

Series Overview

SUMMER 2015

Objective

- *What we hope to see God accomplish in us through this study*

That we live with Jesus as the primary focus of our lives every day.

STATEMENTS OF THE OBJECTIVE

“The believers in Colossae were confronted with a new teaching that promised a deeper experience with God, a new and mysterious freedom, a protection from evil powers, and a more intense form of spiritual formation. This new teaching, however, demoted Jesus Christ and eventually produced spiritual arrogance and division in the body. Paul’s answer is simple: Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God, and he is sufficient for the deepest experience of life with God.”

—Danny Hays and Scott Duvall
The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook

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Premise

- *Why we are studying this*

In light of increasing anti-Christian and anti-biblical hostility, we wonder if this current mess is part of a plan and question whether the Triune God is genuinely sovereign. And we are pressured to compromise on doctrines dealing with the Person of Jesus and definitions of sin.

STATEMENTS OF THE PREMISE

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth... For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross.”

—Colossians 1:15–16a, 19–20a HCSB

Why should we study these letters?

1. We live in the space-age so we ask, “How is Jesus related to this universe?”
2. In this age of ecumenicity, we need spiritual oneness without surrendering the finality of the Christian religion and of the all-sufficiency of Christ.
3. The present Unitarian push calls for reflection on our beliefs of Christ’s deity and His relationship to the Trinity.
4. This is the age of *pragmatism*. Today’s slogan is “Is it true?” but “Does it work?”
5. There is today a renewed interest in the doctrine of the last things as signs of His return multiply.

—adapted from William Hendriksen
Colossians and Philemon

Theme

- *What the study is about*

The answer to everything is Jesus alone, and Paul expects Christians to daily live out the fullness of our direct connection to Him. This will lead to peace, holiness, respect for godly authority, and tender hearts toward other believers.

STATEMENTS OF THE THEME

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

—Colossians 2:6–10 ESV

“Paul emphasizes the cosmic significance of Christ as Lord of creation and Head of the Church. Any teaching, practice, or intermediary that detracts from the uniqueness and centrality of Christ is against the faith.”

—Charles Ryrie
Ryrie Study Bible

“Colossians proclaims the absolute supremacy and sole-sufficiency of Jesus Christ (cf. esp. 1:18; 2:9; 3:11). It is, as A.T. Robertson says [in *Paul and the Intellectuals*], Paul’s ‘full-length portrait of Christ.’”

—Curtis Vaughan
Colossians

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Lesson plans are developed by the Frisco Bible Curriculum Team.

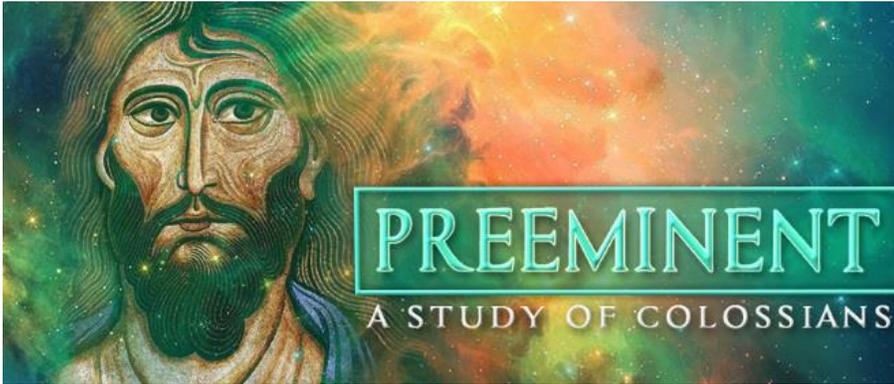
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Faithful

Colossians 1:1–8

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 1

OBJECTIVE:

We Are Faithful Servants of the Messiah

Theme

Paul introduces himself, Timothy, and massively important concepts including: apostleship, sainthood, the Triune God, faith-hope-love, gospel truth, fruitfulness, grace, and service to Christ. He deftly uses the Colossians' own experience, scripture, and Epaphras' life to bring these topics to the foreground. This is a kind-hearted way to establish the lesson on solid truth, setting a conversational yet inspiring tone.

Unfaithful Representations

Like funhouse mirrors, the philosophies of the world have always found a way to distort the Word of God. While many of them still resemble the gospel in some ways, the warped image they show becomes barely recognizable. The only way to combat these heresies is with "the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5 ESV).

It was in this context that Paul wrote his letter to the Church in Colossae. This was not one of his own churchplants; instead, it was likely founded by his companion, Epaphras. Upon learning of the heresy that had sprung up in their midst, Paul lovingly redirects them back to the truth of the gospel that had been so faithfully given to them. Though his letter relays deep truths, his tone remains kind.

What is Truth?

The over-arching theme of scripture is God's redemption of sinful mankind, beginning with the creation and fall of mankind. When sin entered the earth, the effects were disastrous. The most devastating is that humanity's uninhibited fellowship with the Creator was broken, but so much more was lost.

Our bodies began to die.

Our relationships with each other were changed from trust and harmony to blame and discord. Even the earth that had been "very good" had become cursed. (See Gen.

1–3.)



Good Tidings!

The good news is that He didn't leave it that way! God Himself chose to become our Savior. He paid the penalty for our sins "to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14 ESV).

But it doesn't stop there. As God incarnate, Jesus came "to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed"

DISCUSSION

- In what ways do you see the brokenness of our fallen creation? How does that affect the way you view the world around you?
- How do you view the believer's role in ministering to the broken people in their communities or in other parts of the world?

PARTIAL TRUTH IS DANGEROUS

And then she understood the devilish cunning of the enemies' plan. By mixing a little truth with it, they had made their lie far stronger.

— C.S. Lewis
The Last Battle

(Luke 4:18 ESV). And eventually, He will "reconcile to himself all things" (Col. 1:20 ESV).

Faithful Image Bearers

We are created in *imago dei*, as image bearers of the one true God. And as His faithful servants, we are called to a "ministry of reconciliation" to bring all things back into fellowship with God (2 Cor. 5:18 ESV). Like Epaphras, we can bring the good news of the gospel to the lost (verse 8).

In addition to evangelizing and church planting, we can work to repair broken relationships, tend to wounded bodies, and show compassion for those in need. There are many ways that believers can and should be a part of the reconciliation of creation.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

On page 37, you'll find Colossians 1 Observation Worksheet with a space for notes. Follow the directions at the top of the page for verses 1–8.

- Verse 9 begins with the phrase “For this reason...” (HCSB). What is the “reason” Paul is referring to from the preceding passage?

Read Colossians 1:1–2 again.

- How does Paul refer to himself and to Timothy? (verse 1).
- What does he call the people at Colossae? (verse 2).

Read Colossians 1:3–8 again.

- What words or themes do you see repeated in these verses?
- In verse 6, what is “bearing fruit and growing all over the world”? (HCSB).
- How does Paul refer to Epaphras in verse 7?



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Discuss your observations from the Colossians 1 worksheet.

- Why do you think Paul would emphasize or repeat these ideas?
- How do you think they are connected?

Review Colossians 1:1–8.

- What might be the significance of Paul emphasizing that they are brothers?
- Why do you think Paul refers to Epaphras as both “our dearly loved fellow slave” and “a servant of Messiah”? (verse 7 HCSB).



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

Paul responded to the misguided Colossians with instruction. Instead of berating them, he kindly reminded them of the gospel that they had learned and expounded on the truth.

- How do you respond when faced with similar situations? Do you faithfully direct the focus back to Jesus?
- Prayerfully consider how you confront other believers and allow the Holy Spirit to direct your interactions.

Like Epaphras, we should be working to share the gospel’s message of redemption with the people that God brings into our life. Ask God to show you opportunities to live out His truth.

- Would your service for God and for His people be characterized like that of Epaphras?
- Are there any changes you could make today to become better equipped to serve God?

THE GOSPEL IS FOR SHARING

But how can they call on Him they have not believed in?

And how can they believe without hearing about Him?

And how can they hear without a preacher?

And how can they preach unless they are sent?

As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things! ... So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.

—Romans 10:14–15, 17 HSCB

THE GOSPEL BEARS FRUIT

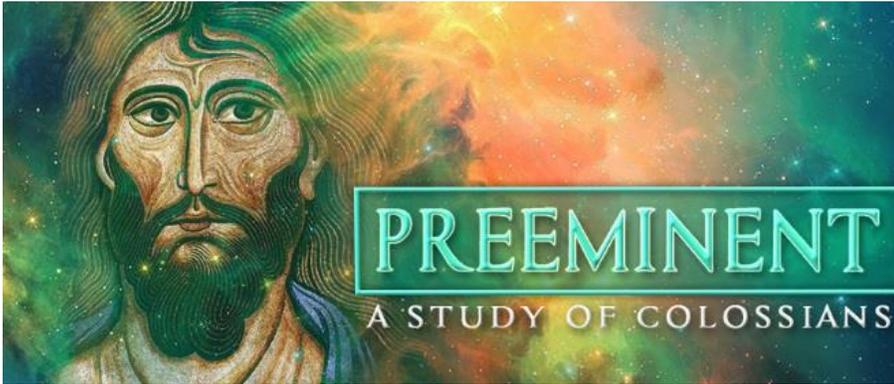
You have already heard about this hope in the message of truth, the gospel that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and recognized God’s grace in the truth.

—Colossians 1:5b–6 HSCB

THE GOSPEL IS EPIC

[W]hy did Jesus come to earth? ... the vast majority of people say something like, “Jesus came to die on the cross to save us from our sins so that we can go to heaven.” While that answer is true, Jesus’ message is an even more grand and sweeping epic than that: “The kingdom of heaven is at hand. I am the King who is bringing healing to the entire cosmos. If—and only if—you repent and believe in me, you will someday enjoy all the benefits that my kingdom brings.”

—Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert
When Helping Hurts



Powerful

Colossians 1:9–14

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 2

OBJECTIVE:

We Walk Wisely and Powerfully

Theme

Paul relates an amazingly rich prayer, begging God to grant the wisdom and power so badly needed in Colossae. Most especially, he prays for them—and all of us—to remember the truth of who we are in Christ.

Letters from Home

As a college student, I used to look forward to letters from home, which were often filled with a variety of pithy reminders: Don't forget to do laundry. Don't forget to check the oil in the car. Don't forget to study. And of course, don't forget to write home. As much as I cringed at their advice, I knew my parents loved me and wanted the very best for me.



In a similar manner, Paul is writing to the church at Colossae. He did not start this church, but he has heard of their faith and love from Epaphras, and he is interested in their continued growth.

In this section, Paul prays and asks God to give the Colossians wisdom and power, and especially that they will remember the truth of who they are in Christ.

Filled with Wisdom

In verses 9–10, Paul asks God to grant wisdom to the Colossians for spiritual insight so that they will walk in a worthy manner, bear fruit, and grow in the knowledge of God.

There were false teachers among the Colossians who may have promoted a “deeper knowledge” attainable only to a privileged few. Paul prays for true knowledge that comes only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

True knowledge should lead to a lifestyle that reflects God's character and pleases Him. The phrase “walk worthy of the Lord” is a metaphor for how a person conducts his daily life (verse 10 HCSB). As a believer walks worthy of the Lord, he should bear fruit with every good work, and continuously grow in knowledge.

Filled with Power

Paul continues his prayer in verses 11–12, asking God to grant power to the Colossians for endurance, patience, and giving thanks.

Endurance and patience are frequent admonitions from Paul, and believers are only capable of them in God's power. Though similar, the words have different focuses: endurance means persevering through trials, while patience means long-suffering and restraint.

DISCUSSION

- Think of a time that you relied solely on your own wisdom without spiritual insight. What were the results and consequences of your actions?
- Paul mentions the “knowledge of His will” in verse 9. How can you find out what God's will is for you? Do you feel any responsibility to know God's will and do it?

GROWING IN THEOLOGY

Theology is the knowledge of God. When someone says, ‘Theology isn't important; I don't want to talk about that,’ they are denying God's wish for us to grow in the knowledge of God.

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Colossians

Giving thanks should be a natural outflow of Christian life. Much of the strength God gives comes through a life of praise and thanksgiving, which turns our focus from self to God.

Giving Thanks

In verses 12–14, Paul focuses on several facets of God's grace for which all believers should be continuously thankful.

- We share in the inheritance.
- We are rescued from darkness.
- We are citizens of the His kingdom.
- We are redeemed.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 1 together aloud.

- Verse 9 begins with the phrase “For this reason...” (HCSB). What is the “reason” Paul is referring to from the preceding passage?

Read Colossians 1:9 again.

- What are the differences between knowledge, wisdom, and understanding?

Read Colossians 1:10–14 again.

- What are the different aspects of walking worthy of the Lord?

Read Colossians 1:12–14 again.

- Make a list of items for which we should give thanks.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Refer to the list you created in the previous section related to walking worthy of the Lord.

- Elaborate on each of the aspects identified above. What do they mean, and what should they look like in your life?

Review Colossians 1:12.

- What is the inheritance, and how has He enabled believers to share the inheritance? The Greek word for enabled is *hikanoō* (ἰκανόω). How is this word translated in other versions of scripture?

Paul prays in verse 10 that the Colossians would “bear fruit in every good work” (HCSB). What are the good works to which Paul refers? Are good works necessary?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

We should follow Paul’s example and be praying for and investing in the spiritual growth of other believers.

- Pray for specific people you know to gain knowledge of His will for their lives. Pray for them according to Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9–12.
- Other than prayer, how are you or how could you invest in the spiritual growth of others?

Through his prayer, Paul exhorts the Colossians to walk worthy of the Lord.

- Does your daily lifestyle reflect a walk worthy of the Lord? If not, which of the aspects you identified above is currently missing or lacking in your life?
- Ask God to give you wisdom and power to change those areas. Consider sharing your list with another person in your group and commit to pray for each other.

IT’S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

It's a jungle out there
Disorder and confusion everywhere
No one seems to care
Well I do

Hey, who's in charge here?
It's a jungle out there
Poison in the very air we breathe
Do you know what's in the water that you drink?
Well I do, and it's amazing

People think I'm crazy, 'cause I worry all the time
If you paid attention, you'd be worried too
You better pay attention
Or this world we love so much might just kill you
I could be wrong now, but I don't think so!

'Cause there's a jungle out there.
It's a jungle out there.

—Randy Newman

WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD

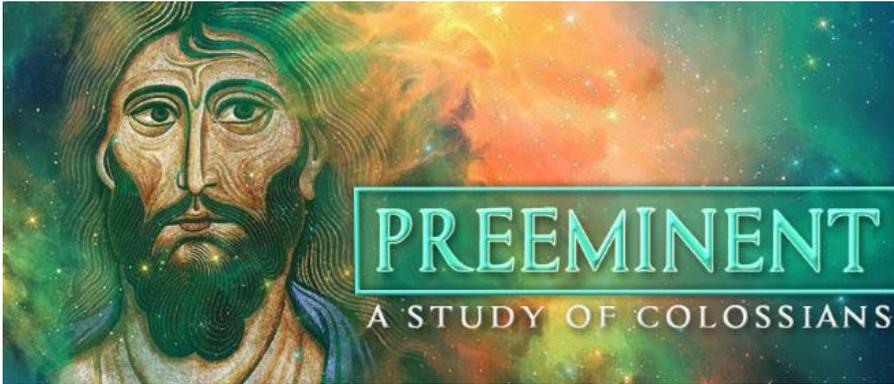
...so that you may walk worthy of the Lord...

—Colossians 1:10a HCSB

With these words, the apostle directs us to the intended result of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. The intended result of God’s truth known and applied is changed conduct.

Paul is not saying that we can become worthy of God’s love and grace by our good works or manner of life. No matter how hard we might try, we can never walk in a manner that makes us worthy of the Lord’s love or salvation. To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord means to walk in a way that is commensurate, fitting, and consistent with who the Lord is to us and what the Lord has done, is doing, and will do for us.

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul’s Letter to the Colossians



Wonderful

Colossians 1:15–23

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 3

OBJECTIVE:

We Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

Theme

Paul shows us the answer to any heresy, trial, or daily need is Jesus. He is wonderful in every sense of the idea, and Paul presents Jesus in poetry crafted to inspire awe in His Person.

The (Not) Real Thing

In 1971, Coca-Cola launched a TV commercial in which young people from all over the world gathered on a hilltop to sing the virtues of world peace and unity. They sang, in part:

I'd like to teach the world to sing
In perfect harmony
I'd like to buy the world a Coke
And keep it company
It's the real thing
What the world wants today

With words about peace, love, and unity, the message and music resonated with Americans; the jingle became so popular that it was adapted for radio and became the worldwide hit single "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing." (Many of you are probably singing the song to yourself right now). The marketers had tapped into a cultural phenomenon; a disillusioned generation felt like its world was flying apart at the seams and was sincerely seeking something real. And Coke was happy to step in and brand itself as "The Real Thing."

