but gratitude for the atonement of the past. And in that *Christ* is exalted, not ourselves.

### **RECONCILED**

The topic is still reconciliation—our reconciliation to Father God “through the blood of [Christ's] cross.” Last week we looked at vv19-20.

#### **Read Colossians 1:19-20.**

In vv21-22 Paul presents the healthy balance of the Christian life—remembering what we once were, balanced with an acceptance of what we are now.

#### **Read Colossians 1:21-22.**

In the previous paragraph Paul's voice was third-person, impersonal. He was speaking universally and, regarding reconciliation, emphasized the restoration of “all things” to an ultimate state of unconditional surrender to the authority of Christ—that is, in the future end-times.

Now, in the paragraph before us, Paul gets personal. Note the pronouns:

And although **you** were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled **you** in His fleshly body through death, in order to present **you** before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

Now Paul is describing *them*—the Colossians—and, by extension, every individual believer. Now the reconciliation of which he speaks is *both* future and present.

### **v21**

Verse 21 represents one of the biggest stumbling blocks for unbelievers to come to Christ.

*...you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds*

Walk up to your average unbeliever on the street and ask them, “Are you hostile and engaged in evil deeds?” “Of course not,” they will answer. “I’m a good person.”

There's the rub. It requires the convicting Holy Spirit to make us realize that this is true in *every* person.



### Definitions (background)

**alienated** = *apellotriomenous* = from <G575> (apo) and a derivative of <G245> (allotrios); **to estrange away**, i.e. (passive and figurative) **to be non-participant** :- alienate, be alien.

They are “alienated”—not “aliens,” as if that were their original condition, but “alienated,” as having become so. (Maclaren)

**hostile** = *echthros* = from a primary *echtho* (to hate); **hateful** (passive *odious*, or active *hostile*); usually as a noun, an *adversary* (especially *Satan*) :- enemy, foe.

**in mind** = *tei dianoiai* = from <G1223> (dia) and <G3563> (nous); **deep thought**, properly the faculty (*mind* or its *disposition*), by implication its exercise :- **imagination**, mind, **understanding**.

**evil** = *ponerois* = from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); **hurtful, i.e. evil** (properly **in effect or influence**, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to *essential* character, as well as from <G4550> (saprois), which indicates *degeneracy* from original virtue); figurative *calamitous*; also (passive) *ill*, i.e. **diseased**; but especially (morally) *culpable*, i.e. **derelict, vicious, facinorous**; neuter (singular) *mischievous*, *malice*, or (plural) *guilt*; masculine (singular) the *devil*, or (plural) *sinners* :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also <G4191> (poneroteris); **translated elsewhere in the NASB “malignant.”**

**deeds, works** = *ergois* = from a primary (but obsolete) *ergo* (to work); *toil* (as an effort or occupation); by implication an *act* :- deed, doing, labour, work.

We cannot truly appreciate the nearness of Christ until we understand how far away from him we once were. We cannot truly appreciate the redemption we have in Christ until we understand our need for it.

Just as the left was offended by George Bush when he said after 9/11, “If you’re not with us you are with the terrorists,” the fallen world is offended by God who says, *If you are not in Me, you are against Me; if you are not in the righteousness of My Son, you have no righteousness of your own, and are thus evil.*

The world rejects God’s standards, which are absolute. The standards of this fallen world are a tapestry of grays—soft, mushy, ever-changing grays—while the standards of God are clearly and distinctly black and white. If you are not His, you have been alienated from Him, you actively hate Him, and that inner hate blossoms into outward evil. Here is how Paul describes it to Titus.

### Read Titus 1:15-16.

The standard for “good” is not man’s good, but God’s. And by that standard, the best of man is little more than a cesspool. As Wayne Grudem points out, this does not mean that unbelievers are never kind to a neighbor, do not love their children, never accomplish any “good” things in their life. It means that they remain spiritually bankrupt. **Positionally** they are as far from God as an ax murderer. Until we apprehend this we cannot appreciate the remarkable contrast between v21 and v22.

### v22

#### Read v22.

**Sidebar:** I could find no one willing to explain to me why the KJVs include “yet now He has reconciled” at the end of v21, instead of placing it at the beginning of v22 as in all other translations. It does not affect the meaning or order, just placement.

Now we have the other side—and the second half of the sentence is dependent on the first: If the first is not true, then there is no need for the second. But if the first *is* true, the second is not just necessary, but a mind-blowing declaration of the depth of God’s solution to man’s sin. The abysmal depth of the unbeliever’s depravity is matched—and exceeded—by the crowning heights of the believer’s righteousness in Christ.

Here we have evidence for the generous, overwhelming love of God. His answer to our confession is not grudging, cautious, doubting. No, He hears our confession and opens the floodgates of His love. In Christ we are not just forgiven, we are

### reconciled

**apokatallasso** = to reconcile fully, or be restored fully to man's earlier relationship with God [this is the effective opposite of "alienated" in v21]

If God stopped here in His response it would be sufficiently generous, sufficiently forgiving. We were alienated, but now He has restored the relationship once lost in The Garden. But no, our heavenly Father continues, declaring us

### *holy*

**hagios** = from **hagos** (an *awful* thing) [compare <G53> (hagnos), <H2282> (chag)]; *sacred* (physical *pure*, *moral blameless* or *religious*, ceremony *consecrated*) :- (most) holy (one, thing), **saint**.

### *blameless*

**amomous** = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G3470> (momos); *unblemished* (literal or figurative) :- **without blame** (blemish, fault, spot), **faultless**, unblameable.

[hearkens back to the required ceremonial purity of the sacrificial animals]

**Read 1 Peter 1:18-19. (in NIV)**

### *beyond reproach*

**anenkletos** (an-eng'-klay-tos) = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G1458> (egkaleo); *unaccused*, i.e. (by implication) *irreproachable* :- **blameless**; *not to be called to account*.

Let's back up a moment and bring out some other aspects of this verse.

*He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death,*

Just as with the apparent redundancy in v19—"all the fullness"—the apparent redundancy of "fleshly body" (*somati tes sarkos*—lit., "body of flesh") should be a red flag for us. Of course the body is flesh; why say both?

Again we have to return to the Gnostic belief that all flesh is evil. For this reason they placed no value on the work of Christ in a physical body, believing instead that reconciliation would be accomplished only by spiritual (angelic, *aeons*) beings. (Vaughan) So, arguing against that Gnostic position, Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ, in a very real, tangible, fleshy body accomplished the necessary reconciliation for man.

Douglas J. Moo suggests another reason Paul may have employed the redundant term here: to emphasize the true, bodily suffering of the Lord in His payment for our reconciliation.

*in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach*

Some say this picture of perfection describes the believer only in his glorified state, not on earth. But I side with those who say it describes the believer both then and now.

In contrast to the picture in v21 of the unbeliever—even though by earthly standards "good"—being *positionally* evil in God's eyes, v22 gives us a picture of the believer being *positionally* holy and beyond reproach in God's eyes. Right now God looks at us and sees not our mistakes, our sin, but the blood of His Son, as in v20:

**to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross**

But this can also refer to that great day when we are literally—no longer positionally but now *actually*—presented to Him "holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Here is an illustration of this mystery.

*You have a horrible, life-threatening disease. The doctor administers an injection of a life-saving serum. The next day, even the following week you feel just as bad as before, suffering the same debilitating symptoms of the disease. You call the doctor and complain that nothing has changed. He assures you that everything is proceeding just fine; the serum just takes a long time to do its work. He says, "The serum is working. You are healed and will not die. But it will take a long time before the symptoms are gone for good."*

**Sidebar:** Although we can get lost in all the indistinct pronouns in vv21-22 (He, His, Him), unsure which member of the Godhead is doing what, I think this is a beautiful and encouraging picture of the Lord Jesus presenting each believer to the Father as one reconciled, holy, blameless, beyond reproach. That is, before

the throne of God the Father we are presented by our sponsor, our Advocate: Jesus—the one who shed His blood to make it possible. [*“Father, this is David. He is Mine.”*]

## v23

Verse 23 presents us with a potentially unnerving “if.”

### Read Colossians 1:22-23.

**Sidebar:** The jury is split on whether it should be “*the faith*” (KJVs, NASB, ESV) or “*your faith*” (NIV)—a difference, but a minor one that we will not address today.

There are several interesting things going on in this verse, but I believe the one most critical—the one we must be sure to understand correctly before we leave today—is the “if.”

*if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard,*

Douglas Moo says that this ties back to the word “present” in v22. That is, *we will be presented before the Father holy, blameless, and beyond reproach if we continue in the faith*. On the surface that sounds very much like the possibility we can lose our faith—that we can be a true believer, but if we don’t tough it out to the end we can lose that faith we began with.

For help with the “if” I went no further than one of Pastor Jeremy’s earlier sermons. On February 7, 2010 he pinch-hitted for Pastor Gary, who had been ill the previous week. He spoke on *The Nature of Saving Faith*, and much of that message was spent defining “the perseverance of saving faith.” The thrust of his point can be summarized in this statement he made:

It is not you become a Christian if you make it to the end; you are a Christian if you make it to the end.

F. F. Bruce puts it this way:

If the gospel teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it teaches at the same time that the saints are those who finally persevere—in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality.

No less than the apostle Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, and Jesus Himself make this point. Jesus mentioned it in the parable of the sower.

### Read Matthew 13:5-6.

The Lord Himself supplies the commentary on this.

### Read Matthew 13:20-21.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul adds some specifics to what he wrote to the Colossians.

### Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

Note the verb. Paul does not say in v2, “by which also you *will be* saved, if you hold fast,” but “by which also you *are* saved, if you hold fast.” It says the same thing if we turn it around. *If you hold fast [this means that] you are saved*. Implied, If you do not hold fast, you believed in vain.

The one who truly belongs to Christ *will be* “firmly established,” “steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

*firmly established*

**firmly established**<sup>nasb</sup>, **grounded**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **established**<sup>niv</sup>, **stable**<sup>esv</sup> = *themelioo* (them-el-ee-ah'-oh) = from <G2310> (themelios); **to lay a basis for**, i.e. (literal) *erect*, or (figurative) *consolidate* :- (lay the) found (-ation), ground, settle; [laying the foundation of a building; used to describe our foundation on the rock in Matthew 7]

True faith that perseveres is built upon the firm, immovable foundation of the gospel. The “immovable” part comes from the next word.

*steadfast*

**steadfast**<sup>nasb,nkjv,esv</sup>, **settled**<sup>kjv</sup>, **firm**<sup>niv</sup> = *hedraios* = from a derivative of *hezomai* (to sit); *sedentary*, i.e. (by implication) *immovable* :- settled, steadfast.

This word could be used in the sense of a building, but probably a better way to understand it in this context is in the sense of *unwavering*. James doesn't use this word, but he gives us the idea with what he writes in his first chapter.

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)

*not moved away from*

Paul includes this, telling the Colossians, *Please do not let those heretical teachers around you move you away from the **truth** of the gospel, the **hope** you have in the gospel. Stand firm on God's word in Christ!*

Here is the picture of the balanced, healthy Christian life established on the firm foundation of God's word in Christ.

## **SESSION 12: FAITHFUL STEWARD**

*Colossians 1:24-25*

### **PREFACE: TRACKING PAUL'S THOUGHTS**

It is fascinating to track Paul's train of thought as he writes to the brothers and sisters in Colossae. When we observe this, it humanizes both the text and the one doing the writing. No longer is it just cold doctrine itemized on a page, but it is a real human being—a teacher, a shepherd—working through his thoughts, letting the Spirit move him from one topic to the next.

Paul begins his letter, as always, with a greeting, which flows effortlessly into an appreciation of their love for the brethren and the fruit they have been bearing since they heard the word of truth from Epaphras, their pastor (1:6b-7).

He begins v9 with “For this reason also...” followed by mention of how regularly and steadily he has been praying for them—for their continuing knowledge of God's will, spiritual wisdom and understanding; continued fruit bearing; and that they would be strengthened from above. He closes this at v12 with “giving thanks to the Father,” which leads him into a new topic.

Verses 12-14 are a transitional passage:

- “giving thanks to the Father” prompts him to elaborate on what the Father has done for them:
  - He *qualified* us to share in the inheritance of the saints;
  - He *rescued* us from the domain of darkness;
  - He *transferred* us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

Then, as we might expect as we watch the wheels turn in Paul's mind, mention of the “beloved Son” sends him on an extended riff (vv14-23) on who Christ is, what He has accomplished in creation, His standing, His Lordship, His fullness. At v21 he personalizes this work of Christ to the people reading this letter, contrasting their previous condition (“alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds”) to their present condition in v22 (“reconciled,” “holy and blameless and beyond reproach”).

In v23 Paul speaks of the continuance of their “hope in the gospel” and closes the passage with “of which I, Paul, was made a minister.” So what is he going to write about next? His ministry, of course.

**Read Colossians 1:24-27.**

### **v24**

So we are now at v24, and from here through v2:5 Paul inserts a personal interlude about his ministry, his “stewardship of the divine mystery” (Bruce). And once again we are confronted with a controversial, disputed verse—one that has been the basis for volumes of scholarly interpretation.

**Read Colossians 1:24.**

I am sure some of you wonder why I so often bother mentioning the underlying Greek words of our text. After all, accomplished biblical scholars have translated it into English for us, which should be perfectly adequate, right? Well, this verse is an excellent example of what we gain—and how controversy can be easily resolved—by examining the original text.

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...*

But let's take it in order. Paul makes one of those statements so foreign to the culture of this fallen world. Why in the world would Paul be cheerful, happy about his sufferings? Was he a masochist? No, he just lived what he wrote. He did not just believe, he knew from experience that one could actually *benefit* from suffering.

**Read Romans 5:1-5.**

Paul knew that suffering—“tribulation”—is part of the maturing process of faith. Not just this, but suffering *for* brothers and sisters in the faith carries extra benefit: the joy that comes from any service unselfishly performed for others, painful or not.

Verse 3 in Romans 5 gives us a clue to resolving the controversy of v24 in Colossians. Note the word “tribulations” (“sufferings” in NIV and ESV); this is the same word translated “afflictions” (“in Christ’s afflictions”) in v24.

**...in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.** (Colossians 1:24b)

Ah, there it is.

**First**, there is an immediate, contextual reason this rings untrue in our ears. Where have we just come from? Paul has spent several paragraphs detailing the *sufficiency* of Christ Jesus.

- firstborn of all creation
- creator
- image of the invisible God
- the fullness of God
- before all things, and in Him all things hold together
- the head of the church
- first place in everything

Now after all that, Paul says there is something *lacking* in Christ?

**Second**, from what we know that Paul has written elsewhere this rings untrue. When we read the words “Christ’s afflictions” our tendency is to immediately think of the cross, and our mind rebels against even the suggestion that Paul could add anything to that. Indeed, Paul agrees. And we don’t have to go far.

### **Read Colossians 1:19-20.**

But this is precisely how many Catholics have interpreted this verse—that this verse refers to Christ’s *redemptive* sufferings, thus using it “as grounds for asserting that Christ’s atonement is defective and that the sufferings of the saints are needed to supplement His work on our behalf” (Vaughan).

But to answer both of these misinterpretations we need only look at the Greek word translated “afflictions” or “sufferings” in v24.

**thlipsis** = from <G2346> (thlibo); *pressure* (literal or figurative) :- afflicted (-tion), anguish, **burdened**, persecution, tribulation, **trouble**.

That word is never used in the NT of Christ’s redemptive suffering on the cross. But it *is* used to describe His and His followers’ *ministerial* suffering—the suffering they experience because of their allegiance to Christ.

### **Read John 16:33.**

### **Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.**

*Curtis Vaughan:* The suffering [Christ’s] people endure are a continuation of what He endured, and in that sense they complete His afflictions. “It is a simple matter of fact,” writes Lightfoot, “that the afflictions of every saint and martyr do supplement the afflictions of Christ. The church is built up by repeated acts of self-denial in successive individuals and successive generations. They continue the work which Christ began.”

The underlying principle is the believer’s union with Christ. That union is so intimate—Christ the Head, His people the body—that He suffers when they suffer (cf. Isaiah 63:9). His personal sufferings are over, but His sufferings in His people continue (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10).



“What is still lacking” is not an intimation of deficiency in Christ’s own sufferings, but a reference to what is yet lacking in Christ’s suffering in Paul.

Pastor Daniel: In reference to fulfilling what is lacking in Christ’s affliction, I’ve appreciated John Piper’s explanation: because Christ is no longer on earth, Paul receives the affliction which Christ would have received were He still here. That’s easy to bring into our own lives.

This idea is captured in the J. B. Phillips paraphrase of v24.

**Read Colossians 1:24 in Phillips.**

What this is, really, is a picture of the exquisite, intimate unity of both Christ with His body, the church, and the unity every believer shares with every other believer. When one of His children suffer, He suffers; when a fellow believer suffers, the body as a whole suffers; when a fellow believer encourages and prays for another, the body heals.

## v25

Once again we see Paul’s train of thought from v24 to v25. Verse 24 is about Paul’s ministry to the church, so it naturally follows that v25 begins, “Of this church...”

**Read v25.**

Although it does not include the words “suffering” or “tribulation,” that reality permeates the verse. We know this because of the account of the moment in his life when he *was* “made a minister.” Shortly after that dramatic call on the Damascus Road, Paul retires to that city blind and, apparently, without appetite, for he neither ate nor drank for three days. Then the Lord sends Ananias to give Paul (Saul) his marching orders, including what He says to Ananias in vv15-16 of Chapter 9.

**Read Acts 9:15-16.**

From the beginning Paul understood that his conversion and the work to follow would entail suffering. Over time he came to understand the *fullness* of this suffering—that it was, in some mystical way, a continuation of the suffering of the Lord. [\[back to Colossians\]](#)

**Sidebar:** While there is nothing wrong with the different translations that say Paul “became” or “have become” a minister, I favor the NASB and KJV that translate the word *ginomai* as “made.” One can “become” something without any external influence, but this was not the case of Paul’s calling. We know from the account in Acts 9 that Christ Jesus personally *made* Paul a minister of His gospel.

Verse 25 deals with another “fullness”—and again we must decide which translation best expresses the original thought.

**NASB:** so that I might fully carry out the **preaching** of the word of God,  
*not shirk my duties as a preacher?*  
*be a thorough expositor?*  
*preach every word, whether it hurts or not?*

**KJVs:** to fulfill the word of God,  
*to fully fill the word of God?*  
*to play my part in fulfilling its prophecies and intent?*

**NIV:** to present to you the word of God in its fullness  
*to present to you the full depth and meaning of God’s word?*  
*to not skim over the surface, but dig deep into God’s word?*

**ESV:** to make the word of God fully known,  
*to share the entirety of God's word?*  
*to faithfully spread the word of God far and wide?*

God took the Jewish zealot, persecutor of Christians, and remade him into a minister, rightly proclaiming and teaching the true, full nature of the Gospel as a faithful steward of the church. And that is the call to us, as well: *Tell them the truth! The whole truth, and nothing but the truth!*

Let me close with this clarification: Paul concludes v25 with (in the NIV) "...to present to you the word of God in its fullness," and then expands on this in vv26-27—where we will continue next week.

We should remember that when Paul says that he had been called to present "the word of God in its fullness," he is saying something different from, for example, Pastor Jeremy saying the same thing. If our pastor said this, he would be referring to the printed, leather-bound book he holds in his hand. He would be saying that to fulfill his calling he must faithfully and accurately explain the *Bible* to the flock.

When Paul says it, he refers to the word God had given him to explain the good news about Jesus the Christ. It was not written down; it was, in fact, *in the process of being written down*, in the biographies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and in the letters of Paul, Peter, Jude, James, John, and the writer to the Hebrews.

Paul was a preacher and *apostle*—*gifted* by the Spirit with healing and prophetic abilities; our pastors are preachers and *expositors* of the written word. To Paul, the "word of God" was the life of Christ, explained to him by the indwelling Spirit; to Pastor Jeremy, the "word of God" is the printed book he reads and studies.

## **SESSION 13: THE PROFOUND MYSTERY**

*Colossians 1:26-27*

### **PREFACE**

We stopped in mid-sentence last week—something not hard to do with the long-winded apostle. So let's read the complete passage again.

### **Read Colossians 1:24-27.**

In our last session we resolved the controversy of v24—that Paul is *not* saying that there was any deficiency in Christ's *redemptive* suffering on the cross, but that His *ministerial* suffering continues on in the lives of those who serve Him. We also considered the various translations of v25; my choice for the translation expressing it best was the NIV:

**I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.**

That is, *the word of God is full to overflowing, and I (Paul) am called to present it to you as fully as I can.*  
In the next two verses Paul expands on what he means by "the word of God in its fullness."

### **v26**

The NASB smooths the transition by inserting the helpful, "*that is,*": *This is what I am talking about*, Paul says.

*...the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,*  
How do I illustrate the NT concept of "mystery"—Greek, *mysterion*? I can think of two illustrations—one very familiar to me, one far less so; one I know firsthand; one I know only secondhand. Both, I believe, are apt.

#### Marriage

- the single person cherishes his or her freedom
- the ol' ball and chain
- but the God-ordained union of two souls changes everything—the mystery is revealed

#### Child-bearing

- the couple cherish their freedom
- there is the pain of childbirth itself; then there are diapers, teenage rebellion—why bother?
- but once the child arrives, everything changes, and the mystery is revealed.

In each of these situations there is a mystery sitting out there—a secret—undiscoverable save for the experience itself. The secret is not revealed by reading a book about it, or by having an elder who has experienced it describe it. That does not take. It must be revealed by the experience itself. *[Thus, the mystery of marriage has been revealed to me, but the mystery of child-bearing and child-rearing remains just that—a mystery.]*

### **Turn please to Daniel 2.**

The story is familiar. Early on during his time serving Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Daniel is given the opportunity to not just interpret the king's dream, but to reveal the content of the dream itself. The wise men at court ("Chaldeans" or magi) had said to the king, *Just tell us the dream and we'll be happy to interpret it for you.* Nebuchadnezzar said, *Oh no. That's too easy. I want you to first tell me what the dream was.* Their reply to that was, *Gimme a break! No one can do that.* The king's response to that was, naturally, *Off with their heads!*

The king decides to let the Hebrews—Daniel and his buds—conduct the executions of his not-so-smart wise men. This piques Daniel's interest: *Why does the king want these men dead?* When the situation is explained to him, he says to king, *Hey, let me have a shot at it.* So Daniel gets the gig. Now note:

### Read Daniel 2:17-18.

("request compassion from the God of heaven")

### Read Daniel 2:19-20.

### Read Daniel 2:26-28.

From the outset, Daniel takes no credit for the revelation of the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The God of heaven revealed it to him, and when the king asked him, "Are you able...?" Daniel's reply was, *No, but the God of heaven is.*

Most commentators agree that the use of the key words in this OT account forms the basis for the apostle Paul's idea of "mystery" in Colossians and other places in his letters. Look at v19 in Daniel 2.

*Then the **mystery** was **revealed** to Daniel in a night vision.*

Curtis Vaughan writes that the Greek *mysterion* "is used in the NT of truth undiscoverable except by divine revelation." And this is precisely what occurs in this story from Daniel. The magi were helpless to reveal the mystery; *Daniel* was likewise helpless—until he received the revelation from God.

The Greek *mysterion* translates the Hebrew *raz* [raws] in the Septuagint. Both are translated "mystery" or "secret" (KJVs) in English. The choice of "secret" in the KJVs hearkens back to the original secular Greek idea of the root word from which *mysterion* stems—*myo* [moo-oh], "which means to shut the mouth; that which must not or cannot be said" (Brown).

The root concept of this word goes back to the mystery cults associated with pagan gods and, later, philosophies—the secret ceremonies, the cultic feasts and sacrifices—all closely guarded secrets revealed only to the initiated.

As Paul translates this into the Christian faith, a mystery is something undiscoverable except to those who are in Christ. We could also say these mysteries are revealed by the indwelling Spirit. Both are true; in Paul's writings, they are interchangeable. What does Paul write in 1 Corinthians?

**For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)**

This mystery was conceived by the Godhead back before time even began, but remained hidden—*apokrypto* (ap-ok-roop'-to): concealed away, kept secret—until in the fullness of time God sent His Son. Christ Jesus was the mystery "manifested"—not just disclosed or revealed, as someone might verbally explain a riddle, but "rendered apparent"; the mystery was disclosed in the *person* of Christ, to those who have placed their trust in Him.

## v27

So track this, beginning in v25:

- v25: God through Christ makes Paul a **minister** of the church ("Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God"). [What is his ministry?](#)
- v25: To deliver in its fullness the **word** of God ("so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God").  
[What is the word of God?](#)
- v26: The **mystery** heretofore kept hidden, but now revealed, made real to **believers**. ("the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints").  
[Tell us more about these saints.](#)
- v27: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this **mystery** among the Gentiles..."  
[There's that mystery again; tell us more about that.](#)

Now, up to this point we have looked at how Paul uses the *concept* of mystery, but not this mystery itself. What is

the mystery? We have it in the second part of v27.

- This mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

### Read v27.

Paul loves the idea of “in Christ” (and so do I); he uses that exact term 170 times in his epistles. Here the essential idea of that intimate relationship is turned around and rendered “Christ in you.” Both are true: We are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

**Sidebar:** This text brings out how the Christian faith is not based on a philosophy or heritage; it is not based on the text of the Bible alone. Our faith is based on the *person* of Christ! It is a uniquely personal, *visceral* faith. Note:

- v24: the church is **His body**
- v24: our afflictions are an extension, or continuation of **Christ’s afflictions**
- v25: **Christ personally** made Paul a minister of the gospel
- v27: God personally opened up the riches of glory; and what is that? **Christ in you**
- v28: do we proclaim a philosophy? no, we proclaim **Him—Christ**
- v28: to the end that “every man [will be] complete **in Christ**”
- v29: how does Paul mean to accomplish this? according to **the power of Christ at work within him.**

Paul speaks of this again in the second chapter.

### Read Colossians 2:2.

Let us never forget the profound intimacy we enjoy with our Maker and Lord.

What is Paul saying here in this context of “mystery”?

Some commentators think the mystery of v27 is about how God extended the gospel of salvation in Christ to the Gentiles. That is, they would translate it,

“...this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ *among you*...”

That is, in your midst. But most commentators, even while mentioning the above possibility, agree with the translations common to us:

“...this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ *in you*...”

That is, in the first part Paul does note that the “riches of the glory of this mystery” have been extended to the Gentiles. But then he narrows the focus to identify the *core*, as it were, of this mystery as “Christ in you,” Christ personally in every believer.

In v26 he writes that this mystery has been historically “hidden”—*apokrypto* (ap-ok-roop’-to). In Galatians 1 Paul uses the flip-side of this word to describe the personal revelation of Christ in him.

