

Colossians 1:15-29
August 25, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: If we each chose to walk through your neighborhood and asked the question, “Who is Jesus?” what answers do you think you’d hear? [Let people engage]

Transition: As you have already mentioned, some might say they don’t know. Some might say He didn’t exist at all. Some might say he was the son of God. But I suspect that the majority we hypothetically interviewed would say, “He was a good man, who was morally upright and had teachings worth following.

Paul’s answer to the “Who is Jesus?” questions is rich and complex but can be distilled into two simple points. First, Jesus is the image and personification of God. Second, he is our Savior – in that through his death on the cross, our sins are forgiven, and we are restored to a right relationship with God. Today’s text gives a robust response to “Who is Jesus.” And it’s **because** of who Jesus is, we see Paul laboring for the church by presenting the Gospel to as many as possible! Let’s read the text. It is my prayer that

BOOK:

The Supremacy of Christ

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Paul’s Labor for the Church

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Verse 28 says, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” As believers, are we laboring to share the Good News, teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ? The same energy that was powerfully at work in Paul's life is available to each of us as well. Let's labor to share the Good News! The fields are ripe unto harvest!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 115-123). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.*

Christ Is the Creator (Col. 1:15–17)

The false teachers were very confused about Creation. They taught that matter was evil, including the human body. They also taught that Jesus Christ did not have a real body since this would have put Him in contact with evil matter. The results of these false teachings were tragic, including extreme asceticism on the one hand and unbridled sin on the other. After all, if your body is sinful, you either try to enslave it or you enjoy it.

In this section, Paul explained the fourfold relationship of Jesus Christ to Creation.

He existed before Creation (v. 15). The term *firstborn* does not refer to time, but to place or status. Jesus Christ was not the first being created, since He Himself is the Creator of all things. *Firstborn* simply means “of first importance, of first rank.” Solomon was certainly not born first of all of David’s sons, yet he was named the firstborn (Ps. 89:27). *Firstborn of all Creation* means “prior to all Creation.” Jesus Christ is not a created being; He is eternal God.

Paul used the word *image* to make this fact clear. It means “an exact representation and revelation.” The writer to the Hebrews affirms that Jesus Christ is “the express image of His Person” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus was able to say, “He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). In His essence, God is invisible; but Jesus Christ has revealed Him to us (John 1:18). Nature reveals the existence, power, and wisdom of God; but nature cannot reveal the very essence of God to us. It is only in Jesus Christ that the invisible God is revealed perfectly. Since no mere creature can perfectly reveal God, Jesus Christ must be God.

He created all things (v. 16a). Since Christ created all things, He Himself is uncreated. The word *for* that introduces this verse could be translated “because.” Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of all *because* He created all things. It is no wonder that the winds and waves obeyed Him, and diseases and death fled from Him, for He is Master over all. “All things were made by Him” (John 1:3). This includes all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. All things are under His command.

All things exist for Him (v. 16b). Everything exists *in* Him, *for* Him, and *through* Him. Jesus Christ is the Sphere in which they exist, the Agent through which they came into being, and the One for whom they were made.

Paul’s use of three different prepositions is one way of refuting the philosophy of the false teachers. For centuries, the Greek philosophers had taught that everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause, and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause the power, and the final cause the purpose. When it comes to Creation, Jesus Christ is the primary cause (He planned it), the instrumental cause (He produced it), and the final cause (He did it for His own pleasure).

If everything in creation exists *for* Him, then nothing can be evil of itself (except for Satan and fallen angels, even those God uses to accomplish His will). Gnostic regulations about using God’s creation are all foolish (Col. 2:20–23). It also means that God’s creation, even though under bondage to sin (Rom. 8:22), can be used for God’s glory and enjoyed by God’s people (1 Tim. 6:17).

He holds all things together (v. 17). “In Him all things hold together” (NIV). A guide took a group of people through an atomic laboratory and explained how all matter was composed of rapidly moving electric particles. The tourists studied models of molecules and were amazed to

learn that matter is made up primarily of space. During the question period, one visitor asked, “If this is the way matter works, what holds it all together?” For that, the guide had no answer.