Even though we know it's ludicrous to think we could solve the world's

problems with a bottle of Coke, the world is happy with anything that causes believers to lose their focus on the real answer: Jesus.

The Colossian Heresy

The Colossians were also very sincere in their faith and love (Col. 1:4), but they were being led away by false teaching. We don't know the exact nature of the heresy that was tormenting the

Colossian church; but it likely combined several elements of Greco-Roman philosophies, pagan worship, Judaism, and Christianity.



The false teachers of the day claimed to be Christians, but they denied the supremacy of Jesus. Their teaching probably contained just enough truth that it resonated with the Colossians, and they were drifting away from the truth of Christianity and into these various influences.

The Main Thing

In Colossians 1:15–23, Paul moves quickly to his main

focus of the letter, specifically the preeminence of Christ in His person and work.

Paul declares that He is the very image of the invisible God (verses 15 and 19), the creator and sustainer of all things (verse 16–17), the head of the church (verse 18),

DISCUSSION

- What are some current worldviews or false teachings that lead believers away from the biblical truth of Jesus? How do you guard against drifting away from the truth?
- What is your view of Jesus' authority and His role in your life? How does your view affect your daily actions? Do your daily actions reflect your view?
- What is your favorite hymn or song that excites wonder for the person of Jesus Christ?

and Redeemer (verses 20–21). Not only does Paul want to dispel the false teaching confronting the Colossians, he wants them to fully know and exalt Christ as the preeminent one.

The first six verses in this passage are written in a rhythmic prose and arrangement that is similar to many of the early Christian hymns, which were often used to inspire worship and reinforce doctrine. Paul's style is intended to inspire the Colossians—and all believers—to respond in wonder and worship for the preeminent Christ. He is wonderful and worthy of our praise!

Finally, Paul urges the Colossians to remain steadfast in their faith and not drift away from the truth (verse 23).

Jesus is the main thing, the preeminent One. We need to keep the main thing the main thing.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 1 aloud together.

- Make a list of the things said about Christ to show His supremacy.
- Identify all the occurrences of the pronoun Him/His/Himself and the prepositions used with each.
- What is the “image of the invisible God”? (verse 15).
- Who is the “firstborn over all creation” and “the firstborn from the dead”? (verses 5 and 18).
- What other phrases and words are repeated in this passage?

BEAUTIFUL ONE

Wonderful, so wonderful
Is your unfailing love
Your cross has spoken mercy over me
No eye has seen no ear has heard
No heart could fully know
How glorious, how beautiful you are.

Powerful, so powerful
Your glory fills the skies
Your mighty works displayed for all to see
The beauty of your majesty
Awakes my heart to see
How marvelous how wonderful you are.

—Jeremy Camp

THE WORLD WILL HATE HIM

Interest in Christ is on the rise. I’ve discovered that the less some people know about Christ the more they like Him.

Since Christ said that the world would hate Him, we can be quite sure that when the world loves Him it is because they have made Him into something He is not. The biblical Christ cannot be dismissed; He stands in our path forcing us to make a decision, either to the right or to the left. In His presence neutrality is impossible.

—Erwin Lutzer
Christ Among Other Gods



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Review Colossians 1:15–20.

- Why did Paul write this section in a poetic form?
- What did this shift in writing style mean to the Colossians? What does it mean to us?
- What clues does the text give us about the types of heresy that were being taught to the Colossians? Look for words and phrases that are repeated, or stressed for emphasis. What types of heresy are being taught in our culture?

Review Colossians 1:23.

- Does this verse suggest that a believer can fall from a state of grace?
- What does it mean to be grounded and steadfast in the faith?

Refer to your list of pronouns created in the first step.

- What do these pronouns reveal about Jesus and His work?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

Paul’s writing style in verses 15–20 was intended to inspire wonder and worship.

- What are some characteristics of Jesus that cause you to respond in wonder?
- How do you or could you worship Him on a regular basis?

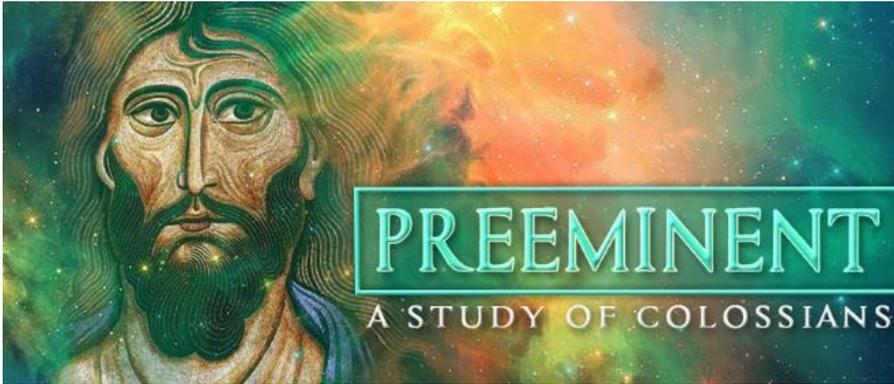
Read the quote in the text box at right.

- How can we use Paul’s words to counter the false teaching?
- How do we remain steadfast so that we don’t drift away from the truth?

ADD OR SUBTRACT

Always, all false belief systems either reject what the Bible teaches about the person of Christ (deny His deity or true humanity), or they seek to add something to the work of Christ (add some system of religious or ascetic works), or they will do both—subtract from His person and add to His work. In other words, what Christ accomplished on the cross is not sufficient, so some system of works is added as a means of true spirituality and access to God.

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul’s Letter to the Colossians



Meaningful

Colossians 1:24–29

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 4

OBJECTIVE:

We Labor for the Truth

Theme

Paul speaks in a brilliant chiasm, exposing his Hebraic-based message for his mostly Gentile audience. The big idea is in the middle—the *mysterion*. This rich Old Testament idea was being abandoned for mystery religion nonsense, so Paul reestablishes the right meaning for the term. The ancient and rich truth is that Gentiles are also chosen for glory. Paul also describes his goal of spiritual maturity and his willingness to suffer and fight in God’s strength so that people grow up well in Christ.

Freedom

Every year on July 4, America celebrates its independence. It’s hard to think about our independence without also thinking about the dedicated service men and women who sacrifice every day to preserve the freedom we celebrate. Military service requires hard work and commitment; these brave men and women regularly endure agonizing labor and unspeakable suffering for a meaningful cause.

Many serve willingly because they believe America and its principles are worth fighting for, and they want the next generation to know the same freedoms and blessing they enjoy.

Mystery

In Colossians 1:24–29, Paul reminds believers

that they, too, have a meaningful cause worth fighting for. The mystery that was revealed in Christ is that Gentiles—who were once foreigners to the covenant—could be fellow-heirs with the Jews. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, Gentiles could be free from the power of sin and death. This is the message that Paul is called to share.

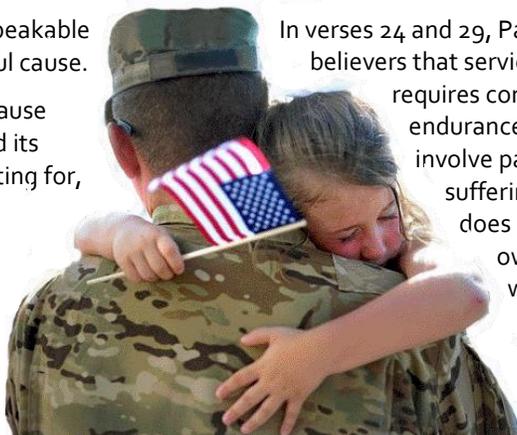
Service

In verses 25 and 28, Paul writes that he has been divinely appointed to serve the church and make the message fully known. He proclaims the message by warning and teaching, with the goal of developing mature believers. We sometimes refer to this process as *discipleship*.

In Matthew 28:18–20, a passage often called “The Great Commission,” Jesus places a similar call on every believer to make disciples.

Suffering

In verses 24 and 29, Paul tells believers that service is not easy. It requires commitment and endurance, and will involve pain and suffering. But Paul does not strive in his own power. God works through Him and supplies supernatural strength.



DISCUSSION

- Have you ever felt called or uniquely empowered to serve the church in a particular capacity? Share about your experience.
- How have you experienced growth as a believer?

THE MYSTERY

So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.

—Ephesians 2:11–13 HCSB

FRISCO BIBLE CHURCH MISSION

We are a redeemed *community* doing the great commission by the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

Through Jesus, every believer is called to join Paul in his mission to proclaim the message. There is no message more meaningful than to proclaim Jesus. It is every believer’s divinely-appointed calling to labor for the truth.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 1 aloud together.

- How do verses 24–29 relate to the rest of the chapter? In other words, what is the context?

Read Colossians 1:24–29.

- What are some words or phrases Paul uses to describe his suffering?
- What is God’s message that Paul seeks to make fully known?

Define the word “mystery” from Colossians 1:26.

- Paul uses a chiasm in Colossians 1:24–29. What are the elements of the chiasm?

GREAT COMMISSION

Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

—Matthew 28:18–20 HCSB

OUR MANDATE

An important question that every believer in Christ might ask is simply, “Is there any one thing that captivates and directs my life, or am I like the man at a Christian conference who said, ‘I’m interested a little in a lot of things, but nothing has ever really captivated me.’”

[The man] showed his multiplicity of interests, but no one driving force. Such, however, was not the case with the apostle Paul. Paul was a man directed by God’s *mission* and *mandate* on his life. He had both purpose and power.

The truth of Christ’s reconciliation or His sacrificial death for our sin was both the means of his salvation and the mandate for his ministry, and the same should be the case for every Christian.

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul’s Letter to the Colossians



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Review the elements of the chiasm you identified in the previous step?

- Why did Paul use this literary style?
- What is the main point of the chiasm?

Review Colossians 1:24.

- What was lacking in Christ’s afflictions? Was Christ’s suffering sufficient for our salvation?

Review Colossians 1:26–27.

- What is the mystery Paul is referring to?

Review Colossians 1:28.

- What methods does Paul use to proclaim the Gospel?
- What is the reason for proclaiming the Gospel?

Why do you think there is so much emphasis on the phrases *in Him*, *in Christ*, and *through Him*? How does being *in Christ* affect your daily attitudes and actions?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

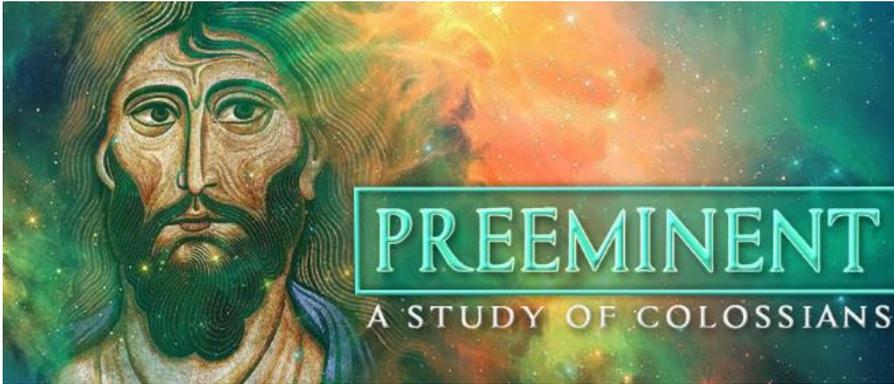
Paul’s main emphasis in this passage is that he is committed to proclaiming God’s message. Every believer should follow Paul’s example. This is also the Great Commission that Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew 28:18–20.

- In what ways are you laboring to do the Great Commission?
- Do you know what the Gospel message is?
- Do you know how to effectively share the Gospel?

A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

—Martin Luther



Masterful

Colossians 2:1–10

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 5

OBJECTIVE:

We Live Like People Who Know the Answer

Theme

Before he gets into the teeth of the jokes that go for theological influence in Colossae, Paul lays forth the answer. Jesus. He is the answer to everything, and knowing He is present with us changes everything about how we live.

What Does 2 + 2 Equal?

If someone told you that $2 + 2 = 5$, what would you say? Of course, you would tell them they were wrong. But what if they gave you reasons and arguments and showed you proofs and evidence supporting their claim that $2 + 2 = 5$? Would you believe them then? Would you even consider the possibility that they could be right?

Of course not. You might be polite enough to hear them out, but you would never seriously entertain their claim to be right, even if you could not spot an error in their argument. Why? Because you *know* that $2 + 2 = 4$, and that 4 does *not* equal 5! You have been rooted and grounded in mathematical understanding and knowledge which gives you assurance that $2 + 2$ absolutely and unequivocally *does not* equal 5.

Our Solid Ground

In the second chapter of his letter to the believers at Colossae, Paul states that God has placed “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in Christ (verse 3 ESV). He also states that the fullness of God dwells in Christ (verse 9 and Col. 1:19), and that there is no higher

authority than Christ (verse 10). Christ is the ultimate package!

Paul says that our faith is rooted and grounded in Christ, and we can have assurance when our understanding is firmly based on Him (verse 2). This assurance is like riches (verse 2). Why? Because with the firm understanding of Christ who holds all wisdom and knowledge, we can recognize and avoid bad arguments, doctrines, and philosophies.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ... See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ

—Colossians 2:4, 8 ESV

We know the answer already! It is Christ. *Solus Christus*. Only Christ. Any argument or philosophy based on anything else is wrong. Any doctrine or practice which leads away from Christ alone is wrong, absolutely and unequivocally.

“So Walk in Him”

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (Col. 2:6–7 ESV). Paul relates that his prayer for all believers (verse 1) is that

DISCUSSION

- Think of a time when someone tried to convince you to do or to believe something you knew was wrong? What did you do?
- Sometimes we all fall into behaviors which are contrary to what we know is right or healthy. Why does this happen?
- There are many practices in churches based on tradition. Is tradition always good or always bad? What are some good and some unhealthy traditions you see in churches today? How do you distinguish the good from the bad?

TRADITION VS. TRADITIONALISM

Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.

—Jaroslav Pelikan

The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities

they gain full understanding of these facts about Christ—that He is the fullness of God, the highest authority, and the repository of all wisdom and knowledge—so they can live according to that understanding. This understanding encourages our hearts, unites us in love, and shines through us in lives marked by thanksgiving, lives that are wholly bright because of Christ in us (verses 2, 7).



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 2:1–10.

- What does Paul say is the reason for his struggle in verses 1–2? What does he desire for the church at Colossae and elsewhere?

Review Colossians 1:9.

- What does Paul say is God’s mystery in verse 2?

Review Colossians 1:24–27.

Paul likely wrote to the church in Ephesus around the same time he wrote to the church in Colossae. Read and compare Ephesians 3:1–6.

- In verses 9–10, what reason does Paul give for the superiority of wisdom and understanding based on Christ compared to that based on human philosophy and traditions?

KEEPING STRICTEST WATCH

But God left free the will; for what obeys Reason, is free; and Reason he made right,
But bid her well be ware, and still erect;
Lest, by some fair-appearing good surprised,
She dictate false; and mis-inform the will
To do what God expressly hath forbid. ...
Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve;
Since Reason not impossibly may meet
Some specious object by the foe suborned,
And fall into deception unaware,
Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warned.

—John Milton
Paradise Lost

IN CHRIST ALONE

In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

—Keith Getty & Stuart Townend



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Paul exhorts the believers in Colossae to not let anyone delude them with plausible arguments, nor take them captive by teachings not based on Christ (verses 4 and 8).

- Why does Paul need to do this?
 - What are some things we can infer about the situation in Colossae from this warning?
 - What are some things we can infer about our human nature from this warning?
- Why is Christ the only thing on which we need to base our lives and practices? How do we know that He alone is enough?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

As Christians, our entire lives are supposed to be oriented according to the fact that Jesus is fully God, preeminent above all else. We are to “walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as [we] were taught” (v. 6–7 ESV).

- How does the life of a Christian look different than the life of an unbeliever?
- How is a Christian’s mindset different? How does that difference affect the way a Christian behaves, both toward other believers and toward unbelievers?

Take some time this week to examine your life. Think about your habits, both of doing and of thinking.

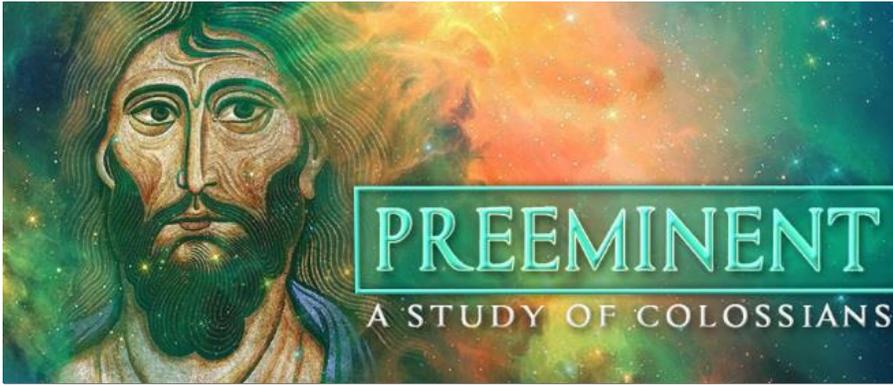
- Are there areas in which you have become comfortable but which are not based on Christ alone or on the knowledge of His preeminence in everything?
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you to a deeper acknowledgement of, and reliance on, Christ alone.