### Read Galatians 1:15-16.

**reveal** = *apokalypto* = to take off the cover; to reveal.

*God willed to make known what is **the riches of the glory** of this mystery among the Gentiles,*

Whenever I stop to ponder this incredible statement, and ones like it elsewhere, I long for the mind and knowledge I will have in heaven, rather than the feeble fleshly mind and understanding I have now. Here is something few of us appreciate; we nod our heads and say, “Ah yes, how wonderful: the riches of His glory. Very nice.” Whereas if we truly grasped the *immensity* of that statement we would fall to our knees in probably a catatonic state.

Psalm 16 tells us that all of the heavens declare the glory of God. And all the riches of this glory are contained in Christ—and Christ is in us (and we are in Him). How can pitiful flesh process such information! The answer is that it can't. Thank God that our salvation does not depend on that. And we can also thank God's patience for that.

**Read Romans 9:22-24**



## SESSION 14: PROCLAIMING CHRIST

*Colossians 1:28-29*

### PREFACE

The title of this class is “Just Jesus”—with good reason. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this letter to the Colossians is how Paul presents—sometimes subtly, sometimes with the force of repetition—the supremacy, the sufficiency of Christ Jesus. What a perfect message this is for us, for, just like those in the church at Colossae, we too are surrounded every day by voices and philosophies in opposition to our faith. We *need* the message of this letter. We *need* to be reminded that we need look nowhere else for strength, for help, for sustenance—for truth.

Turn please to Colossians 2:8, to what I believe is the central, core message of this book.

### Read Colossians 2:8.

Then watch as Paul sings a hymn of devotion to Christ, exclaiming His many sufficiencies.

### Read vv9-15. [note the emphasis on “Him”]

We are still inside the apostle’s interlude in which he speaks of his personal ministry. But even here the emphasis is still on Christ.

Verse 25 of Chapter One begins, “Of this church I was made a minister...” And what was His calling by God? To preach the word of God—that is, the life of Christ, explained to Paul by the indwelling Spirit. This mystery (v26) had been hidden, but now revealed—“manifested”—in Christ to His saints. Through ministers such as Paul (and others) God chose to reveal the “riches of [His] glory” (v27)—that is, “*Christ in you*.”

And what is this message delivered to Paul for him to deliver to the saints? What is he to proclaim? A list of rules and regulations a la the Mosaic Law? A philosophy? A deeper mystery reserved for the elite? Nope. “We proclaim Him...” A *person*: Christ.

### Read Colossians 1:28-29.

### v28

#### *We proclaim*

“We” = either the editorial plural, or Paul is now (after, in v27, “I, Paul...”) including his fellow ministers. But more important, the “we” (*which in the original is emphatic*) contrasts the message Paul and his fellows are delivering to the message from the Colossian errorists: **They** are telling you lies; **we** are telling you the truth by proclaiming Christ.

**proclaim** = *katangelo* = from <G2596> (kata) and the base of <G32> (aggelos); to *proclaim, promulgate* :- declare, **preach**, shew, speak of, teach.

First Paul mentions *what* (actually Whom) he is proclaiming, then he breaks down the component parts of his proclamation.

#### *Him*

Here, once again (as well as in the last words of this verse) Paul emphasizes the personal nature of this faith. He does not preach a litany of rules and regulations, requirements to *get us to Christ* (“*do this, then this, and this, and you will then earn Christ*”); he preaches the Person, Jesus.

*F. F. Bruce*: This Christ, whose life flows in all His people, is the one whom the apostle and his associates proclaim. He is the sum and substance of their message, whether in the saving news which they announce in the world to bring men and women to faith, or in the teaching which they impart to those who have believed.

*every man... every man... all wisdom... every man*

Note the repetition of the Greek *pas* in v28.

In contrast to the cultic mysteries, or Gnosticism, which emphasized salvation through knowledge, Paul proclaims that the gospel of Christ is open to *all*. Any time a religion includes human effort as the means to enlightenment or salvation, it must by definition be restrictive, for not everyone will achieve these ends.

Last week Linda and I watched the movie *Hawaii* (1966), based on the James A. Michener novel of the same name. It's the story of a zealous missionary from New England going to the Hawaiian islands to save the "pagan heathen." But the man (played by Max von Sydow) is so strident, so unbendingly legalistic that he repels more people than his preaching attracts. For him the Bible is a bludgeon with which to browbeat the prospective converts into Christianity, rather than a message of hope in the good news Christ offers. In the face of such abusive preaching, ultimately even his own wife rebels against his dictates.

In the native island culture at that time, the early nineteenth century, it was perfectly acceptable for a brother and sister to be married. The queen is married to her brother, and they love each other deeply. But the missionary insists that before she can be a Christian she must send away her husband/brother, calling their marriage a "mortal sin." He says to her, "You will not be in a state of grace unless you do this." Finally, on her deathbed, she sends her husband away. Once she has done this, the missionary baptizes her and assures her that now she will go to heaven.

That, of course, utterly perverts the concept of grace. Grace is a gift, given freely to anyone and everyone, as a result of the work of Christ—not man. All we need do is believe. Changes in a life occur as a *result* of grace, not as a prerequisite for it. This is why Paul proclaims, simply, "Him": it all happens *after* Him.

unregenerate → **Christ** → salvation, sanctification, holiness, etc.

### **Read 2 Timothy 1:8-9.**

In the first chapter of Colossians Paul emphasizes the *universality* of the gospel. In v6 he writes that

**the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing**

In v23 he declares that the hope of the gospel

**was proclaimed in all creation under heaven**

And here in v28 he brings this to a climax with his dramatic repetition of

**admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete**

Once the mystery spoken of earlier was revealed, manifested in the person of Jesus, it was available to *all*. God's grace is color blind; it neither respects or refuses ethnicity, nationality, race, levels of intelligence, or personal history. It is available to all.

*admonishing, teaching*

F. F. Bruce continues,

[Those who have believed] have not learned all there is to know when once they have come to Christ; that is only the beginning. He is indeed the embodiment of divine wisdom, but the exploration of the wisdom that resides in Him is the task of a lifetime, and even so the most enlightened of mortals can only "know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9). It is necessary, then, not only to preach the gospel but also, when people have believed the gospel, to "instruct everyone and teach everyone in all wisdom."

**admonishing**<sup>nasb,niv</sup>, **warning**<sup>kjvs,esv</sup> = *noutheteo* = from the same as <G3559> (*nouthesia*); to put in mind, i.e. (by implication) **to caution or reprove gently** :- admonish, warn.

Scholars seem to be split on what Paul is referring to here. Some hold that the “warning” is intended for the unsaved, to point out their need for Christ. This was Lightfoot’s position, that this word may be directed toward non-Christians (to stimulate repentance and the next word, translated “teaching,” to Christians (to enhance faith (Moo).

Others—including Douglas Moo—say that this is likely directed toward believers who might be tempted to stray. He points out that because of the goal of this activity—to “present every man complete in Christ”—this is probably being directed toward Christian converts. So the first word, “admonishing,” is, in a manner of speaking, the sterner side of the teaching. Paul used the same word in his first letter to the Thessalonians referring to Christian brothers.

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14.**

And in 1 Corinthians 4:14 he wrote

**I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.**

The brighter side of this teaching is, well, “teaching”—the “authoritative communication of gospel truth” (Moo).

**teaching** = *didasko* = a prolonged (causative) form of a primary verb *dao* (to learn); to teach (in the same broad application) :- teach.

*with [or in] all wisdom*

How was this teaching to take place? *en pase sophia*: in all wisdom. I like what Douglas Moo says about this:

As people need wisdom to know how to live out true knowledge of God, so the preacher needs wisdom to know how to teach and admonish the people... [In Colossae] the believers need great wisdom in negotiating the competing religious teachings they are hearing.

*present every man complete in Christ.*

The word translated “complete,” or “perfect,” or “mature” in our common versions (*teleion*) can be a bit tricky in English, according to Douglas Moo. Does it mean “perfect” in the way we would interpret that word: absolutely flawless (sinless)? Or does it mean “mature” in the sense that we are coming along, we are maturing (but not yet perfect)? Happily we don’t have the time to burrow down into that, but let it suffice that most commentators agree that Paul is thinking about the return of Christ—the *parousia*.

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20.**

If this moment is what Paul had in mind when writing to the Colossians, then his use of *teleion* in v28 would refer to when we do, indeed, stand before our Lord perfect in every way.

Whatever the level of maturity or completeness is intended, it is a touching picture of the faithful evangelist presenting [*paristemi*—another reason to associate the moment with Christ’s return] his converts to his Lord.

We can’t know, of course, how—or even if—it will play out this way. But it is a pleasant thought, isn’t it. Perhaps that will be part of our heavenly reward: the privilege of presenting to our Savior and Lord those who have come to Him through something we have said or done in His name.

Or perhaps Paul is just speaking here as a pastor, referring to how he will one day have to answer to God for the souls left in his charge. (Hebrews 13:17)

### **v29**

As the first chapter closes, Paul speaks of the means by which he accomplishes all this teaching.

### **Read v29.**

The apostle works *hard* at his calling:

**labor** = *kopiaō* (kop-ee-ah'-o) = from a derivative of <G2873> (kopos); **to feel fatigue**; by implication **to work hard** :- (bestow) labour, toil, **be wearied**.

**striving** = *agonizomai* = from <G73> (agon); **to struggle**, literally (**to compete for a prize**), figuratively (to contend with an adversary), or genitive (to endeavor to accomplish something) :- fight, **labor fervently**, strive; **intense exertion**.

If we isolate the first part of this verse, we are left picturing the apostle slogging it out manfully, exerting almost superhuman effort to fulfill his calling. And we might accurately imagine Paul, at the end of each day, collapsing exhausted into his bed. [Dwight L. Moody: "Lord, I'm tired! Amen."] But then Paul pulls a fast one on us. This may be fleshly effort—but the sustaining force behind it is *not* fleshly.

This labor, this striving, is not by Paul's power, but by *Christ's* power.

...according to His power, which mightily works within me.

The NASB is not the best translation of this verse. The KJVs and the ESV do a better job of capturing the repetition employed for emphasis.

NKJV: To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

ESV: for which purpose also I labor, striving according to his working which is at work powerfully in me.

**working** (noun) = *energeia* (en-erg'-i-ah) = from <G1756> (energes); efficiency ("energy") :- operation, strong, **(effectual) working**.

**works** (verb) = *energeo* = from <G1756> (energes); **to be active, efficient** :- do, (be) effectual (fervent), be mighty in, shew forth self, work (effectually in).

**mightily**<sup>nasb, kjvs</sup>, **powerfully**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *dynamis* = from <G1410> (dunamai); **force** (literal or figurative); **specially miraculous power** (usually by implication a miracle itself) :- ability, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

When we are "in Christ" it is *His* supernatural, divine power at work in our ministry. And why it is appropriate that He receive all the praise and credit for the results.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

## SESSION 15: FERVENT PRAYERS

*Colossians 2:1-3*

### PREFACE

At this point in our study of Colossians we are reminded that while the *text* of God's word was written by the Holy Spirit, its *structure*, its divisions, are man-made—that the chapter and verse breaks have been inserted for ease of use: indexing the Bible to make it easier to find what we are looking for. There is no *thematic* break at the chapter break. The apostle Paul is still on the same topic with which he closed Chapter One: his work on behalf of the church. Let's begin at v28 in Chapter One.

**Read Colossians 1:28-2:3.**

### v1: THE STRUGGLE

Chapter One closes with Paul writing, "For this purpose..." For what purpose? To "present every man complete in Christ." To this end Paul "strives." This work may be powered by Christ, as v29 tells us, but that does not mean that Paul is lounging around eating bon-bons. The work is Christ's, but He is doing it *through* the flesh of the apostle. So the striving, the struggling is very real. And Paul chooses words that express this. In v29 it is the verb:

**striving** = *agonizomai* = from <G73> (agon); **to struggle**, literally (**to compete for a prize**), figuratively (to contend with an adversary), or genitive (to endeavor to accomplish something) :- fight, **labor fervently**, strive; **intense exertion**.

In v2:1 it is the noun:

**struggle**<sup>nasb,esv</sup>, **conflict**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *agona* = from <G71> (ago); properly a place of assembly (as if led), i.e. (by implication) **a contest** (held there); figurative an effort or anxiety :- conflict, contention, **fight**, race; strenuous activity. [As with so many words, *agon* originally stood for the *place* of an assembly for contest, then eventually was used for the contest that took place there.]

There is a different Greek word that he would have used to express the formal clash of great armies (*polemos*); this word is more personal, used of an athletic contest or fight. *Vine's* calls it "a contest against spiritual foes, as well as human adversaries."

Turn please to the gospel of Luke.

**Read Luke 22:39-44.**

The attitude of prayer in the first century was standing. But Jesus was in such agony of soul that Matthew and Mark tell us that He fell to the ground on His face. His agony was so intense, so deep, that it required an angel to come and strengthen Him—to keep Him going. His sweat was so profuse it seemed to have the consistency and appearance of thick blood pouring from His head. Jesus was in "agonia."

**agony** = *agonia* = from <G73> (agon); a struggle (properly the state), i.e. (figurative) **anguish** :- agony.

Out of all the words the apostle Paul could have chosen to describe his work on behalf of the Colossians, the Laodiceans and others—striving (v29), struggling (v2:1)—he chose the same one used to describe the horrific agony through which the Lord passed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Like the scene in the Garden, Paul seems to be referring to his prayers—his intercessory prayers on behalf of the young churches. Remember, at the time he was in house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier at all times. He was not out traveling, preaching, or even making tents. His days were numbered, and virtually all his efforts on behalf of the churches consisted of writing letters of counsel—and praying for them.

He cared so deeply, so intensely for even those he had never met, that he describes his prayer time as "agony."

**Sidebar:** When we seek to personalize this, a question rises: *How much do we care?* By this I don't mean to suggest that every Christian should be invested 101% in absolutely every endeavor involving faith. Not everyone can be a missionary in Africa. Not everyone can stand on a street corner in Times Square. Not everyone can attend seminary. But what if God has *called* us to one of these or something else. What if God has called us to work in support of missionaries. What if God has called us to work in prayer or financially for those who speak boldly in His name. What if God has called us to teach or be a spiritual guide for youth in the church. Are we struggling, fighting, sweating over the task assigned us? Or are we just phoning it in? When we pray for others is it just a perfunctory laundry-list of concerns, or do we *labor*, do we *agonize* over their situations and needs?

One more note: To some it may seem like Paul is bragging here. *Look how hard I pray for you; aren't you impressed?* But that's not it at all. How do *you* feel when someone tells you they have been praying for you? Are you not encouraged? Does this not help sustain you through the hardest times, knowing that a brother or sister is joining with you in that struggle?

## V2: THE PRAYER

In v2 Paul describes the content of his many fervent prayers. In v28 of the previous chapter he states that his overriding purpose is to “present every man complete in Christ.” And here, to that end, he lists some of what he means by that completeness. This, however, is not a simple bullet-list of discreet items, but a description of how one flows from and into others.

*that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love,*

**encouraged** = *parakaleo* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2564> (kaleo); **to call near**, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation) :- beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) exhort (-ation), entreat, pray.

In the Christian community the word “encouraged” has become commonplace, and, out of sheer repetition, has lost much of its true depth. This is a powerful and unique aspect of the body. Members of other groups can certainly encourage each other; Christians are not alone in their support and help for each other. What makes it unique in the church is that when we encourage each other—come alongside to comfort, exhort, help—we do it in the name of Christ Jesus. In that moment we become *His* heart, *His* hands and feet, *His* arm helping hold up a brother or sister. This encourages *hearts*.

And Douglas J. Moo points out how we must adjust our understanding of the word “heart” (kardia).

The strong tendency in modern English is to use heart with reference to the emotions, whereas in Scripture “heart” designates the center of the personality, the source of willing and thinking in addition to feeling. “Encouraged in heart” or “to have hearts encouraged” is therefore a way of referring to an encouragement that touches the deepest part of our being and that affects every aspect of our persons.

How and why is this done? Because we are “knit together in love” (the NIV “united” is too soft, too shallow).

**knit together** = *syμβιβάζω* = from <G4862> (sun) and *bibazo* (to force; causative [by reduplication] of the base of <G939> (basis)); to drive together, i.e. unite (in association or affection), (mentally) to infer, show, teach :- compact, assuredly gather, intrust, knit together, prove. [in 2:2 a passive form, hence “knit together” rather than “drive together”]

Paul uses this same word in v19, in the context of speaking more directly to the situation in Colossae.

## Read Colossians 2:18-19.

This is the picture of the working, thriving body of Christ, in which each member is supported, encouraged by the others in *agape* love. And let us not pass lightly over this mention of love; we'll come back to it in just a moment.

*and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,*

Since he began this letter Paul has been contrasting the (for lack of a better word) *intellectualized* knowledge and understanding of the heretical Gnostics harassing the Colossians, with the (again, for lack of a better word) *spiritualized* knowledge and understanding in Christ.

v1:5—you previously heard in **the word of truth, the gospel**

v1:6—understood the grace of God **in truth**

v1:9—you may be filled with **the knowledge** of His will in all **spiritual wisdom and understanding**,

v1:26—the **mystery** which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints

v1:27—to whom God willed to **make known** what is the riches of the glory of this **mystery**

v1:28—admonishing every man and **teaching** every man **with all wisdom**

And although Paul is not yet ready to leave this critical topic, he seems to wrap it all up in a gushing summation at the beginning of Chapter Two:

v2:2-3—the full assurance of **understanding**, resulting in a **true knowledge** of **God's mystery**, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**.

So from the beginning, Paul has been peppering his counsel with Gnostic terms used in the context of the gospel of Christ. But let's back up and look at what he is saying here in v2.

For the believers in all the churches that receive his counsel, Paul's earnest prayer is that their faith would not be thin and fragile, vacillating. As he wrote in v23 in the previous chapter, his prayer is that they will

continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard,

Look at how he expresses it here in vv2-3. First it is **authentic and complete**:

and attaining to **all** the wealth that comes from the **full assurance** of **understanding**, resulting in a **true knowledge** of **God's mystery**, that is, **Christ Himself**, in whom are hidden **all** the treasures of **wisdom** and **knowledge**.

Second, he wants them to have a solid **confidence** about it. Their faith would become such a solid conviction that it could not be buffeted and knocked off-course by every passing philosophy. Their faith could and would still be challenged, but they would be so assured of it, so confident in it, that nothing could pull them away.

Then, third, he employs some of the **same words** they have been hearing from the Gnostics in describing what he wants them to have:

**understanding** = *synesis* = from <G4920> (suniemí); **a mental putting together**, i.e. **intelligence** or (concretely) the intellect :- knowledge, understanding.

**true knowledge** = *epignosis* = from <G1921> (epiginosko); recognition, i.e. (by implication) **full discernment**, acknowledgment :- (ac-) knowledge (-ing, -ment).

**mystery** = *mysterion* = from a derivative of muo (**to shut the mouth**); **a secret** or "mystery" (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites) :- mystery.

**wisdom** = *sophia*.

**knowledge** = *gnosis*.

But, fourth, here's the critical **difference** that changes the very nature of all these words and ideas used by the Gnostics: All this knowledge and wisdom and understanding Paul speaks of is based in "God's mystery, that is Christ Himself."



**Sidebar:** The KJVs end v2 differently, with “both of the Father and of Christ.” This translation is based on their use of a different original manuscript. Douglas J. Moo tells us that “the Greek text underlying the last four words in this phrase are very confused, with a tangled web of textual variants [‘no less than fifteen’] facing the interpreter. But most scholars concur that the reading assumed by [the NIV, NASB, ESV and most others] is the correct one.”

This interpretation agrees nicely with what Paul wrote in 1:27, assigning the “mystery” to Christ.

### Read Colossians 1:27.

Christ Jesus Himself is the one in whom is hidden *all* wisdom and knowledge.

**hidden** = *apokryphos* = from <G613> (apokrupto); secret; by implication treasured :- hid, kept secret.

**treasures** = *thesauros* = from <G5087> (tithemi); **a deposit**, i.e. **wealth** (literal or figurative) :- treasure. [we get the word “*thesaurus*”—a treasury of words—from this Greek word]

**wisdom** = *sophia*; **knowledge** = *gnosis*.

All wisdom and knowledge that surpasses anything imagined by this fallen world (because it is kept secret in Christ) is attainable, knowable *in Christ*. But when we consider this passage as a whole, we see that the whole process begins not just in Christ, but in Christ’s *body*—the church! Notice how Paul begins this passage:

...that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love...

*R. Kent Hughes:* F. F. Bruce comments: “Paul emphasizes that the revelation of God cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love within the Christian community.”

This means that mere intellectual comprehension of the mystery of Christ will not bring full understanding of the mystery, for understanding also comes through the love of Christians one for another. How is this so? When we are loved by other believers, we experience Christ through them, and thus our knowledge of Christ is enhanced. The complementary side of this is that when we allow the Holy Spirit through us to live the life of Christ (and we experience this when we do acts of love toward members of the Body of Christ), then too we have our knowledge of him enhanced.

This is an important message for an alive Christianity. No intellectual process will lead to a full grasp of the mystery of Christ unless it is accompanied by a love for him and for Christians that knits us, the Church, together in love. We cannot pursue knowledge of God in willful, unloving isolation, rejecting fellowship with others.

The deepest knowledge of the mystery of Christ comes from both the head and the heart. We must study the Scriptures about him intensely, with all our heart, and we must love him and his people with all our heart—and then we will know as we ought. So when brotherly love is present and continuing, it facilitates a profound knowledge of Christ, which in turn results in wisdom and knowledge.

## SESSION 16: AN ORDERLY FAITH

### Colossians 2:4-5

#### PREFACE

For the first nine months of our marriage, in 1971, Linda and I lived in a tiny apartment that had originally been a one-car garage. Our rent was ninety dollars per month. Living on seaman's pay, that was all we could afford. Dinners were macaroni and cheese; entertainment was walking to the local library.

One day when Linda was not home, to this modest domicile came knocking a *Kirby* vacuum cleaner salesman. And, because I was, at the time, a young idiot, I let him in and listened attentively to his spiel. By the time he left, I was convinced that I *must* purchase this extraordinary machine for my wife. No matter that it cost several hundred dollars. No matter that our dwelling was so small you could stand anywhere in it and see all four walls of the other rooms. No, I *had* to get this for my wife.

Happily, the young woman I married has *never* been an idiot. When she returned home she patiently educated me on the basics of economics, budgets, and folly. I am pleased to report that her reasonable argument won out over the persuasive patter of the salesman, and we never purchased that vacuum cleaner.

#### True Knowledge

In our last session the apostle Paul expressed his earnest desire for the Colossians. He told them that he “agonized” over them in his prayers, that they would realize that all the wisdom and knowledge and understanding they would ever need could be found in Christ.

#### Read Colossians 2:1-3.

Our passage for today begins with Paul's reason for expressing all that.

#### Read Colossians 2:4-5.

#### v4

Last week one of the words in our text was *thesauros*, from which we get the English word *thesaurus*—a treasury of words. Well, in v4, the translators have leafed through their respective thesauri to come up a plethora of English words with which to translate the two key words in this verse.

**delude**<sup>nasb, esv</sup>, **deceive**<sup>nkjv, niv</sup>, **beguile**<sup>kjv</sup> = *paralogizomai* = from <G3844> (para) and <G3049> (logizomai); **to misreckon**, i.e. delude :- beguile, deceive; to miscalculate, **to reason falsely**. [Vaughan: “leading astray by false reasoning”]

The other word is translated with two words in the NASB: “persuasive argument.”

**persuasive argument**<sup>nasb</sup>

*pithanologia* (pith-an-o-lo-gee'-ah)

**persuasive words**<sup>nkjv</sup>

from a compound of a derivative of <G3982> (peitho) and

**enticing words**<sup>kjv</sup>

<G3056> (logos); persuasive language :- enticing words.

**fine-sounding arguments**<sup>niv</sup>

**plausible arguments**<sup>esv</sup>

[Lightfoot: “persuasive rhetoric”; Vaughan: “implies the attempt to convince someone by ‘fast talk,’ or by handing him a ‘smooth line.’”]

**beguiling speech**<sup>rsv</sup>

**specious arguments**<sup>nab</sup>

I like the ESV's “plausible arguments.” [story of performance as Satan's voice]

Satan does not present himself as a monster; his minions do not tempt us with brutality. They tempt us away from the path of Christ with sweet talk, with fine-sounding words and utterly “plausible arguments.”

## Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

That vacuum cleaner salesman in 1971 used “beguiling speech” on a nineteen-year-old rube. He may not have lied outright, but he used a “smooth line” and “fast talk” to persuade someone who could obviously ill-afford his product to one end: his own profit. Just so the Gnostics in Colossae.

This is why it is so important to be familiar with the God of the Bible through His printed word. “Fine-sounding arguments” and “persuasive words” find no purchase in the life of a person who knows and lives by God’s word.

It is also why it is so important to be part of a local body. The plain truth is that we cannot do it on our own. Paul’s argument is presented in the context of a supportive, edifying family of fellow believers, all “knit together in love” (v2). It is not always necessary to have organized opposition from without; we can also be led astray by the “persuasive arguments” of our own ignorance.

As Solomon writes in Proverbs 27:17,

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

We all need the “sharpening” that comes from pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, brothers and sisters in the church—even as we sharpen them. The church is a marvelous and highly effective invention of God’s. It works.

### v5

In v5, immediately after the warning of v4, as a good counselor Paul affirms in the Colossians something they are doing right.

## Read v5.

One gets the impression that the Holy Spirit was to the apostle something more than just some vaporous, mystical, incorporeal spook. One also gets the impression that Paul chooses his words carefully—and means what he says. Paul saw, in the Spirit, the capacity to supernaturally bond *his* spirit to others. It is this other-worldly ability (in Christ) that gives him the authority to both rebuke, to warn (v4), and affirm (v5) those far away from his “body” (*sarx*).

And Paul does not say this lightly; he is not saying, as many mindlessly do today, “Hey, I’m with you, buddy. You’re in my thoughts and prayers.” No, he really means, *I am **with** you. I am there in your midst.* This is demonstrated even more in what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about a member of their congregation sleeping with his step-mother.

## Read 1 Corinthians 5:3-5.

In *Stargate SG-1*, the science fiction series we like so much, they occasionally use a holographic technology that lets a person in one place, appear and even have a conversation with people in another place. He or she is not really there, yet they can interact—hear and speak with others—as if they were.

Although he would never imagine it in such fantastical terms, I believe this is how Paul saw his long-distance interaction with the various churches under his counsel. In this declaration—“I am with you in spirit”—he exhibits for the church the incredible power of the *Holy* Spirit working in and through the body of believers. (Isn’t it interesting that he writes “to see your,” rather than to “hear of your.”)

And just how does he affirm them “in spirit”?

*...rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.*

Although the two key words in this phrase were used in military settings, they were also used in more general contexts.

**good discipline**<sup>nasb</sup>, **good order**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **orderly**<sup>niv</sup> = taxis (tocks'-iss) = from <G5021> (tasso); **regular arrangement**, i.e. (in time) fixed succession (of rank or character), official dignity :- order.