But the Christian has an answer: Jesus Christ! Because “He is before all things,” He can hold all things together. Again, this is another affirmation that Jesus Christ is God. Only God exists before all of Creation, and only God can make Creation cohere. To make Jesus Christ less than God is to dethrone Him.

It used to bother me to sing the familiar song, “This Is My Father’s World.” I thought Satan and sin were in control of this world. I have since changed my mind, and now I sing the song with joy and victory. Jesus Christ made all things, He controls all things, and by Him all things hold together. Indeed, this *is* my Father’s world!

Christ Is the Head of the Church (Col. 1:18)

There are many images of the church in the New Testament, and the body is one of the most important (Rom. 12:4ff; 1 Cor. 12:14; Eph. 4:8–16). No denomination or local assembly can claim to be “the body of Christ,” for that body is composed of *all* true believers. When a person trusts Christ, he is immediately baptized by the Holy Spirit into this body (1 Cor. 12:12–13). The baptism of the Spirit is not a post-conversion experience—for it occurs the instant a person believes in Jesus Christ.

Each Christian is a member of this spiritual body, and Jesus Christ is the Head. In Greek usage, the word *head* meant “source” and “origin” as well as “leader, ruler.” Jesus Christ is the Source of the church, His body, and the Leader. Paul called Him “the Beginning” which tells us that Jesus Christ has priority in time as far as His church is concerned. The term *beginning* can be translated “originator.”

No matter which name you select, it will affirm the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the church. The church had its origin in Him, and today it has its operation in Him. As the Head of the church, Jesus Christ supplies it with life through His Spirit. He gives gifts to men, and then places these gifted people in His church that they might serve Him where they are needed. Through His Word, Jesus Christ nourishes and cleanses the church (Eph. 5:25–30).

No believer on earth is the head of the church. This position is reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ. Various religious leaders may have founded churches, or denominations; but only Jesus Christ is the Founder of the church which is His body. This church is composed of all true believers, and it was born at Pentecost. It was then that the Holy Spirit came and baptized the believers into one spiritual body.

The fact that there is “one body” in this world (Eph. 4:4) does not eliminate or minimize the need for *local* bodies of believers. The fact that I belong to the universal church does not release me from my responsibilities to the local church. I cannot minister to the whole church, but I can strengthen and build the church by ministering to God’s people in a local assembly.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and the Beginning of the church; and He is also the Firstborn from the dead. We saw this word *firstborn* in Colossians 1:15. Paul did not say that Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead, for He was not. But He is the most important of all who have been raised from the dead; for without His resurrection, there could be no resurrection for others (1 Cor. 15:20ff).

It seems odd that Paul used the word *born* in connection with death, for the two concepts seem opposed to each other. But the tomb was a womb from which Christ came forth in victory, for death could not hold Him (Acts 2:24). The Son was begotten in resurrection glory (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:33).

This brings us to the theme of this entire section: “That in all things He might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). This was God’s purpose in making His Son the Savior, Creator, and Head of the church. The word translated “preeminence” is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It is related to the word translated “firstborn,” and it magnifies the unique position of Jesus Christ. “Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11).

In 1893, the World’s Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago, and more than 21 million people visited the exhibits. Among the features was a “World Parliament of Religions,” with representatives of the world’s religions, meeting to share their “best points” and perhaps come up with a new religion for the world.

Evangelist D.L. Moody saw this as a great opportunity for evangelism. He used churches, rented theaters, and even rented a circus tent (when the show was not on) to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His friends wanted Moody to attack the “Parliament of Religions,” but he refused. “I am going to make Jesus Christ so attractive,” he said, “that men will turn to Him.” Moody knew that Jesus Christ was the preeminent Savior, not just one of many “religious leaders” of history. The “Chicago Campaign” of 1893 was probably the greatest evangelistic endeavor in D.L. Moody’s life, and thousands came to Christ.

But the false teachers of Colossae could never give Jesus Christ the place of preeminence; for, according to their philosophy, Jesus Christ was only one of many “emanations” from God. He was not the only way to God (John 14:6); rather, He was but one rung on the ladder! It has well been said, “If Jesus Christ is not Lord of all, He cannot be Lord at all.”