If you don’t already, consider praying consistently for other believers in the same way Paul said he did in Colossians 1:9–12 and 2:2–4.

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

In light of increasing anti-Christian and especially anti-biblical hostility, ... church leadership is bombarded with calls for compromise, particularly on doctrines dealing with the Person of Jesus and definitions of sin. All these questions were brilliantly answered 1,900+ years ago when Paul wrote to Colossae... The answer to all this mess is Jesus, and only Jesus. Paul expects Christians to daily live out the fullness of our direct connection to the God-Man, Jesus. This will lead to peace, holiness, respect for godly authority, and tender hearts toward other believers.

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Colossians



Graceful

Colossians 2:11–23

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 6

OBJECTIVE:

We Find Our Life in Christ Alone

Theme

Paul examines the Colossian heresy in the aspects that it was practically experienced in: asceticism, mysticism, and legalism. He shows that the Godhead is greater than each of these beliefs and that reliance on Jesus is eroded by each. Further, eternal rewards are lost when we settle for attractive-looking additions that promise “fuller” Christianity than what Jesus provides.

Obedience

Obedience is a key aspect of the Christian life. “To obey is better than sacrifice,” as Samuel informed Saul at Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:22 ESV). A desire to obey is healthy and natural. But Satan tries to hijack our desire to obey and run it aground into human-based systems intended to replace our trust in, and reliance on, Jesus Christ alone.



Having explained in the beginning of Colossians 2 that Christ is the preeminent, all-sufficient answer, Paul then addresses three common human-based systems that are time and again

advocated as alternatives to the only legitimate hope of salvation. Legalism, mysticism, and asceticism were just as popular in the first century as they are now; and all just as frustratingly pointless.

Legalism

Legalism elevates obedience to an idol. Legalism is personally futile because it is ultimately impossible. As Paul concluded his reflections on this in Romans 7:21–24: “Wretched man that I am!” (ESV).

In all its forms, legalism destroys the very essence of what grace is. It diminishes the incalculable value of grace—the sacrifice required by Jesus on the cross—by insinuating that it is not sufficient. And it diminishes our thorough need for grace—the completeness of our death in sin before regeneration—by claiming that there is something we can do to earn salvation.

Mysticism & Asceticism

Similarly, our desire to obey is hijacked and run aground when we submit it to the teachings of mystics or ascetics. Both of these false teachings are alluring because they seem so wise. Mysticism purports to have secret knowledge from spiritual sources and claims to be able to teach others how to obtain the same, as long as they obey the system.

Asceticism teaches that everything physical is bad or tainted and must be shunned. Only what is barely required for survival is allowed, with the constant

EPHESIANS 2:8–9 ESV

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

DISCUSSION

- Our pride does not easily accept the fact that grace is a free gift. What kinds of things do we often convince ourselves must be added to God’s grace?
- What is the role of obedience in a Christian’s life compared to grace?
- What does it look like when one person tries to impose their personal conviction of obedience on someone else?

goal of stopping short of any enjoyment. Again in this case, our desire to obey is hijacked by something that seems wise, because we are all familiar with our innate sinfulness so often experienced through overindulgence of various pleasures.

Paul decries the foolishness of each of these teachings. Our circumcision was “made without hands”; it was not our work (verse 11 ESV). God made us alive with Christ “by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (verse 14 ESV). Jesus is fully God, the highest authority of any other, whether physical or spiritual, and the Head of the church (verses 10 and 19). Colossians 2 is Paul’s brilliant treatise on the preeminence of Christ.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 2:11–23.

- What are two physical images that Paul uses to describe our spiritual transformation in Christ? (See verses 11–15.) Who accomplishes this spiritual work and change in us: us or God?
- Rewrite, or reread aloud, Colossians 2:8-15, replacing each occurrence of “He” or “he” and “Him” or “him” with its correct antecedent. Does this help your understanding of what is being said?
- Paul mentions asceticism and mysticism in verses 18 and 20–23. What analogy does he use in verse 19 to warn against such teachings?

SAVED BY GRACE ALONE

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

— Ephesians 2:4–8 ESV

ABIDE IN ME

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

— John 15:1, 4–5 ESV



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Paul says that we were dead, but God made us alive together with Christ (Col. 2:13). Why is this truth the basis for combatting rules-based human systems?
- Paul says that Christ is the ultimate authority (Col. 2:9–10). Why is this truth the basis for combatting mystical systems based on visions or angels or special revelation?
- Paul says we have died with Christ to this physical world (Col. 2:20). Why is this truth the basis for combatting any physical-based sanctification system?
- How do we as the body of Christ stay healthy and continue to grow in grace? (See Col. 2:19.)



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

Paul mentions human tradition in Colossians 2:8. We are often quite willing to accept—without even recognizing or questioning it—legalism, mysticism, and asceticism when they come down to us as traditions from our family or church history and taught to us from a young age. Think about your own upbringing. Examine your longest held beliefs.

- Are there any traditions you have inherited which are actually human precepts trying to add to or minimize grace?

It is sometimes easier to spot false teachers trying to sway us from outside than it is to recognize our own pride gently slipping the same constraints on our self from within.

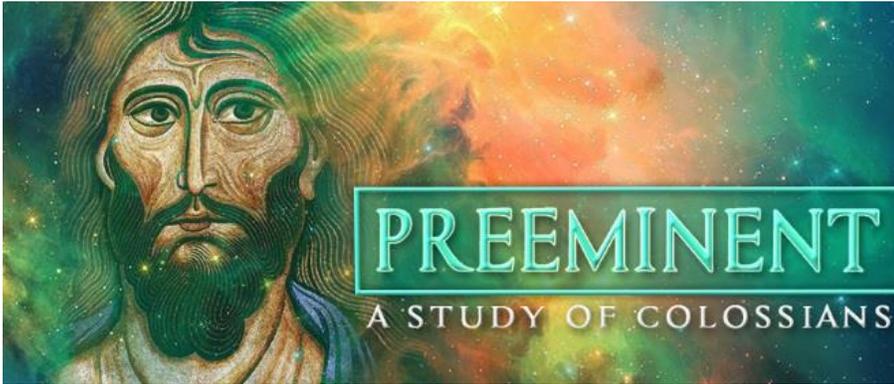
- What are some ways we subject ourselves to legalism or asceticism? How can we guard our hearts against such complicit abdication of freedom based on grace?
- Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit asking you to obey in a specific way? In such a time, how easy is it to pass judgment on those who don't have the same conviction?
- Do you have a mental image of what a Christian person looks like, or how they behave? Do you have ready examples of appearance or behavior that in no way could ever be indicative of a Christian?

In both of the previous two cases, this impulse is a nascent form of legalism in which we want to impose our view of obedience onto someone else. As you stay on your guard against being deluded or being taken captive by others, pray also that you be not found guilty of deluding others, or taking your own captives.

LEARN, JUDGE, & DISCERN

There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority even to those to whom God has given special abilities. To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God's true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture.

—James W. Sire
Scripture Twisting



Mindful

Colossians 3:1-4

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 7

OBJECTIVE:

We Mindfully Set Our Hearts on Things Above

Theme

Many call this paragraph the height of all Christian thought. This introduction to the “practical” section of the book contains a beautiful and powerful call to be mindful. Paul wants our minds trained in the right direction so that our living naturally follows that path.

The True King



Let’s put ourselves in the shoes of the Colossians for a moment and try to read Colossians 3:1 as they would read it. It is around A.D. 60; and they are still desperately waiting for the return of Christ, the Messiah, the true King. Here, Paul reminds them of Christ’s position.

The phrase “seated at the right hand of God” means that Christ sits in a place of honor, exultation, sovereignty and power. He has left his throne, come down to earth as a baby, offered Himself as the perfect sacrificial lamb, conquered death, and has now risen up to take His proper place next to the Father for the rest of eternity. He is not someone to be trifled with.

As Paul transitions to practicality, he reminds the Colossians who Christ is because he knows that it is essential in understanding who they are.

Of Life and Death

In Colossians 2, Paul wrote “Since you died with Christ” and then juxtaposes it a few verses later with the phrase “Since, then you have been raised with Christ” to create an interesting contrast between the two (Col.2:20, 3:1 NIV). He then throws even more comparisons in by juxtaposing “things above” and “earthly things” as well as “death” and “life” in the following verses (3:2, 3). Paul uses these literary devices to showcase the difference between the sinful nature that we are born into and the life suitable for a follower of Christ.

On Things Above

After establishing Christ’s authority and demonstrating the incompatibility of contrasting worldviews, Paul immediately goes into what we should do about it by challenging us to “set your minds on things above” (Col. 3:2 NIV).

“We become like what we behold... What we love to behold is what we worship. What we spend our time beholding shapes our hearts and molds us into the people we are.”

—Tony Reinke
www.DesiringGod.org

DISCUSSION

- What sort of things do we set our hearts on? What are we passionate about and what do we pour our time, energy, and emotions into pursuing?
- What is your view of God? Do you see him as a loving friend, a just judge, a majestic king, a strict master, or something else?
- In John 10:10 Jesus says that “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (NIV). How do we let the thief come into our lives and steal, kill, and destroy us? In what ways can we choose life?

Our thinking will eventually affect our words and actions, which will dictate our lives. By setting our minds on things above—on Christ, we ensure that we will continually grow towards Him rather than away from Him and will become more like Him instead of wallowing in our own sinful natures.

As J.B. Lightfoot said in *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, “You must not only seek heaven; you must also think heaven.”

As we go about our lives, Paul challenges us to be mindful of our identities by mindfully raising our eyes towards Him who sits on the throne in heaven because he knows that it is only then that true transformation can take place.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 3:1–4.

- What words, phrases, and themes are repeated throughout the text?
- In verse 1, where does it say that Christ is?
- What does verse 4 say about our positions as fellow heirs with Christ?

In Colossians 3:2, Paul writes to set your minds on heavenly things and not earthly things.

- What are some examples of the types of things he is referring to?

WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

It is true that your life actions will follow what you focus on. If you focus on being grateful...you live differently. If you set your mind on your studies...you do better on tests. If you think about loving your neighbor...you'll be almost inexorably drawn to live that out.

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Colossians

LET YOUR MIND DWELL ON THESE THINGS

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

—Philippians 4:8 NASB



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Read Ephesians 1:18–23, Hebrews 10:12–13, and 1 Peter 3:21–22.

- What is the significance of where Jesus is located? (Col.3:1).
- What does it mean to be hidden with Christ in God? (3:3).
- What are the implications of the phrase in Colossians 3:4 that says “Christ, who is your life”?
- How does truly understanding who God is affect our understanding of who we are as followers of Christ?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

Paul calls us as followers of Christ, to remember who Christ is and to award Him the honor and respect that He deserves. How often do we treat Him like a friend or a genie in a bottle rather than the all-powerful King of the entire universe? By putting Christ in *His* proper place it is easier to figure out *our* proper place.

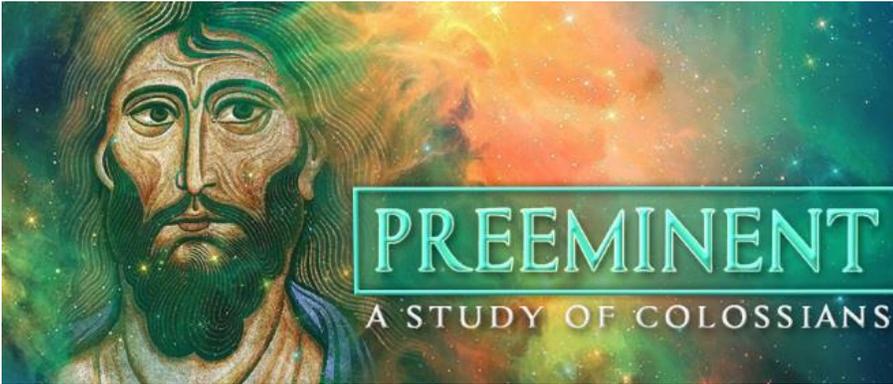
As you go about your week, try to remember just exactly whom it is that you serve. He is all powerful. He sacrificed His life for you. He is absolutely omnipresent; and someday, you will appear with Him in glory. Put your minds and hearts on things above and let your thoughts transform your words and deeds.

- What choices can we make to set our hearts on things above instead of on earthly things on an everyday basis?
- As a believer, your life is hidden in Christ. How does understanding that fact encourage you to live your life differently?

AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

—Ephesians 1:18–23 NIV



Purposeful

Colossians 3:5–17

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 8

OBJECTIVE:

We Walk With Purpose

Theme

Paul uses a clothing metaphor to describe the daily habits that make up the Christian way of living. The specifics are wonderfully helpful, and the capstone summarizes brilliantly: do all in Jesus' name.

New Year's Resolutions

At the beginning of every new year, millions of people around the world sit down and come up with New Year's resolutions for the upcoming year. They tell themselves that this year they are going to exercise more, eat better, give away more money, be kinder, etc. But what it comes down to is that they are using the new year as a chance to purposefully start over and become better than they were before. The new life we find in Christ is no different.

Normally, in order for someone to decide what areas of their lives they want to improve, they have to first take an honest look at themselves and see where they are lacking. In such times of reflection, they often determine what practices could be added in to improve their lot, as well as what self-damaging practices could be taken out to end self-sabotage.

Similarly, Paul uses this section of text to practically discuss behaviors that are unbecoming of a follower of Jesus Christ; and then he goes on to discuss what those negative practices should be replaced with.

A Vacant House

Jesus, while in a debate with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, once discussed wandering demonic spirits who had been cast out of their human hosts (Matt. 12:43–45). He says that when a spirit is cast out and can find no resting place, it returns to the host it left simply to find the house "unoccupied, swept clean, and put in order" (12:44 NIV). It then decides to move back in and brings more spirits with it, making the condition of the host even worse than he or she was before.

Like wandering demonic spirits, eliminating unbecoming habits can be a similar process in that the eliminated habits leaves holes that will eventually be filled with something else. The trick is filling it with a becoming habit instead of something that leaves us worse off than we were before.

A New Creation

Because of Christ's sacrifice, everyone who puts their faith in Him are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). Our old selves were crucified with Christ, and now it is time to walk forward by purposely taking off the old and putting on the new (Gal. 2:20).

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come."

—2 Corinthians 2:20 NIV

DISCUSSION

- Have you ever made a New Year's resolution? If so, what was it? Did you keep it?
- Look over The Good, the Bad, the Ugly list below. What is one good practice that you think you excel at, and what is one bad practice that you wish to put off?
- What is a practical way that you can "put to death" the sin in your life?
- Do you think it is easier to forgive or to accept somebody else's forgiveness?

THE GOOD

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Forgiveness
- Love
- Thankfulness

THE BAD, THE UGLY

- Sexual Immorality
- Impurity
- Lust
- Evil Desires
- Greed
- Idolatry
- Filthy Language
- Anger
- Rage
- Malice
- Slander
- Lying Lips



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 3:1–17 aloud together.

- What words or ideas do you observe in the passage?
- Why does the text say that we should put the things of your earthly nature to death? (verses 6, 9–10).
- Select five attributes listed in the passage and look up their definitions. What differences or nuances do the terms imply?
- What does the passage say in regarding the importance of forgiving one another?
- In what other passages are we called to “put on” something?

Read Ephesians 6:13–17.

- What is the significance of the phrase “to put on?”

PUT ON YOUR ARMOR

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

— Ephesians 6:13-17 NIV

BOUND BY LOVE

But two things cannot be held together without a third; they must have some bond of union. And the fairest bond is that which most completely fuses and is fused into the things which are bound.

—Plato

Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Is the act of taking off your old self and putting on a new self a “one-and-done” type of deal, or is it a process?
- In whose strength is this process accomplished?
- Out of all of the virtues, why do you think that Paul singles out the virtue of love as the one virtue that binds everything else together? Is love just a powerful feeling or is it something more? (verse 14).
- What is the significance of clothing yourself with the Good? What difference does it make if we are clothed with the Bad?
- What type of standards do we use to evaluate those around us?
- Paul commands us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (verse 15). Do you feel at peace? Is Christ’s peace a fleeting feeling, or is it the one calling the shots in your life?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

Paul commands believers to purposely do whatever we do, no matter in word or deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus and to give thanks to God the Father while we do it. That is a pretty big command! A command which, without help, we would never be able to carry out. Although Paul uses these verses to provide a pretty extensive and practical list of suitable and unsuitable attributes, we have to remember that our pursuit of holiness must still be done using God’s strength. Don’t turn these attributes into an unattainable check list in your quest to be a “better” believer.