Paul uses this word when he instructs the Corinthians that their assemblies are to be conducted “properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Corinthians 14:40). A good illustration of what this word means (without using the word itself) is found in 1 Corinthians.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-3.**

**stability**<sup>nasb</sup>, **steadfastness**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **firm(ness)**<sup>niv,esv</sup> = *stereoma* (ster-eh'-oh-mah) = from <G4732> (stereo); **something established**, i.e. (abstract) confirmation (stability) :- steadfastness.

Reading this verse, we might rightly ask, “If this is the case, why all the concern in the other passages that they not be ‘deluded with persuasive argument’? Which is it?”

Here is how Douglas J. Moo answers this:

The language he uses later in this chapter suggests that the false teaching is something to be resisted, not something that has already infected the church. The Colossian Christians have started well (1:7-8), and they are continuing well. It is the future for which Paul is concerned. As [W.] Wink puts it, “The epistle is a vaccination against heresy, not an antibiotic for those already afflicted.”

We might rightly be of the opinion that *our* church would stand strong against heretical teaching, false doctrine. But, as Paul states in v4, such things can sound at first perfectly agreeable. We—both the individual and the corporate body of Christ—must always stand guard—in firm, orderly fashion—against such things.

## SESSION 17: THE WALK

### Colossians 2:6-7

#### PREFACE

Let's begin our study of this passage by returning, for just a moment, to the first chapter. In the first portion of his letter, Paul eloquently expresses key descriptions of the "beloved Son."

- 1:15 image of the invisible God, firstborn of all
- 1:18 <sup>creation</sup> head of the body, the church
- 2:2 the mystery of God
- 2:3 repository of all wisdom and knowledge

In a rare moment of brevity, the apostle opens the transitional passage of vv6-7 with a succinct summing up of all these qualifications in a name/title used nowhere else in Scripture: *ton Christon lesoun ton kyrion*—literally, "the Christ Jesus the Lord" (Moo). This is the only place in the NT where these individual terms are so arranged, and it seems to express, in one expansive title, the full supernatural weight of just who and what the "beloved Son" is.

#### Read Colossians 2:6-7.

#### v6

*Therefore...*

Up till now, the content of the letter to the Colossians has been generally *indicative*—that is, Paul has been making factual statements about the way things are. Our passage today is transitional in that it introduces the *imperative* portion of the letter [through v4:6], in which Paul lays out a series of commands (the first: "walk in Him"). [Between these two sections there is some spillage of course, but this delineation is *generally* true.]

*as you have received (the: definite article) Christ Jesus the Lord,*

Also unique is how Paul uses *paralambano* here—the only instance where the verb has a *personal* object.

**received** = *paralambano* = from <G3844> (*para*) and <G2983> (*lambano*); **to receive near, i.e. associate with oneself** (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy to assume an office; figurative to learn :- receive, take (unto, with).

That is, he is not referring to the Colossians receiving and accepting cold doctrine, teaching, traditions; he says "you received *Christ...*"—a person. It would be so natural for Paul to write, for example, "As you received your instruction in The Way from Epaphras, continue walking by those precepts." But just as he has been doing all along in this letter, Paul makes it personal. **Everything is centered and grounded in the person, Christ Jesus.** [as opposed to the philosophies or traditions of the false teachers]

And note in the definition: "associate with oneself." When, for example, we marry someone (especially in Christian marriage), we are declaring far more than, *I like this person*, or *I think she's hot!* or *He will be a good provider*. In Christian marriage we are publicly declaring that we are *joining* with this person; we are to be—and to be recognized as—mystically "one." Just so those who are "in Christ." We are associating ourselves, identifying ourselves with Him.

The believers in Colossae received:

- the Anointed One, Messiah, the one fulfillment of all
- Christ** Messianic prophecies; divine Prophet, Priest, King.
- Jesus** the historical person, human flesh, God incarnate; "Jesus" is Greek for "Joshua," which means, "the Lord is salvation," so they received Him as the sole source of salvation.
- the **Lord** sovereign, Master; the only One to whom we submit our allegiance and very lives.

*Billy Graham:* No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ, and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior, and Master.

*so walk in Him (NIV: continue to live in Him)*

**walk, continue to live**<sup>niv</sup> = *peripateo* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G3961> (pateo); **to tread all around, i.e. walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); figurative **to live, deport oneself**, follow (as a companion or votary) :- go, **be occupied with**, walk (about).

The NIV does a good job of capturing the present tense of this word. We “receive” once, but we “walk” or “live” as a commitment to a long-term way of doing something. This is “a command to *keep* on doing [this] as [a] general habit or *life-style*” (Hill/Archer). One commentator puts it, “conduct your lives as incorporated in Him.”

*as you received... live*

- you did not earn or deserve His salvation—every day give thanks for that
- you received Him by His *grace*—live by His grace
- you received Him with confession—continue to confess Him
- you received Him because He loved you—every day love Him back
- you received His forgiveness—live every day in His forgiveness
- you received His sanctification—every day grow in the sanctified life
- His sacrifice turned away God’s wrath—live every day under a loving Father who knows you as His child

Finally, what does this “walk” look like?

### **Read from Colossians 1:9-12.**

...filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

...walk[ing] in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

v7

We can do all this because of what it says in v7.

### **Read v7.**

*...having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him*

Just as the NIV was helpful in v6, adding a word to express the tense of the verb, so here in v7 the NASB adds words to help us with the tense of the verbs.

Believers “have been” (one time in the past, once-for-all) “rooted” [perfect tense]. The word is

**rhizoo** (rhid-zah'-oh) = to root (figurative *become stable*).

What a wonderful word-picture this is; in the original secular Greek the noun form (*rhiza*) was used for the foundation of the earth, and for the foot of a mountain. It was also used for that from which other things spring (e.g., the root of evil or the root of good). The way a mountain is rooted into the earth’s mantle—that’s how deeply and permanently we have been, once-for-all, rooted into Christ Jesus!

We are “rooted” once, but we are “being” (continual, ongoing process) “built up” [present tense] over time—both are accomplished “in Him.”

**built up** = *epoikodomeo* = from <G1909> (epi) and <G3618> (oikodomeo); **to build upon, i.e. (figurative) to rear up** :- build thereon (thereupon, on, upon).

Admittedly Paul is mixing his metaphors, since the first (“rooted”) is typically agricultural—or at least natural—and the second (“built up”) is usually associated with construction. Here’s the idea; think about the construction of the new One World Trade Center, or “Freedom Tower” in New York City. Just imagine how deeply, how solidly the foundation of that huge building is anchored—“rooted”—into the bedrock of Manhattan. But then, with that root in place (once; one root, one foundation), the skyscraper is successively “built up,” floor upon floor. The root is never seen, but its necessary strength is repeatedly demonstrated in the witness of each new floor.

Just so our lives. Rooted into the immovable bedrock of Christ Jesus, the conduct and progression of our “building up” stands as a witness for the strength of our Foundation. And from beginning to end, it is all “in Him.”

*...and established in your faith, just as you were instructed,*

Like “built up,” the word translated “established” (NIV: strengthened) is in the present tense. [continual, ongoing process].

**established** = *bebaioo* (beb-ah-yah’-oh) = from <G949> (bebaios); to **stabilitate** (figurative) :- **confirm**, (e-) stablish.

The word has a legal background, where it means to validate or guarantee, but here it has the basic sense of “firm” or “solidly grounded”—*Webster’s*: “not easily moved or thrown off-balance”.

There is a passage in 2 Peter that speaks to this.

**Read 2 Peter 3:17-18 (not NIV; ESV preferred).**

[steadfastness = stability]

*established in your faith*

“Faith” is what keeps us stable when “unprincipled men” seek to lead us astray. But the different translations leave us wondering just what aspects of faith are being addressed in Colossians 2:7.

KJVs, NIV, ESV = in the faith

NASB = in (or by) your faith

I’m a little uncomfortable with the NASB “in your faith”—and *really* uncomfortable with “by your faith.” Not that it can’t be true, but all three of these words—rooted, built up, established—are in the passive mood, which de-emphasizes our part in the process and implies that it is God doing the work.

“In the faith” is a better translation, since the consensus seems to be that what Paul refers to here is the “sphere” of faith. As Curtis Vaughan puts it,

“In the faith” conceives of faith as the body of truth (the faith system) and looks on this as the sphere within which the being “strengthened” takes place.

*just as you were instructed*

This passage opened with “as you have received Christ,” and we rightly emphasized the work of God in that process of receiving. But this passage comes full-circle by bringing out the second aspect of how these Colossians received Christ: They were “instructed.”

**instructed**<sup>nasb</sup>, **taught** = *didasko* = a prolonged (causative) form of a primary verb *dao* (to learn); to **teach** (in the same broad application) :- teach.

**Read Romans 10:11-15.**

Nothing is impossible with God, and the Holy Spirit can certainly grab hold of the isolated person born on a desert island who has never heard anything about Christ. But in God’s economy, He normally works through the very human process of one person teaching another. The Colossians heard of Christ, came to faith, and were “rooted,” “built up,” and “established in [their] faith” because of the faithful teaching—and example—of Epaphras, and



others.

But teaching takes many forms. While the formal teacher—i.e., pastor, Sunday School teacher—may plant the *seeds* of knowledge and understanding, it is the example, the witness of those *lives* and others that truly establishes faith. I will say again something I have said before: I have sat under many pastors, and I cannot recite even one sentence of any sermon any of them ever preached in my hearing. But I *can* tell you about their character, their varying levels of servanthood, the ways they modeled Christ to me.

For myself, perhaps the most eloquent instruction I received for a life of faith came from the simple, daily lives of two homely, unsophisticated parents who loved the Lord.

*overflowing with gratitude*

Finally, our walk is to be distinguished by thanksgiving, gratitude—in abundance.

**gratitude**<sup>nasb</sup>, **thanksgiving** = *eucharistia* = from <G2170> (eucharistos); **gratitude; active grateful language (to God, as an act of worship)** :- thankfulness, (giving of) thanks (-giving).

**overflowing**<sup>nasb, niv</sup>, **abounding**<sup>kjvs, esv</sup> = from <G4053> (perissos); **to superabound** (in quantity or quality), **be in excess**, be superfluous; also (transposed) to cause to superabound or excel :- (make, more) abound, (have, have more) abundance, (be more) abundant, be the better, **enough and to spare**, exceed, excel, increase, be left, redound, remain (over and above).

We may be in the habit of seeing gratitude as simply good manners—which it certainly is. But this context brings out how critically important thanksgiving to God is to keep us rooted and established in our relationship to God.

Gratitude in its fullest expression ensures balance and stability. Think about it: It is simply good manners to say, “thank you” when someone does something for us. But in our walk of faith in Christ, it also keeps us properly aligned, keeps our ego in check.

It is more than just bad manners. When we fail to express thanksgiving to God for what He has done for us, we begin to forget that He has; we are on-track to imagining we have done it for ourselves.

Our gratitude to God is to be overflowing, spilling out all over the place. It should be a ready, well-used response to His grace, His mercy, His kindness and generosity, His *forgiveness*, every day of our lives—not just as one component of a morning prayer; our lives, our thoughts our conversation, should vibrate to the pitch of thanksgiving, of appreciation for everything God has done for us.

## SESSION 18: NO ONE ELSE

### *Colossians 2:8-10*

#### **PREFACE**

In the previous passage (vv6-7) the apostle Paul went out of his way to paint a picture of desired—indeed, *essential*—stability and strength for the walk of the Colossian believers. They must be **rooted, built up, established** in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul now gets right down to it; he has reached the point in his letter where he is going to address head-on the situation facing the Colossians [from v2:8 into Chapter 3]. Although there is no grammatical bridge from v7 to v8—no “Therefore,” or “So,” or “For”—in the first verse in today’s passage we have the “why” for the previous passage: why it is so critical that we remain firmly grounded in Christ.

#### **Read Colossians 2:8.**

#### **v8**

*See to it*

Watch out! [KJVs: “Beware”]

*that no one takes you captive*

The KJVs have unfortunate translations of this text. The NKJV seems to disregard or not acknowledge the complete word, translating its simple base word [*sulao*], which can indeed be translated “cheat.” The KJV is technically OK only if you understand how they would read the word “spoil” in the 1600s, and then extend it. To modern eyes the KJV reads, “Beware lest any man ruin you, or harm you.”

The Greek word Paul uses is unique to this passage, used only here in the NT, and was rarely used anywhere else. This is what the word means:



*sylagoeo* (soo-lahg-ogue-eh'-oh) = from the base of <G4813> (*sulao*) and (the reduplicated form of) <G71> (*ago*); **to lead away as booty**, i.e. (figurative) seduce :- spoil; “used of taking captives in war and leading them away as booty” (Vaughan); “carried off as plunder” (Moo) [i.e., spoil].

If we simply take this at face value—take you captive, lead you away—well, that doesn't sound so bad. It sounds like he's saying the false teachers will just lead us astray into not-quite-accurate philosophies. Doesn't sound so bad.

No, look again at that picture: Those captives are not being led away to a garden party. At best they are being led into abject slavery, but more often than not they are being led to their death—not even a clean and quick death, but a *tortuous* death.

Acceptance of and adherence to any philosophy or religion other than faith in Christ leads ultimately to death—a horrible, eternal death.

*through philosophy and empty deception*

And just *how* are we led away into captivity? There is nothing new under the sun; what threatened the Colossians threatens us today.

While the other translations are more literal (i.e., accurate), the NIV offers us a pretty good idea of how this would have been originally interpreted: “hollow and deceptive philosophy.” Paul is not denigrating “philosophy” in general; at the time this word [\[used only here\]](#) would have been applied to just about any organized thought, good or bad. But he is speaking against the deceptive philosophy of the false teachers in Colossae.

**empty** = *kenos* = vain, foolish, futile things; “people or teachings that are devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value”  
(Moo)

**deception** = *apate* = delusion, deceit

Paul, in Ephesians, gives us a more detailed description of what he is saying here.

### Read Ephesians 5:6-10.

Back in v8, Paul expands his denunciation of these spurious philosophies with three prepositional phrases:

*[philosophy] according to the tradition of men*

“...the product of mere human speculation and does not put its adherents in touch with divine truth.” (Moo)

### Read Mark 7:5-9.

*[philosophy] according to the elementary principles of the world*

This is one of those phrases that is a toss-up for interpretation. The phrase *stoicheia tou (hah) kosmos* could refer to

- the **essential principles of a particular area of study**; we see this interpretation in most of our translations—except for the ESV;
- other **spiritual beings**; this is the interpretation in the ESV and *Today's NIV*;
- the **fundamental material components of the universe**—i.e., air, earth, fire, and water—which, during the time of this writing, would have also been associated with spiritual beings, or the gods.

I will spare you all the detailed arguments for and against each of these (I *would* like to include more than just one verse in this session). Let me just read a tiny portion of what Douglas J. Moo says about this:

The Colossian “philosophy,” by its preoccupation with rules about material things, was, in Paul’s view, treating them like the pagans did, as if they were fundamental cosmic powers that needed to be placated. They were, in effect, putting them in the place of Christ...and failing to recognize that believers had “died” to them with Christ (v20).

*rather than according to Christ.*

Not surprisingly, the apostle has a better alternative:

*Don't waste your time with those; you are to live according to Christ! After all, why bother with these inferior things when you could worship and live by the principles of the One who actually created the universe?!*

## Read Colossians 1:15-17.

### v9

Verses 9 to 12, in the NASB, comprise one sentence. So, of course, our study today will have to stop in mid-sentence.

## Read Colossians 2:9-10.

*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,*

Verse 9 is a restating of what he wrote in 1:19.

**fullness** = *pleroma* = from <G4137> (pleroo); **repletion or completion**, i.e. (subject) what fills (as contents, supplement, copiousness, multitude), or (object) what is filled (as container, performance, period) :- which is put in to fill up, piece that filled up, **fulfilling**, full, fulness.

We examined Paul's clever use of this word in detail back when we studied v1:19. Let me revisit just a brief portion of it:

The Greek *pleroma*, translated "fullness" in our text, was a technical term used by Gnostics to refer to the hierarchy of these supernatural beings dwelling between God and the world (Vaughan). These *æons*, "emanations from God," influenced and controlled men's lives; in a manner of speaking, in this "deceptive philosophy," these *æons* comprised "the fullness." That is, taken as a whole, the *æons* represented, even *possessed*, the fullness of God.

So Paul's intentional use of the same Greek word *pleroma* is telling—especially that he precedes it with "all." He is saying to the Colossians, *You've been hearing that these mystical intermediaries are the fullness of God, but in fact in only one person has God the Father made all His fullness to dwell: the God/Man Jesus Christ.*

And, at the time, I also pointed out that this "fullness" resides permanently in Christ, "bodily."

**dwells, lives** = *katoikeo* = from <G2596> (kata) and <G3611> (oikeo); **to house permanently, i.e. reside** (literal or figurative) :- dwell (-er), inhabitant (-ter).

**bodily form** = *somatikos* = adverb from <G4984> (somatikos); **corporeally or physically** :- bodily.

Once again in the Second Chapter Paul rebuts the Gnostic position that the Son of God could not possibly have been incarnated, in evil human flesh. Paul not only states that He did, but that it was permanent. The Son of God remains, today, seated at the right hand of the Father in His glorified body.

### v10

*and in Him you have been made complete*

So note the progression of thought here: Paul makes the case for the completeness of Christ; He alone possesses every bit of God, no other *æon* intermediaries are necessary. When we come to Christ we get the full package—complete.

Then in v10 he declares that "in Him **you** have been made complete!"

**made complete, given fullness<sup>niv</sup>, have been filled<sup>esv</sup>** = *pleroo* = [verb form of *pleroma*, "fullness" in v9] from <G4134> (pleres); **to make replete, i.e. (literal) to cram** (a net), level up (a hollow), or (figurative) to furnish (or imbue, diffuse, influence), satisfy, execute (an office), finish (a period or task), verify (or coincide with a prediction), etc. :- accomplish, × after, **(be) complete**, end, expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, make) full (come), fully preach, **perfect**, supply.

We could probably devote an entire session to discussing what this means, and how it plays out in the temporal life of the believer. But let's whittle it down to the essentials of what it *is* and is *not*:

- Does it mean that Christians—those *in* Christ—are now in possession of everything the Son of God possesses? all of God? absolute divinity? **No.** (the “given fullness” of the NIV might lead one to that conclusion)
- What it means, first, is that **everything we have in Christ is all we need**—for salvation, for righteousness, for fulfillment, for peace with God. Hence the title of this study: *Just Jesus*.
- But it also means that when we are “in Christ,” there is not and should not be room for any thing or anyone else. Christ is enough. He is sufficient. R. Kent Hughes offers an illustration of this: If we are standing at the shoreline of the Pacific Ocean, before that seemingly limitless body of water, and we bend down and fill from that ocean a jar to the brim, that jar is full of the Pacific Ocean. Does it contain every last drop of the entire Pacific Ocean? No, but what it is filled with *is* the Pacific Ocean.  
Christ is the fullness of God, and, as believers, we are filled with Christ—or put perhaps more accurately, **we are made complete, perfect, in Christ.**

*and He is the head over all rule and authority;*

Just as they did in v1:16, the two words translated “rule” and “authority” (KJVs: “principality and power”) refer to spiritual beings.

### **Read Colossians 1:16.**

Christ Jesus is their “head”—source of creation, authority over—in the same way that he is the Head of His church—but for one critical difference, as Vaughan points out:

Whatever powers there are in the universe, whatever ranks and orders of authority and government, they all owe their being to Christ and are under His lordship. It is important to observe that though Christ is here described as Head, the powers and authorities are not called His body. That distinction is reserved for Christ’s people.

No one else has the relationship with Christ enjoyed by believers. We are filled by Him, made complete in Him, and, as His body, enjoy a unique intimacy with Him.



## SESSION 19: STRIPPED OFF/PUT ON

*Colossians 2:11-12*

### PREFACE

We are presently in the middle of an extended paragraph that contains the most eloquent concentration of statements regarding the believer's relationship to Christ Jesus. Here Paul bases his argument for the believer's stand against "hollow and deceptive philosophy."

His argument is not that we *follow* Christ—though we do.

His argument is not that we *subscribe to His teaching*—though we do.

His argument is not that we *love* Christ—though we do.

Paul's argument for faithfulness to Christ, in Colossians 2:6-15, is based on the believer's mystical yet very real *union* with Him. Just look at how this passage is peppered with this truth.

### Colossians 2:6-15

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk **in Him**, having been firmly rooted and now being built up **in Him** and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. (vv6-7)

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (v8)

For **in Him** all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and **in Him** you have been made complete, and **He is** the head over all rule and authority; (vv9-10)

and **in Him** you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried **with Him** in baptism, in which you were also raised up **with Him** through faith in the working of God, who raised **Him** from the dead. (vv11-12)

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **He** made you alive together **with Him**, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and **He** has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When **He** had disarmed the rulers and authorities, **He** made a public display of them, having triumphed over them **through Him**. (vv13-15)

[**Christ** / **God the Father** / **Undetermined**]

We walk **in Him**.

We are built up **in Him**.

We have been made complete **in Him** because **in Him** is the fullness of God, and thus He is "head over all rule and authority."

We have been cleansed, purified **in Him**, and made alive—through death, burial, and resurrection—**with Him**.

Our relationship with Christ—indeed, with the fullness of the Godhead—is  
not just that of a student to his teacher,  
not just that of a worshiper to his deity,  
not just that of a follower to his lord,  
but of someone physically, spiritually, *viscerally* **in** his Savior and Lord.

This is the setting—the environment—for our consideration today of vv11-12.

## **v11: CIRCUMCISION**

So we are not just in the middle of a paragraph, but in the middle of a sentence as we turn to v11. Let's back up and read from v8.

### **Read Colossians 2:8-12.**

Before we get into v11 I want to reiterate something with which I closed in our last session ([quotation from Curtis Vaughan](#)), a perfect illustration of this unique relationship every believer—and the community of believers, the church—has with Christ Jesus.

Whatever powers there are in the universe, whatever ranks and orders of authority and government, they all owe their being to Christ and are under His lordship. It is important to observe that though Christ is here described as Head, the powers and authorities are not called His body. That distinction is reserved for Christ's people.

Christ is "head," Lord over all rule and authority, but none of those entities are bonded to Him like each believer in His body, the church. No one else has the relationship with Christ enjoyed by believers. We are filled by Him, made complete in Him, and, as His body, enjoy a unique intimacy with Him.

The Lord loves metaphors and symbols; He uses them throughout Scripture. Think Jeremiah's clay jar (Jeremiah 19), Hosea's harlot wife, Gomer (Hosea 1-4), Jesus' seeds growing by the side of the road (Matthew 13).

In v12 Paul addresses the symbol of baptism; here in v11 Paul refers to one of the the Lord's most ancient and enduring symbols: circumcision.

### **Read v11.**

In Genesis 17 the Lord established circumcision with Abraham—and note: from the outset it was understood to be just a sign, a token of a covenant.

### **Read Genesis 17:10-11.**

Circumcision was an outward "sign" of something that could not be seen by man. Even back in those days the idea of circumcision was being used as a metaphor representing the conversion of a fleshly nature to a righteous nature.

### **Read Deuteronomy 30:6.**

Even so (and not surprisingly), the Jews insisted that it was the outward sign that made the critical difference between Gentile and Jew. And, to a certain extent they were correct: to have one's male offspring circumcised demonstrated obedience to Yahweh, and His covenantal Law. However, the fact that the child was only eight days old when the rite was performed meant that the circumcision said nothing about the level of obedience of the child himself. *He* wasn't being obedient; his parents were.

So the apostle Paul expresses clearly and succinctly in his letter to the Romans what the Lord always intended by circumcision.

### **Read Romans 2:28-29.**

circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

From the beginning, circumcision, like believer's baptism, was meant to be an *outward* sign of something that was already in place on the *inside*. It was a fleshly demonstration of a supernatural, internal change in the individual. Originally, for the Jew, circumcision of the male child on the eighth day signified his part in the Jewish community by blood, and implying his allegiance—and, especially, obedience—to Yahweh and His Law.



In Christ the outward sign became meaningless. The requirements of the Law were fulfilled in His atoning sacrifice—once for all. No longer is circumcision required—indeed, in the early church it would become a stumbling block to true faith:

- used by the Judaizers in the Galatian church, who claimed that Christians must also follow the Mosaic Law, and be circumcised;
- and although the textual evidence is thin in the Colossian letter, something similar may have been going on there.

The phrase “made without hands,” in the negative, translates one Greek word that in the positive effectively means “made by God.” The NIV suggests this with its “done by the hands of *men*” (emphasis added).

And Douglas Moo points out that the verbs here (vv11-12) are all in the *past* (Greek *orist*) tense. Why? Verse 10 has the answer:

...in Him [Christ] you have been made complete,

All that needed to be done has already been done—and God through Christ did it.

### *the circumcision of Christ*

This Paul calls the all-sufficient “circumcision of Christ.” In Scripture circumcision is used as a metaphor representing the removal of sinful flesh, or the removal of the proclivity toward sin. Circumcision performed by man is only an external sign that does nothing to the condition of the heart. But the “circumcision of Christ” doesn’t bother with an outward sign—it goes straight to the heart, removing (or “putting off” the “body of the flesh,” or (NIV) “sinful nature.”

We can all attest to the fact that at least a remnant of “sinful nature” still resides in us, so this cannot mean that Christ’s circumcision removes it 100%. What it means is that what has been removed is the “enervating power of our fleshly nature or propensity” (Moo)

[*enervating* = *deprived of strength, weakening, debilitating*] The sin nature we were born with is no longer the dominant force it once was.

For further illumination of this concept—and a perfect segue into v12—lets read how Paul speaks of it in his letter to the Romans.

### **Read Romans 6:3-11.**

## **12: BAPTISM**

And now, just as in the Romans passage, in v12 baptism is portrayed as a participation in Christ’s death and resurrection—thus, from one perspective, water baptism becomes a symbolic reenactment of the “circumcision of Christ” (F. F. Bruce)—not the physical circumcision performed on Jesus when He was eight days old, but the spiritual circumcision performed on *us* by Him. That is, when we are baptized we publicly declare the internal removal of our “body of the flesh”—the stripping away of sin’s power in our life.

### **Read vv11-12.**

What is Paul saying here? What is the relationship between baptism and spiritual circumcision? Is baptism when that actually takes place, or is baptism like circumcision under the law: just an outward symbol? There is considerable scholarly debate on this verse.

Perhaps the best answer to this is that a good case can be made for Paul referring (in v12) to our *spiritual* baptism, rather than water baptism, since in v11 he is clearly speaking of *spiritual* circumcision—one “made without hands.” The second (water) baptism, like OT circumcision, is a public, outward symbol or sign of what has already taken place inside.

*Curtis Vaughan:* Baptism, then, is not a magic rite, but an act of obedience in which we confess our faith and symbolize the essence of our spiritual experience. Faith is the instrumental cause of that experience and, apart from real faith, baptism is an empty, meaningless ceremony.