In Ephesians 2:22, Paul writes, “And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (NIV).

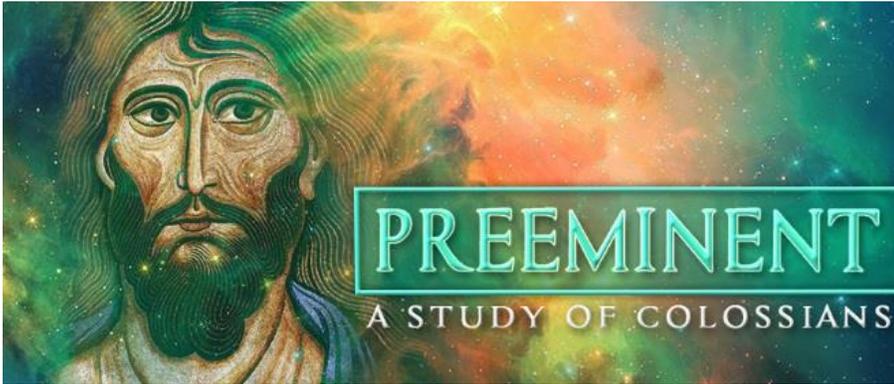
Did you catch that? You are being built (which is an ongoing process) by the Holy Spirit to become a dwelling for God! You probably won’t change your habits overnight, but you aren’t alone in this fight. He is with you, so go forth and live a life of purpose.

PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

When we commit ourselves to the pursuit of holiness, we need to ensure that our commitment is actually to God, not simply to a holy lifestyle or a set of moral values ... offer yourselves to God, and in doing that commit yourselves to the pursuit of holiness in order to please Him.

—Jerry Bridges

Holiness Day by Day: Transformational Thoughts for Your Spiritual Journey



Delightful

Colossians 3:18–4:6

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 9

OBJECTIVE:

We Are Delightful in Our Responses to Life

Theme

Paul describes our various responses to life relationships. Since our minds are set on things above, it leads naturally to these kinds of responses. We are kind and thoughtful in the home, at work, and with non-Christians. We also respond to the Lord by engaging in continual conversation with Him.

What Does New Life Look Like?

In Colossians 3:17, Paul instructs believers to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (ESV). He goes on to reveal how our new life in Christ changes not only our attitudes, but the way we respond to others as members of society. The end of the third chapter and beginning of the fourth give instructions regarding our behavior in our most basic human relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters.

These examples are used because they define so much of our identity and shape our priorities, but Paul was not the first to give advice on these household relationships. Notably, Aristotle wrote about them in *Politics* with the message that women, children, and servants are naturally inferior. Though Paul wasn’t advocating some form of societal upheaval, the ways he bucked these traditional “household codes” were revolutionary. His first-century audience would have recognized the shift from reinforcing control to serving others.

The Least of These

These relationship pairs represent an inequity of power, and Paul addresses the vulnerable members first in each case. Wives were already supposed to submit to their husbands. The same was true for children to their parents and slaves to their masters.

The difference is that their allegiance is now with the Lord over all others. They are to continue in their part in society, but in a manner that pleases God and follows His teachings. This kind of delightful service comes from “sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord” (Col. 3:22 NIV).

A Radical Change

An almost parallel passage in Ephesians 5 fittingly begins with “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” and provides context for the instructions afterward (verse 21 ESV). Husbands who are believers are to demonstrate kindness and a selfless love to their wives. Parents and masters, likewise, are admonished to lead with gentleness.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person
—Colossians 4:6 ESV

Unlike the culture that praises the powerful, Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of

DISCUSSION

- What is the significance of focusing on the believers’ responses in relationships over their roles in society?
- How has the context for these relationships changed since the writing of Colossians? How has it changed in your lifetime?

THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

—Matthew 20: 25–28 ESV

death” (Phil. 2:8 ESV). It is this example of yielding His own rights for the betterment of others that He gives to those in authority.

Walk in Wisdom

In a nutshell, Paul tempered service with pleasing the Lord and authority with kindness. Whatever part you play in society, live wisely and speak graciously (Col. 4:5–6). And remember, “You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:24b ESV).



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 3:18–4:6 aloud together.

- What words and ideas do you see repeated in the passage?
- What reason did Paul give the masters to treat their servants fairly? (4:1).
- What did Paul ask the Colossians to pray for? (4:2–4).

There's a chart you can fill in on page 50 (the second page of the Lesson 9 Guide). You can take notes of the relationship pairs given in Colossians 3:18–4:1.

- What similarities do you see in the instructions to three relationship pairs?
- What are their differences?

Read Ephesians 5:21–6:9 and complete the second chart on page 50.

- In what ways does the Ephesians passage mirror the Colossians text?
- What differences do they have?

DELIGHTING IN SERVICE

Yes service to God means sacrifice and devotion. But we don't give up our lives to serve others—we give up our lives to serve the Lord. It is almost incidental that we are serving a husband or wife, an elderly parent, a handicapped child, or a tribe on a mission field.

When our focus in Christian service is squarely on the Lord Jesus, our work may be tiring, but it doesn't have to be tiresome. We may get weary, but our work does not have to be wearisome if our energy comes directly from the Lord Jesus. How can service to the Lord be a tedious, boring effort?

—Joni Eareckson Tada
Diamonds in the Dust

LOVING LIKE JESUS

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."...

And [Jesus] began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

—Luke 4:18–19, 21 ESV



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Who does Paul repeatedly declare to be the Authority in each of the three relationship pairs?
 - Why is it important to establish that fact in each situation?
- What does it mean to have your speech "seasoned with salt"? (4:6)
- How do the instructions in Colossians 4:2–6 help us in determining the right responses in our relationships as described in the previous verses?
- How did reading Ephesians 5:21–6:9 affect your understanding of Colossians 3:18–4:1?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

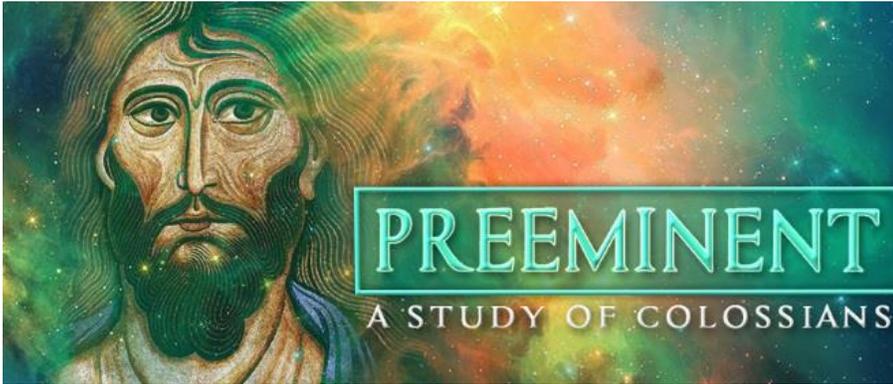
Sometimes we get so caught up in doing what we are supposed to do that we forget to be kind. But Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). As believers, our lives should be seasoned with grace so that our interactions within our community are characterized as being delightful, rather than dreary.

Regardless of which name badge you wear or what your family looks like, God wants you to serve Him in all that you do with sincerity and wholeheartedness. Like any other relationship, communication is important. Spend time with Him in prayer. Ask Him to take care of your concerns and express your thankfulness for all that He has done. Then let the Holy Spirit empower you to demonstrate His love to your family, your coworkers, and your community.

WISDOM AND GRACE

Truth without grace breeds a self-righteous legalism that poisons the church and pushes the world away from Christ. Grace without truth breeds moral indifference and keeps people from seeing their need for Christ.

—Randy Alcorn
The Grace and Truth Paradox



Joyful

Colossians 4:7–18

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 10

OBJECTIVE:

We Are Faithful Slaves of Christ

Theme

Paul wraps up his letter with joyful, encouraging, and insightful comments. Reading of these brethren, we are inspired and drawn to imitate their positive traits.

People in the Bigger Picture

Having encouraged the Colossian believers with the nature of his constant prayers for them, having explained the preeminence of Christ over all and for all, and having exhorted them to think and live brightly in the light of that truth, Paul now closes his letter with several personal comments, ensuring the church at Colossae has a broader view of the work—and workers—of the gospel beyond their city limits.

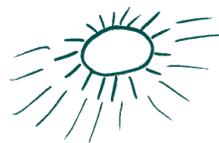
Paul talks about the people going from him to Colossae carrying this letter; he sends greetings from the people with him in Rome who came from Colossae; he introduces his fellow workers, both Jewish and Gentile; he expects the Colossians to contact other churches near them in the Lycus Valley; he addresses specific members of the local churches; and he includes a simple, personal request for himself: “Remember my chains” (Col. 4:18 ESV).

Christian Community

Through all of this seemingly random writing, Paul is deftly weaving a profound sense of Christian community across geographic, political, social, and cultural boundaries. With pen and ink, he is

demonstrating to the church what he meant a few paragraphs before: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11 ESV).

In Christ, Paul was willing to partner with anyone who proved faithful, whether it was Luke the physician or Onesimus the slave. He expected the churches to behave the same way, even reaching out to other bodies of believers to share fellowship and teaching for their mutual edification.



Because Jesus is preeminent, we can and should live as one body—one community of faith, redeemed by and for Christ, living our lives wholly bright for the glory of God.

Each Part Working Properly

Epaphras was a church planter. Nympha hosted a church in her home. Luke was a physician and a chronicler. Tychicus was a letter carrier. Everyone in the church can play a role, and all roles work together for the benefit of the body. As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus (a letter also carried and delivered by

DISCUSSION

As we conclude the annual theme of *Wholly Bright*, take some time to discuss what you have learned from the series over the past year. Each is listed below, with its stated objective:

- **Wholly Bright:** *That we shine God’s reflected glory*
- **Stirred Up** (2 Peter): *That we continually grow up in Jesus*
- **No Other One** (Christmas): *That we lift our eyes to see and worship the unique Jesus*
- **To Nineveh** (Jonah & Nahum): *That we engage a hostile culture with grace and truth*
- **In the Name of the Lord** (David): *That we would each shine brightly, distinctively, as one who comes in the name of the Lord Almighty*
- **Preeminent** (Colossians): *That we live with Jesus as the primary focus of our lives every day*

Tychicus), the different roles in the church work “so that we may no longer be ... tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine ... Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:14–16 ESV).



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 4:7–18.

- Who are the characters named by Paul in this closing section of his letter? What do you know about each one? Do you recognize any of them from other books or letters of the New Testament?
- There is a lot of motion going on in this section. Who is traveling? Where did they come from, and where are they going? Who does Paul send, and where does he send them?
- What are the traits of individuals which Paul holds up as praiseworthy in this section?
- What are the links between the letters of Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon?
- Who is the one other coworker of Paul mentioned in Colossians, but not in this closing section? (Col.1:1–2).

EPAPHRAS

Epaphras is worthy of a further word. Paul tells us that this remarkable man is

- Colossian (Col. 4:12),
- a servant of Jesus (verse 12),
- a diligent laborer among the three Lycus Valley congregations (verse 13), and
- a fellow-prisoner in Christ (Phlm. 23).

He was a committed prayer partner and willing to suffer for others to know and grow in Christ.

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Colossians

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Epaphras grasped, what many of us are slow to realize, that the tactics of the Christian battle are born of the strategy of prayer. ... There are many things outside the power of ordinary Christian people, and great position, wide influence, outstanding ability may be lacking to almost all of us, but the humblest and least significant Christian can pray ... perhaps the greatest power we can exert is that which comes through prayer.

—Thomas W. Constable
Notes on Colossians



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- What can we learn about Paul and his philosophy of a ministry team from this list of his coworkers?
- What is Paul doing by mentioning so many other laborers for the gospel, some of whom probably never went to Colossae personally? How would the picture he paints broaden the understanding of the believers at Colossae with respect to the work of the gospel?
- Typical letters of Paul's time were not much longer than this final section of Colossians. Paul probably spent the equivalent of about \$2,000 today to write Romans. What impression did such letters likely make on his audiences? What message did it send to them concerning his care for them?
- Why do you think Paul asks that the church remember his chains?



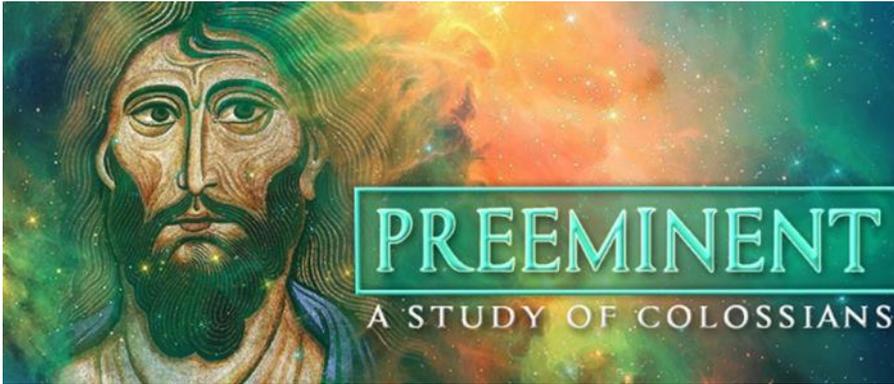
HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

- Paul builds Christian community across geopolitical and social boundaries at the end of Colossians, but the bulk of his letter strongly defends the doctrinal boundary of Jesus' preeminent sufficiency. Does your church strive to excel on both of these fronts? What are some ways your church can improve community and simultaneously maintain or strengthen its doctrinal purity?
- The objective of this series on Colossians is "that we live with Jesus as the primary focus of our lives every day." How has the truth of Christ's preeminence impacted your daily disciplines, and your relationships with others both in and out of the church?
- Paul and his fellow servants are great examples of people living distinctive, wholly bright lives in Christ. How has the *Wholly Bright* theme this past year impacted the distinctiveness of your life in Christ "in public, in private, and even in the face of opposition"? What are some ways you can continue to mature in this area?

WHOLLY BRIGHT: THAT WE SHINE GOD'S REFLECTED GLORY

People desperately need us to live out our distinctive life in Christ—in public, in private, and even in the face of opposition. Our position as God's kingdom people is not a reason for swagger, but rather a calling for service. When we shine forth as God's unashamed servant-priests, we not only are being true to our Lord and to ourselves, we are fulfilling His plan to draw others to His truth and love.

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Wholly Bright



Appendix

Series Overview

Objective:

We live with Jesus as the primary focus of our lives every day.

Statements of the Objective:

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.
—Colossians 3:17 NASB

The believers in Colossae were confronted with a new teaching that promised a deeper experience with God, a new and mysterious freedom, a protection from evil powers, and a more intense form of spiritual formation. This new teaching, however, demoted Jesus Christ and eventually produced spiritual arrogance and division in the body. Paul's answer is simple: Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God, and he is sufficient for the deepest experience of life with God.

—Danny Hays and Scott Duvall
The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook

Premise:

Our world regularly feels like it is flying apart at the seams. In light of increasing anti-Christian and especially anti-biblical hostility, even Christians wonder if this current mess is part of a plan or not. We question whether the Triune God is genuinely sovereign. With a view to survival, church leadership is bombarded with calls for compromise, particularly on doctrines dealing with the Person of Jesus and definitions of sin. All these questions were brilliantly answered over 1,900 years ago when Paul wrote to Colossae from his first Roman imprisonment.

Statements of the Premise:

He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.
For everything was created by Him,
in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—
all things have been created through Him and for Him.
He is before all things,

PASTOR'S SUGGESTED READING

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Anders [Holman]
Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, Barclay;
Moody Atlas of Bible Lands, Beitzel;
Recovering the Christian Mind, Blamires;
The Closing of the American Mind, Bloom;
Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age, Boice;
A Handbook on Colossians, Bratcher & Nida;
On Being a Christian Academic, Craig;
Homilies on Colossians, Chrysostom;
The Subversion of Christianity, Ellul;
Decision Making and the Will of God, Friesen;
Colossians, Geisler;
Loving God with all Your Mind, George;
The Opening of the Christian Mind, Gill;
Association, Synagogues, and Congregations, Harland;
Exposition of Colossians and Philemon, Hendriksen;
The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, Henry;
Colossians, Lange;
St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, Lightfoot;
Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Merick;
Opening Up Colossians & Philemon, McNaughton;
Love Your God With All Your Mind, Moreland;
Knowing Christianity, Packer;
Technopoly, Postman;
The Church in Roman Empire, Ramsay;
How Should We Then Live?, Schaefer;
What Every Christian Needs to Know, Taylor;
"Colossians class notes," Toussaint;
Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound, Utley;
Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life, Colossians, Vaughan [EBC];
Margins, Wood

and by Him all things hold together.
 He is also the head of the body, the church;
 He is the beginning,
 the firstborn from the dead,
 so that He might come to have
 first place in everything.
 For God was pleased to have
 all His fullness dwell in Him,
 and through Him to reconcile
 everything to Himself
 by making peace
 through the blood of His cross—
 whether things on earth or things in heaven.

— Colossians 1:15–20 HCSB

Why should we, especially today, study these letters?

1. First of all because we live in the space-age...We discuss the prospects of inter-stellar flight. So, we as Christians naturally ask, "How is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, related to this vast universe of space and star-systems? Or does he, perhaps, stand outside of it?" For the great comfort of all believers this basic question is answered in Colossians. (See especially 1:16–17, 20.)
2. This is an age of ecumenicity...In the ecumenical movement there are men who are earnestly desirous of promoting the type of spiritual oneness of which Christ would approve (John 17:21)...without any sacrifice of essentials...All this is to be encouraged. There are others, however, who seem to have surrendered—if they ever had it!—the idea of the finality of the Christian religion and of the all-sufficiency of Christ...They seem to feel that Christ, to be sure, has something, in fact, has much to offer, but not everything. The entire epistle is really an answer, but see especially 1:18; 2:9–10.
3. The present era calls for basic reflection on Christ's deity. The Unitarian [push]...the Mohammedan crisis...the influence of the theology of Karl Barth and [others] who rewrite Paul...forces upon us a re-examination of our historical and confessional beliefs regarding the relationship of Christ to the Father and to the Trinity. On this point Colossians speaks with great clarity. (See 1:15; 2:9.)
4. This is the age of pragmatism. Today's slogan is not "Is it true?" but "Does it work?"...Colossians points out that these two questions cannot be separated. To be sure, Christianity is a life, but it is a life based upon a belief...See especially Colossians 1 and 3:5–17.
5. As the signs of the return of our Lord are beginning to multiply, there is today a renewed interest in the doctrine of the last things. On this point, too, Colossians has much to offer...especially 1:12; 1:28; 3:4.

—William Hendriksen
Colossians and Philemon

Theme of the study:

Paul's letter is a response to news he received from Epaphras regarding the churches of the Lycus Valley. Much of the report was encouraging, but some aspects were terribly troubling. Apparently the Colossians were making up their own religion, as humans are wont to do. It appears to have included some redefinitions of sin in some arenas coupled with mysticism and asceticism in other areas. The Jewish legalistic roots of this are evident, as are various Greek philosophies. The answer to all this mess is Jesus and only Jesus. Paul expects Christians to daily live out the fullness of our direct connection to the God-Man, Jesus. This will lead to peace, holiness, respect for godly authority, and tender hearts toward other believers.

Statements of the theme:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

—Colossians 2:6–10 ESV

Paul emphasizes the cosmic significance of Christ as Lord of creation and Head of the Church. Any teaching, practice, or intermediary that detracts from the uniqueness and centrality of Christ is against the faith.

—Charles Ryrie
Ryrie Study Bible

Colossians proclaims the absolute supremacy and sole-sufficiency of Jesus Christ (cf. esp. 1:18; 2:9; 3:11). It is, as A.T. Robertson says [in *Paul and the Intellectuals*], Paul's "full-length portrait of Christ."

—Curtis Vaughan
Colossians

Background for Colossians

(From Wayne Braudrick's *Notes on Colossians*)

Historical and Geographical Background

We have no idea when Colossae was founded. It sits on the Lycus River in a volcanic rift that provides the most natural pass through the hills from Ephesus (about 110 miles west) to the upper lands of Anatolia and eventually, the rich trade routes of the Euphrates. The city first appears in historical records when the Persian emperor Xerxes ("Ahasuerus" in the Book of Esther) visited there sometime around 480 BC. It was a prosperous trade city at that time, a fortune that continued at least 80 more years. Xenophon traveled through there on a military mission in 401 BC and called Colossae "a city inhabited and prosperous and great." (Anabasis I.ii.6).



But, Colossae did not maintain her position or prestige. We don't know the exact stages of decay, but Colossae appears to have declined through each of the successive kingdoms to rule Anatolia. Phrygia was first, a kingdom famous for her "liberty" cap (the floppy-topped "beanie" of today is a direct copy) and mighty kings immortalized in Greek mythology (Gordias who founded the capital Gordium and whose "Gordian Knot" would later be cut by Alexander the Great, Midas who was cursed to turn whatever he touched to gold, and Mygdon who battled with the Amazons). Phrygian power peaked under the historical king Midas (not the gold-finger), who dominated most of western and central Anatolia. After him, Gordium was sacked by Cimmerians about 695 BC. Phrygia then became subject to the Lydian kingdom. Later, Persia dominated, as Xerxes and his successors reached toward Greece. After the Greeks defeated Persia, Alexander and his Hellenistic successors ruled Anatolia. Once the transfer of Greek power to Rome had begun, the nearby city-state of Pergamum briefly ruled the area, followed finally by Rome. In the late second century BC, Rome made Colossae and the other Lycus Valley cities part of the Roman province of "Asia." The writer Strabo traveled through Colossae near the time of Christ and called it "a small town" (Geography XII.viii.13).

As Colossae declined, her closest neighbors grew. Situated about 10 miles NNW from Colossae, Laodicea became a very powerful city, taking over as the hub of trade and banking. In fact, Rome named it the capital city of the political district. This represented a spectacular rise for a town founded in honor of the scheming, vindictive, divorced wife of the Hellenistic king Ptolemy II (283–246 BC), named Laodice. Laodicea became so wealthy and sure that the citizens immediately rebuilt their city after the devastating earthquake in AD 60. They did so without accepting the aid offered by the Roman government. The rebuilt waterworks are exceptionally impressive, with a large cold springs/well complex across from a massive hot spring Nyphaeum. (The raised street over a waste water sewer that separates these two complexes helps explain Jesus' words to the city in Revelation.)

Hierapolis, 13 miles in another direction, became famous as a spa city, as the hot springs full of limestone minerals created the kind of sensation such things always do. The spillways and punchbowls flowing down from Hierapolis' lofty terrace are still a major attraction. (However, no one is allowed to enter the bowls today. In the hubristic eyes of the "World Heritage Site" manifesto, modern people will immediately ruin something that millions of visitors over thousands of years couldn't bother.) The Hellenistic and Roman ruins are extensive, speaking to a wealthy population growing during the years of Colossae's decline. The city name may mean "holy city" in reference to the Plutonium—a deep hole that released poison gases and supposedly went down to Hades/Pluto's kingdom. But it could be named for Hiera, the Amazon queen defeated by the Phrygian king Mygda.

Each of these cities had early churches, likely founded by Paul's companion Epaphras, who was himself a Colossian. On his third missionary journey, Paul traveled through the area but apparently did not stop in Colossae. The church at Colossae became well-

known (likely because of Paul’s letter) and even had a bishop for a number of years, until the declining fortunes of the city forced the bishopric to move to Khonai. A reportedly lovely church stood on the site until Colossae was burned by the Seljuk Turks as part of their great eleventh through twelfth century uprising under a re-invigorated fundamental Islam. The devastated city was plundered for marble to build other medieval settlements and almost nothing of Colossae remains above-ground today.

It’s instructive to consider Colossian decline in light of apostolic correspondence. It is fascinating that this rather tiny, diminished church received one of the only extant letters from an apostle. This little town was blessed with scripture, showing again that God truly does choose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise and reminding churches today to care more about healthy growth in Christ than the measurements preferred by the worldly-successful (1 Cor. 1:27).

Paul and the Early Churches

Paul traveled through the area, planting churches and inspiring others to do the same. Unlike earlier struggles with Corinth, his authority in Asia appears unchallenged. We have no reason to doubt the legendary claim that Epaphras founded the church in Colossae. Of course, most first century churches were established where Jews had settled, and there were many Jews in this area of Anatolia. This led to a fascinating mix of Jew and Gentile in the Lycus Valley congregations—something many other churches wouldn’t experience until later.

Though much of the congregation was evidently Gentile, we can detect a strong Hebrew presence in both Colossae and the church there. The text speaks to a Jewish base in the Colossian heresy, something Dr. Lightfoot pointed out over a century ago. (See J.B. Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*.) Also, the Lycus Valley towns boasted a strong Jewish population. Barclay notes:

These three cities stood in an area in which there were many Jews. Many years before, [Hellenistic king] Antiochus the Great had transported two thousand Jewish families from Babylonia and Mesopotamia...These Jews had prospered and, as always happens in such a case, more of their fellow countrymen had come into the area to share their prosperity...The number of Jews who resided there can be seen from the following historical incident. In the year 62 B.C., Flaccus was the Roman governor resident [at Laodicea]. He sought to put a stop to the practice of the Jews sending money out of the province to pay the Temple tax. He did so by placing an embargo on the export of currency; and in his own part of the province alone he seized as contraband no less than twenty pounds of gold which was meant for the Temple at Jerusalem. That amount of gold would represent the Temple tax of no fewer than 11,000 people. Since women and children were exempt from the tax and since many Jews would successfully evade capture of their money, we may well put the Jewish population as high as almost 50,000.

—William Barclay

The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians



Several inscriptions in Hierapolis refer to Jews. They used self-designations to delineate their Jewish places, including the terms “settlement” (*katoikountes*) and “people” (*laos*) (CIJ 775–76). The monument pictured here reads: “The grave and the burial ground beneath it together with the base and the place belong to Aurelia Glykonis, daughter of Ammianos, and her husband Marcus Aurelius Alexander Theophilos, also known as Aphelias, of the people of the Judeans. They will be buried in it, but it is not lawful for anyone else to be buried in it. If this is violated, the guilty one will pay a fine of 1000 denaria to the people of the Judeans. A copy of this inscription was placed in the archives.”

Paul’s Partners

The Apostle works with and through various partners in his ministry. This team includes his co-sender Timothy, the letter carriers Onesimus and Tychicus, and of course the Colossian church’s founder, Epaphras. Paul mentions a number of other Christian brethren and instructs the Colossians to forward the letter to the Laodicean church. Getz points out that “all spiritual leaders should operate according to this ministry team model illustrated so often in scripture” (Life Essentials Study Bible 1649).

Epaphras is worthy of a further word. Paul tells us that this remarkable man is Colossian (Col. 4:12), a servant of Jesus (verse 12), a diligent laborer among the three Lycus Valley congregations (verse 13), and a fellow-prisoner in Christ (Phlm. 23). He was a committed prayer partner and willing to suffer for others to know and grow in Christ.

Theological Background

Debates have raged for years regarding the exact nature of the heresy tormenting the Colossian church. Since we were not intended to be privy to Epaphras’ initial report to Paul, we cannot speak with absolute certainty.

Epaphras came to Paul in prison to report a problem with false teachers who taught a mixture of Christianity with Greek philosophy called Gnosticism (2:8) and Jewish legalism (cf. Jewish elements, 2:11, 16, 17; 3:11; angel worship, 1:16; 2:15, 18 and asceticism 2:20–23).

...The essence of the problem centered around the person and work of Christ. The Gnostics denied that Jesus was fully man but affirmed that He was fully divine because of their eternal antagonistic dualism between matter and spirit.

...They also denied His mediatorial preeminence. For them there were many angelic levels (*eons*) between a good high god and humanity; Jesus, even though the highest, was only one of the gods. They also tended to be intellectually exclusive (cf. 3:11, 14, 16, 17) and emphasized a special exclusive secret knowledge (cf. 2:15, 18, 19) as the path to God instead of Jesus' atoning, vicarious sacrifice and mankind's repentant faith response to His free offer of forgiveness.

—Bob Utley, *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philippians)* Volume 8

The text gives some interesting clues as to its syncretistic nature:

- It has some form of Judaism at its base. This is revealed in Paul's discussion of circumcision (2:11; 3:11) and dietary regulations (2:16), as well as his allusion to Sabbath and festival days (2:16).
- It purports to be a philosophy, but Paul calls it "hollow and deceptive philosophy" (2:8).
- Mysticism is surely some part, since 2:18 describes "access to a visionary realm," and the leaders of the heresy claim special authority and status.
- Pagan mystery religion may be blended into this unholy mess. Chapter 2 could be speaking against the placating of deity and earning of salvation inherent in the pagan mysteries. Also, the license that horrifies God would fit the mysteries best. Finally, Paul's purposeful use of "mystery" in the correct Bible sense is telling.
- Asceticism is clearly a part, as the denouncing in 2:20–23 reveals. This may have been rooted in incipient Gnosticism.
- These false teachers claimed to be Christians, yet they denied the supremacy of Jesus.

Thus, the Colossian heresy Paul addresses had Jewish, pagan, and Christian elements mixed up together. Paul gives the definitive answer in his brilliant, inspired letter. The answer to everything is Jesus.

Lesson 1 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- We remember to treat other believers as brothers.
- We demonstrate our faithfulness to God in how we live out His truth in our interactions with the world around us.

Key Concepts

- The gospel is absolute truth in a world of uncertainty.
- The gospel has the power to change lives.

Insights

The Greeting (verses 1–2)

Any good letter begins with a greeting. It's a formality, of course; but it sets the tone of the rest of the letter. The subject matter of Colossians could have been communicated harshly or even been read as stiff and formal. Instead, Paul opens his epistle in kindness and familiarity. In addition to the "grace and peace" salutation that we have come to expect from this apostle, there are other parts of this greeting that are worthy of note.

Our brother...faithful brothers—Perhaps bearing in mind that he will be addressing deep theological concepts and correcting errors in their theology, Paul chooses to focus on how their faith has bound them together. Also, since he had never met the Colossian church personally, it was good to reiterate their familial connection in Christ.

The saints in Christ at Colossae—This designation acknowledges two (often contrasting) realms in which the believers exist: the spiritual and the physical. Both have significant influence on how they live. Their culture tries to change them from the outside even as they allow Christ to change them from the inside.

The opening greeting closes with a most significant placing of two things side by side. He writes to the Christians who are in Colossae and who are in Christ. A Christian always moves in two spheres. He is in a certain place in this world; but he is also in Christ. He lives in two dimensions. He lives in this world whose duties he does not treat lightly; but above and beyond that he lives in Christ. In this world he may move from place to place; but wherever he is, he is in Christ. That is why outward circumstances make little difference to the Christian; his peace and his joy are not dependent on them. That is why he will do any job with all his heart. It may be menial, unpleasant, painful, it may be far less distinguished than he might expect to have; its rewards may be small and its praise non-existent; nevertheless the Christian will do it diligently, uncomplainingly and cheerfully, for he is in Christ and does all things as to the Lord. We are all in our own Colossae, but we are all in Christ, and it is Christ who sets the tone of our living.

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul's Letter to the Colossians: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary

Who was Epaphras?

The apostle Paul had many partners in ministry who allowed their lives to be directed by God. Not much is recorded about Epaphras, but we do know that he was instrumental in founding the churches in the Lycus Valley. He was a "beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf" (Col.1:7 ESV). And his example should continue to inspire believers even today.

A contracted form of Epaphroditus. He must not, however, be confounded with the messenger of the Philippian community. He was with Paul during a part of his 1st Roman imprisonment, joining in Paul's greetings to Philemon (Philemon 1:23). Epaphras was the missionary by whose instrumentality the Colossians had been converted to Christianity (Colossians 1:7), and probably the other churches of the Lycus had been founded by him. In sending his salutation to the Colossians Paul testified, "He hath much labor for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for them in Hierapolis" (Colossians 4:13). Epaphras had brought to Paul good news of the progress of the gospel, of their "faith in Christ Jesus" and of their love toward all the saints (Colossians 1:4). Paul's regard for him is shown by his designating him "our beloved fellow-servant," "a faithful minister of Christ" (Colossians 1:7), and "a



bondsman of Christ Jesus" (Colossians 4:12 margin). The last designation Paul uses several times of himself, but only once of another besides Epaphras (Philippians 1:1).

—S.F. Hunter
International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

The Truth of the Gospel

We live in an age of relative truth—or rather, where various opinions are elevated to the same status as “truth.” But that concept is powerless, incapable of solving the problems that naturally come from living in a fallen world. It cannot save us, and so we would be without hope if it were not for the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The term gospel is found ninety-nine times in the NASB and ninety-two in the NET Bible. Gospel is the translation of the Greek noun *euangelion* (occurring 76 times), “good news,” and the Greek verb *euangelizo* (occurring 54 times), “to bring or announce good news.” Both words are derived from the noun *angelos*, “messenger.” In Classical Greek, a *euangelos* was one who brought a message of victory or other political or personal news that caused joy. In addition, *euangelizomai* (the middle voice form of the verb) meant “to speak as a messenger of gladness, to proclaim good news.” Further, the noun *euangelion* became a technical term for the message of victory, though it was also used for a political or private message that brought joy.

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul's Letter to the Colossians: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary

The gospel is the “good news” that we have a Savior who loves us and wants to redeem all of His creation. This kind of truth isn’t just additional knowledge to be accumulated and hoarded. It is transformative. “[The gospel] is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it” (Col 1:6 ESV). It is what changed Saul the Pharisee to Paul the Apostle. It is what compelled Epaphras to plant the Colossian church, and it is what should motivate us to faithfully share God’s love to a broken world.