I am fascinated by how something Paul writes in Galatians ties in with this passage. It is not only a beautiful word picture, it may help clarify for us this business of how and why he associates baptism with circumcision in our passage.

### Read Galatians 3:26-27.

When I read that passage a light bulb came on in my head.

### Galatians 3:27

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

**clothed**<sup>nasb, niv</sup>, **put on**<sup>kjvs, esv</sup> = *endyo* (en-doo'-oh) = from <G1722> (en) and <G1416> (duno) (in the sense of sinking into a garment); to invest with clothing (literal or figurative) :- array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on.

### Colossians 2:11

and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

**removal**<sup>nasb</sup>, **putting off** = *apekdysis* (ap-ek'-doo-sis) = **divestment; putting off**, stripping off.

In the middle of this word is the Greek *ekdyo*, which means “to cause to sink **out**” (of, especially, clothing). In the Galatians passage it is *endyo*—to sink **in** or into.

**clothed**<sup>nasb, niv</sup>, **put on**<sup>kjvs, esv</sup> = *endyo* (en-doo'-oh) = from <G1722> (en) and <G1416> (duno) (in the sense of sinking into a garment); to invest with clothing (literal or figurative) :- array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on.

Keep your finger in Galatians and go back to v11 in Colossians.

and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the **removal** of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

**removal**<sup>nasb</sup>, **putting off** = *apekdysis* (ap-ek'-doo-sis) = **divestment; putting off**, stripping off.

In the middle of this word is the Greek *ekdyo*, which means “to cause to sink out” (of, especially, clothing). In the Galatians passage it is *endyo*—to sink **in** or into.

So now, let's put this all together. As it says in Colossians, at conversion, Christ “circumcises” us—stripping off the filthy, worn-out clothing we were born with: the power of the sin nature. We are left naked, needing something to replace what was removed. And Christ supplies that. As it states in Galatians, we are given brand new, clean clothing with which to cover ourselves: **Christ Himself!** All of this is based on faith—“through faith in the working of God”—and occurs at our spiritual baptism, when we are buried with Christ, then raised up with Him—just like God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

What's the difference between the first and second baptism? Just this: aside from the difference in chronology (at the first we are saved; at the second we are *declaring we have been saved*) at the second (water) baptism we leave the water; at the first (spiritual) baptism, we remain **in Christ**—we are “raised up with Him.”

In brand new, clean clothes. In Him.

## SESSION 20: THE TRIUMPH OF THE SON!

*Colossians 2:13-15*

### PREFACE

What did we look like before we came to Christ? How would we describe ourselves? My guess would be that even if you wouldn't say it out loud in a Sunday School class, you think you weren't that bad—certainly not as bad as *others* of your acquaintance. Especially if you were born and raised in the church, as so many of us were; I mean, how truly sinful can you be if you're still just a kid?!

I can't think of any place in God's word where it says something like, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins—unless you were only seven years old." We are *born* dead in our sins; we are born "bad."

#### Sidebar:

Regarding infants who die, note John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) and Bathsheba's child (2 Samuel 12:23).

### Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

If God looks upon the redeemed and sees the righteousness of His Son, it is equally true that God looks upon the unregenerate and sees their sin—no matter how "good" they are by earthly standards—because they are "children of wrath."

### So Far

The apostle Paul began this paragraph (vv8-15) by warning the Colossians not to fall prey to "hollow and deceptive philosophy" (v8). Paul proceeded to detail a number of very good reasons *why* they should not (or need not) follow the traditions of men, the elementary principles of the world, rather than Christ—beginning with a description of Christ Himself. In contrast to the empty, hollow philosophies with which they were being tempted, Paul offers the "fullness" of Christ Jesus and declares that the Colossian believers themselves have been "made complete" in Him, who is the "head over all rule and authority" (vv9-10). Drawing upon the imagery of two Judeo-Christian symbols, he then details how believers—at the moment of conversion—were spiritually circumcised in and by Christ, and were spiritually baptized (buried and raised up) with Him "through faith in the working of God" (vv11-12).

Now, as we close this paragraph in vv13-15, Paul expands on all Christ Jesus did for us, drawing it to a dramatic, cosmic, triumphant conclusion.

### Read Colossians 2:13-15.

### vv13-14

It is an ugly picture that opens v13, one that can be read in a couple of ways—neither mutually exclusive. First we must note the mercy and grace of our God: we did not raise ourselves up to Him, thus receiving life, but He stooped to us *while we were still dead* and graciously brought us to life. It is a moment so graphically portrayed in the oracle given to the prophet Ezekiel concerning Jerusalem's abominations.

*"When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, 'Live!'" (Ezekiel 16:6)*

*When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh*

The first way all our common versions translate this is, literally from the Greek, "**in** [en] your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh." That is, when you were dwelling **in the sphere of** your sin. Once again we have an example of all the translations presenting it one way, and virtually every commentator saying it should be something else. Go figure. They suggest the better way to read this is, "When you were dead **because of** [or **through, or by reason of**] your sins." You were spiritually dead **because of** your sins—or, more precisely, you were spiritually dead because of the sin nature with which you were born, because of the original sin of Adam. Either interpretation works; both are true.

The first part of v13—“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him”—is essentially a restating of v11, but with a difference.

**Question:** What two things are added in v13?

**dead** = *nekros* = from an apparently primary *nekus* (a corpse); dead (literal or figurative; also as noun) :- dead.

**made...alive together with** = *syzōopoieō* (sood-zo-op-oy-eh'-o) = from <G4862> (sun) and <G2227> (zoopoieo); **to reanimate conjointly with** (figurative) :- quicken together with.

Absent the circumcising of Christ, we are all just a bunch of walking corpses. Physiologically, at the moment of our birth we begin the process of dying: a steady, relentless march into death. Spiritually, at the moment of our birth we are *already* dead; the flesh just doesn't acknowledge it. Fallen flesh simply refuses delivery on the truth that each of us is “dead in [our] transgressions and the uncircumcision of [our] flesh.”

Only one person can reanimate dead flesh—not Dr. Frankenstein, but God.

Just think of the irony: The only way for us to be given real life is by and through the living Son of God. But the only way this is possible (in God's economy) is through the *death* of His Son.

**Read Hebrews 2:14-15.**

*having forgiven us all our transgressions,*

Note again the time-frame: God the Father made us alive with Christ *while* we were still sinners. And the two clauses that follow that incredible statement make it clear that two things were a part of that reanimation process (bringing to life someone born dead). We don't want to super-irrigate this, making it sound intensely conditional. But the text—in all but the NIV—suggests not just a relationship between life and forgiveness, but that the forgiveness and cancellation of debt occurred *prior to* the reanimation (“having”). Which makes perfect sense; we do not have that new life until God through Christ forgives us our sin.

**Question:** What is the best, the most wonderful word in that forgiveness clause?

**transgressions**<sup>nasb</sup>, **trespasses** = *paraptoma* = from <G3895> (parapipto); a **side-slip** (lapse or deviation), **i.e. (unintentional) error or (willful) transgression** :- fall, fault, offence, sin, trespass.

*having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us,  
which was hostile to us*

Verse 14 offers us details into the extent—the “fullness,” as it were—of our forgiveness in Christ.

When we purchased our first home in San Diego, Linda and I gulped twice and signed over our lives to the bank. As I recall, we had three jobs between us just to qualify for the \$25,000 loan. By signing those papers we were signing an IOU to the bank: we promised to pay them back the money they had advanced us for the purchase of the house. If we had ever reneged on that promise, they would have summarily confiscated the house from us. We owed them a debt, and one way or another that debt would be repaid.

Similar to the bilateral agreement we had with the bank (so long as we made our monthly payments, they would let us live in the house), Israel *explicitly* signed a contract with God; they agreed to a bilateral covenant with Him: If they would hold up their end of the agreement, He would hold up His end.

**Read Deuteronomy 28:1-2.**

**Read Deuteronomy 28:15.**

And on more than one occasion Israel agreed to those terms. They signed the papers. But which path did Israel take? They reneged on their agreement with Yahweh. And, even with His forbearance and longsuffering with Israel, eventually He kept His end of the agreement they had signed and kicked them out of their house.

But what about Gentiles? We didn't sign any contract with God, did we?

### Read Romans 2:14-16.

Gentiles *implicitly* signed an agreement with God. As R. Kent Hughes puts it, "The Gentiles had countersigned through their consciences to keep the moral Law as they understood it."

So the "certificate of death," or "handwriting of ordinances" stood against every one of us, and by its measure we were all profoundly guilty.

hostile to us<sup>nasb</sup>, contrary to us<sup>kjvs</sup>, stood opposed to us<sup>niv</sup> = **condemned us**

*...and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

Remember what was nailed on the cross above the head of Jesus? In three languages so all could read it, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19-20).

Something else was nailed to the cross that day: There was, as it were, a document listing every law we had failed to obey, every debt not repaid, every mortgage with a remaining balance, every sin we had committed against a holy God. And across that document of debt was stamped—not in ink, but in the Savior's blood—"Paid in Full." Then, once the epochal moment was past, that document fell from the blood-stained wood and flew away, far over the horizon, never to be seen again. [*"taken out of the way" = airo = used for weighing anchor and sailing away*]

### v15

In v15 Paul concludes his discourse on the believer's fullness, or completeness in Christ. He also completes the circle he began in v10, where he stated that Christ is "the head over all rule and authority." In v15 he closes the circle by telling us what was done to those "rulers and authorities."

### Read v15.

There is one more tie-in to an earlier verse—at least a recycling of same imagery. In v11 Paul says that

...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the **removal** of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

Also translated "put off," *apekdysis* [*ap-ek'-doo-sis*] is the noun form of the verb used in v15. Once again Paul employs the imagery of stripping off clothing when he writes, in v15,

**When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities...**

*apekdyomai* [*ap-ek-doo'-oh-my*] is a verb meaning to divest, to despoil, or to strip off. And, once again, one can interpret this verse several different ways; because of time constraints, I'm going to cut right to the chase. [*and everyone said, "Amen."*]

All of v15 is rich with imagery, and is a dramatic—I would say even *cinematic*—conclusion to this treatise on the fullness of Christ, our completeness in Him, and the Godhead's lordship over every created being—including the unseen, darker forces. Douglas Moo makes a pretty good argument for turning our purple "He" in the handout to blue. That is, he argues that it is God the Father doing everything in v15. So here's the picture:

Remember the scene in the movie *Ben-Hur* when the victorious Roman consul Quintus Arrius, [*played by Jack Hawkins*] returns to Rome with his now adopted son, Judah ben-Hur. They ride together in a magnificent golden chariot in a huge triumphant procession through the streets of Rome, awarded the admiral in recognition of his defeat of the enemy at sea. Not shown in the film, is that typically following the victor would come, in chains, the humbled, defeated captives. The victorious Roman would be publicly paraded in honor, while the defeated slaves would be publicly paraded to their shame and dishonor.

God the Father stripped the defeated “rulers and authorities” of their armor and weapons—and their dignity—and behind His own golden chariot He paraded them through the streets for everyone to see that they, indeed, had no power over them.

Now, there are two possible interpretations for how this verse ends—and I dare not gloss over these, because both are feasible, but express slightly different things.

God did all this to the “rulers and authorities” (depending on your translation) either **“through [or in<sup>esv</sup>] Him”<sup>nasb</sup>** or **“in it”<sup>kjvs</sup>**. That is, either in or through Christ Jesus, or in the cross.

“Through Him” refers either

- to the person Christ; the image being that, as with creation, God performed all this through the agency of the Son, or
- to the resurrection and ascension of Christ [\[Douglas Moo\]](#)

“In it” refers to the cross; that is, the work accomplished by the cross-kind-of-death of the Son. [\[ties back to the end of v14\]](#)

Now, no doctrine is threatened by choosing either of these possibilities. Douglas Moo himself admits it is “very tough” to choose between the two (Him or it). I can comfortably accept either one.

*through (in) Him*

The bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus and His return to the glory of heaven to sit down at the right hand of the Father is the most dramatic and powerful statement imaginable for Christ’s defeat of death and Satan.

This agrees with Ephesians 4:8, which quotes Psalm 68:18:

Therefore it says,  
“When He ascended on high,  
He led captive a host of captives,  
And He gave gifts to men.”

*in it*

At the same time, while still on the cross, Christ cried out, “It is finished!” The work was done; the once and final sacrifice was now completed. At this moment the dark spiritual forces in opposition to Him could only hang their head in defeat and shame. They had lost.

I guess I favor “in Him” (ESV) for one simple reason: What is the common denominator in these two possible interpretations? Christ, which harmonizes with everything Paul has been writing up till now. It wasn’t the blood-stained tree of wood; it was *Him*. It wasn’t the supernatural resurrection itself; it was the *Son of God, Savior of mankind* being raised from the dead. It wasn’t the supernatural lifting of Him into the clouds; it was *our great High Priest* of His own once and final sacrifice, returning to glory—the only high priest who ever sat down, because now there would be no need for further sacrifices (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Let’s close with a passage from 1 Corinthians.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26.**

## SESSION 21: HOLDING FAST

### Colossians 2:16-19

#### PREFACE

There is a certain rhythm, or pattern to Chapter Two of Colossians:

**Warning**, followed by the **Basis for Resistance or Confidence**.

v4	I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.
v5b	good discipline and the stability of your faith in <b>Christ</b> .
v6	as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him
v7	just as you were instructed
v8	See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception
v8b	rather than according to <b>Christ</b> [backing this up with details about the “fullness” of Christ in vv9-15]
v16	no one is to act as your judge
v17b	the substance belongs to <b>Christ</b>
v18	Let no one keep defrauding you
v19	hold fast to the head (i.e., <b>Christ</b> )
v20	do not submit yourself to worldly decrees
v3:1	keep seeking the things above

Paul repeatedly warns the Colossians about not giving into false teaching, and then follows that with the reason(s) they need not. They have every reason to remain in Christ; He is sufficient.

So after that long discourse in the previous passage [vv8-15], he naturally opens the next warning with “Therefore...”

**Read Colossians 2:16-19.**

#### vv16-17

*Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day*

Verse 16 is further evidence that the problems going on in Colossae were syncretistic—that is, they were a mixture of several belief systems. For example, the requirements based on food, festivals, or new moons, could refer to any number of religions or philosophic traditions—including Judaism. But the Jewish law said nothing about drink, so Paul could not have been referring just to that. However, *only* Judaism had a *shabbat* [shab-bawth’], so he could not have been referring just to Gnosticism or asceticism.

*things which are a mere shadow of what is to come*

But what does Paul mean when he refers to these as being a “mere shadow” of what is to come? The writer of Hebrews helps us out.

**Read Hebrews 8:3-6.** [copy & shadow]

**Read Hebrews 9:8-12.** [symbol (illustration)]

**Read Hebrews 10:1.** [shadow & form (likeness, image)]

Remember the opening of the old Alfred Hitchcock television program, where all that was on the screen was a simple outline of the profile of the rotund director. Just a black outline, but the figure was immediately recognizable. Seeing that, the viewer knew right off whom it represented. Then the man himself stepped in from the right, and fit himself perfectly to the outline.



The outline was not the man himself, it just pointed us to the real thing.

From the beginning, Israel, especially, had missed the forest for the trees: God would give them a symbol, a copy, a *shadow* that He meant to point to the real thing, but Israel fixated on the symbol rather than the substance—the body.

For my favorite example, when the sojourning Israelites grumbled against God and Moses, the Lord sent fiery serpents among them as punishment. When they confessed their sin, Moses interceded with the Lord, and He graciously gave them a way out.

**Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.” Numbers 21:8**

Now listen to what Israel took away from that.

### **Read 2 Kings 18:4.**

The people of Judah had made a god out of that serpent, and had given it the name Nehushtan. So Hezekiah had it destroyed along with all the other idols. But the Lord had given that bronze serpent as a “shadow” of the substance—the real thing. Jesus Himself explains it.

### **Read John 3:14-15.**

God had Moses use that serpent on a pole to get people accustomed to looking *up*, to something higher than themselves, for salvation. The bronze serpent was just a type for, a shadow of the true and substantive [\[bodily \(soma = bodily\)\]](#) Christ.

Paul is not saying to the Colossians that these “things” are bad, or worthless. As shadows they served a purpose in God’s plan. The law was not worthless; respecting the Sabbath day of rest was not (and is not) wrong. But these things were not an end in themselves—they were meant to point us to Christ. One does not have a *relationship* with regulations; one has a relationship with Christ Jesus.

Here is how Douglas Moo summarizes it:

Believers who belong to the new era through their incorporation into Christ...experience the reality to which the Old Testament and its law pointed.

### **vv18-19**

The original Greek text for vv18-19 is one long sentence, reflected in all our common translations but the NIV. The NIV breaks it up into three sentences for easier reading, without effectively changing the meaning. For our purposes we’ll treat the two verses as one.

### **Read vv18-19.**

*Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize*

The opening of v18 is very much like the opening of v16, using similar imagery. In v16 Paul says that we should let no one judge us; in v18 he says that we should let no one defraud, or judge against [\[implied, unfairly condemn\]](#) us.

**defrauding<sup>nasb</sup>, cheat<sup>nkjv</sup>, beguile<sup>kjv</sup>, disqualify<sup>niv, esv</sup>** = *katabrabeuo* = from <G2596> (kata [\[against\]](#)) and <G1018> (brabeuo [\[umpire\]](#)) (in its original sense); **to award the price against**, i.e. (figurative) **to defraud** (of salvation) :- beguile of reward.

*Curtis Vaughan*: The essential meaning is, “Let no one deny your claim to be Christians.”

Most of us have run into this from time to time: pious judgments by self-righteous “Christians” who have assigned themselves the task of bringing everyone else up to their own lofty spiritual standards. They begin their reeducation with phrases such as,

“Well, I don’t know if you are a Christian if you...” [participate in some heinous activity]

“A good Christian wouldn’t...” [dance, go to movies, drink, smoke, etc.]

What follows this initial injunction are a number of descriptions of the false teachers; included in the descriptions are the methods by which they are trying to unfairly judge the Colossian believers. Let’s not take them in order, but start with the root, or over-arching character trait of these self-appointed judges.

*inflated [or conceited] without cause by his fleshly mind*

KJVs: vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind

ESV: puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind

NIV: his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions

I think we get the point. Let’s put it this way: *The guy doesn’t know what he’s talking about—and the little he does know he got from the world’s system.*

*by delighting in self-abasement*  
or “false humility”

I am reminded of what Jesus had to say about this in His Sermon on the Mount.

### **Read Matthew 6:16-18.**

Now, of course, Jesus spoke of people who were probably earnest in their fasting, but also wanted to make a show of it [*“as the hypocrites”*]. In our text, the context [not the word itself] makes it pretty clear that the “humility” of the false teachers was in fact hypocritical. The NASB, with its translation “self-abasement” *hints* at the asceticism that we believe was being pushed in Colossae. That is, the punishment of the flesh based on the ascetic philosophy—part of Gnosticism—that said all matter, and especially the flesh, was evil.

The ESV cuts right to the chase, not hinting but stating explicitly, “insisting on asceticism.” The “insisting” in the ESV is an outlier translation; the word *thelo* can, technically, be so translated, but most interpreters see no grounds to conclude that the false teachers were *forcing* these habits on the Colossians. This passage, instead, is describing what the false teachers were enjoying doing themselves.

*delighting in...the worship of the angels*

Opinions on this vary, but I think the easiest and most probable interpretation of this is that it refers to the “hierarchy of spirit-beings” (Vaughan) that filled the universe—the aforementioned *aeons*. There may even be a reason these two characteristics—false humility and angel worship—are mentioned together.

*Curtis Vaughan:* The heretics probably insisted that their worship of angels rather than the supreme God was an expression of humility on their part. Lightfoot writes that “there was an officious parade of humility in selecting these lower beings as intercessors, rather than appealing directly to the throne of grace.”

*taking his stand on visions he has seen,*

This phrase is challenging; the Greek is obscure, and difficult to translate [as I am told].

Douglas Moo, while citing the alternate interpretations, comes down on the side of the NIV and ESV: “going on in detail about visions/what he has seen”. The verb could also be translated, as the NASB, “taking a stand,” or dwelling in. Literally *embateuo* means to “set foot upon.”

What is clearly incorrect is the insertion by the KJVs of the negative: “has *not* seen.” Virtually all commentators agree this should not be there—probably erroneously entered by a scribe in the manuscripts used by the KJVs.

Even so, we could probably conclude from the context that these miscreants were certainly *embellishing* their prowess at visionary insight. As one scholar writes,

“If, as we may easily imagine, these pretenders were accustomed to say with an imposing and mysterious air, ‘I have seen, ah! I have seen,’—in relating alleged visions of heavenly things, the Colossians would understand the reference well enough” (Findlay)

If the Greek is obscure, the lesson for us is not. On what are *you* taking your stand? Where are you dwelling? Is your faith built on ecstatic visions, of feelings? Is it based on the logic of the world system? Or do you take your stand on Christ and His word?

*and not holding fast to the head,*

The last characteristic is so obvious as to be almost redundant. Of course these false teachers are not “holding fast” to Christ! If they ever *were* connected to Him, their hold is slipping dangerously. Some may even have abandoned Him all together. But even if they were true believers, they, as Douglas Moo writes, “had lost contact with the only effective source of spiritual growth.”

And v19 concludes with the reason this connection is so important.

*...from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.*

After Christ Jesus Himself and God’s written word, each individual believer grows and matures spiritually by being part of the body of Christ as a whole: the church. As members of that body we hold each other together, just as the “joints and ligaments (bonds)” hold together the various parts of the human body.

And it all comes from God.

## SESSION 22: WHO DO WE WORSHIP?

*Colossians 2:20-23*

### PREFACE

One of Linda's favorite movies is the 1963 John Wayne picture, *Donovan's Reef*. In one scene, Michael Donovan (Wayne) and his love interest, Amelia Dedham, are out in the hills of the South Seas island cutting down a tree for Christmas. Amelia is the adult daughter of Donovan's old navy pal and the island's doctor. Unbeknownst to her, the three young children with them in the selecting of a Christmas tree are her father's younger children from his marriage to the last island princess, Manulani—who died in childbirth. At one point the oldest of the three children, Lelani, pauses to thank "the goddess of the canyon for our tree" in her native tongue. "Goddess?" Amelia asks. "Do you believe in gods and goddesses?"

The young girl answers politely but imperiously, "I believe in the one God, as we all do. But I respect the beliefs and customs of my people." And she walks away, having serenely put the older woman in her place.

It all sounds very good, and the scene is played to show the maturity and wisdom—and equanimity—of the young girl, who is now the island princess, after her mother. But in the light of our passage for today, it is, in fact, not remotely wise at all.

The world would have us believe that the height of wisdom is to be fair and open to *all* beliefs. But of course *real* wisdom reveals that when we believe in everything, we in fact believe in nothing.

Our passage addresses the futility, the idiocy of either clinging to the old, or sampling new and strange regulations and beliefs after we have "died with Christ."

### Read Colossians 2:20-23.

### vv20-22

If you think about it, adherence to regulations and mechanical obedience to dogma are far easier than establishing and sustaining a Spirit-based relationship with Christ.

Years ago, when we were performing my one-act play, *Who Do You Say That I Am?*, with a couple from a Des Moines church, the husband, playing the role of Hananiah, the Money-changer, presented a challenge because he didn't quite grasp the concept of stage acting. Instead of investing himself in the character, he insisted, "Just tell me what you want, and I'll do it." Well, that's not acting—but it is a far-sight *easier* than acting. Instead of coming to grips with your character, understanding him, developing his personality traits, interpreting the author's text and intentions, establishing a rapport with the audience and other characters on stage—that is, *possessing* your character—just have the director give you your marching orders, and you perform them by rote. That's not acting.

Which is easier:

- Go to confession and list for the priest all the bad things you choose to tell him about, do your penance ("Say five Hail Marys and four Our Fathers...") and leave the confessional free and clear; or
- Live by the Spirit?

*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world,*

Believers are not dead with Christ, because He is alive. But in Him we are dead to "the elementary principles of the world." Here again is the mysterious and controversial phrase we encountered in v8 that has various interpretations. In our study of v8 we settled on Douglas Moo's interpretation, and so here.

The phrase refers primarily to the basic "components" of the universe and, secondarily, to the spiritual forces often thought to be associated with those physical components.

That is, the stars and planets, and the pagan spirits man has associated with them.

When a person is literally dead, he has been disconnected from life. If we are spiritually dead to the fundamental spirits of the worldly culture, we have been disconnected from them. If we are so irrevocably disconnected, then,

*why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"...in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?*

**Sidebar:** The translations, "as if you were **living** in the world" are the more literal renderings of the Greek, but the NIV captures the contextual idea for us with, "as though you still **belonged** to it," or, as if you were still a part of it.

Specific to the Colossian situation, *Why are you listening to those false teachers with their rules and regulations, when you no longer have any reason to? You are no longer a part of their world: You are now in Christ!* But I think it is fair to broaden this application.

### **Read Romans 6:1-11.**

- Why do we still pay homage to our old sin nature, when, in Christ, we are dead to that nature? [\[Note: that sin nature is not dead, but we are dead to it.\]](#)
- Why do we give it such respect, when it no longer holds such power over us?

Unlike the Colossians, we may not labor under false teachers trying to coax us away from the grace we have in Jesus Christ, but we can still labor under the enticing wiles of Satan, his minions, and the world's society that serves him.

*(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)*

Here is a strong argument. All these restrictions and requirements—most of which have to do with food—miss the point that in Christ ours is now a *spiritual* life. What truly matters is the condition of the *heart*, not the stomach.

When some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus and challenged Him with, "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread," Jesus bottom-lined his reply with this to His disciples:

### **Read Matthew 15:17-20.**

Paul wrote in Romans 14:17,

...the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

*...in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?*

This is what opened the scene in Matthew 15.

### **Read Matthew 15:1-3.**

Here is the first sign you are listening to the wrong people. When their rules and regulations, their teaching cannot be squared with God's word, do not walk, but *run* in the opposite direction.

## **v23**

### **Read v23.**

Go back to that scene with Lelani claiming to believe in the true God while thanking the "goddess of the canyon" for their Christmas tree. And, watching the movie, we are meant to think this makes her mature and wise. But that is the perfect illustration of "the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion." Lelani was crafting *her own* form of worship, her own form of piety that fit *her* preconceived ideas of truth—and that is never wise.

*These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in...*

The “matters” (“things” in KJVs, “regulations” in NIV) probably refers back to v21’s list of “Do nots.” From a worldly, flesh-centered aspect they would have the appearance of higher wisdom. But of course it is just a thin, almost vaporous veneer of religion—not the real thing.

*self-made religion*

This is a fascinating term—a Greek word used nowhere else, and probably coined by Paul. Translated,

NKJV: self-imposed religion

NIV: self-imposed worship

ESV: self-made religion

KJV: will worship [my favorite]

**ethelothrēskia** = from <G2309> (thelo) and <G2356> (threskeia); voluntary (**arbitrary and unwarranted**) piety, i.e. **sanctimony** :- will worship.