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Lesson 2 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- We should continuously grow in our knowledge of God.
- Our lifestyle should be worthy and pleasing to God, a reflection of our knowledge of Him.

Key Concepts

- We should be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.
- We should walk worthy of the Lord.
- We should remember the blessings of God and give Him thanks.

Insights

The Reason for the Prayer (verse 9a)

"For this reason we also" links verses 9–14 with the preceding section of thanksgiving. Specifically, Paul is referring to the reports from Epaphras regarding (1) their faith, love, and hope and (2) the success of the gospel in their midst. Although Paul was grateful for what God had already done in the lives of the Colossians, he knows their faith and commitment would quickly wane without continuous growth in the truth and knowledge of Christ.

Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding (verse 9b)

The false teachers of the day promoted a "deeper knowledge" that could only be obtained by a select few—namely, the false teachers. Believers could attain greater knowledge by accepting new doctrines from the false teachers. Thus, many Colossians believed they could only hope to attain a limited knowledge of God. The false teachers often used words like *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *spiritual understanding*, so Paul used these very words in his prayer to address and dispel the false teaching.

- **That you may be filled** comes from the Greek word *plēroō* (πληρόω), which means to pervade, influence, and possess fully. Paul was making two specific points to combat the false teaching: (1) believers cannot fill themselves, but must cooperate with the Spirit; and (2) believers can attain a full knowledge.
- **Knowledge** comes from the Greek word *epignōsis* (ἐπίγνωσις), which means full or precise knowledge. This is an emphatic compound term formed from *epi* (above) and *gnōsis* (knowledge), or literally "greater knowledge." The term is used to refer to experiential knowledge of something; in the New Testament, it is used to refer to a full, relational knowledge of God and Christ. Paul is again emphasizing that believers can attain a full knowledge.
- **Wisdom** comes from the Greek word *sophia* (σοφία), which refers to the basic, fundamental precepts. In this context, it refers to the basic principles and truths of the Word that every believer should know and live by.
- **Understanding** comes from the Greek word *synesis* (σύνεσις), from which the English word synthesis is derived. It means to bring together, or unite. With *synesis*, you take wisdom (biblical truth) and apply it to the details of your life or a specific situation for critical discernment. Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with *spiritual* understanding, thus our discernment and understanding should be guided by the Spirit.

The true knowledge of God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding enables believers to walk worthy of the Lord.

Commentary on Verse 9

Through his prayer in Colossians 1:9, Paul has charged us to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. To be so filled is in essence to be filled with God Himself and to begin to experience His fullness—His character, peace, comfort, power, and purpose (compare Ephesians 3:19).

In this regard, 2 Corinthians 4:6–7 teaches us an important truth.

4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 4:7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

According to this passage, what are we? We are clay vessels that God has designed to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the person and work of Christ. But when this occurs in us, it will result in transformed lives, lives that manifest the power of God in Christ-like living. Thus, in Colossians 1:10–14, Paul points us to the kind of fruitful life that is the designed end of a being filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul's Letter to the Colossians: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary

Walk Worthy of the Lord

The false teachers in Colossae attracted people through their offer of “spiritual knowledge,” but they did not relate this knowledge to life. In the Christian life, knowledge and obedience go together. There is no separation between learning and living. The wisdom about which Paul prayed was not simply a head knowledge of deep spiritual truths. True spiritual wisdom must affect the daily life. Wisdom and practical intelligence must go together (Keathley).

Walk comes from the Greek word *peripateō* (περιπατέω), which means to walk, live, and conduct one’s life. It literally means to walk around and implies a lifestyle.

Thus, the goal of spiritual understanding in verse 9 is a changed lifestyle, a new manner of living that is pleasing and glorifying to God. Pleasing the Lord stands in direct opposition to a worldly mindset that seeks primarily to please self.

In the Greek text, verses 9–20 are one sentence (Utley). There are four participles that describe the result of walking worthy of the Lord. All of the participles are in the continuous present tense and thus describe the walk, or pattern of life, that pleases God (Keathley). Each participle is followed by a prepositional phrase. The four participles are listed below in bold, and their related prepositional phrases are italicized:

- **Bearing fruit** *in every good work.*
- **Growing** *in the knowledge of God.*
- **Be strengthened** *with all power.*
- **Giving thanks** *to the Father.*

Five Reasons to Give Thanks

Giving thanks is the fourth participle that describes a life that is growing in spiritual understanding. One of the reasons that giving thanks is so important is that it focuses our attention away from self and toward God. Thankfulness cannot occur out of ignorance; it requires a degree of comprehension about the things for which we should be thankful. Therefore, Paul gives the Colossians some specific reasons to be thankful. The reasons that Paul lists are just a partial listing of the many blessings believers have through Christ, but they provide an excellent foundation for understanding what we have received through Christ.

Through Christ, the Father has

- **enabled** us to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light,
- **rescued** us from the domain of darkness,
- **transferred** us into the kingdom of the Son (whom He loves),
- **redeemed** us, and
- **forgiven** us.

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Lesson 3 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- Jesus Christ is the preeminent One.

Key Concepts

- We should be awed and inspired by the person and work of Jesus.
- We should rejoice and worship Him for His redemptive work in our lives.
- We should remain grounded and steadfast in the faith.

Insights

While Paul was not addressing full-blown Gnosticism (it would later develop in the second century), it appears that the false teaching in Colossae included an incipient form of Gnosticism that was blended with certain Jewish traditions and teachings. Many of the terms that Paul uses are commonly used in Gnostic teachings, and Paul seems to be addressing those concepts and directly countering the false teaching.

The Christ Hymn

Verse 15–20 is a poetic passage that deals with the lordship of Jesus Christ and His redemptive acts. The passage may reflect an early church hymn or creed. Paul emphasizes the “full knowledge” of Jesus, including His lordship over all creation and His redemptive acts. Paul uses several popular Gnostic terms (such as *firstborn*, and *fullness*) to apparently counter the false teaching in Colossae. These verses represent one of the loftiest descriptions of Christ’s character and deity to be found in scripture.

Do these six verses really contain a hymn? Certainly one cannot recognize here the established forms of either Hebrew or Greek poetry. What is here is rhythmical prose, but it is rhythmical prose with a strophic arrangement such as is found in much early Christian hymnody. As with the “Christ hymn” in Philippians 2:6–11, it is not of the first importance to decide whether Paul is composing the words *de novo* or reproducing an inspired composition already known to him (and possibly to his readers) and stamping it with his apostolic authority.

The strophic arrangement is indicated by the repetition of key words or phrases. There appear to be two strophes—verses 15–16 and verses 18b–20—with verses 17–18a supplying a transitional link between them. Each strophe begins with *hos eimi* (ὅς εἰμί) (“He who is”) and exhibits the key words *prōtotokos* (πρωτότοκος) (“first-born”), *hoti en autos* (ὅτι ἐν αὐτός) (“because in Him”), *dia autos* (διὰ αὐτός) (“through Him”), *ho pas* (ὁ πᾶς) (“all things”). The first and last clauses of the transitional link begin with *kai autos eimi* (καὶ αὐτός εἰμί) (“He indeed is”), the first summing up the preceding strophe and the last introducing the following strophe.

—F.F. Bruce

The “Christ Hymn” of Colossians 1:15–20

The Image of the Invisible God

The image of the invisible God means that Jesus is the exact likeness and manifestation of God. The invisible has become visible.

Paul counters the common false teaching by asserting that Jesus is nothing less than the exact image of God; He is both a representation and manifestation of God. If you want to know what God is like, you need only look at Jesus.

For further investigation, compare the following verses:

- John 1:1, 14, 18;
- John 14:9-11;
- 1 Timothy 1:17; and
- Hebrews 1:3.

The Firstborn of All Creation

Firstborn denotes two things about Christ: (1) He preceded all of creation, and (2) He is sovereign over all of creation. In Jewish culture, a firstborn child had priority in the family, and enjoyed the privilege of dignity and superiority. The Greek word for *firstborn* is *prōtotokos* (πρωτότοκος). However, Paul describes Jesus as *ho prōtotokos* (ὁ πρωτότοκος). The addition of the definite article has the connotation of “absolutely first” or before all others.

This term has been the source of much debate. Some would argue that Jesus is a part of creation and is merely the first created of all beings. This is erroneous for several reasons.

First, it is inconsistent with the context. Since everything was created by Him (verse 16), then He must precede creation—not be a part of it.

Second, it is inconsistent with the whole of scripture which affirms His uniqueness and participation in creation. (Compare with John 1:3, for instance.)

Third, the word *prōtotokos* has two connotations. It can refer to first in *time* (priority) or first in *rank* (sovereignty). Based on Paul’s statement in verse 18 (“He is the head of the body”), it seems clear that Paul is referring to His sovereignty.

Everything Created by Him

Jesus was God’s agent of creation, both of the visible and invisible, of earthly and heavenly spheres—everything. Jesus is the agent in creation, but the Father is the primary cause. Although the common world view of Paul’s time accepted a spiritual realm, it rejected the notion that there is any relationship between spirit and matter. Thus, Paul is refuting the false teaching regarding creation.

The verb “created” is used twice in verse 16. The first is an aorist passive and the second is a perfect passive verb. The aorist indicates a definite action at a specific point in time and completed; the perfect tense indicates a definite action in the past, and the action continues to the present. Creation was in (*en*) Jesus, through (*dia*) Jesus, and for (*eis*) Jesus.

All things—Paul leaves little doubt about Christ’s singular authority. Notice the word “all” is repeated seven times in this passage. It is the Greek word *pas* (πᾶς) which means the whole, the entirety, and in all respects.

- **Everything** was created by Him (verse 16a).
- **All things** have been created through Him (verse 16b).
- He is before **all things** (verse 17a).
- By Him **all things** hold together (verse 17b).
- So that He might come to have first place in **everything** (verse 18).
- God was pleased to have **all His fullness** to dwell in Him (verse 19).
- To reconcile **everything** to Himself (verse 20).

The Preeminent Person of Christ

In verses 15–18, Paul highlights several unique characteristics that qualify Jesus Christ to be the preeminent One who has supremacy over all things. Dr. Constable provides the following list of thirteen assertions about Christ:

- He is the image of the invisible God (verse 15).
- He is the first-born of creation (verse 15).
- He is the originator of creation (verse 16).
- He is the agent of creation (verse 16).
- He is the goal of creation (verse 16).
- He is the antecedent of creation (verse 17).
- He is the sustainer of creation (verse 17).
- He is the head of the church (verse 18).
- He is the first-born from the dead (verse 18).
- He is the preeminent one (verse 18).

- He is the fullness of God (verse 19).
- He is the reconciler of all things to Himself (verse 20).
- He is the maker of peace (verse 20).

Christ the Redeemer

Following the Christ hymn in verses 15–20, Paul’s focus in verses 21–23 is on Christ’s redemptive work through His death and resurrection.

Christ’s Physical Body—Paul’s reference to Christ’s “fleshly body” may have been intended to distinguish it from His “spiritual body,” which is the church. One of the popular heresies of the day was that Jesus only *appeared* to have a physical body. This teaching was based on the incorrect notion that all flesh is inherently evil, and thus Christ could not have had a real flesh body. Paul counters this teaching by emphasizing His shed blood (verse 20), His physical body (verse 22), and His death (verse 22).

Once vs. Now—Paul presents a strong contrast between the Colossians’ pre-Christian status and their favorable situation now as Christians. Paul identified the *former* condition of the believers at Colossae. The phrase “once you were” comes from the Greek words *eimi pote* (εἰμί ποτε), which means “at some other time, either past or future, but not now.” In context, Paul was clearly stating the former condition of the believers. They were formerly:

- **Alienated**—Sin has resulted in estrangement from God and thus creates the need for reconciliation. (See also Ephesians 2:12; 4:18.) Their alienation is due, in part, to the fact that they were hostile in mind.
- **Hostile in mind**—speaks of a state of enmity or active hostility and opposition. This opposition is specifically in the realm of the mind (i.e. rejecting truth). (See also Romans 1:21–22.)

Reconciliation – As a result of Christ’s redemptive work, believers have been reconciled to God. Christ is now working in believers to present them holy, blameless, and above reproach before God. Paul is, of course, referring to the believers’ *position* in Christ, and not their behavior. In Christ, believers are:

- **Holy**—meaning set apart from sin,
- **Blameless**—meaning without blemish or defect (faultless), and
- **Above reproach**—meaning without any occasion for condemnation.

The language used in this passage is the same as that used in the Old Testament to describe the unblemished animals that the Levitical priest would bring for a sacrifice to God. When Christ brings His followers to the Father for inspection, they will be found to be perfect in every way—unblemished and above reproach.

Remain Grounded and Steadfast

Verse 23 is often used to suggest that believers can fall away from grace. That is not what Paul is suggesting in this verse. Paul affirms the believers and their position in Christ, but tempers it with a warning about drifting away from the truth. This is the central theme and purpose of Paul’s letter to the Colossians: he wants them to be assured of who they are in Christ, and not be swayed by the false teachings that were tormenting the church at Colossae. The idea here is very similar to Jesus’ story contrasting the person who built his house on the sand with the one who built his house on the rock. (See Matthew 7:24–27.) Paul wanted the Colossians to build their house on the solid foundation of truth and not on the shifting sands of false teaching.

“If” introduces a condition the writer assumed was true to reality for the sake of his argument (a first class condition in Greek). We could translate it, “since.” Paul assumed his readers would do what he described because perseverance is normal for genuine believers. However, perseverance in the faith is not inevitable. Apostasy is a real possibility to which he alluded here, and it is necessary to abide in the faith to obtain a good report from the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ.

—Dr. Thomas W. Constable
Bibliotheca Sacra 164:653 (January–March 2007)

The apostle concludes this section with a strong conditional sentence that has both a positive affirmation and a negative warning. The positive element is seen in the fact that the condition is a first class condition that assumes the condition of remaining established, that is firm in the faith, has been, is, and will be true of the Colossians. This is made even more emphatic with the particle *indeed*, which serves to emphasize the word it is attached to, in this case, the first class condition *if*.

The negative warning is seen in the clause, “without shifting from the hope of the gospel you heard.” So there is a real danger presented here, a danger of not being presented before the Lord at the Bema as mature believers whose lives have been consistent in the process of spiritual growth or Christ-like sanctification. This is consistent with what the apostle says in other parts of this letter about the danger of being “careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (2:8), and of not holding “fast to the head from whom the whole body, supported and knit together through its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God” (2:19).

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
The Supremacy of the Work of Christ: The Purpose and Application of His Work

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Lesson 4 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- We should labor diligently for the truth.
- We should be prepared for suffering.

Key Concepts

- Paul uses chiasm to drive home his point.
- We should understand and be able to share the Gospel.
- We should understand the mystery.

Insights

The Gospel

In the preceding verses of Chapter 1, Paul has described the preeminence of Christ both as sovereign creator and head of the church, and the supremacy of His redemptive work. The Gospel message—which centers on the preeminent person and work of Jesus—must be proclaimed because it is God’s only plan of salvation for the entire world. Paul concludes the previous section by saying “This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it” (Col. 1:23 HCSB).

Paul’s concluding statement in the previous section now becomes the focus of the next section, in which Paul sets forth his role in proclaiming the Gospel message (Col. 1:24–2:3).

Chiasm

In this passage, Paul writes in a brilliant chiasm, a literary device used commonly by Hebrews. Chiasm refers to a crosswise structure of concepts and words that are repeated in reverse order, similar to the letter x in which two lines cross each other. In fact, the term is derived from the Greek letter *chi*, which is the letter we call x. Chiasm was often used in oral literature to aid in memorization. Old Testament writers may have used this arrangement as a means of interpretive control by helping the reader focus on the main point.

Although Paul is writing to a primarily Greek audience, he reverts to his Hebrew roots to drive home a very important message. The structure of his chiasm is as follows:

- **A** I suffer for the body of Christ, a cause of joy.
- **B** I serve God’s church, making His message fully known.
- **C** The mystery is ancient and now clear to Christians.
- **C** The mystery is that Gentiles have hope of glory in Christ.
- **B** We proclaim Jesus, teaching with all wisdom.
- **A** I labor for everyone’s maturity in Christ, something empowered by Jesus.

Paul Serves the Church (A)

Paul’s suffering

Since Paul was proclaiming the success of the Gospel, it might have seemed ironic to some of his readers that he was writing this letter from prison. Paul therefore assured his readers that his current afflictions were part of God’s plan, and he rejoiced in them. There are three things that characterized Paul’s sufferings:

- They were a source of joy.
- They were for the benefit of others (namely, the Colossian believers), for the sake of the body of Christ.
- They were related to the sufferings and afflictions of Christ.