Even though the word itself is used nowhere else, there are a number of instances of such behavior in the Bible that help us understand this. One is the unfortunate tale of Aaron’s two sons.

### **Read Leviticus 10:1-3.**

Nadab and Abihu got toasted because they performed, as the KJV would have it, “will worship.” They said, *We know how to worship the Lord’s way, but we want to do it this way.* They were presumptuous, and considered *their* will superior to that of the Lord’s. And it cost them their lives.

**A word of caution:** Let us not be too smug about what happened to Nadab and Abihu. While it is true we live under grace, and not the strictures of the Law, we can still be guilty of “will worship”—worshiping the Lord the way we like, rather than in a way that glorifies Him alone. As Jesus told the woman at the well, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) When our “worship” is casual, flippant, insincere, performed mechanically by rote; when it includes elements not in line with God’s word, it is will-worship: worship performed according to *our* will rather than the will of God, and thus disobedient—and worthless.

Then Paul includes two more practices that are worthless—ones he has mentioned before.

*...self-abasement and severe treatment of the body*

Here again Paul refers to the ascetic practices that were, apparently, part of the syncretistic philosophies being propounded in Colossae.

Because he follows it with “severe treatment of the body,” we can read (in the NASB) “self-abasement,” as the other translations, as a form of false humility. The first is a milder form of the second. Self-abasement could be termed verbal severity—putting oneself down before others in a self-serving display of mock humility. The second refers either to (as in v21) dietary and behavioral restrictions, or to self-flagellation—“severity of the body” taken to the extreme—or both.

We might paraphrase these three as

- fake piety
- fake humility
- fake holiness

All of which point not to God, but, nauseatingly, to self.

*The Message* paraphrase: Such things sound impressive if said in a deep enough voice. They even give the illusion of being pious and humble and ascetic. But they’re just another way of showing off, making yourselves look important. (v23)

*but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

None of these things do anything more than intensify our preoccupation with self.

*Alexander Maclaren:* There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us, and that is the power of the indwelling Christ.

They are worthless to make us more righteous, more holy, more obedient to God.

*R. Kent Hughes:* The answer to legalism is the continual realization of the grace of Christ. The answer to mysticism is an understanding of how profoundly we are related to Christ. The answer to asceticism is the reckoning that we have died, been buried, and are resurrected with Christ. The answer is where it all began: at the foot of the cross.



## SESSION 23: A HIGHER PURPOSE

*Colossians 3:1-4*

### PREFACE

#### Turn to Colossians 2:20.

In our last session, Paul expressed his frustration over the behavior of the Colossians. If he had been there speaking in person, I can imagine him crying out to them in a loud voice,

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (Colossians 2:20-21)

And he extended that list to include their dabbling in

self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body,

All of which are worthless “against fleshly indulgence.”

I then extended that frustration, applying it to our struggles against the sin nature, posing two questions:

- Why do we still pay homage to our old sin nature, when, in Christ, we are dead to that nature?
- Why do we give it such respect, when it no longer holds power over us?

I wisely (or perhaps cowardly) did not volunteer any answers to those questions, which would logically culminate in, ***What should we do about it?*** Well, Paul answers that for us in Chapter Three. In some of the most eloquent language found in this letter, Paul tells us how to get our minds right—how to quit paying attention to worthless rules and regulations; worthless dogma; worthless, self-centered piety, fake humility, and fake holiness. Chapter Three—especially the first seventeen verses—makes a pretty good handbook for living a life “according to Christ” (v2:8).

What the false teachers in Colossae were promoting was a *self*-centric life; the apostle declares in Chapter Three that the answer to this is to live a *Christ*-centric life. Or put another way, most of Chapter Two warns us about the *dark* side, while Chapter Three encourages us toward the side of *light*.

#### Read Colossians 3:1-4.

v1

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ,*  
Again implied, “—and you certainly have—”.

#### Read Colossians 2:11-13.

There is a tension in Colossians, fueling debate between interpreters. Because Paul in his other writings emphasizes our “being raised”—i.e., resurrected bodily—in the future, some question the authenticity of the writing in Colossians that speaks of being “raised up” right now. Without belaboring the point (we could spend a session or two on just this), Chapter Three of Colossians makes a strong argument for the believer’s privilege of sharing in the *power* of Christ’s resurrection in the here and now, for Paul here encourages us to do things that are simply not possible outside of Christ, outside the unique advantage we have in Him. And among these are that we are to “seek” and “set [our] mind[s] on things above.”

*keep seeking the things above*

The NASB explicitly reveals the tense of the verb: “**keep seeking** the things above.” That’s the idea; we are never to stop seeking the things above.

**seek, seeking, set...heart**<sup>niv</sup> = zeteo = of uncertain affinity; to seek (literal or figurative); **specially (by Hebrew) to worship (God)**, or (in a bad sense) to plot (against life) :- be (go) about, desire, endeavour, enquire (for), require, (x will) seek (after, for, means). Compare <G4441> (punthanomai).

Once again the NIV, with “set your hearts on,” is the least literal, but does express the essence of the statement.

### Read Matthew 6:19-21.

We “seek” those things dear to our heart. Wherever our treasure is, that is where we want to be. *Temporally*, for most of us, our treasure is stored in home and family, so that is where we want to be; *spiritually* our treasure is stored above, so that is where we want to be in our spirit, in our heart.

And what is our ultimate treasure?

*...where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

For every believer—everyone “raised up with Christ”—that treasure is Christ Himself. And here is reference not just to Christ’s present *location*, but to His *sufficiency*.

### Read Hebrews 10:11-14.

### Read Hebrews 1:3.

Paul says, *You want to talk to me about aeons, and vague spiritual beings floating about the heavenlies? Let me tell you about the One who sits eternally within arm’s reach of God the Father.*

v2

And then Paul underscores this in v2 by saying something similar, but not identical.

### Read v2.

**set your mind(s), Set your affection**<sup>kjv</sup> = *phroneo* = from <G5424> (phren); **to exercise the mind**, i.e. entertain or have a sentiment or opinion; by implication **to be (mentally) disposed** (more or less earnestly in a certain direction); intensive **to interest oneself in** (with concern or obedience) :- set the affection on, (be) care (-ful), (be like-, + be of one, + be of the same, + let this) mind (-ed), regard, savour, think; **to have understanding**.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to **live in harmony** in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2)

**Have** this **attitude** in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Philippians 2:5)

So what is he saying here in these first two verses?

**First**, as one who has “been raised up with Christ,” we are to seek *Him*: everything Christ is, everything He represents, everything He teaches, every high desire He has for our life. Things of this earth should not be our ultimate aspiration; the things of earth should be nothing more or less than a launchpad to heavenly things.

This means that our life here on earth is not for us just a holding pattern, where we impatiently bide our time waiting for heaven. God has placed all around us things and people that point us toward Him. *There* is our earthly joy—finding God all around us, using His creation as an illustration of His beauty, His generosity, His grace and mercy. We “seek the things above” when we recognize Christ in our everyday lives:

- In the evening sunset we see His splendor.
- In the laughter of children and grandchildren we see His joy; in their lives we see His bountiful, immeasurable gifts to us.
- In the natural creation we see His careful, meticulous devotion to not just our spiritual existence, but our physical existence while on earth.

Remember what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:16:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created *through Him and for Him*. (emphasis added)

Christ created everything around us, and He did it for Himself! That is, that in His creation we would discover *Him*—that all creation, and our enjoyment of it, would ultimately glorify *Him*.

Put another way, as believers we are to see all of life from a *heavenly* perspective. As we age, and our physical sight becomes clouded by cataracts, our spiritual sight just keeps getting brighter and clearer.

**Second**, having found Him, we are to make Christ the first place we go. Out of all the worldly pleasures available to us, He is to be our priority. He is to be, as Jesus Himself put it in Revelation 2, our “first love.”

We are to be preoccupied with “things above,” preoccupied with things of God, of righteousness, of spiritual wisdom and insight, of purity and grace—all of which stand in opposition to the things below, things of the earth. We are in this world, and we are to maintain normal relationships in this world—we are not to go into reclusive hiding. But, as William Barclay, writes,

there will be this difference—from now on the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity...He will no longer live as if this world was all that mattered; he will see this world against the background of the large world of eternity.

Or, as J.B. Lightfoot put more succinctly,

You must not only seek heaven; you must also think heaven.

Once we have found it, heaven—God and His eternity—should be always on our mind. What does this look like?

**Read Colossians 3:15-17.**

### vv3-4

We are to do this—we *want* to do this—because, as v3 puts it, we have died, and now dwell with Christ.

**Read vv3-4.**

Paul uses the word *krypto* (kroop'-to) here to describe an aspect of our relationship with Christ, and it means pretty much what you would think.

**hidden** = *krypto* = a primary verb; **to conceal** (properly by covering) :- hide (self), **keep secret**, secret [-ly].

But what does it mean that our “life is hidden with Christ in God”? There are two ways to look at this—neither of which cancel out the other. The first speaks to our *position* in Christ, that we are supernaturally changed, but that change is not something revealed physically on earth, but only seen in heaven. Douglas J. Moo explains:

This “hidden”/“revealed” motif (in vv3-4) is fundamental to the widespread Jewish apocalyptic worldview. According to this perspective, many things relating to God and his purposes exist in the present, but because they are in heaven, they are hidden from human sight. But the apocalyptic seer is given a vision of these things, things that will one day be revealed as they come to pass and are seen by people on earth. So, Paul suggests, at the present time our heavenly identity is real, but it is hidden. We have certainly not been physically transported to heaven; nor do we, who belong to the heavenly realm, look any different from those around us who still belong to this world. Verse 4 affirms that this will one day change. In the meantime, our true status is veiled; and, though we may not look any different than those around us, Paul’s point in this context is that we certainly need to behave differently. (emphasis added)

This is reflected in what the apostle John wrote in his first epistle.

**Read 1 John 3:1-2.**

But there is a second way in which we are “hidden with Christ in God.” “Hidden” can also denote security, safety.

**Read Psalm 27:1,4-5.**

When we are His, in Christ, God protects us; He shelters us “under His wings,” as a hen protects her brood.

We have been “raised up with Christ.” Though on the surface we may not look any different from our unsaved neighbor, we now belong to heaven. God sees our changed state; Christ Jesus *lives in* our changed state; and in that changed state we fall under the protective love of Father God.

**Read Psalm 91:1-4.**

## SESSION 24: A BLOODY DEATH

*Colossians 3:5-7*

### PREFACE

With v5 we begin an examination of the classic “put off/put on” process to which Pastor Jeremy has so often referred. In this session we will look at a first group of those things we are to “put off.” But to be precise, the easier “putting off” or “putting aside” will come in our next session. In *this* session the process is going to be more difficult, more painful, more bloody.

### Read Colossians 3:5-7.

#### v5

I always think it best to digest the text myself first, drawing at least initial conclusions without the higher conclusions of the scholars. A preferred starting point to any passage is, “What is God’s word saying to me?” before mixing in other interpretations. At times, however, a glaring difference between two or more translations will force me to the commentators right off the bat, asking them, “Well, which is it?”

That was the situation with v5, where virtually all common translations begin with, “Therefore put to death...,” whereas the NASB begins with, “Therefore consider...as dead.”

At first blush these seem to say two different things.

**put to death:** personally active: do the deed, kill it, strangle it, bury it; i.e., destroy something that is still living.

**consider...as dead:** *think* of it as dead; no need to kill it yourself, because it is already dead.

Which is correct? The answer is: yes. In the first paragraph of Chapter Three Paul encourages us to set our minds and hearts on things above, rather than on the things of temporal earth. Why? Because (v3) our connection to temporal things has died and our life is now hidden, safely tucked away with Christ in God. *We have died.*

Because we have died (with Christ), Paul commands us (v5) to put to death the evil deeds or passions of our persistent earthly body.

**Sidebar:** I find the KJVs misleading with, “put to death (mortify) your members,” which sounds as if he is telling the Colossians to start cutting off pieces of their bodies. [**members = *melos* = a limb or part of the body**] There *are*, admittedly, a few NT passages where “members” refers generally to *faculties* of people, but for what Paul is saying in this passage, I prefer those translations that make it clear that the members of the body themselves are less the problem than what those members are *doing*.

Curtis Vaughan points out that the word translated “put to death”—*nekrosate* (“make dead”)—is very strong; that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes, but to wipe them out, exterminate them, “slay utterly”—“a vigorous, painful act of personal determination.” Then he cites an illustration used by the great preacher Alexander Maclaren:

Maclaren likens it to a man who while working at a machine gets his fingers drawn between rollers or caught in the belting. “Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up an axe lying by and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist... It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death.”

Now, let’s reconcile the different translations, “put to death” and “consider as dead.” Once again Daniel J. Moo comes to the rescue.

There is...undoubtedly a particular connection with v. 3a: “you died.... therefore put to death.” Or, to use the language often applied to this general theological concept: “become what you are.” We who have died to “the elements of the world” (3:3; 2:20) and to the power of sin (Rom. 6:1-6) because of our union with Christ are to “become” dead to sin in the realities of everyday life. But this “putting to death” of sin is not only demanded by our incorporation into

Christ; it is also empowered and effected by it. Union with Christ, because it puts us in a new relationship to sin and brings us into the sphere of the Spirit's power, will impact the way we live. Ultimately, then, the imperative "put to death" in this verse must be viewed as a call to respond to, and cooperate with, the transformative power that is already operative within us. (emphasis added)

So the apostle presents, in v5, a list of five fleshly sins—four of which are explicitly sexual in nature.

**immorality**<sup>nasb</sup>, **fornication**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **sexual immorality**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *porneia* = harlotry (including adultery and incest); figurative idolatry :- fornication.

[R. Kent Hughes (and below): "every kind of immoral sexual relation."]

There is nothing new under the sun, and the sensual temptations of men and women go all the way back to the Garden. So then, as now, I believe the apostle knew that many in the Colossian church would read the first item on this list, which pertains especially to *physical* sexual sin, and say (as many of us would today), "Well, I don't cheat on my husband or wife, I don't have affairs with the neighbors, so I'm in the clear." Thus Paul included the second item on the list, which, convictingly, catches every *other* form of sexual sin.

**impurity**<sup>nasb, niv, esv</sup>, **uncleanness**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *akatharsia* (ak-ath-ar-see'-ah) = from <G169> (akathartos); impurity (the quality), **physical or moral** :- uncleanness.

["This is wider and subtler than physical immorality, for it embraces the lurid imagination, speech, and deed of a sensual heart or filthy mind."]

**passion**<sup>nasb, nkjv, esv</sup>, **inordinate affection**<sup>kjv</sup>, **lust**<sup>niv</sup> = *pathos* = from the alternate of <G3958> (pascho); properly **suffering** ("pathos"), i.e. (subject) a passion (especially concupiscence) :- (inordinate) affection, lust.

[Originally *pathos* could be good or bad, but in the NT it is always presented as something sinful. (Curtis Vaughan) "The shameful emotion that leads to sexual excesses. Paul used the same word to describe the "passionate lust" of the Gentiles who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4:5) and the "shameful lusts" of homosexuality (Romans 1:26)."]

**evil desire(s), evil concupiscence**<sup>kjv</sup> = *epithymia* (ep-ee-thoo-me'-ah) = from <G1937> (epithumeo); **a longing (especially for that which is forbidden)** :- concupiscence [precisely the correct word; it's just that we no longer use it], desire, **lust** (after).

["wicked, self-serving, rapacious lust"]

Let's look at a passage that expands on this using the same word.

### Read James 1:14-15.

Completing this list of sexual sins with "greed" may, at first glance, seem odd. But when you think about it, it is a perfect closer. For what is greed, after all? *I want!* And at their root, what are all sexual sins? *I want! I don't care about anyone else. I want!* When King David looked on Uriah the Hittite's wife he knew his desire for her was a sin, but reason and fidelity to the Lord's law were overwhelmed by *I want!*

And giving oneself over to the baser passions of the flesh, to an insatiable selfishness, is idolatry, since we have thus placed our own self-interest before God. Instead of glorifying the Lord God, we have given ourselves over to glorifying our natural flesh.

### Application

Right about now in my study I regretted the lack of time we would have in class to discuss the ways and means of carrying out the command of v5. It is one thing to read it on the page, but quite another to put it into daily practice. Just how are we to do this?

But then I realized that even if we had the time for such a sharing of ideas and methods, this topic especially is perhaps not suitable for such a mixed gathering as this—mixed not just by sex, but by such disparate ages. The

sins mentioned in v5 are deeply personal, embarrassing, offensive. They may be better confronted individually, or with a trusted and Biblically wise counselor.

But by way of application I *would* leave you with this: The command here to put these sins to death is brutal and bloody. Death is never pretty, and like the illustration by Maclaren, killing something so deeply a part of us will be excruciating, and will require the power of Christ and the indwelling Spirit to accomplish. On paper it sounds simple enough: Live what you already are. But in the flesh it can at times seem almost impossible. But by the power of God, it is not. If it were, he would not have given us the command.

*Douglas Moo:* Putting to death sins like these is possible...because God has given His people, through His Spirit, a new power to conform their conduct to God's holy demands.

## v6

### Read v6.

**Sidebar:** The NASB (updated) and KJVs add “upon the sons of disobedience,” while the NIV, ESV, and NASB (original) leave it out. Two of the oldest (i.e., considered more authoritative by most scholars) manuscripts do not have this, which is why these two translations do not have it. However, a good argument can be made for its inclusion, as well—not the least is the inclusion of “you *also*” in v7.

But, again, this is one of the reasons I favor the NASB for study; in these situations there will be a margin note explaining the variance.

In the companion verse, Ephesians 5:6, the phrase is explicitly included:

**Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**

It is remarkable how often God's word—especially in the OT—puts things in terms of sexuality and/or marriage. In a particularly graphic chapter in Ezekiel, the Lord likens Jerusalem's unfaithfulness to Him to an adulteress wife.

### Read Ezekiel 16:32-33.

With the NT imagery of the church being the bride of Christ, it makes sense that God in His word would associate spiritual unfaithfulness to physical unfaithfulness—even prostitution.

### Read Jeremiah 13:27.

So it is not surprising that God's wrath would be kindled against “these things”—the itemized list of v5. After all, think how the Lord speaks of marriage—of two people, man and woman, becoming “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The relationship between husband and wife is personal, intimate, precious. It is unique, like no other relationship on earth.

If that is how the Lord God pictures His relationship with, first, Israel, and second, believers through Christ—intimate, precious—then his response to betrayal (“idolatry”) is going to be like that of a husband who has discovered his wife in the arms of another man, or a wife who learns of her husband's adultery: deep hurt, and anger. And the Lord's anger is translated “wrath.”

**wrath** = *orge* = from <G3713> (oregomai); properly desire (as a reaching forth or excitement of the mind), i.e. (by analogy) **violent passion (ire, or [justifiable] abhorrence)**; by implication **punishment** :- anger, **indignation, vengeance, wrath**.

We need not, as forgiven Christians, shy away from this word “wrath.” If we think in terms of God's wrath meted out upon the unregenerate in the Day of Judgment, we understand that His wrath is synonymous with banishment to hell and eternal punishment.



But it can also represent, in a way, His judgment of believers—not directed at them, but to their deeds—when they stand before Him and are held to account for their lives.

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.**

Consigned to hell? No. Forgiven? Indeed. Persistent sinful behavior judged and punished (or perhaps better described as “burned up” [1 Corinthians 3:15])? You bet. “Sons of disobedience” refers specifically to those in opposition to God, but at the same time it is included here as a warning to believers.

v7

Verse seven closes the sentence of v6, illuminating the command of v5 to put to death or consider as dead “these things.”

**Read vv6-7.**

The NASB points out that “living in them”—which refers back to “the sons of disobedience”—can also be translated “living among these”—which refers back to the list of sins.

Let me close with a Lampel paraphrase of our passage, which roughly reverses the order of the text for clarification:

You once walked in immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). The wrath of God will come upon those who *still* walk in these things. But in Christ you have died to such things, *so live who you are*: In your mind, put to death these things that tempt the flesh, so that they will no longer even *exist* for you.

## SESSION 25: PUTTING OFF, PUTTING ON

### *Colossians 3:8-11*

#### **PREFACE**

A few weeks ago we were in Marshalltown, at Linda's parent's house, so I could power-wash the exterior of their house. Naturally, it was the hottest and most humid day of the week, and the job I expected to take about an hour, took most of the day. By the end of the day my clothes were soaked through with sweat, with water spray, and I was filthy—and miserable from the heat and humidity. All I wanted to do was get out of those clothes and into the shower. A short while later I felt much better: scrubbed clean and wearing fresh, clean clothes.

That is the idea behind most of Chapter Three in Colossians: removing our filthy old clothes and putting on (literally, sinking into) clean new clothes.

Although it is not a Biblical perspective, many of us experienced a similar sensation at our baptism. I can still remember walking up and out of that huge round baptistry, in the old Baptist Temple in which I grew up, feeling cleaner than ever before. I felt washed, fresh-scrubbed, *new*. My old ways were now behind me; everything before me was goodness and light. (Anyway, that's what it felt like at the time. Would that my life had actually played out that way from the age of nine.)

Here is the outline, the structure of Paul's "put off/put on" treatise in Chapter Three:

#### **Put off**

3:5 – put to death/consider...as dead immorality, etc.

3:8 – put them all aside: anger, etc.

#### **Put on**

3:10 – put on the new self

3:12 – put on a heart of compassion, etc.

3:14 – put on love

#### **Read Colossians 3:8-11.**

#### **VV8-9A**

The list last week in v5 had to do with impurity and greed, while the sins listed in v8 are more concerned with attitude and speech.

**anger** = *orge* = from <G3713> (oregomai); properly desire (as a reaching forth or excitement of the mind), i.e. (by analogy) **violent passion (ire, or [justifiable] abhorrence)**; by implication **punishment** :- anger, **indignation, vengeance, wrath**.

**wrath** = *thymos* = from <G2380> (thuo); passion (as if breathing hard) :- **fierceness, indignation, wrath**. Compare <G5590> (psuche).

*Orge* and *thymos* are virtually synonymous, and used interchangeably throughout the NT and Septuagint (Greek translation of OT). If there is a slight difference, it is that "*thymos* is preferred for depictions of sudden bursts of anger...whereas in *orge* there is an occasional element of deliberate thought" (H-C. Hahn). Or put another way, *orge* might be used for premeditated anger, while *thymos* might be preferred for the anger of momentary passion. [But then (wouldn't you know it), some scholars say it is just the opposite.]

**malice** = *kakia* = from <G2556> (kakos); **badness**, i.e. (subject) depravity, or (active) **malignity**, or (passive) trouble :- **evil, malice** (-iousness), naughtiness, **wickedness**.

**slander, blasphemy**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *blasphemia* = from <G989> (blasphemos); **vilification** (especially against God) :- blasphemy, **evil speaking, railing**.

**abusive speech**<sup>nasb</sup>, **filthy language/communication**<sup>niv, kjvs</sup>, **obscene talk**<sup>esv</sup> = *aischrologia* = from <G150> (aischros) and <G3056> (logos); **vile conversation** :- filthy communication.

And in the beginning of v9 Paul adds to the list, “Do not lie to one another.”

### Turn to the epistle of James.

James emphasizes the perils of human speech in his epistle.

**Read 1:19-20.**

**Read 1:26.**

**Read 3:5-6, 8**

Jesus, too, spoke about those things that come out of our mouths.

### Read Matthew 15:17-20.

My guess is that every one of us has experienced the truth of this in the church. If I had a nickel for every time I had to go to a brother or sister and say, “Please forgive me for what I said,” I would be driving a newer car today.

James emphasizes the importance of *controlling* the tongue, while Jesus speaks of how the tongue is an indicator for the content of the heart. Certainly we should learn restraint and discretion in matters of speech, but that does not fix the root of the problem: the heart. When the *heart* is changed—as Paul writes further into v9—by laying “aside the old self,” the tongue will follow, and less self-control will be necessary.

## vv9B-10

*since you laid aside the old self/man with its evil practices*

The verb in v8—*apotithemi*—translated “put aside,” or “put off” is not really the reference for the metaphor of taking off old clothes and putting on new. But the verb in v9 is; it normally refers to a literal “taking off” of clothes.

**laid aside**<sup>nasb</sup>, **have put off**<sup>kjvs, esv</sup>, **have taken off**<sup>niv</sup> = *apekdyomai* = middle from <G575> (apo) and <G1562> (**ekdyo**); **to divest wholly oneself**, or (for oneself) despoil :- put off, spoil.  
**ekdyo** = from <G1537> (ek) and the base of <G1416> (duno); **to cause to sink out of, i.e. (specially as of clothing) to divest** :- **strip**, take off from, **unclothe**.

Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they **stripped** him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.” (Luke 10:30)

Let’s return to Chapter Two, where Paul lays the groundwork for this.

### Read Colossians 2:11-12.

As F. F. Bruce puts it,

...their baptism was said to be, in effect, not the removal of an insignificant scrap of bodily tissue, as the old circumcision was, but the stripping off of the whole “body of flesh”—the renunciation of the sinful nature in its entirety.

Note that in v8 Paul tells the Colossians to “put aside” the behaviors of the sinful nature, but here he reminds them that they [already] “have put off/laid aside the old man/self.”

Likewise, he tells the Colossians (in v10) that they [already] “have put on the new self/man.”

*...and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him*

This passage (vv9b-10) is rich with imagery and doctrinal truth. I would like to propose two ways of thinking of it—not to suggest there are *only* two ways, nor are these two interpretations between which we must choose. Though they are different, I don't believe we must pick the one that is correct and reject the other. They are just a couple of good ways to fix in our minds the fullness of what Paul is really saying here.

### ***Shedding and Renewal***

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.**

*though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*

The NASB has the best translation:

**decaying** = *diaphtheiro* (dee-af-thi'-ro) = from <G1225> (diaballo) and <G5351> (phtheiro); **to rot thoroughly**, i.e. (by implication) **to ruin (passive decay utterly, figurative pervert)** :- corrupt, destroy, perish.

I thought of a snake shedding its old skin to make way for the new. Of course this process (in 2 Corinthians 4 and Colossians 3) is different; think of it this way:

Throughout the believer's life—throughout the maturing, sanctification process—the “old man,” the “outer man” is being sloughed off a piece at a time. Metaphorically, pieces of our flesh rot and fall off. So long as we are alive on this earth, the process never ends; we never run out of flesh to slough off.

Why is this happening? What is driving this process? Just this: *The inner renewal of the “new man.”* The picture I want you to have in your minds is of yourself, standing there before a mirror, and you are semi-transparent—you can see inside. Inside is a glow—the glowing of constant renewal: growth, maturing in Christ, through the process of sanctification gradually becoming more like Him. As this glowing continues, more and more of your outer flesh is rotting and flaking away: the more you glow, the more outer flesh you shed. And then, on the day you step over the threshold of heaven, the last tiny bits of the old flesh fall away, leaving only a glowing, resplendent “new man,” glowing inside and out.

### ***First Man, Last Man***

*...according to the image of the One who created him*

The end of v10 gives us a clue to a second way to interpret the text. Just what does Paul mean, specifically, by the terms “old man” and “new man”?

So far we have been expressing them in the sense of old *nature*, and new nature. That is, the “old self” refers to the fallen, depraved nature we were born with, while the “new self” refers to the nature we are acquiring as we journey through our sanctification in Christ. But there can be a different definition for these terms—and another clue to this is to simply answer two questions:

From whom did our old nature come?      Adam

From whom does our new nature come?      Christ

Let's read how Paul detailed this to the church in Corinth.

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.**

The word translated “man” in this passage is the same used in our Colossian passage for “self” or “man.”

**anthropos** = from <G435> (aner) and ops (the countenance; from <G3700> (optanomai)); **man-faced, i.e. a human being**  
:- certain, man.

Let's look at just a couple more references that get us closer to the idea of “put on.”

**Read Romans 13:13-14.**

**Read Galatians 3:25-27.**

And if we continue in Galatians 3 to v28, we see a tie-in to v11 in Colossians.

**Read Galatians 3:28.**

**Read Colossians 3:11.**

As F. F. Bruce points out,

It is not only the old sinful habits and attitudes that are done away with in this new creation. The barriers that divided human beings from one another are done away with as well.

## **SESSION 26: THE GARMENT OF CHRIST**

### ***Colossians 3:12***

#### **PREFACE**

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that we have each followed the injunctions of Paul, who began this chapter (v3) by reminding us that, as believers, we have died, and our “life is hidden with Christ in God.” Because of that (vv1-2) we are to “keep seeking the things above,” and “set [our] mind on the things above,” instead of “the things that are on earth.”

The apostle then proceeds to detail what this looks like. Just what is involved in changing our hearts from the things of earth to the things of heaven? The first step is to remove from our persons the impurities we have encountered and, to our shame, adopted as part of our life (v5):

- immorality
- impurity
- passion
- evil desire
- greed

In vv8-9 he adds to this list of impurities a list of sinful attitudes and speech:

- anger
- wrath
- malice
- slander
- abusive speech
- lying to one another

All of these are presented in the context of removing them from our life as one would slip out of worn, ugly, filthy clothes. Since we’ve done this, we’re left standing there naked (*not* a pretty site for some of us), and we are in desperate need of new, clean clothes. Paul has presented two lists of things that we should *remove* from our lives, so he proceeds, in vv12-17, to give us two lists of things we are to be sure are a *part of* our lives. He has told us what to *put off*; now he tells us what to *put on*.

#### **Read Colossians 3:12-14.**

So far as Paul is concerned, the starting point for putting on righteousness is the same starting point for removing that which is unrighteous:

*an understanding and apprehension of **who we are in Christ**.*

The first four verses of Chapter Three set the stage.

#### **Read Colossians 3:1-4**

- we are raised up with Christ (v1)
  - we have died, and our life is hidden with Christ in God (v3)
  - Christ is our life, and we will share in His glory (v4)
- And he adds, in vv9-10, that *positionally* this has *already* been accomplished:
- we *have* laid aside the old self
  - we *have* put on the new self

All of that he places in the context of putting off unrighteousness. The same applies in the context of putting on.

- we are chosen of God, [already] holy and beloved (v12)
- we are forgiven (v13)
- we are called to the peace of Christ (v15)

All of these express the basis—who we are in Christ—on which we can accomplish all that he (Paul)—and He (Christ Jesus)—desire for our walk.

## v12

*So, as those who have been chosen of God,*

**Read Ephesians 1:3-5.**

*holy and beloved,*

As those chosen, elected, we are **holy** [*hagios* = **sacred, ceremonially consecrated**; from root (*hagos*) meaning “an awful thing.”] and **loved** [*agapao*]. Note: neither of these qualities have anything to do with us. We are holy and beloved because of God, only because we were chosen by Him to be followers of His Son. We are loved by God the Father because we have “put on,” as one would a new suit of clothes, Christ Himself. If we are clothed in Him—not just by Him, but *in* Him—we are to put on the *virtues* of Christ Jesus.

To this end, Paul offers a list of five virtues that stand in contrast to the five sins in v8—the evil practices of the “old self.” Here before us are the milestones of our trek into Christ-likeness. They are to be our goals along the upward glide-slope of our sanctification; as we attain and pass each one, we look upward to our perfect Example, seated at the right hand of the Father, and we thank Him, and praise Him, for it is true that any progress made by us in these virtues is solely by *Christ’s* doing, through the work of His Spirit dwelling within. For these are *holy* qualities.

**heart of compassion**<sup>nasb</sup>, **tender mercies**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **bowels of mercy**<sup>kjv</sup>, **compassion**<sup>niv</sup>, **compassionate hearts**<sup>esv</sup> = *splanchna oiktirmos* (oyk-tir-mos') = probably strengthened from splen (the “spleen”); an intestine (plural); figurative pity or sympathy :- bowels, **inward affection**, + tender mercy; **with** (*oiktirmos*) pity, mercy: “love characterized by mercy,” “heartfelt compassion,” “tenderhearted mercy.”

**Our Example: Read Matthew 9:35-36.**

This is not the mercy of the intellect, but the deep, visceral mercy of the gut.

**kindness** = *chrestotes* = from <G5543> (*chrestos*); **usefulness**, i.e. **moral excellence** (in character or demeanor) :- gentleness, good (-ness), kindness; “God’s own goodness,” **excellence, uprightness.**

The first definition for this word is “usefulness”; it comes from *chrestos*, which means “employed.” The connection to kindness may not be obvious, so let’s trace this back—first by looking at a negative context.

**Read Romans 3:12.**

“...become worthless/unprofitable...no one who does **good**.”

So the idea is “profitableness,” moving from that into “wholesomeness” (Vincent) to “moral excellence” to “God’s goodness.”

**Our Example: Read Matthew 11:28-30.**

When Jesus offers us an “easy” (*chrestos*) yoke, He is not saying that His burden will be a piece of cake, but that it will be *good, comfortable, profitable*—kind.

**humility, humbleness of mind**<sup>kjv</sup> = *tapeinophrosynē* = from a compound of <G5011> (*tapeinos*) and the base of <G5424> (*phren*); **humiliation of mind, i.e. modesty** :- humbleness of mind, humility (of mind), lowliness (of mind). [The KJV is the most literal translation.]

**Our Example: Read Philippians 2:5-8.**



And from this same passage—vv3-4—we read how this humility is to play out in our own lives.

**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**

**gentleness**<sup>nasb,niv</sup>, **meekness**<sup>kjvs,esv</sup> = *prautes* (prah-oo'-tace) = from <G4239> (prau` s); **mildness**, i.e. (by implication) humility :- meekness.  
[similar to "humility," *prautes* is defined as "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (as quoted by Moo).]

Let us not be unduly influenced by how this fallen world defines "meekness." Society would wish for Christians to be "gentle" and "meek" as *they* define those terms, so we would not be such an obstacle to their agenda. But we are to live by the Lord Jesus' dictionary—not theirs.

### **Our Example: Read John 13:5, 12-15.**

But we can't stop there; if, as Jesus states in the earlier passage from Matthew 11, He is "gentle and humble in heart," then we must let that be defined by the *entirety* of His earthly life. F. F. Bruce writes,

[The apostle] Paul entreats his Corinthian friends "by the gentleness and forbearance of Christ," but if the language which follows that entreaty [in 2 Corinthians 10] is an expression of gentleness and forbearance, one wonders what he would have said had he been unrestrained by those graces. Yet those graces are evident in his affectionate concern for his converts—a concern matched by his indignation against those who were leading them astray.

And there is the key to Christ's "meekness." To those who were His—even those still struggling with belief in Him—Jesus was extraordinarily kind and gentle, putting their well-being before His own. But to those who were intent on leading those followers astray, Jesus could exhibit the unyielding ferocity of a lioness protecting her cubs. Just moments before Jesus declared He was "gentle and humble in heart," [Matthew 11] He said this regarding the cities that had rejected Him.

**"And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you." (Matthew 11:23-24)**

Notwithstanding His righteous anger against those who reject His salvation, or actively lead astray those who do not, the Lord Jesus is, like His Father, remarkably patient, as we see in the last quality in our list.

**patience, longsuffering**<sup>kjvs</sup> = *makrothymia* (mak-roth-oo-mee'-ah) = from the same as <G3116> (makrothumos); longanimity, i.e. (objective) **forbearance** or (subjective) fortitude :- **longsuffering**, patience; **forbearance toward others**.

### **Our Example: Read 1 Peter 2:21-23.**

And right there is the key to finding and developing patience, forbearance in ourselves:

**[He] kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously**

As v21 states, we "have been called" to learn from the example of Christ Jesus, and to fashion our life on His. We do this—no matter the individual quality—by entrusting ourselves to "Him who judges righteously"—God our Father.

## **SESSION 27: FORBEARANCE, FORGIVENESS & LOVE**

### ***Colossians 3:12-14***

#### **PREFACE**

This week we continue the list of virtues we are to “put on” once we have “put off” the aforementioned sins. While it is true that the words Paul employs speak of putting off/on clothing, we must remember that these specifics are not individual articles of clothing, if we keep with that metaphor. That is, this is not like Ephesians 6, where the apostle itemizes the particulars of the “full armor of God” we are to strap on:

- breastplate = righteousness
- shoes = preparation of the gospel of peace
- shield = faith
- sword = word of God, etc.

In Colossians 3 we have but *one* article of clothing we are to put on once we have divested our persons of the itemized sins. Over the last few sessions we have made the case for that one article being Christ Himself. Time again throughout this letter Paul has emphasized not just the *centrality* of Christ, but the sufficiency of Christ. He is all we need, as he states in v11: “Christ is all and in all.”

So these virtues are not to be seen as individual articles of clothing we slip into. These individual virtues are part of the character of Christ; when we put on *Him*, we put on them—or perhaps more accurately, these are the virtues of Christ our Example which we should endeavor to emulate.

#### **Read Colossians 3:12-14.**

### **V13: FORBEARANCE AND FORGIVENESS**

The obvious question is, What is the difference between “patience” in v12, which is translated “longsuffering” in the KJVs—and “bearing with one another” in v13? Just this: patience is the attitude (**noun**), while forbearance and forgiveness are the behaviors reflecting that attitude (**verb**)—plus, they are two different Greek words.

For a passage that illustrates both words, beginning with *makrothymia* —patience, longsuffering—turn to the pastoral epistle of 2 Timothy. Here is Paul’s charge to the young pastor to “preach the word”—but note how Timothy must do this.

#### **Read 2 Timothy 4:1-2.**

Why is patience needed by the pastor—*any* pastor? Because not everyone “receives” the word at the same pace; not everyone “gets it” right away. The preacher may offer a perfectly reasonable, digestible explanation of the passage at hand, and some in the congregation understand it immediately. Others, however, may struggle with the understanding—perhaps even rejecting it before they eventually accept it. With these the pastor must exhibit patience as he helps them along toward the truth.

Just so we are to be patient with each other, waiting on and helping each other especially as we grow and mature in Christ at different speeds.

In v3, the word translated “endure” is the same Greek word that begins v13 in our Colossians passage—albeit in the negative.

#### **Read 2 Timothy 4:3-4.**

Here Paul describes those who cannot bear to hear the truth: they will not put up with anything uncomfortable; like whining, spoiled infants, they demand instead sweet-sounding Pablum that goes down easily.

The word translated “endure” in 2 Timothy and “bearing with” (one another) in Colossians 3 is

***anechomai*** = middle from <G303> (ana) and <G2192> (echo); **to hold oneself up against, i.e. (figurative) put up with**  
:- bear with, **endure, forbear**, suffer.

So, in the context of 2 Timothy 4, if we were to switch it from the negative (“*will not endure*”) to the positive, those individuals *would* put up with sound doctrine, accepting that it is something necessary and, even if uncomfortable at times, profitable. [[Now back to Colossians.](#)]

The setting in Colossians is not preacher to congregant (as in 2 Timothy), but believer to believer: *anechomai allelon* (a-lay’-lone), bearing with one another. I love the way Robertson puts it in his word studies: “holding yourselves back from one another”—a picture of self-restraint in the face of a natural, instinctive desire to mix it up.

Douglas Moo points out that even though this is presented in a positive, affirming light, it still has the idea of “a somewhat grudging willingness to ‘put up with’ difficult circumstances or people.” In Matthew 17:17 Jesus said, “You unbelieving and perverted generation... How long shall I **put up** with you?” Then Moo goes on to say,

While not requiring the greatest display of Christian kindness and patience, “bearing with one another” is nevertheless a first and necessary step in establishing community. The demand acknowledges that every Christian fellowship is made up of all kinds of people and that we will accordingly sometimes find ourselves in close fellowship with people who are very different than we are. For the sake of maintaining community, we will sometimes have to “put up with” people with whom we would not normally choose to associate.

Speaking for myself, the best tool at my disposal for learning this virtue is to remind myself of all the people who likewise find it a challenge to “put up with” *me*.

The next phrase, however, makes it clear that grudgingly putting up with the others is not the end of it, but just the beginning. It would be a pretty sour congregation that stopped at just *enduring* each other. So immediately after the call to “bear with one another” is the call to “*forgive* each other.”

*and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone;*

ESV: and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other;

### **Read Matthew 18:21-22.**

What follows is a parable about a king who forgives the huge debt of one of his slaves (10,000 talents—the equivalent of 150,000 years’ wages for a slave), and how that forgiven slave then turns around and refuses to forgive a fellow slave for his debt to him of a relative pittance (100 denarii—the equivalent of 100 days’ wages for a slave).

Here is how Jesus concludes the parable:

### **Read Matthew 18:32-35.**

That passage, along with the way Jesus follows up his model prayer in Matthew 6—

**“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Matthew 6:14-15)**

—these have always sent a chill down my spine. Is it really true I am not forgiven by God just because I may have failed to forgive someone else at some point in my life? But I was encouraged by this perspective from F. F. Bruce:

In His teaching, [Jesus] made it clear that those who seek the forgiveness of God must be ready to forgive others. Not that human forgiveness is a work that earns the divine forgiveness—the initiative in forgiveness lies with God—but an unforgiving spirit is an effective barrier to the reception of His forgiveness. (emphasis added)

Remember how Jesus closed that parable in Matthew 18:

...if each of you does not forgive his brother **from your heart.**" (emphasis added)

Here's the picture: At all times we are encompassed by the mercy of God; His grace and forgiveness never cease. But when we have a cold, unforgiving heart toward a brother or sister, we effectively block the Lord's forgiveness. It is still there, but we do not experience it because of the hardness of our own heart. [\[back to Colossians\]](#)

*just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

Paul then expands on this forgiveness of others that should be a part of our lives. Let's focus on the adverb *kathos* (kath-ocē'), translated "just as," or "even as." We can interpret this two ways: How and Why.

### **How**

The strongest interpretation is that we should forgive others *in the same manner* or way that the Lord forgives. The word for forgiveness in this verse is *charizomai*, which "conveys the idea that forgiving others is an act of grace, freely offered, and often not deserved" (Moo). So *how* does Christ forgive?

- He does so completely, without caveats;
- He does so immediately, without hesitation;
- He does so eternally, without taking it back.

### **Why**

Along with *how* we are to forgive, we could also include *why* we are to forgive. Think back to that parable: Why should that slave have forgiven his fellow slave? If for no other reason, because *he* had been forgiven by his master for a far worse offense. Remember the comparison: the first slave owed an amount equal to the wages of 150,000 years; the second slave owed an amount equal to the wages of 100 *days*.

No complaint or quarrel we might have against someone else, no offense they might have committed against us, can come anywhere close to our offense against holy God. What we deserve—even now, today—is His eternal wrath. What we got instead was His only Son nailed to a cross. We have been graciously forgiven by our Master for despicable sin; because of that, how dare we ever fail to forgive the minuscule slights of a brother or sister?

### **v14: LOVE**

Here is a rhetorical brain-teaser: Would there have been true atonement for the sins of mankind if Jesus had gone through His crucifixion absent any feeling for mankind—just going through the motions or mechanics of it? That is,

*Would Christ's sacrificial death have been effective without love?*

### **Read v14.**

Even though vv12-13 speak of person-to-person relationships in the body of Christ, the perfection or unity or harmony spoken of in v14 does not refer to the people of the church, but to the virtues listed above (vv12-13).

If we revert back to the clothing metaphor—i.e., put on as a garment, a heart of compassion; put on as a garment, kindness; etc.—then what v14 is saying is, after all those have been put on, "over all these virtues put on love," as the NIV translates it.

**beyond**<sup>nasb</sup>, **above**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **over**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *epi* (ep-ee') = a primary preposition properly meaning **superimposition** (of time, place, order, etc.), as a relation of distribution [with the genitive], i.e. **over, upon**, etc.; of rest (with the dative) at, **on**, etc.;...

[\[epidermis = the topmost layer of skin, over everything else\]](#)

The picture is one of love being the essential completing layer to the ensemble of virtues—“perfection” = completeness.

But if we remain with the concept we’ve been running with for this passage—that these are all virtues of Christ; *He* is the one we have put on, so when we put Him on, we are also putting on these virtues—then it is *Christ’s* love that completes this package of virtues. When we put on Christ, we put on His love—more than that, we *abide in* His love:

“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.” (John 15:9)

My earlier brain-teaser is moot, for Ephesians 5:2 tells us that Jesus indeed went to the cross out of love.

**Read Ephesians 5:1-2.**

## **SESSION 28: IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS**

*Colossians 3:15-17*

### **PREFACE**

A change takes place in v15 of our text. Since the beginning of Chapter Three Paul has been telling the Colossians—and each of us in the body of Christ—to *remove* certain things from our lives and to *apply* certain things to our lives—the classic “put off/put on” passages.

v1: keep seeking

v8: But now you also, put them all aside: anger, etc.

v9: Do not lie to one another

v12: put on a heart of compassion, etc.

v13: bear with one another

v14: put on love

Up till now the emphasis has been on *doing*—put these things off, put these things on. But now, in vv15-17, the emphasis changes to *let it happen*.

**Read Colossians 3:15-17.** [not KJVs]

**Sidebar:** I could find no explanation for the “let.” It is not a discreet word in the Greek text, but drawn from the verbs “rule” (v15) and “dwell” (v16). The tenses of the two verbs seem to indicate more of a command (“do this”), but all the translators have gone with “let.” So, considering their agreement, all I can do is bow to their superior understanding of the text.

Perhaps more important than the difference between “put off/put on” and “let” is that vv15-17 represent an eloquent *how* to the earlier commands. As has come up in our recent sessions, these imperatives cut against our fleshly nature, and there may be times when we despair of our ability to live in such a righteous way.

But the commands of vv12-14 are book-ended by clues to how these are possible—even this side of glory. We find the first clue at the end of v11:

**Christ is all, and in all.**

Every believer has Christ Jesus inside. And just who is He?

**Read Colossians 1:15-20.**

I challenge you to find any better description of “Christ is all” in Scripture (or anywhere else, for that matter). That is the first “how” bookend; the second we find in vv15-17, and that bookend consists of three elements that give us the ability to carry out the “put off/put on” imperatives Paul has just listed: the *peace* of Christ, the *word* of Christ, and the *name* of Christ.

The setting for these three verses is the body of Christ—the community of believers, and we could summarize this passage with,

**We are to let Christ have His way with us.**

Then—and only then—will our lives reflect the righteousness of His example.

### **v15: PEACE**

**Read John 14:26-27.**

*After I go, the Holy Spirit will be your Teacher, but I give you right now, before I leave, My peace—My special, otherworldly peace.*

So right now, because He personally gave it to us, every believer has inside him or her Christ's peace.

### Read v15.

**Sidebar:** Most of the oldest, most authoritative manuscripts have *Christos*, while the KJVs, from a later manuscript, have *theos* (God).

**peace** = *eirene* (ay-ray'-nay) = probably **from a primary verb eiro (to join)**; peace (literal or figurative); by implication prosperity :- **one**, peace, **quietness**, rest, + set at one again.

This is the peace of *shalom*, [in the Septuagint, the Greek *eirene* translates the Hebrew *shalom* (completeness, soundness, well-being)] "the eschatological state of cosmic restoration that the Old Testament prophets anticipated" (Moo). We saw this in Chapter One:

### Read Colossians 1:19-20.

We are to let this unifying peace "rule in [our] hearts."

**rule** = *brabeuo* (brab-yoo'-oh) = from the same as <G1017> (brabeion); **to arbitrate**, i.e. (genitive) to govern (figurative prevail) :- rule; **umpire**.

Whenever competing concerns arise within the family, the church, the controlling factor should be the peace that comes from Christ Jesus. Not selfish wants, not the powerful over the weak, but the corporate wellness, the unifying joy of Christ's peace. It is to be sincere and heartfelt.

### Read Romans 14:16-19.

What is the starting point for this? What changes in us first as we fulfill our "calling," as Paul puts it, and let the peace of Christ control us? His peace changes the way we see ourselves and each other—a change so eloquently described in Philippians 2.

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

And although it seems to break the rhythm of this injunction regarding peace among believers, the call to "be thankful" is fitting, as Douglas Moo points out.

Believers who are full of gratitude to God for His gracious calling will find it easier to extend to fellow believers the grace of love and forgiveness and to put aside petty issues that might inhibit the expression of peace in the community.

### v16: WORD

This verse is one of those that no one agrees on—that is, the punctuation and which words go together.

- Is the "word of Christ" words *He* spoke, or the word *about* Him?
- Is that word to dwell within the individual, or among believers?
- Do "teaching" and "admonishing" go with the "word," or with the singing?

First, what goes with what. The NASB associates "teaching and admonishing one another" with "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."

**NASB:** Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.



The NIV, on the other hand, separates those from the singing of psalms, etc.

**NIV: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.**

I favor the ESV, which is a pretty good compromise, keeping “wisdom” with the teaching, and the singing with those things we tend to sing:

**ESV: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**

As to the *scope* of the indwelling (individual or corporate), F. F. Bruce writes,

Perhaps it would be unwise to rule either alternative out completely. Let there be ample scope for the proclamation of the Christian message and the impartation of Christian teaching in their meetings.

As to the scope of “the word of Christ” (*His* words only, or the word *about* Him), a logical starting point would be the Greek word translated “word,” which is little help in settling the dispute. It is the popular *logos* [used 330 times in the NT], which is variously translated speech, account, matter, report, saying, word (of course), and, as we all know from John 1, even Word, for Christ Himself.

Out of all the possible interpretations, I favor “the message that proclaims Christ” (from Moo, source unknown). This does not limit it to the very teaching of Christ, but it includes it (for Jesus certainly proclaimed Himself). More important, if that which resides in us—both personally and corporately—does *not* proclaim Christ, it is to be rejected and silenced. Because, again as Paul writes in v11, “Christ is all and in all.”

So with this “word” which dwells in us

- we teach it
- we admonish with it
- we sing about it

and, just as with the peace of Christ (v15), we are to do all this with thanksgiving in our hearts.

v15 = thankful = *eucharistos* = from a derivative of *charizomai*

v16 = thankfulness, gratitude = *charis* = grace, graciousness

In fact, note the rhythm of thanksgiving in this passage; all of this—the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, everything in our lives done in the name of Jesus—all is to take place within an atmosphere of gratitude to God:

v15: and be thankful;

v16: singing with thankfulness/grace in your hearts;

v17: giving thanks through Jesus to God the Father.

## v17

**Question:** Considering the context, which do you see as the most important word in v17? For me, it is the word “all.”

The peace of Christ and the word of Christ are to be the dominating forces as we move and participate within the body of believers, as we teach and admonish each other, as we come together to worship and sing to our Lord. And then Paul closes this injunction with, *Oh, by the way, everything in your life is to be permeated with Christ.*

Paul opened this section of the letter in Chapter Two.

**Read Colossians 2:6-7.**

And now he summarizes and wraps up this section in v17.

## Read v17.

We are in the habit of closing our prayers with some variation of “in the name of Jesus.” We get this, principally, from the words of Jesus in John 14:

**“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)**

Unfortunately, ritually tagging our prayers with “in the name of Jesus” can become nothing more than a linguistic habit, nothing more than good form—that is, meaningless. As we have been stressing throughout this study of Colossians, as believers we abide *in* Jesus the Christ—*inside the realm* of Christ: He in us, we in Him. And this is succinctly expressed at the end of v11: “Christ is all, and in all.”

*Douglas J. Moo:* To do all things “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” then, does not mean simply to utter Jesus’ name but to act always in concert with the nature and character of our Lord.

F. F. Bruce expands on this with a series of clarifying questions:

What is the Christian thing to do here? Can I do this without compromising my Christian confession? Can I do it (that is to say) “in the name of the Lord Jesus”—whose reputation is at stake in the conduct of His known followers? And can I thank God the Father through Him for the opportunity of doing this thing?

In everything we say, everything we do, we are to represent Christ to a fallen world, and we are to do it with thanksgiving and joy in our hearts.

## **SESSION 29: OBEDIENCE**

*Colossians 3:18-4:1*

### **PREFACE**

Once again, at first blush, our text seems to take a sudden and abrupt turn. But really it does not. The easiest way to show the transition from v3:17 to the new paragraph beginning with v3:18 is to imagine a colon at the end of v17.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father: [for example, or, like this, or, here's what that will look like]

At the time Paul wrote this, our entire passage (vv3:18-4:1) would have applied to the personal household, for slaves would have been a part of that household. Not ignoring the historical context, but making application of this passage for us today, the first paragraph (vv18-21) addresses personal family life, while the second (vv3:22-4:1) addresses the work environment—as well as, I might add, our responsibilities serving in the church and elsewhere.

We gain a clue to the perspective of this text if we note the repetition.

v18: as is fitting in the Lord

v20: this is well-pleasing to the Lord

v22: fearing the Lord

v23: as for the Lord

v24: knowing that from the Lord...it is the Lord Christ whom you serve

v4:1: you too have a Master in heaven

This higher motivation for these commands seasons the entire passage.

### **Read Colossians 3:18-21.**

[Note: If this were a class for young adults or older teenagers, we could easily devote a session to each verse in this passage. But since it is a class for, mostly, the venerable aged—most not just married, but married a good long time, or even no longer married—I will not be getting down to the bare metal of these verses. Likewise, most in this class have happily handed down the rearing of young children to their *adult* children—even adult *grandchildren*—so we will tread lightly on that relationship as well. Even so, we are never too long in the tooth to be reminded of how God has ordained proper family life.]

### **vv18-19: WIVES AND HUSBANDS**

I still recall my revulsion when studying the passage parallel to this in Ephesians, many years ago with my friend Dave in California.

**Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:22-24)**

Though I had been a believer since the age of 7, I had been away from the church for a number of years, and was thoroughly steeped in liberal, feminist philosophy. And when we got to that passage I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise as I mentally conjured the appalling image of a husband's foot on the neck of his whimpering, barefoot and pregnant wife. But then we *studied* the passage. And I quickly realized I had a lot to learn about God's definition of a healthy marriage, and healthy, God-honoring family life. Here is some of what I didn't realize at that first reading:

- The tense of the Greek word translated "subject to" or "submit to" shows that the submission is to be voluntary—not forced on her by a demanding, tyrannical husband.