Completing what is lacking

Verse 24 has been a source of controversy with varied opinions as to its meaning. Paul does not imply that there is a deficiency in Christ's death and suffering on the cross. That would contradict the central message of the epistle, as well as the rest of Scripture. (See Hebrews 9:12, 24–26, 10:14.) Christ's sufferings were complete and sufficient; nothing can be added to secure salvation. What was "lacking" in Christ's afflictions was the future suffering of all believers who, like Paul, will experience great affliction for the sake of the gospel.

- These words have evoked a great amount of discussion. Many Roman Catholics, for instance, interpreting the "afflictions" of Christ as Christ's redemptive sufferings, have used this verse 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. But whatever is meant by "what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions," we may be sure that Paul did not regard the death of Jesus as lacking in efficacy (see Colossians 2:11–15). That death was complete, once for all, and wholly adequate to meet man's need.
- The simplest and most logical explanation stems from the union that exists between Christ and that of His people in the body of Christ, the church. When believers suffer, Christ suffers with them. Christ's substitutionary sufferings are finished, complete, but His sufferings in and through His people continue. This concept is expressed in several other passages of the New Testament (see, for example Matthew 25:34–40; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; Acts 9:4–5.)

—J. Hampton Keathley, III
Paul's Letter to the Colossians

It is no wonder, then, that Paul rejoiced in his sufferings. Seen in the light of his union with Christ, they were transfigured and made an occasion for fellowship with Him, as well as a benefit to the body, the church.

Paul's labor

In verse 29, Paul had to expend physical, mental, and spiritual energy for the cause of the Gospel. Sometimes he had to contend with adversaries in the world, and sometimes with his own flesh. Nevertheless, the supernatural power of the indwelling Christ energized him.

- **Labor** comes from the Greek word *kopiaō* (κοπιᾶω), which means to work to the point of weariness, to be faint with exhaustion.
- **Striving** comes from the Greek word *agōnizomai* (ἀγωνίζομαι), which means to contend or fight in a public contest. Our word *agony* is derived from this word. Paul is not talking about light-duty work; the work of the Gospel requires hard work and dedication.

But the key here is the means he depended on for both his motivation and strength to continue. The apostle labored, struggling hard in the task God had given him, but not in his own strength. He labored and struggled only by the strength that God abundantly supplies to all His people if they will just draw upon His supernatural resources—the Word, the Holy Spirit, and prayer. His success was due to the energy of the eternal God. It was not his education (considerable though it may have been), nor his culture that was so deeply rooted in the life and literature of God's ancient people, nor his shrewd methodology—and he was a master of missionary strategy—nor was it simply hard work. His secret lay in his Companion.

Paul Proclaims Jesus (B)

Paul's Service

In verse 25, Paul viewed himself as a divinely commissioned steward of the Gospel and the church.

- **Servant** comes from the Greek word *diakonos* (διάκονος), which means to help another as an attendant. We get the English word *deacon* from this word. The focus on the word is that of ministry to others as a servant who comes alongside to help. Paul uses it to describe himself as a servant of the gospel (Col. 1:23), of the church (Col. 1:25), and of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6).
- **Administration** comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία), which means the stewardship or management of a household. The key idea here is that of a divine appointment, a stewardship bestowed on the apostle. Paul saw his call as a divine appointment, a high calling from God. On the one hand, he was a servant of the church; but more importantly, he was a steward of God and accountable to Him first and foremost. It was a stewardship that was given to him—he did not earn it or deserve it. It was a grace gift and privilege given to Paul from God.

Paul's Proclamation

In verse 28, Paul states that he proclaims the message by warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom. The method by which this is done is spelled out with two participles meaning, "warning (or admonishing) and teaching."

- **Warning** comes from the Greek word *noutheteō* (νουθετέω), which means literally to "put into the mind," to admonish or warn. The basic idea is that of putting sense into the mind through warning, counsel, or admonishment. This is the negative side of proclamation and carries a moral appeal to the volition to straighten out something that is out of order or contrary to the will and purpose of God.
- **Teaching** comes from the Greek word *didaskō* (διδάσκω), which means to instruct or direct. This is the positive side of proclamation and involves the impartation of biblical truth to lay the needed foundation for biblical wisdom or understanding. In "admonishment" there is a moral appeal for spiritual change, and with "teaching" there is a doctrinal emphasis that forms the means and basis for change through the power of God's gracious work in Christ.

Both negative admonitions and positive teaching methods were necessary to bring all people to full maturity in Christ. Paul's goal was to present every person mature in Christ. Paul had the imminent return of Christ in view as the time when he desired to present every person mature in Christ.

- **Mature** comes from the Greek word *teleios* (τέλειος), which means brought to completion, or fully accomplished. The word is sometimes translated *perfect*, which implies a future, eschatological focus of ultimate sanctification, but full perfection will be attained only when Christ returns and believers are fully transformed. Paul's focus is on the present experience of the Colossians, so *mature* is the better translation. Our task in ministry is never over with the conversion of men and women. That's only the beginning. The objective of the church is to see all believers grow from one stage of maturity to another, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Mystery (C)

The message Paul preached is further explained as "the mystery."

- **Mystery** comes from the Greek word *mystērion* (μυστήριον), which means a secret which would remain such but for revelation. The term as it is used by Paul does not refer to something mysterious, but refers to a divine truth that is unknowable apart from special revelation. Paul explains that the mystery is a message that has been hidden in the past (unknown in the Old Testament), but now is revealed in Christ through the stewardship given to Paul and other New Testament apostles and prophets.

The mystery does not refer to something mysterious or to a secret ritual. Rather, Paul is speaking of God's unfolding plan for the world and, above all, His plan of redemption through the Messiah. The mystery was not that Gentiles would be saved, but how they could be "fellow-heirs" on the same level with Jews, without a partitioning wall between them. (See also Eph. 2:12–14 and 3:6.)

The mystery is further described as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27 ESV). Paul's writing stresses God's initiative in revealing the message and man's complete helplessness at deriving and understanding it. As a message of God's complete and finished work of grace in Christ, it is completely foreign to man's fallen mind. Always, man seeks to either subtract from or add to the gospel of grace in Christ.

In Christ: A Central Theme in Colossians

The work of Christ is a central theme in Colossians. The following list was compiled by Dr. Constable:

- **In whom** we have redemption (1:14).
- **In him** all things were created (1:16).
- **In him** all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (1:19).
- Reconciled **in his body** of flesh (1:22).
- **In whom** are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3).
- Walk **in him** (2:6).
- Rooted and built up **in him** (2:7).
- **In him** all the fullness of deity dwells bodily (2:9).
- You have been filled **in him** (2:10).

- You were circumcised **in him** (2:11).
- **In him** you were raised up (2:12).
- Triumphant over them **in him** (2:15).
- Pleasing **in the Lord** (3:20).
- Fellow servant **in the Lord** (4:7).
- The ministry that you have received **in the Lord** (4:17).

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Lesson 5 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study of Colossians 2:1–10?

- Jesus Christ is fully God (verse 9), He contains all wisdom and knowledge (verse 3), and He is above all other authority (verse 10).
- When our faith is rooted in a firm understanding of Christ (verse 7), we can live (verse 6) in rich assurance (verse 2).
- This assurance includes knowing that all arguments (verse 4), philosophies, and traditions not based on Christ alone, or which lead away from Christ alone, are wrong (verse 8).
- This assurance also helps us live in love, unity, and good order (verses 2, 5).

Insights

Leaders, review sections from the Series Overview at the beginning of the Appendix, such as the Theme, Premise, and Background information.

Mystery, Wisdom, and Knowledge

Paul’s use of the terms *mystery*, *wisdom*, and *knowledge* in Colossians 2:2 and 3, followed by his statement of purpose in verse 4, hint that the churches of the Lycus Valley, the region including both Colossae and Laodicea were dealing with an attempt by outsiders to augment the original Christian teachings on which those churches were founded. (See verse 1.) It is possible that Epaphras journeyed to meet with Paul specifically to receive advice on how to deal with this insidious new problem. Paul’s response—the preeminence of Christ—is presented in the very language of those who may have been trying to subvert the believer’s reliance on Christ alone.

In mystery cults, a “mystery” was a secret ritual one performed to enter into relationship with a god. This union carried benefits such as immortality. Because the Colossians knew of these teachings from their culture, Paul applies the term “mystery” to Christ in his letter. Christ—the mystery of God—reveals and fulfills God’s plan of salvation (Eph. 3:4, 9; Col. 1:20–23). Since Christ unites believers with God and gives them eternal life, the Colossians have no need for secret rituals.

Jewish traditions prized wisdom, and mystery cults valued knowledge—but Christ is the true source of both. Since the believers of Colossae have Christ (1:27), they have no need for the wisdom and knowledge of false teachers. Christ, both sufficient and unique, provides them with an understanding of how to act wisely.

—*Faithlife Study Bible*
FaithLife.com

We Are Not Self-Sufficient

Paul makes it clear in Colossians 2:2 and 2:8, as well as 1:23, that it is possible for us to lose our focus on Christ alone, to be deluded, even to be taken captive by fine-sounding “teachers.” Our pride alone is enough to coax us into the heresy of thinking we must add something to Christ’s sacrifice for God to accept us. When coupled with convincing arguments from people who seem to have some authority or expertise, our reasoning is all too easily duped into donning a blindfold and submitting to being led astray as if we were actually blind.

Paul blows this up by stating that there is no higher authority than Christ, there is no other correct wisdom or knowledge outside of Christ. He’s telling us to not put on a blindfold, because we have the light of Christ in us (Col. 1:12), the fullness of deity Himself. What more could we possibly need? The temptation to rely on our own reason, on someone else’s reason, or on anything outside of Christ is real, and it’s something we must guard against every day.

Paul’s Prayer

Paul repeats in chapter 2 the structure of a key message from chapter 1 of Colossians: the fact that he is praying for them and the nature and goal of that prayer.

1. Paul is earnestly praying for the believers (1:3, 9; 2:1),
2. that they will continually increase in spiritual wisdom and knowledge in Christ (1:9, 10; 2:2, 3)

3. to the specific end that they will walk in Him fruitfully (1:10, 11; 2:6)
4. and give thanks to God (1:12; 2:7).

Whom do we know who does not need such a prayer lifted on their behalf every day? Who among us would not covet such a prayer from fellow believers lifted on our own behalf?

Lesson 6 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study of Colossians 2:11–23?

- Our salvation was effected by God alone, not by us. We were dead; God made us alive (verse 13). We were burdened with a “body of flesh” (a sinful nature); God circumcised it off of us, changing our very nature (vv. 11–13). We were legally in debt because of sin; God cancelled that debt (verses 13–14).
- Circumcision and personal payment for sin were part of Judaism’s legal requirements, along with many other practices. These have been replaced with Christ and by Christ’s cross (verse 13–17).
- Human-based systems such as mysticism and asceticism lead away from the fullness of life in Christ who is our Head. They are promoted by arrogant false teachers acting according to their own flesh (verses 18–19).
- Human-based systems and “self-made religion” may sound good and appear wise, but they are ultimately empty and useless for either salvation or sanctification (verses 20–23). They attempt to take the place of our trust in the grace of Christ alone.

Insights

Obedience

Obedience is a key aspect of the Christian life. “To obey is better than sacrifice,” as Samuel informed Saul at Gilgal (1 Sam. 15:22). There are many uniform ways in which we all obey God, and there are many personal ways in which we each uniquely obey God. A desire to obey is healthy and natural. But Satan tries to hijack our desire to obey and run it aground into human-based systems intended to replace our trust in, and reliance on, Jesus Christ alone.

Having explained in the beginning of Colossians 2 that Christ is the preeminent, all-sufficient answer, Paul then addresses three common human-based systems that are time and again advocated as alternatives to the only legitimate hope of salvation. Legalism, mysticism, and asceticism were all just as popular in the first century as they are now—and all just as frustratingly pointless.

Legalism

Legalism elevates obedience to an idol. It transmogrifies obedience from a sweet, heartfelt response based on the fact that we have received grace, into a monstrous prerequisite for obtaining grace in the first place or keeping it over time. Legalism is personally futile because it is ultimately impossible. As Paul concluded his reflections on this in Romans 7:21-24: “Wretched man that I am!” (ESV). But “misery loves company” as the saying goes. Legalists rarely keep their frustrating philosophy to themselves, but go about burdening others with their unbearable load. Even genuine, personal obedience turns ugly when one tries to impose it on someone else.

In all its forms, legalism destroys the very essence of what grace is. It diminishes the incalculable value of grace—the sacrifice required by Jesus on the cross—by insinuating that it is not sufficient. And it diminishes our thorough need for grace—the completeness of our death in sin before regeneration—by claiming that there is something we can do to earn salvation.

Legalism existed in its own right, apart from mysticism. Paul spoke vehemently in Galatians about fools who traded the eternal Abrahamic covenant of grace for a warped Mosaic Law. Moses’ Law and its bilateral covenant were never intended for justification, which continues to be found only through Abraham’s experience – grace through faith. Yet these “Judaizers” twisted Moses and ignored both Abraham and Messiah Jesus in their determination to earn their own salvation.

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Colossians

Mysticism

Similarly, our desire to obey is hijacked and run aground when we submit it to the teachings of mystics or ascetics. Both of these false teachings attack us from a basis of seeming wisdom. Mysticism purports to have secret knowledge from spiritual sources and claims to be able to teach others how to obtain the same, as long as they obey the system. The sense of authority is real, and the source seems so irrefutable that obedience to some form of mysticism is an easy option for many people.

Mystery religions: Some of these religions were very old. All were secretive. For example, exposure of the Eleusinian mysteries was cause for immediate death, and most mystery groups held to similar thresholds of privacy. The closed group offered personal salvation through levels of earned attainment. Those who reached each level enjoyed a sense

of community with their fellow achievers. Some of the cults commanded certain ascetic practices; at other times they were wildly licentious and orgiastic. [*The Bacchae* by Euripides gives some hint of the wildness and helps explain why the Roman Senate later forbade the Dionysian mysteries for a season.]

—Wayne Braudrick
Notes on Colossians

Asceticism

Asceticism teaches that everything physical is bad or tainted and must be shunned. Only what is barely required for survival is allowed, with the constant goal of stopping short of any enjoyment. Some also teach that you must inflict pain on your body to offset whatever personal enjoyment occurs unavoidably. Again in this case, our desire to obey is hijacked by something that seems wise because we are all familiar with our innate sinfulness so often experienced through overindulgence of various pleasures.

Paul decries the foolishness of each of these teachings which were likely making attempts to corrupt the church at Colossae. Our circumcision was “made without hands” (Col. 2: 11 ESV); it was not our work. God made us alive with Christ “by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands” (verse 14 ESV). Jesus is fully God, the highest authority of any other, whether physical or spiritual, and the Head of the church (verses 10 and 19). Colossians chapter 2 is Paul's brilliant treatise on Christ's preeminence, which could be subtitled, “Keep watch, people, and don't lose your Head!”

Lesson 7 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study of Colossians 3:1–4?

- We need to give Jesus the respect and devotion that His personhood deserves.
- We should come up with practical ways to set our passion or focus on things above.
- We must live a life mindfully aware of our identities as children of God.
- Jesus Christ is sovereign.
- Our thoughts *will* eventually affect our actions.
- As J.B. Lightfoot says, "We must not *only* seek heaven, we must think heaven."

Insights

What Is the Significance of the Right Hand of God?

From www.CompellingTruth.org/right-hand-of-God.html

(all quotes from the ESV)

In ancient times, a person with high or highest rank stood to the king's right side. Even today, a person may be called someone's "right hand man" or "wingman" when he or she serves as the closest person to another leader. An example of this can be found in Genesis 48:13–14 where Jacob blessed the child who would receive a greater blessing with his right hand. The right hand of God likewise relates to this concept of someone being right next to God, acknowledging both authority and closeness to Him.

While God the Father does not consist of a physical body like humans do, the right hand of God is often used figuratively in Scripture. In the Old Testament, the phrase is used to refer to the coming Messiah. For example, Psalm 110:1 predicts, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'" (also quoted in Matthew 22:44). Psalm 118:16 adds, "the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!"

In the New Testament, we find additional expressions of this phrase in reference to Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:20–21 notes, "...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Romans 8:34 teaches, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

In fact, many times the New Testament writers use "the right hand of God" to express where Jesus is now. Mark 16:19 shares, "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God." Acts 2:33 shares a portion of Peter's sermon on Pentecost that includes, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." The first martyr Stephen was said to have looked into the sky and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). Colossians 3:1 also notes that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 10:12–13 describes this right hand of God as a place of honor and exaltation for Jesus, sharing, "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet." This location gives Him reign over all powers: "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him" (1 Peter 3:21–22).

The right hand of God, therefore, is a reference to both a place of proximity to God the Father and a position of power above all other powers. Jesus the Messiah exists at this right hand of God today, perfectly reigning with God the Father and God the Spirit in community and power.

Hidden in Christ

"Hidden with Christ in God" suggests not only that the believer's life is secure, but also that it belongs in a very real and profound sense to the [currently] invisible spiritual realm. At the present time his connection with God and Christ is a matter of inner experience; one day it will come into full and open manifestation.