*Douglas J. Moo:* It is probably significant that the household code here in Colossians urges wives to "submit" to their husbands but children and slaves to "obey" their fathers and masters, respectively. This pattern is typical, though not universal, in the NT, and suggests that the NT writers put the relationship of wife to husband in a different (and less

“authoritarian”) category than these others. “Obedience” naturally fits a situation in which orders are being issued, and in which the party obeying has little choice in the matter. Submission, on the other hand, suggests a voluntary willingness to recognize and put oneself under the leadership of another.

- The context shows that the wife’s submission is in response to her husband’s unselfish love—*agapao*, in v19. This is not romantic love; as Curtis Vaughan writes, it “denotes *caring* love, a deliberate attitude of mind that concerns itself with the well-being of the one loved.” It is, to be precise, the manner of love Christ demonstrated on the cross, and demonstrates every day to the church. (Even this call to “love” one’s wife was unique in the first century.)

### Read Ephesians 5:25.

- This behavior is becoming and proper—fitting—“in the Lord.”
- If the wife is to behave toward her husband in a way “fitting in the Lord,” the husband is to behave toward his wife in such a way that does not cause her to be embittered toward him—that is, he is not to treat her harshly.
- Contrary to what the ignorant of the world think, the NT teachings about the roles of husband and wife actually *elevate* the woman. In the first century—especially in the Roman world of Paul’s environment—wives were mere chattel. The husband and father had unqualified, absolute rule over his wife and children. In her relationship to her husband, the wife was only marginally better than a household slave. That is demonstrably *not* the picture in the NT.

### vv20-21: CHILDREN

Verses 18-19 are about the relationship between wives and husbands; vv20-21 repeat (with some adjustments) the same relationship between children and their fathers.

- We have already pointed out the difference between the wife voluntarily “submitting” and the child “obeying.”
- While we can easily understand this injunction in the context of the family with young children, Douglas Moo bravely discusses whether this applies to *adult* children as well, and suggests that it does when the adult child is “living under the protection of” the parent—a situation not uncommon these days. “But when children are no longer under the protection and care of their parents, we would suggest that, while deference and ‘honor’ are still appropriate, obedience is no longer necessarily to be expected” (Moo).
- Just as with the relationship between husband and wife, with his children the father has the responsibility to not “provoke” his children. [different word, *erethizo* (air-eth-id’-zo), from the one used in v19 regarding wives] The word translated “fathers” can refer to both parents. In the context of the first century, the emphasis on the father is appropriate; in our context today, it is appropriate to apply this to either parent. And this verse (v21) taken as a whole is saying that parents are to “raise their children in such a way that they do their utmost to avoid provoking [a] rebellious attitude in them” and not to discipline “to such an extent that they ‘lose heart’ and simply give up trying to please their parents” (Moo).

### vv3:22-4:1: SLAVES AND MASTERS

#### Read Colossians 3:22-4:1.

To be clear, Paul is not employing a euphemism. Slaves in the first century were a common, integral part of society. At the time there were more slaves in Rome than citizens. “Slave” is the best, most accurate translation of the word; the translation “servant” or “bond-servant”—sometimes appropriate—is the one that, at times, can be the softening euphemism. For example, in the context of the believer’s relationship to Christ, some translations may use “bond-servant,” but in truth we are *bought and paid for* by Christ’s sacrifice—lock, stock and barrel [Revelation 5:9]—which is the very definition of a slave. So Paul addresses, in vv22-25, believing slaves, whether in non-believing or Christian households.

Rather than spend our time discussing first-century slavery, however, we’ll cut right to the application for us today. While it is true that the term “slave” is appropriate regarding our relationship to Christ, unless I am mistaken it does not apply to any of our earthly relationships. So as we work through these verses let us keep in mind *both* situations:

- our responsibility to our heavenly Master as true, purchased slaves;
- our responsibility to our earthly masters or bosses, as followers of our heavenly Master.

The two cannot be separated, for our righteous behavior and diligence to earthly masters is based on our devotion to our heavenly Master.

I would like to approach this paragraph, first, by defining all the terms, making sure we understand what Paul is saying, then, second, circle back and summarize the application for us today.

### **v22: Sincerity**

#### **Read v22.**

The Greek word translated “obey” in v22 (slaves to master) is the same one used in v20 (children to parents). So parents, you are to be as obedient to your boss as you expect your children to be obedient to you.

In English it is not obvious that Paul contrasts the slave’s earthly masters to his heavenly Master (Lord or God) by using the same word:

**kyrios** = from kuros (supremacy); **supreme in authority**, i.e. (as noun) controller; by implication Mr. (as a respectful title)  
:- God, Lord, master, Sir.

But here’s the difference: while we are to “obey” our earthly masters/bosses, we are to “fear” our heavenly Master.

**fearing** = *phobeo* = from <G5401> (phobos); to frighten, i.e. (passive) to be alarmed; by analogy **to be in awe of, i.e. revere** :- be (+ sore) afraid, fear (exceedingly), **reverence**.

The central message of v22 is that our work is to be performed with “sincerity of heart,” rather than with “external service” or “eyeservice.”

“Eye-service” is the best literal translation from the Greek, but does little to help us understand what is meant. The NASB “external service” doesn’t help much either.

**ophthalmoudoulia** (of-thal-mod-oo-lay’-ah) = from <G3788> (ophthalmos) and <G1397> (douleia); **sight-labor, i.e. that needs watching** (remissness) :- eye-service.

What this compound word means is best captured by the NIV:

**and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor,**

*but with **sincerity** of heart*

Once again the KJV gives us the most literal translation with “singleness” (of heart).

**haplotes** = from <G573> (haplous); **singleness, i.e. (subjective) sincerity (without dissimulation or self-seeking)**, or (objective) generosity (copious bestowal) :- bountifulness, liberal (-ity), simplicity, singleness.

[“The ‘single’ eye (Matthew 6:22) has a concentrated focus that leads a person consistently in the the same direction. So, here, ‘singleness of heart’ (KJV) refers to a focused and unvarying concentration of the will that produces consistent conduct.” (Moo)]

### **vv23-24**

#### **Read vv23-24.**

The word translated “heartily” in most translations is the Greek *psyche* (soo-kay’) most often translated “soul” or “life.” I think the *Young’s Literal Translation* captures it well:

**and all, whatever ye may do—out of soul work—as to the Lord, and not to men,**

The idea here is not the *amount* of effort, but the *motivation behind* the effort; not the external, but the internal.

The Christian's soul belongs to the Lord, so we do our work for *Him*, not for men.

Verse 24 gives one reason we are to do this—

**“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.”**

Imagine the joy with which this would fill the heart of a first-century slave. He or she would have no hope of *earthly* reward, but in Christ they could look forward to a far more substantial *heavenly*, eternal reward.

The Christian has only one true Master, and He is the one who hands out the rewards. Again, however, the almost universal translation of the Greek *douleuo* (dool-yoo'-oh) as “serve,” does not quite capture the strength of the word, which means, literally, “to be a slave to,” “to be in bondage.”

**v25**

**Read v25.**

In Ephesians, Paul explicitly addresses this to masters—

**Read Ephesians 6:9.**

—but here it is implied that it is addressed to slaves. So between the two passages we can safely conclude that no matter which you are, slave or master, the heavenly scales of justice are not weighted to one side or the other. No extra helping of pity or forbearance is shown the slave, and no favoritism is shown the higher-ranking master.

**v4:1**

And speaking of masters, this paragraph ends with an explicit injunction for them after another of those unfortunate chapter breaks, in v1 of Chapter Four.

**Read v4:1.**

Masters (*kyrios*) of slaves are to grant them

**justice** = *dikaio*s (dik'-aye-yos) = from <G1349> (dike); **equitable (in character or act)**; by implication innocent, holy (absolute or relative) :- **just**, meet, **right** (-eous).

and

**fairness** = *isotes* = **likeness** (in condition or proportion); by implication equity :- **equal (-ity)**.  
[Not “as equals,” but “fairly”—fair treatment of a slave or servant.]

Why? Because every earthly *kyrios* has a heavenly *Kyrios* who will judge him accordingly.

**VV3:22-4:1: APPLICATION**

Now, how should we apply this to our lives today? It is a pretty straightforward migration from slave to employee. But I would suggest a third application:

Believers today (at least in the United States) are not slaves to an earthly master, but we *are* slaves to a *heavenly* Master (if that makes you uneasy, substitute “servant”). So the instruction in this passage applies both to your work for an earthly employer and your work performed in the name of your heavenly Master—Jesus. That is, this applies to the pastor behind the pulpit, the elder or deacon, the teacher, the janitor, the occasional helper at church work-day, the one who ministers at the nursing home—anyone who does anything in the name of Jesus, which should include *every* Christian.

**v22**

- Be an obedient, trustworthy, reliable worker.
- Do good work even when no one is watching—even when no one will be able to tell the difference.
- Ground your work in a sincere heart. Don't just go through the motions; sincerely *want* to do a good job.

**vv23-24**

- Do all this, first, because of the lordship of Christ in your life. Be a good worker out of your love and reverence for the Lord. Your earthly boss may reward your work with a paycheck that lasts only a few days, but the Lord will reward your work with an eternal crown. Remember that no matter what you are doing, you are ultimately serving Christ Jesus.

**v25**

- And no matter who you are, no matter how high or low your position, you will be judged by your work.

**v4:1**

- If *you* are an earthly boss or supervisor, treat your employees with justice, with fairness, with kindness, for *your* Boss is watching.



## SESSION 30: FINAL COUNSEL

### Colossians 4:2-6

#### PREFACE

The apostle Paul has just a few more things to say by way of counsel before he begins his typical housekeeping remarks with which he closes most of his letters. He returns to the subject of prayer, and the Colossians' conduct toward those outside the church.

#### vv2-4

In the writing craft there is something called the "circle method," where the writer completes a narrative arc by returning to an earlier theme. Paul employed this in his letter to the Colossians. As he prepared to wrap up this letter, I believe Paul went back and reread what he had written earlier—or had his amanuensis read it back to him—for in the conclusion of his letter he touches on themes with which he began the message. Or, perhaps, these themes were so deeply inculcated in him that they simply rose back to the surface of his thoughts.

#### Read Colossians 1:3, 9.

Paul opens this letter expressing his thanks to God for the Colossian's level of faith, as it has been reported to him. And he makes it clear that he and those with him have been steadily praying for them, and giving thanks for them. Their situation is always before him; they remain a permanent item on his prayer list.

Then, in the closing paragraphs of this missive, Paul returns to the subject of prayer—this time turning it around to exhort the Colossians to a devotion to prayer, and to ask them to pray for him.

#### Read Colossians 4:2-4.

#### v2

Paul colors his call to prayer with three modifiers; he gives them/us three specifics on *how* to be praying. First,

#### *Devote yourselves to prayer*

**Devote yourselves**<sup>nasb, niv</sup>, **continue earnestly**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **continue steadfastly**<sup>esv</sup> = *proskartereo* = from <G4314> (pros) and <G2594> (kartereo); **to be earnest towards**, i.e. (to a thing) **to persevere, be constantly diligent**, or (in a place) to attend assiduously all the exercises, or (to a person) to adhere closely to (as a servitor) :- attend (give self) continually (upon), continue (in, instant in, with), wait on (continually); **habitually**.

Luke chose the same word to describe the fresh, early beginnings of the church.

#### Read Acts 2:42.

Of course this does not mean prayer in full-flower (head bowed, on our knees) 24/7. At its root this kind of devotion means that we do not pray as if it is an afterthought, or as something performed halfheartedly, or (worse) by rote. We are earnest about it, and we are persistent—we do not give up when the answer is not received in the first five minutes after our "Amen."

But it also means that we nurture a *life* of prayer. This sort of prayer life must be practiced and nurtured because it is not natural to us; it is a skill that must be developed. In past studies I have likened it to a vibration: all day, every day we go about our lives vibrating to the pitch of heaven, which makes our communion with God—if not literally constant—second nature to us. The Quaker, Thomas Kelly, from the first half of the twentieth century put it this way:

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings. (emphasis added)

Thus we never permit the affairs of this world to isolate us from the affairs of the Spirit.

*keeping alert in it*

**keeping alert**<sup>nasb</sup>, **being vigilant**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **being watchful**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *gregorountes* = from <G1453> (egeiro); **to keep awake**, i.e. watch (literal or figurative) :- **be vigilant**, wake, (be) watch (-ful); **be awake and alert**.

Two senses:

- “watch their own life in light of the return of Christ[;] believers need constantly to be awake ‘awake’ to the nature of the times they live in—the ‘last days’—and to orient their lives accordingly[; a] devotion to prayer... characterized by a strong sense of expectation about Christ’s near return that governs and motivates prayer.” (Douglas Moo)
- be “active in prayer, alive in the fullest sense, never careless or mechanical, dull and heavy” (Vaughan).

*with an attitude of thanksgiving.*

**thanksgiving** = *eucharistia* (yoo-char-is-tee'-ah) = from <G2170> (eucharistos); **gratitude; active grateful language** (to God, as an act of worship) :- thankfulness, (giving of) thanks (-giving).

*vv3-4*

In v2 Paul tells the Colossians *how* to pray; in vv3-4 he gives them a specific *for which to pray*.

**Read vv3-4.**

The apostle was imprisoned—probably house arrest in Rome—when this was written. Look closely at his prayer request. One would imagine, under such circumstances, that he might ask them to pray “that the emperor would let me out of these infernal chains!” But in his request he almost *personalizes* the gospel word (*logos*). He doesn’t ask for prayer that *he* would be set free, as much as that the *word* would be set free!

*praying...that God will open up to us a door for the word,*

He refers to this in his second letter to Timothy, written shortly before his death.

**Read 2 Timothy 2:8-9.**

Paul may be, but God’s word cannot be imprisoned. And if only one can be set free, then Paul says swing wide the door for the gospel of Christ. That word *will* go forth, as the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah,

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
And do not return there without watering the earth  
And making it bear and sprout,  
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;  
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;  
It will not return to Me empty,  
Without accomplishing what I desire,  
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11

Even when the Catholic church physically chained the Bible to the pulpit, kept it in Latin, so it could only be read and interpreted by clergy alone—even that could not imprison the word, and it burst forth through the work of Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the like.

*so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ...*

But Paul knows that he has been called to carry that word, to declare the “mystery of Christ”—that is, aspects of the gospel message that God had not revealed in the past, but now had been revealed in Christ. [Hebrews 1:1-2]

*that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.*

The NASB translation of v4 is not the best—not inaccurate, just lacking punctuation. The NKJV and ESV are better.

Here's the ESV:

that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Why does he ask them to pray for his clarity of speech? We find an answer in his letter to the Romans.

### Read Romans 1:15-17.

The gospel is “the power of God for salvation”! Those He calls to deliver that good news must do so eagerly, openly, unashamedly—and *clearly*. The mystery has been removed: It is not a message reserved for the intellectual elite; it is the message of salvation for *anyone* who believes.

### v5-6

After asking them to pray for *his* ministry, Paul's last bit of counsel is about how they are to conduct *their* ministry.

### Read Colossians 4:5-6.

### v5

Verse five begins with that familiar NT word typically translated “walk,” and quite appropriately translated “conduct yourselves” in the NASB.

**peripateo** = from <G4012> (peri) and <G3961> (pateo); **to tread all around, i.e. walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); **figurative to live, deport oneself**, follow (as a companion or votary) :- go, be occupied with, walk (about).

How are we to conduct ourselves toward those outside the community of faith in Christ? With “wisdom” (*sophia*). Paul doesn't clarify this at all; he doesn't spiritualize this wisdom. But he doesn't really need to, for he has already set that table earlier in the letter. Let's return for a moment to Chapter Three, where he details for the Colossians how they are to “put on the new self.”

vv1-2: Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

[their wisdom is to come from “above”]

vv10-11: and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

[their wisdom should flow out of a “true knowledge” of God—and in Christ there is equanimity of nationality, race, status]

vv16-17: Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

[their wisdom is based on the “word of Christ” dwelling within them]

And Paul says they are to do this “making the most of the opportunity,” or “making the best use of the time” (ESV). Curtis Vaughan points out that this is a market term that meant “to buy out,” to “purchase completely.”

So Christians, as an expression of practical wisdom, must buy up and make the most of every opportunity for witnessing to the faith.

### v6

The second way we are to conduct ourselves around unbelievers is with “grace” (*charis*).

### Read v6.

Graciousness is kind, patient, understanding, even-tempered. Salt adds flavor, makes the bland more interesting, and can be used as a preservative.

Douglas J. Moo: Paul is calling on Christians to speak with their unbelieving neighbors and friends with gracious, warm, and winsome words—all with the purpose of being able to answer unbelievers.

Perhaps the apostle Peter put it best:

**...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Peter 3:15)**

## SESSION 31: THE PERSONAL TOUCH

*Colossians 4:7-11*

### PREFACE

On November 24, 2008, I wrote the following in that week's *Reflections by the Pond*:

God's continuing grace is never more eloquent than when it is extended through the simple kindness of a friend.

We live in the age of round-the-clock cell phone connections. We need never be more than an obnoxious ring-tone away from speaking with anyone, anywhere. Even so, there are times when we must turn off the little plastic wonder, forcing the caller to leave a message. Then he is shunted off to our fully-digitalized, virtualized capacity, off-site voice mail. Thus we need never be more than a recorded message away from anyone trying to make contact with us.

But in a time of grief, nothing is better than a neighbor.

Years ago, when my aunt died, those of us who remained were suddenly burdened with the many details and arrangements to dying. There was the funeral to plan, flowers to order, luncheons to arrange. We had to meet with the lawyer, the pastor, the funeral director. Something had to be written for the notice in the local paper.

Though it was all proper and fitting, it all can become a bit much for those who simply want to sit and remember the good times shared with a loved one now gone.

So in a small Midwestern town, when the family needs to run errands, yet at the same time receive well-wishers—both in person and by phone—it is not a machine, but a neighbor who attends the phone and the doorbell. It is warm, and real, and wildly inefficient.

While we met our obligations for our aunt, instead of using voice mail or an answering machine, a neighbor gave of her time to sit at Mom's house to answer the phone and answer the knocks at the door.

The apostle Paul understood this. Of course it is true that the first century did not enjoy the many other options we have for communication, but I have a feeling that even if it had, Paul would have still opted for the personal touch. Even if there had been a reliable postal service, it is not hard to imagine that Paul would still have sent his correspondence by means of a brother in the faith. A mailman would have just delivered the letter to the door; Paul's "mailmen" delivered far more than that.

**Read Colossians 4:7-9.**

### vv7-8: TYCHICUS

We first meet Tychicus [too-kee-kos'] in Acts 20. He is listed with those who accompanied Paul on his last journey to Jerusalem. The purpose of that trip was to deliver to the Jerusalem church gifts from a number of Gentile churches, and he had probably been entrusted with the gift from his church located in Asia [today's Turkey]. So on *this* occasion, he had probably visited Paul in Rome, collected the correspondence, and was now returning to his home region. Many believe he carried the letters not just to Colossae, but to Ephesus and to Philemon as well. Paul mentions him as one of his regular messengers in his letters to Timothy and Titus, but he was more than just a "go-fer."

Paul describes Tychicus as his

- beloved brother [a dear *adelphos*]
- faithful servant [trusted *diakonos* (deacon: attendant, worker) to Paul]
- fellow bond-servant in the Lord [*syndoulos*: a co-slave (with Paul) to the Lord]

The NASB “As to all my affairs, Tychicus...will bring you information” is too sterile. A more literal rendering of the Greek would be “all the things concerning me”—what Paul was doing, how he felt, what was on his mind, his sorrows and his joys.

Paul knew Tychicus could be trusted not just to deliver his letters, but to share faithfully and accurately with their brothers and sisters in Christ the details of his life. Verse 8 expresses that level of intimacy (and requires little exegesis).

**Sidebar:** The KJVs’ “that he may know *your* circumstances” is a variant reading of the Greek text. Douglas Moo says it “is unlikely to be original” (i.e., inaccurate), but F. F. Bruce suggests it carries equal weight with the other reading.

## **v9: ONESIMUS**

Tychicus had as a traveling companion the slave, Onesimus.

### **Read v9.**

From the phrase, “who is one of you” (or “your number”) we can safely deduce that Onesimus—and, it follows as well, his master Philemon—was from Colossae. For him this was a return home. He probably received a warm welcome as a brother in Christ from the church body, but the reception he would get at the home of his master was less certain.

**[regarding Onesimus and Philemon, read the NT letter to Philemon, then read *Seeds of Encouragement*, appended at the end of this PDF]**

Paul refers to Onesimus as a “faithful and beloved brother”; in the letter to Philemon, he calls Onesimus his “very heart.” But while the slave was clearly dear to Paul, he does not describe him—as he did Tychicus and Epaphras—as a “fellow worker.”

We can understand why, under the circumstances, he might diplomatically refrain from referring to Onesimus as a “fellow bond-slave,” but from this we might also deduce that Onesimus was not yet numbered with Paul’s “ministry team.”

## **v10: ARISTARCHUS, JESUS-JUSTUS, AND JOHN-MARK**

**Read Colossians 4:10-11.**

### ***Aristarchus***

Tychicus and Philemon were standing there in front of the church in Colossae as this letter was being read to them. Paul now mentions three individuals—Jews—who were still with him in (probably) Rome, but would have been known to many in Colossae: Aristarchus [ar-is'-tar-khos], Mark (John-Mark), and Justus. These three send their “greetings.”

We learn from the accounts in Acts that Aristarchus was from the city of Thessalonica in Macedonia. **[Today that city is in Greece, rather than Macedonia.]** and a later traveling companion of Paul’s. His life was threatened, along with Gaius, during the riot in Ephesus **[Acts 19:29]**.

Now he is with Paul, who refers to him as “my fellow prisoner.” It is possible Paul means this metaphorically—i.e., Aristarchus has been “taken captive” by the Lord to serve him—or he means this literally. Interpreters are divided. Best guess is that Aristarchus is voluntarily confined with Paul so that he might be of service to him.

### ***Jesus-Justus***

We know nothing about this man except for his name. **[Jesus his Jewish name; Justus his Roman name—e.g., Saul/ Paul]**

## *John-Mark*

More interesting is the reference to Mark, “Barnabas’ cousin.” Here we have evidence of restoration and grace. We first meet Barnabas in Acts 4.

### **Read Acts 4:36-37.**

We meet Mark in Acts 12—one of my favorite, most hilarious episodes in the Bible. Peter has been imprisoned by Herod, and v5 tells us that “prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.” This prayer meeting (or at least one of them) was being held in the home of Mary, the mother of a young man named John Mark [John his Jewish name; Mark his Roman name]. An “angel of the Lord” frees Peter and, wanting to get off the streets, he heads to one of the homes where Christians worshiped together—Mary’s house.

### **Read Acts 12:12**

Because of the way this is worded, John Mark was probably better known than his mother Mary. So, mind you, these people have been on their knees, “fervently” praying for Peter. He knocks at the gate and the servant-girl who answers is overjoyed that it is Peter. She runs inside to tell the others and...

### **Read Acts 12:15.**

**The Lesson:** If you believe enough to pray, believe enough that God will *answer* your prayer.

We next meet Mark at the end of the same chapter, when Barnabas and Saul take him along with them on their missionary trip (v25). In Chapter Thirteen we learn that Mark (John) bailed out during the trip (v13), so, later, when they were organizing their second missionary journey, Paul refused to permit John-Mark to accompany them since he had “deserted them in Pamphylia.” This dispute caused such a rift between Paul and Barnabas, that they parted company. Barnabas took his cousin with him to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas to accompany him through Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:37-41). [Now back to Colossians.](#)

Only from Colossians 4:10 do we get the family connection between Barnabas and Mark—Mark’s mother Mary was probably sister to Barnabas. But it is what is *not* stated that makes this verse so interesting. John-Mark is back with Paul! We don’t know the circumstances; we don’t know who made the first move. But the bad feelings had been repaired, and the relationship restored. This improved relationship is reflected in Paul’s final correspondence in 2 Timothy.

### **Read 2 Timothy 4:11.**

So even as his end drew near, Mark was on Paul’s mind. In v10 of our text, Paul adds a parenthetical phrase regarding Mark:

(about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)

Some have tried to guess what this is in reference to, but the fact is we simply do not know, beyond what is here. Paul had apparently issued previous instructions to the Colossian church regarding Mark, [\[the word could be translated “command” or “order,” but most agree that the context here calls for a softer tone\]](#) and he wanted him to be received properly by them.

And, of course, we know that Mark went on to write the earliest of the four gospel accounts. The timing of that, compared to the dating in Acts and the epistles of the NT, suggests that Mark, even while serving the apostle Paul, was probably compiling the necessary information for his gospel.



*these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.*

Paul closes v11 with some additional information about these three individuals: perhaps with a note of sadness he adds that they were the only ones “from the circumcision” (Jewish Christians) helping him, and by them he was encouraged.

**encouragement, comfort** = *paregoria* (par-ay-gor-ee'-ah) = from a compound of <G3844> (para) and a derivative of <G58> (agora) (meaning to harangue an assembly); an address alongside, i.e. (special) consolation :- comfort.  
[Used only here in the NT; the word from which we get “paregoric” and denotes relief of pain (Curtis Vaughan).]

What a testimony! Paul searches for just the right word with which to express how precious these three men were to him, and he settles on one he’s never used before: *They relieve my pain*. No higher praise. What better use could we be to a brother or sister in Christ, than to relieve their pain.

## **SESSION 32: CLOSING ADMONITIONS (FINAL)**

*Colossians 4:12-18*

### **PREFACE**

It has been a rewarding journey, for the last nine months, through Paul's letter to the Colossians. We have learned much about Paul, about Epaphras, about Tychicus, about the Colossians themselves. But far more than that we have learned much about Jesus Christ.

As A. T. Robertson writes, Colossians truly is a "full-length portrait of Christ." In this letter the apostle Paul declares in no uncertain terms the supremacy of Christ Jesus. Just as some people carry around with them a copy of the US Constitution for those times when they need reassurance of our laws, I commend to you this letter to the Colossians for those times when the philosophies of this world begin to sound convincing, when faith begins to lose its firm footing. Just open this book and refresh your faith with the preeminence, the majesty and power, the *sufficiency* of Christ.

In our final passage, Paul mentions more of his fellow laborers, offers final greetings and commands, before saying good-bye in his own hand.

**Read Colossians 4:12-13.**

### **vv12-13**

Paul first mentions Epaphras—currently with him in Rome, but essentially the "pastor" of the Colossian church—the one who had brought the gospel to them, and who carried the burden of their spiritual well-being. It was Epaphras who journeyed to Rome to inform Paul about what was going on in his church—e.g., the false, heretical teachers pulling some away from faith in Christ alone—and to seek his counsel.