—Curtis Vaughan
Colossians

Set Your Heart on Things Above

Note 6 at Col 3:2: The word "set" can mean "to become fixed; harden" (American Heritage Dictionary). This is the way it is used in this verse. This is speaking of a permanent focus on things above.

David fixed his heart on praising the Lord to such a degree that even in the midst of terrible adversity, he remained steadfast (Ps 57:7). Those who do not fix their hearts on the things of God in advance of problems will succumb to the temptation (2Ch 12:14).

The Lord made the heart the driving force behind people's actions. People cannot consistently act contrary to their hearts (Pr 4:23). And the heart doesn't change quickly. Jesus said the people's hearts had "waxed gross" (Mt 13:15). This is talking about a process of change that takes place over a period of time (see note 3 at Mt 13:15).

This process can either be positive or negative. Positively speaking, our hearts can be so set on things above that it would be difficult to immediately change and follow the devil. It takes a period of time to move away from what our affections are set on. In the negative, if our hearts are not set on the things above, then it would be difficult to go contrary to what we have been focusing on and follow God. It takes a process to turn our hearts toward God.

It takes time to set our affections on things above, just like it takes time for concrete to set. But once concrete sets, it is not easily altered. Likewise, our hearts cannot be easily altered from a set state. Therefore, it is imperative that we set our affections on things above.

—Andrew Womack
"Colossians 3:2"

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Lesson 8 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study of Colossians 3:5–17?

- We should be a people who walk with purpose.
- We should clothe ourselves with righteousness and put off evil.
- The Christian walk is a process, not a one-and-done deal.
- Our strength comes from the Lord.
- Love holds all things together.

Insights

Other Bible Passages that Call Us to "Put On"

- Job 29:14 NIV
I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban.
- Isaiah 59:17 NIV
He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.
- Romans 13:12 NIV
The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.
- Ephesians 4:24 NIV
And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Ephesians 6:11-17 NIV
11 Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Definitions

From <http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/col3v5.html>

In Ephesians 3:12, Paul gives the Colossians a list of things that they should take off and put on. You will find some of those list items defined below.

The Good

Heartfelt Compassion σπλάγχνον οίκτιρμός

- **Heartfelt** σπλάγχνον (*splanchnon*)—The chief intestines, viscera; the entrails, bowels, Acts 1:18; metaphorically the heart, the affections of the heart, the tender affections.
- **Compassion** οίκτιρμός (*oiktirmos*)—Compassion; kindness, in relieving sorrow and wan.
- Meaning the seat of emotions.

Kindness χρηστότης (*chrēstotēs*)—means "goodness, kindness, generosity" and is always seeking the highest good in others. Kindness is an attitude that always demonstrates itself in action. It reaches out and touches people.

Humility ταπεινοφροσύνη (*tapeinophrosynē*)—is an attitude of self-evaluation that recognizes one's own weakness and failures, but also the power of God working through the person. This is the kind of person God can use in His kingdom. It is a wholesome esteem, lacking any taint of arrogance. There is a false humility that is deceitful.

Gentleness πραύτης (*prautēs*)—is often translated "meekness" but is really power under control. It is the gentleness that is strong, but humble and courteous, considerate. This "gentleness" does not imply weakness and is a better word than meekness. It is an obedient submission to the will of God and gives strength to put on the other characteristics in this list. It is a fruit of the Spirit and a beatitude of Jesus. Here is the power of our personalities brought into submission to God by the Holy Spirit. Meekness, mildness, forbearance.

Patience μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*)—is "longsuffering" when someone provokes us. It patiently endures when under pressures of life and refuses to retaliate. It is that quality that takes time before action is taken. Patience; patient enduring of evil, fortitude, slowness of avenging injuries, long-suffering, forbearance, clemency.

The Bad, the Ugly

Sexual Immorality πορνεία (*porneia*)—refers to any kind of illicit sexual behavior outside of marriage relationship. It is all sexual immorality including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, close relatives, etc.

Impurity ἀκαθαρσία (*akatharsia*)—means uncleanness, filthiness in a moral sense. It is a perverted immoral life-style. Uncleanness; lewdness; impurity of motive.

Lust/Passion πάθος (*pathos*)—means inordinate affection, a strong drive that does not cease until it is satisfied. This strong desire can be either good or bad, but in this context indicates depraved passion. This person is a slave to his evil desires. He is a driven person who is obsessed by his evil passions. Suffering; an affection, passion, especially sexual.

Evil Desire κακός ἐπιθυμία

- **Evil** κακός (*kakos*)—Bad, of a bad quality or disposition, worthless, corrupt, depraved, wicked, criminal, morally bad; τὸ κακόν—evil, wickedness, crime, deceitful mischievous, harmful, destructive; evil mischief, harm, injury, afflictive; evil, misery, affliction, suffering.
- **Desire** ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*)—Earnest desire, irregular or violent desire, specifically impure desire, lust, metaphorically The object of desire, what enkindles desire. Means, "desire, longing" for something that is forbidden. It is a "lust" for all evil in a broad sense for anything evil. Paul probably includes the word here to cover every conceivable evil thing that is against holiness of God.

Greed πλεονεξία (*pleonexia*)—is covetousness, insatiableness with the idea to desire more and more. It is a selfish greed that cannot be satisfied. Here is the person who wants that which is forbidden to him. It is beyond his means so he takes it anyhow. It leads to rape, murder, robbery, wars, etc. If I cannot have what you possess by legal means, I will take it by any means.

Anger ὀργή (*orgē*)—is the long-lasting, slow burning anger. It tends to stay around a long time. Mental bent, impulse; anger, indignation, wrath, indignantly, vengeance, punishment.

Rage/Wrath θυμός (*thumos*)—refers to a burning anger that flares up quickly and burns with the intensity of a fire. It just as quickly dies out. It is like burning dry pine straw that blazes up quickly and burns itself out.

Malice κακία (*kakia*)—is an all-pervading evil mind-set that conceives of evil things to do. It is a vicious nature that is predetermined to do evil to others. This person is just plain bad, evil, wicked. He has a deliberate intention to do evil. Calamity, misfortune.

Slander βλασφημία (*blasphēmia*)—is the word from which we get blaspheme in English. This person will use abusive speech to belittle other people and cause them to lose their good reputation. They insult people with their speech. Slander, railing, reproach, blasphemy.

Lesson 9 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study of Colossians 3:18—4:6?

- We should be delightful in our responses to life.
- We serve as unto the Lord.
- We lead with gentleness.
- We are to walk in wisdom and grace.

Insights

Household Codes

Collectively, rules regarding the relationships between wives and husbands, children and parents, and servants and masters are called “household codes.” Much has changed in the last couple of millennia. The first two relationship pairs still bear a lot of similarities to their modern counterparts, but we’ve taken a lot of principles of the servant/master relationship and applied it to the workplace. Though not an exact match, the key lessons still hold true today. Among the differences is that the servant or slave was considered a part of the household—granted, not an equal one—while we wouldn’t generally consider our coworkers to be family.

Paul, in writing Colossians and Ephesians, was certainly not the first to talk about household structure. Peter also covered it in his first letter. But many other philosophers, politicians, and thinkers had much to say before then—Aristotle, Josephus, and Philo, to name a few. Even the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi from 1754 BC laid out rules concerning the treatment of spouses, children, and servants. But those all had a common message: it was accepted as fact that women, children, and servants were naturally inferior to those in power over them.

Of household management we have seen that there are three parts—one is the rule of a master over slaves... another of a father, and the third of a husband. A husband and father rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the older and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature...

The freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature. So it must necessarily be with the moral virtues also; all may be supposed to partake of them, but only in such manner and degree as is required by each for the fulfillment of his duty.

—Aristotle
Politics

It is inconsistent with the text to assume that Paul was simply reinforcing the hierarchy in the culture around them. Instead, it seems that he was answering the question of new believers, “How does my faith affect my interactions in my community?” Paul instructs the believers to carry on, but with a major difference: that each member of the household is under the Lordship of Christ. Both service and leadership are now to be carried out to the glory of God. It is a move from man-pleasing to God-pleasing, responding to others with kindness and respect.

Seasoned with Salt (Col. 4:6)

Salt, among the Greeks, was the emblem of wit. Here the meaning seems to be, that our conversation should be seasoned with piety or grace in a way similar to that in which we employ salt in our food. It makes it wholesome and palatable. So with our conversation. If it be not imbued with the spirit of piety, it is flat, insipid, unprofitable, injurious. The spirit of piety will make it what it should be—useful, agreeable, beneficial to mankind. This does not mean that our conversation is to be always, strictly speaking, religious—wherever we may be—any more than our food should be mere salt; but it means that, whatever be the topic, the spirit of piety should be diffused through it—as the salt in our food should properly season it all—whatever the article of food may be.

—Albert Barnes
Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments

Observations

Read through Colossians 3:18–4:1 and Ephesians 5:21–6:9 several times, and try to observe as much as you can about the passages. Look for similarities, for contrasts—take note of anything that stands out to you. Use this worksheet to make notes. Then review your results.

Colossians 3:18–4:1	
Wives	Husbands
Children	Parents
Servants	Masters

Ephesians 5:21–6:9	
Wives	Husbands
Children	Parents
Servants	Masters

Lesson 10 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study of Colossians 4:7–18?

- Paul demonstrates his commitment to unity in Christ by introducing members of his ministry team that cross social, national, and cultural lines.
- The preeminence of Jesus allows us to enjoy community between believers of any background and to simultaneously maintain the purity of doctrine based on that preeminence.
- There are many roles we can play in the work of the gospel. Not all are glamorous, but all are useful for the building up of the church in Christ.

Insights

Roll Call

Many of the people Paul mentions at the end of his letter to the Colossians also appear elsewhere in the New Testament, but some occur only here. This table is a comprehensive list of references for each person.

PERSON	NOTES & QUOTES (all quotes from ESV)	REFERENCE
Tychicus	Tychicus accompanied Paul during his third missionary journey in at least Greece and Troas.	Acts 20:1–6
	“So that you [the church at Ephesus] may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.”	Ephesians 6:21–22
	“ Tychicus will tell you [the church at Colossae] all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose ...”	Colossians 4:7–8
	“ Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.”	2 Timothy 4:12
	“When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you [Titus], do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.”	Titus 3:12
	It is possible that Tychicus and Onesimus carried at least four letters from Paul on this one trip: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21–22); • the letter to the Colossians; • the letter to Philemon; and • the letter to the church at Laodicea, not currently extant (Col. 4:16). 	
Onesimus	Onesimus is the subject of Paul’s letter to Philemon. He was a servant of Philemon (a believer in Colossae) who had possibly stolen from him and run away. Somehow Onesimus came across Paul who was instrumental in his salvation and later sent him back to Colossae (with Paul’s letter for Philemon) to be reconciled to his master and now brother in Christ.	Paul’s letter to Philemon, especially verses 8–18
	“I have sent him [Tychicus] to you [the church at Colossae] for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus , our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.”	Colossians 4:8–9

Aristarchus	During Paul's third missionary journey, while he was in Ephesus, "there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ... So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus , Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel."	Acts 19:23, 24, 29
	Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and was also with Paul in Greece and Troas.	Acts 20:1–6
	Aristarchus sailed with Paul to Rome during his first imprisonment.	Acts 27:2
	" Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you ..."	Colossians 4:10
	"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus , Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers."	Philemon 23–24
Mark	After Peter was rescued by an angel from Herod's jail, "he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark , where many were gathered together and were praying."	Acts 12:12
	"And Barnabas and Saul returned [to Antioch] from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark ."	Acts 12:25
	Paul's first missionary journey: "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they [Barnabas and Saul] went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them."	Acts 13:4–5
	"Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia."	Acts 13:13–14
	Paul's second missionary journey: "And after some days, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.' Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark . But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord."	Acts 15:36–40
	"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him) ..."	Colossians 4:10
	"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark , Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers."	Philemon 23–24
	"Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."	2 Timothy 4:11
	"She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark , my son."	1 Peter 5:13
Jesus / Justus	"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus . These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me." This is the only reference.	Colossians 4:10–11
Epaphras	Epaphras came to Paul in Rome from Colossae; he likely founded the Colossian church. "[Y]ou learned it [the gospel] 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."	Colossians 1:7–8
	" Epaphras , who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis."	Colossians 4:12

	" Epaphras , my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers."	Philemon 23–24
Luke	Luke, a physician by trade, was the author of both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.	
	" Luke the beloved physician greets you ..."	Colossians 4:14
	"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke , my fellow workers."	Philemon 23–24
	" Luke alone is with me."	2 Timothy 4:11
Demas	"Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas ."	Colossians 4:14
	"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas , and Luke, my fellow workers."	Philemon 23–24
	"For Demas , in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."	2 Timothy 4:10
Nympha	"Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house." This is the only reference.	Colossians 4:15
Archippus	"Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house ..."	Philemon 1–2
	"And say to Archippus , 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.'"	Colossians 4:17
Timothy	<i>Timothy is not listed at the end of Colossians, but rather at the beginning. His prominent inclusion in the first line indicates that Timothy is a co-author with Paul of this letter to the church at Colossae.</i>	
	"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae ..."	Colossians 1:1–2

Paul the Letter Writer

The following excerpt is from "Paul the Letter Writer" by E. Randolph Richards:

Christians often imagine Paul wrote letters like we did before email. ... Ancient letter writing was different in almost every aspect. ...

Today, paper and pen are so inexpensive as to be negligible. In antiquity, this was not so. The entire process of writing his letter to the Romans probably cost Paul (in today's dollars) over \$2,000, not including the travel costs for whoever carried it to Rome Ancient letter writers, even literate ones, used secretaries (Rom. 16:22). ... In Paul's day, literacy meant the ability to *read*, not the ability to write. ...

Writing down a letter was considered a specialized skill. A secretary needed to know how to cut and glue papyrus, cut and sharpen pens, mix ink, and prick and line the sheets. A letter to a church, to be read publicly as Paul intended (Col. 4:16), could not be scratched messily across some sheet. Ancients had a sense of propriety. Important letters should be prepared neatly on good quality papyrus (Cicero, *Att.* 13.25, 13.21). The quickly scrawled first draft was not suitable for sending to a church. ... Careful thought and composition were essential. Ancient writers thoughtfully pondered their drafts, weighing each phrase. ...

When Paul decided to send a letter to Corinth, he contracted a secretary. It would have taken more than the usual haggling. A typical letter of that time was about the length of 3 John. Paul's letters were extraordinarily long. ... The secretary would bring a stack of wax tablets. In a typical scenario, as Paul speaks, the secretary scratches furiously on the tablets. Sosthenes [1 Cor. 1:1] interjects at times. Paul ponders and perhaps rephrases. Team members wander through the room at times, pausing to listen, offering suggestions. After several hours, the secretary leaves to prepare a rough draft of that portion. When the secretary returns a few days later, Paul listens to the draft, making corrections and additions. He then adds more to the letter. This process continues over the

next few weeks until the letter is 100 percent precisely the way Paul wanted it, because as the primary sender, he is responsible for every word. The secretary brings the final draft to Paul (on nice papyrus and in good handwriting). As authentication (2 Thess. 3:17), Paul adds some closing remarks in his own handwriting, sometimes several verses (Gal. 6:11–18), sometimes just a line or two (1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17–18), and sometimes just a final phrase (“Grace be with you” 2 Tim. 4:22). The letter is then rolled. A string is tied around it and clay pressed over the knot to seal it.

We today, of course, cannot know exactly the procedure Paul used or how long each letter took. We should not, though, make Paul write in *our* image. ... A better understanding of ancient letter writing helps us to see how truly “weighty” [2 Cor. 10:10] Paul’s letters were.

—E. Randolph Richards
“Paul the Letter Writer”

Bibliography

Richards, E. Randolph. “Paul the Letter Writer”, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook*, pp. 770–771.

Colossians 1 — Observation

Objectives

Read through Colossians 1 several times, and try to observe as much as you can about the passage. Don't try to interpret the passage yet—that will come later. Just look for repeated words and phrases. Look for lists, for contrasts—take note of anything that stands out to you. Use this worksheet to circle items or make notes.

Colossians 1 (HCSB)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Timothy our brother: _____

2 To the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers. Grace to you and peace
from God our Father. _____

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

4 for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints _____

5 because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope
in the message of truth, the gospel _____

6 that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has
among you since the day you heard it and recognized God's grace in the truth. _____

7 You learned this from Epaphras, our dearly loved fellow slave. He is a faithful servant of
the Messiah on your behalf, _____

8 and he has told us about your love in the Spirit. _____

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We
are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual
understanding, _____

10 so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every
good work and growing in the knowledge of God. _____

11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all
endurance and patience, with joy _____

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in
the light. _____

13 He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of
the Son He loves. _____

14 We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, in Him. _____