Paul goes out of his way to express to the church how hard, how fervently Epaphras was laboring for them. He does this with his choice of two words.

*always **laboring earnestly** for you in his prayers,*

**laboring earnestly**<sup>nasb</sup>, **laboring fervently**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **struggling**<sup>esv</sup>, **wrestling**<sup>niv</sup> = *agonizomai* = from <G73> (agon); **to struggle**, literally (to compete for a prize), figuratively (to contend with an adversary), or genitive (to endeavor to accomplish something) :- fight, labor fervently, strive; **to contend for a prize**; ["...**strenuous and consistent intervention** with the Lord on behalf of the Colossians—prayer needed especially in light of the danger posed by the false teachers." (Douglas Moo; emphasis added)]

In v12 Paul describes Epaphras in much the same way he described himself in vv1:28-29.

**Read Colossians 1:28-29.**

striving = *agonizomai*

And both men are striving, are laboring fervently for the same thing.

Epaphras...is...always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. The various translations shift the words around, and change the meaning slightly, but essentially say the same thing: the prayers of both Paul and Epaphras are that the Colossians would stand firm, mature, perfect (i.e., complete), fully assured of their faith in the will of God in Christ.

The second word Paul uses to describe Epaphras' labors is found in v13.

**Read v13.**

Paul emphasizes again that he backs up his brother—"I testify for him" (the NIV "vouch for" is a little weak)—and assures his church back home that

*he has a **deep concern** for you*

**a deep concern**<sup>nasb</sup>, **great zeal**<sup>kjvs</sup>, **working(ing) hard**<sup>niv,esv</sup> = *echei polyn ponon* = from the base of <G3993> (penes); **toil**, i.e. (by implication) **anguish** :- **pain**. [*"work that involves much exertion or trouble"*]

Here is the picture of a true pastor, a true shepherd agonizing over the condition of his flock, on his knees day and night on their behalf. In this description one is reminded of the image of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

#### **Read Luke 22:44.**

Finally in v13, Paul adds that Epaphras' concern did not stop with Colossae, but extended to those in Laodicea and Hierapolis, two cities nearby.

#### **v14**

Two more of Paul's companions are mentioned in v14.

#### **Read Colossians 4:14.**

This is the first mention of Luke by name in the NT, and the only reference to him being "the beloved physician." From it we also deduce that he was a Gentile. In vv10-11 Paul mentions three individuals, stating that they were the only Jewish "fellow workers" with him. If we assume that he considered Luke a fellow worker—a logical conclusion since we know Luke traveled extensively with Paul, and was with him at the end—then he was not Jewish, but Gentile.

Demas (day-mas') is another story, however. We know nothing about him personally—except for the telling passage in 2 Timothy.

#### **Read 2 Timothy 4:9-10.**

For some the gravitational pull of this world overwhelms. For some—even some believers—the enticements of this present age are stronger than the promises of the next. The story of Demas, once a companion of the apostle Paul, should stand as a warning for all of us. [[Back to Colossians](#)]

#### **vv15-17**

#### **Read Colossians 4:15-16.**

In many respects the early church was ignorant of much that we know today. The faith was young; many of the documents that we depend on for understanding the Christian faith were just being written, and were as yet unknown to the church at large. And many, if not most of the believers could not read anyway; documents had to be read to them.

So today we have a great advantage. The Christian faith is more developed, mature; a completed canon is readily available in not just multiple languages, but multiple versions; and most believers can read the Bible for themselves. But perhaps there is one thing the early church had that is, if not lacking, at least diminished today: enthusiasm, excitement, eagerness.

Just imagine, you are a believer in Colossae, and one day old friends Tychicus and Onesimus arrive carrying a letter from the apostle Paul. You sit in rapt wonderment as the letter is read (and surely re-read). Of late you have been hearing all sorts of teaching that has caused you to question some of what you thought you knew and believed.

Some of it seems to make sense to you, and you have been left confused: Which is correct?

But then you hear the counsel of Paul. His convicting and reassuring words make you feel like someone who has just stepped from quicksand onto solid rock. Your faith has regained its footing. Then, near the end of his letter, you hear that Paul also wrote a letter to the believers in Laodicea, and soon you will be hearing it as well. What joy fills your heart, anticipating that good news!

When was the last time your heart beat faster over the sweet anticipation of hearing a new (to you) or deeper message from the Lord? When was the last time hearing that good news ignited in you a youthful excitement, or a deep, profound joy?

Most of us have lived with the Lord and His word so long that we have lost the wonderment of it all. Let us call upon the Holy Spirit to reawaken in us some of that “new-Christian” enthusiasm we have lost.

*Nympha and the church that is in her house*

Verse 15 includes the line “Greet...Nympha [or Nymphas] and the church that is in her [or his] house.”

The KJVs use the masculine form of the name (*Nymphas*), with the associate masculine pronoun “his.” I won’t trouble you with all the detailed whys and wherefores behind this, but let it suffice that most modern translations and commentators agree that the feminine (*Nympha*) is correct.

### **Read v17.**

(ar'-khip-os: “horse-ruler”)

Scholars have wasted many good hours theorizing about who Archippus was, where he lived, what his role was in the church—and was Paul, here affirming or scolding him. Some scholars need to get a life. The plain truth is that Scripture does not tell us; we don’t know the answers to those questions.

Archippus is mentioned in just one other place: Philemon.

### **Read Philemon 1-2.**

The context seems to suggest that either Archippus was a member of their household, or important in the church that met in their house. That’s all we can guess at. [\[Back to Colossians\]](#)

*“Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord,  
that you may fulfill it.”*

**blepo** = see what is in front of you

“Take heed” = keep an eye on, pay attention to

Whatever his “ministry”—the word is *diakonia*: work, service—it was important, enough that Paul publicly called upon the church itself to remind Archippus of this.

**fulfill** = *pleroo* = from <G4134> (pleres); to make replete, i.e. (literal) to cram (a net), level up (a hollow), or (figurative) to furnish (or imbue, diffuse, influence), satisfy, execute (an office), finish (a period or task), verify (or coincide with a prediction), etc. :- accomplish, × after, (be) complete, end, expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, make) full (come), fully preach, perfect, supply.

Paul has been using this word throughout his letter to the Colossians, and here he uses it to encourage Archippus *to complete, to accomplish* the task his Master (*kyrios*) has assigned him.

I can’t think of a better last command with which Paul could have closed this letter.

The Lord has assigned every one of His children some good work to accomplish in His name in His kingdom. No matter what it is, from the small and secret to the large and public, we are to see it through to the end. We are to pay attention to it, and complete it, for the work order has come straight from the top.

## v18

Paul opened this letter expressing grace to the Colossians, and he closes it (as in all his letters) doing the same. But first he has one last request of them.

### Read v18.

The apostle dictated most of his letters, but he typically “signed” each letter in his own hand. This authenticated the letter (even more important, considering his apostolic office), and added a personal closing. As Paul takes the stylus in his own hand he includes a prayer request: “Remember my bonds.”

**chains, bonds, imprisonment** = *desmos* = from <G1210> (deo); a band, i.e. ligament (of the body) or **shackle** (of a prisoner); figurative **an impediment** or disability :- band, bond, chain, string.

*Matthew Henry*: He does not say, “Remember I am a prisoner, and send me supply;” but, “Remember I am in bonds as the apostle of the Gentiles, and let this confirm your faith in the gospel of Christ.” It adds weight to his exhortation [in Ephesians 4:1]: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”

# Seeds of Encouragement

**P**hilemon, a follower of our Lord Jesus, to my brother and friend, Paul; to Timothy, his son in the Spirit and fellow worker:

The members of this household—as well as those who worship in it—greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blessings of God upon you both, as you, Paul, suffer imprisonment for His name and glory. It is with a heart filled with an uncomfortable blend of gratitude and righteous anger that I answer your recent letter. Let this reply, in your hands, indicate sufficiently that yours arrived safely, with dispatch, by way of the assigned courier.

I will confess to you that it was not a pleasurable emotion that coursed through me when I first laid eyes on my returning slave. When, from a distance, I spied the absent Onesimus traipsing down the road—as if pursuing nothing more than a pleasurable romp in the afternoon sun—the rage so long nurtured in me rose like last evening's beans. How dare he come back to me with such a carefree air about him!

I will also confess to you, however, that it was with a certain measure of shame that I suddenly remembered the story told by the Lord when He had occasion to teach to a number of tax-gatherers. Quite unexpectedly, I saw myself in the role of the father whose son had abandoned his responsibilities, only to finally regret his life of dissipation and debauchery, and to return with his tail between his legs. Because my 'son' was returning—not in shame, but with great glee and bounding spirit—I was filled with unquenchable anger, rather than the compassion expressed by the father in Jesus' story.

As you know well, Paul, I am a businessman, and one who subscribes to the twin philosophies of promises kept and debts repaid. I believe in fairness, but also corresponding responsibility, and my initial reaction to my slave's return was one of fierce retribution over his promises broken and his debts left unpaid.

My good friend Paul: Though I love you as both brother in Christ, and as my Spiritual 'father,' I must, with regret, address you with what might be perceived as brutal candor.

When the slave Onesimus handed me your letter, and I began to read your words, my

anger was kindled anew when I realized that you had been the one harboring this fugitive. When one loses a valuable resource, there is a small comfort in supposing that the loss has not been compounded by someone else taking possession of that same resource. In that event, simple loss suddenly becomes theft. The knowledge that you, my brother, were the one in possession of my lost resource filled me with a powerful resentment that has not yet subsided. But, I admit, he is well, and certainly fit for new service. . .



"I just heard he was back!"

His attention still on his thoughts and the letter being penned to his friend, Philemon did not even look up when his wife, Apphia, flew into the room. "What's that, dear?"

"Is it true? Onesimus has returned? Who brought him?"

"No one," Philemon answered, finally pulling himself away from his private thoughts. "He returned on his own."

Apphia was stunned into silence. How remarkable, that a runaway slave would actually return by his own choice! Onesimus was not ignorant; he knew that the punishment for running away could be harsh. This was all very inconvenient; as the woman of the house, and the one in charge of the household slaves, it would fall to her to address the situation.

"What did he have to say for himself?" She asked.

"Not much. He went through all the motions, said all the right words. He was suitably repentant, threw himself at my feet and all. But it seemed almost a charade; even as he clutched at my ankles, he could barely keep himself from grinning up at me!"

"Now we're going to have to do something about it," Apphia said with a sigh. "It was almost easier when he was still a runaway."

"But there's something else," Philemon said. "The situation's been muddled by this." He handed the rolled letter from

Paul to his wife.

"What's this?"

"Our runaway has been in the company of Paul."

Apphia lifted her gaze off the fresh papyrus scroll to stare at her husband. "Paul? But he's in prison."

"Yes, I know. Apparently, Onesimus found his way to him. He must have heard our discussions regarding Paul's welfare. Remember, the church has been lifting up prayers on his behalf; Onesimus must have overheard, and gone to him."

"Whatever for?"

"I wouldn't know why he went to him in the first place, but, according to Paul's letter, Onesimus has been of some value to him. As a matter of fact, they've become quite close."

"So instead of returning him to us," Apphia said incredulously, "Paul kept Onesimus as his own servant."

"Not quite." Philemon frowned as he returned to writing his reply.

## *Seeds Planted*

My dear friend, I am not unsympathetic to your plight. You already know that Apphia and I, along with everyone who meets in our home, continually beseech the Lord on your behalf. We consider your current imprisonment to be a gross unfairness. Yes, we have heard of your witnessing for Christ there, and we praise God for the many opportunities for this. But we also know how much further this witness could be spread, were you free of Rome's chains.

Would that my faith were as constant as yours. From you, my friend, I learned of Christ; from you I have learned to place my trust in Him as Lord. But what you have not yet taught me well is to remember that He—and He alone—is the one who orders the stars, and the events in our lives. How much I hate the thought of you in prison! How I would rather have you here with me. Pray for me, that I will learn obedience and trust.

Your words of gratitude are a soothing oil upon my head. Modesty demands that I protest your glowing words of affirmation, yet I would not lie to you (you, who would, of course,



see the lie coming from afar off) and say that they are of no consequence to my life.

It pleases me that even from this distance you are aware of my love for you. If I hate the thought of you in chains, that thought, nonetheless, only deepens the love I have for you. And when I hear how you have been encouraged by our lives, I am reminded how much you have encouraged ours.

Let me be of further encouragement by telling you of last evening's events. If you remember, when you were last here you baptized a husband and wife: Lucian and Claudia. If their faces have been lost in the veritable sea of faces to which you have ministered, be reminded that it was the radiant and expectant face of Claudia, coming up out of the water, that brought such joy to your heart. After their many trials—especially those with their rebellious son—it was with a singular relief that they fell into the supportive arms of our Lord, giving every one of their cares over to Him.

The young boy's name was Alexander—that young rascal who brought so much sorrow into their life. If you recall, you spent no insignificant amount of time with him, helping him to understand the forgiving grace of Jesus. But to no avail; when you eventually left our home to travel to Ephesus, young Alexander was as rebellious as when you had first arrived, and your spirits were low because of his stubbornness toward Christ.

He remained so for some time, bringing heartache, even despair, to his parents. They stayed faithful, however, spending much time on their knees, patiently pointing the boy in the right direction—whether he liked it or not!

But the day came when those many prayers were answered. So permit me to bring you the glad tidings that the seeds you sowed into that small life have finally taken root.

Your planting, combined with the watering and careful cultivation by many in this church, has resulted in a new soul being added to the Book of Life. Yesterday he declared his allegiance to Christ, and last evening, with his proud parents beaming from the shore, Alexander was baptized. Praise God!

My brother Paul, that having been said in all sincerity, I now feel my thoughts returning to the matter at hand. My mind and heart seem split, as if being controlled by two separate spirits.

There is that strong part of me that wants

desperately to help you in every way possible—to minister to your needs in the way you have so often ministered to mine. For the sake of this discussion, we might refer to this part as being controlled by the Jesus Spirit.

But there is also that equally strong part of me that desires nothing less than justice where wrong has been done. Fairness insists that people—be they free or slave—be held accountable for their transgressions. We could say that this part of me is controlled by the business spirit.

For the moment, the spirits on either end of the rope in this tug-of-war are of equal weight and strength. And I am in the middle! What to do?

Onesimus—heretofore, an able and dependable servant—did not leave this house empty-handed. While it is true that he did not abscond with as much as he could, he did help himself to some of our stores and a small purse. Regardless his status from here on out, these must be repaid.

### *Family*

The sun was melting into the distant horizon, painting the garden in deep shades of burnt orange, when Apphia joined her husband for their usual evening chat—a custom they had kept since their second day of marriage. In this quiet moment, while the day reached toward its end, Philemon and his wife would let the events of the day just past simmer into their conversation, while they looked forward to the new day approaching. Here they talked—quietly, simply—and patiently listened to no one else but the other.

The olive wood bench was nestled between two myrtle bushes, and the whole area was scented by their evergreen fragrance. The bench was hard, but its seat, nevertheless, had two distinct impressions from where the couple had ended many years of days.

“What are you going to do?” Apphia asked her husband.

“I don't know yet.”

“Paul will be expecting your answer.”

“I know that.”

“He wants you to send Onesimus back to him, doesn't he?” She asked.

“Paul makes that quite clear in his letter. He stops short of saying it, but it's clear.”

“So why don't you do it?”

“Send him to Paul?” Philemon stiffened, turned to his wife. “What will that say to the other servants? That will give tacit permission for all the servants to leave whenever they like and make another life for themselves. What will that do to my authority? And where in that does Onesimus meet his responsibilities to *me*?” He sagged down into himself. “No. It wouldn't be right.”

Apphia nodded her head in agreement. “I hate to think of Paul going through this—but after all, he's not alone. His letter says that Timothy and Mark, Demas, Aristarchus and Luke are there with him. Why would he need Onesimus?”

Philemon withdrew the small scroll from inside his robe. “We only have what he says: ‘I would have liked to keep him.’ And he says that Onesimus has ‘become useful’ to him.”

“Maybe you should send a letter back to Paul, asking for more details,” Apphia suggested. “Then we can better make the decision.”

“I suppose.”

“Have you spoken with him yet?”

“Who?”

“Onesimus. He's been in his quarters since he returned.”

“I sent him there. I wanted time to let the anger wash out of me before dealing with him.”

“And has it?”

“Has what?”

“Are you still angry with Onesimus?”

“Oh, I rather think I'm more angry with *Paul*, than the slave. In Onesimus' position, I suppose I'd have done the same thing. What I can't abide is that Paul didn't send him back to me immediately. *That* would have been the right thing for him to do.”

Apphia gazed off toward the west, toward the orange ball now almost lost below the horizon. She sighed, and said, “It would be different if Onesimus were part of the family, instead of a slave. Then it would just be a *family* decision.”

Her words stabbed into Philemon like a hot knife. But of course, it *was* a family decision. How had Paul put it? ‘I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to



you.’ And later he had written that Philemon should think of Onesimus ‘no longer as a slave, but...as a dear brother.’

Philemon turned toward his wife and said, “But Onesimus *is* a part of the family.”

## *The Interview*

It was the one room of the house in which none of the slaves were permitted. It was here that Philemon conducted his business affairs in relative solitude and quiet. Here was the one room in which he could call upon all of his well-practiced abilities to make the deals that kept him and his family wealthy.

This too, since Philemon had become a believer, was where he came to commune with God and worship his Savior. In this quiet place where no others were allowed, he could focus all of his thoughts and adoration upon the one who gave His life that he might live.

It was upon the heavy, wooden door to this room that the slave knocked.

“Come in, Onesimus,” Philemon answered. The cedar door swung out slowly, and Onesimus stepped inside. “Sit down here, next to me.”

The slave, with head lowered respectfully, crossed the room and perched nervously on the low stool that was positioned next to where Philemon sat waiting.

Onesimus was a rather ordinary-looking man, somewhere around twenty-five or thirty years of age—although no one really knew how old he was. He had been purchased by Philemon five years earlier from a passing caravan that included a group of prisoners from Crete. Philemon had selected him for his strong back, but soon Onesimus’ unique brand of earthy intelligence won him a position of trust within the household.

He kept his gaze lowered, as if studying the floor, while Philemon chose his words.

“I’ve read Paul’s letter carefully,” he began. “He speaks most highly of you.”

“Yes, master.”

“Tell me why you ran away. Did we treat you unfairly?”

“Oh, *no*, master.”

“Then why?”

Slowly and methodically, after a moment’s thought, Onesimus began, “You never invited me into your meetings,

but I could hear what was being said. At first your discussions were confusing, and your prayers were foreign to any experience of mine. But little by little, I came to be curious about these things. Then my curiosity became something more—I wanted to *understand*.” He took a breath, as if gathering courage to go on.

“You and the others spoke often of the man Paul. I do remember the time he was here, but nothing else. You spoke of him as you would a leader—yet he wasn’t actually here. You gave his words great weight. They were important to you.”

“You never said anything to me,” Philemon interrupted.

“It would not have been proper to share my feelings with you, my master.”

“I’ve always treated you well.”

“Yes, you have,” Onesimus quickly agreed. “But there is a fixed distance between master and slave. I could not share it with you.”

“But you could with Paul?” Philemon said, only partially hiding his disappointment.

“Paul is not my master.”

An awkward silence fell over them for a few moments. Then Philemon said, “But why did you leave?”

Onesimus thought carefully before answering, and when he did, it was with his face once again to the floor.

“I know it was *wrong* to leave, and I ask your forgiveness. But I don’t know if I can put into words why I did.”

“Try. Speak freely.”

“I was not leaving *here*—but going *there*.”

“Where?”

“Not a place, but an *idea*. I was filled with a desire to know more about this Jesus you spoke of and prayed to.”

Philemon blurted out petulantly, “I would have told you.”

“Forgive me, master, but I did not feel comfortable bringing it to you.”

“Go on,” Philemon said, sadness creeping into his voice.

“From what I had overheard, I knew the city where Paul could be found—and I still had his face in my memory. It took me many days, but I finally found the jail he was in. For awhile, after that, I did nothing but sit at his feet, listening to his words about Jesus.

“Slowly, after many more days, I began to ask my questions. He always answered them—sometimes with words that needed explaining, but he always answered them. What surprised me was that he never concerned himself with who I was, or why I was there. Oh, in time he learned that I was of your house, but he never pried into the reasons for my being there with him. He just accepted me.”

A small smile spread over his face as Onesimus continued. “After awhile, I began doing things for him. Small things—sometimes just sitting with him after everyone else had left. He seemed to take comfort in having me there with him. I don’t know why. He spoke often of you and mistress Apphia. He remembered you fondly, telling me about the many things the two of you had done for the other believers—in your church and elsewhere.

“One day—it was late, long after everyone else had left—he turned and looked into me, and said, ‘Onesimus, I’ve told you much about Jesus. Now I want you to tell me what He means to *you*.’ It took me a long time to find the words, but I told him that I believed that Jesus was really God—God in flesh; that *this* God was the only true one, that all other gods were false; and that when Jesus died on the cross, my sins died there with Him. I told him that because of Jesus, my many sins were forgiven.

“What I said pleased him, but he said, ‘You still haven’t told me *what Jesus means to you*.’ What I told him was that I now felt part of something new and different, that I now had a *new* master—one who would always care for me and love me. But more than that, I knew that I would never again feel alone, that I would always have brothers and sisters who would support me—just like those who were there supporting Paul. I knew that my past life no longer mattered. What really mattered was my *new* life, and those who would share it with me. The next day, Paul had John Mark take me to a nearby stream, where he baptized me.”

Though Philemon stared at Onesimus, his eyes were unfocused, his gaze distant. As images of Paul and his servant together played over and over in his mind, he struggled to suppress the feelings of jeal-

ousy—even betrayal—that surged in him, trying to accept the events and changes that had transpired. He fought against the anger he felt from being helpless—from not having any control over what had taken place between his friend Paul and his servant Onesimus. At last, he spoke.

“Why did you come back?”

“I guess there were several reasons. First, because Paul wanted me to. I owe him a great debt, and I felt that by serving him, I am serving my Lord. I also felt the need to ask your forgiveness. I was wrong to leave, I know that. You are my master, and I am to obey you.

“The *real* reason I returned, well—it’s harder to explain. I don’t know if I have the words for it. Being there, with Paul, I came to understand that living a life with Christ is more than just *believing*. At first, when he spoke of having a personal faith, I thought that meant that our faith was to be kept separate from each other—that the only thing that mattered was what was between us and Jesus.

“But then I learned that the truth is quite the opposite. *Before* Christ, we were separate; living under him, we are all connected—members of each other.

“While I was there, I could see with my own eyes how important it was for others to encourage Paul in his work—and especially in his imprisonment. He would have days when the reality of his situation would press down on him like a heavy weight. He would think that all his work for the Lord had been in vain, despair would creep up on him, and he would begin to lose hope.

“But then would come word of victories in Perga, or a great spiritual revival in Miletus, or he would receive a personal letter from a dear friend that just said how much they loved him. What a difference these would make! After being there, I know that these words of encouragement literally kept him *alive*. Without them—and the brothers and sisters who were there in person—Paul would have lost all hope.

“So—and I’m not sure I can explain this well—I realized that I *had* to return, to bring his letter to you, to keep that connection alive. I can’t read—you know that—so I don’t know what his letter says.

But I know that you are dear to him, and that if he needs you, or he needs me, we should do everything we can for him.”

Philemon looked upon this man who had changed before his very eyes. Or was it *he* who had changed? Onesimus had entered the room a slave; he would be leaving a man—a brother. What miracle had transpired in that Roman cell?

After a long silence Philemon, his voice heavy with emotion, quietly said, “Thank you for being honest with me. You may go now.”

Onesimus rose from his stool and left the room, shutting the heavy cedar door behind him.

## Epilogue

**M**y dear brother and friend in the Lord Jesus Christ:

Abject humility can be an ugly thing in one so proud as I, but at the risk of possibly fatal ugliness, I will attempt to put words to the utter humiliation I am now feeling in my heart.

You may be wondering why I have chosen to append this to an already hopelessly ugly letter. Rather than my starting over, let the existence and reading of what has gone before stand as part of my humiliation. Stand on the street corner and shout out its words! to make public the evidence for the shame I now feel.

Dear Paul, I am a well-educated and wealthy man; I am a respected member of my community; and I hold a position of some tangible weight in the local Christian community.

I am a person of substance who has just been taught a most profound lesson of life by a common slave.

No—let me amend that. I am mistaken on both counts. Onesimus is no longer anyone’s slave—and he is *anything* but common. I have this day released Onesimus from all obligations to me and, as he is now in your presence, let the delivery of this letter demonstrate that he is now, indeed, a free man.

While I am embarrassed by my gross stubbornness, I am rejoicing that Christ saw fit to take pity on my stupidity, and perform surgery on this cancer before The Day.

I confess to you that when Onesimus first arrived here bearing your letter, I did not welcome him as I would you. My treatment of him was both stern and petulant. I boxed him away for a period of punishment, all the while serving only to punish myself. I tried to be angry

with him, but soon realized that instead, I was angry with you for keeping him from me.

But God has worked a miracle in my life by graciously changing my vision: He has changed my sight, so that now I see Onesimus not as a possession, but as a man and brother. He no longer belongs to me; neither does he belong to you.

He belongs to Christ.

I see now why Onesimus has become precious to you. This brave and deeply Spiritual man has afforded me the opportunity to witness the finest example of what it is to be a servant—not of man, but of Christ.

Though he did steal from me, Onesimus does not have anything to repay. For I have been repaid in full by the lessons he has taught me with his life of gentle humility.

With a glad and grateful heart I return Onesimus to you—not as his master (for he is no longer a slave to anyone but his Lord, Jesus Christ) but as our friend and brother.

May you profit from his life as much as I have.

Grace to you, brother Paul. I need not prepare a room for you; you may have mine!

The members of this household—Apphia, Archippus, and I—send you and your fellow workers our greetings, as well as our constant prayers for your release.

The Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ be a comfort to you in our absence.



The preceding, based on Paul’s letter to Philemon, began life in the form you see here, as a narrative, for the monthly devotional journal, *Aspects*. It was later re-imagined in 2005 as a one-act play entitled, *Brothers*.

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## BIOGRAPHY

We are David and Linda Lampel, and we live in a large country house in the rural area outside Winterset, Iowa, in the middle of the United States. Our home is surrounded by fields of corn and soybeans, and by dense woods that are home to deer, raccoons, possums, wild turkeys, woodchucks, coyotes, and myriad birds of all shapes and colors. The tranquility and beauty of this place contribute to what we do. In fact, we believe that the Lord brought us to this home because He knew that here we would best be equipped to serve Him and others.

Both of us work at home—Dave with his writing, and Linda (now retired) with her baking, needlework, and crocheting projects that are given to charities. Now that she has been unshackled from the business world, Linda has expanded our gardens, and has returned to baking all our bread—and spending more time with our family of five cats. The Lord has given us a good life, and we are most grateful to Him—especially for our 45 years together as husband and wife.