We have now studied three arguments for the preeminence of Jesus Christ: He is the Savior, He is the Creator, and He is the Head of the church. These arguments reveal His relationship with lost sinners, with the universe, and with believers. But what about His relationship with God the Father?

He Is the Beloved of the Father (Col. 1:19–20)

Paul had already called Jesus Christ “His [God’s] dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). For this reason, God can call *us* His beloved (Col. 3:12).

Then Paul took a giant step forward in his argument, for he declared that “all fullness” dwelt in Jesus Christ! The word translated “fullness” is the Greek word *pleroma* (pronounced “play-RO-ma”). It was a technical term in the vocabulary of the gnostic false teachers. It meant “the sum total of all the divine power and attributes.” We have already noted that Paul used this important word eight times in the Colossian letter, so he was meeting the false teachers on their own ground.

The word *dwelt* is equally important. It means much more than merely “to reside.” The form of the verb means “to be at home permanently.” The late Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest, noted Greek expert, pointed out in his excellent commentary on Colossians that the verb indicates that this fullness was “not something added to His Being that was not natural to Him, but that it was part of His essential Being as part of His very constitution, and that permanently” (*Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament*, Eerdmans, p. 187).

The Father would not permanently give His *pleroma* to some created being. The fact that it “pleased the Father” to have His fullness in Christ is proof that Jesus Christ is God. “And of His [Christ’s] fullness have all we received” (John 1:16). “For in Him [Jesus Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9).

Because Jesus Christ is God, He is able to do what no mere man could ever do: reconcile lost sinners to a holy God. When the first man and woman sinned, they declared war on God; but God did not declare war on them. Instead, God sought Adam and Eve; and He provided a covering for their sins.

The natural mind of the unsaved sinner is at war with God (Rom. 8:7). The sinner may be sincere, religious, and even moral; but he is still at war with God.

How can a holy God ever be reconciled with sinful man? Can God lower His standards, close His eyes to sin, and compromise with man? If He did, the universe would fall to pieces! God must be consistent with Himself and maintain His own holy Law.

Perhaps man could somehow please God. But by nature, man is separated from God; and by his deeds, he is alienated from God (Col. 1:21). The sinner is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1ff), and therefore is unable to do anything to save himself or to please God (Rom. 8:8).

If there is to be reconciliation between man and God, the initiative and action must come from God. It is *in Christ* that God was reconciled to man (2 Cor. 5:19). But it was not the incarnation of Christ that accomplished this reconciliation, nor was it His example as He lived among men. It was through His *death* that peace was made between God and man. He “made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20).

Of course, the false teachers offered a kind of reconciliation between man and God. However, the reconciliation they offered was not complete or final. The angels and the “emanations” could in some way bring men closer to God, according to the gnostic teachers. But the reconciliation we have in Jesus Christ is perfect, complete, and final. More than that, the reconciliation in Christ *involves the whole universe!* He reconciles “all things unto Himself ... things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20).

However, we must not conclude wrongly that universal reconciliation is the same as universal salvation. “Universalism” is the teaching that all beings, including those who have rejected Jesus Christ, will one day be saved. This was not what Paul believed. “Universal restorationism” was not a part of Paul’s theology, for he definitely taught that sinners needed to believe in Jesus Christ to be saved (2 Thes. 1).

Paul wrote that Christ solved the sin problem on the cross once and for all. This means that one day God can bring together in Christ all that belong to Him (Eph. 1:9–10). He will be able to glorify believers and punish unbelievers, *and do it justly*, because of Christ’s death on the cross. No one—not even Satan—can accuse God of doing wrong, because sin has been effectively dealt with on the cross.

If Jesus Christ is only a man, or only an emanation from God, He cannot reconcile God and man. The only arbitrator who can bring God and man together is One who is *both God and Man Himself*. Contrary to what the gnostics taught, Jesus Christ was a true human being with a real body. He was God in human flesh (John 1:14). When He died on the cross, He met the just demands of the Law because He paid the penalty for man’s sins (1 Peter 2:24). Reconciliation was completed on the cross (Rom. 5:11).

A man once came to see me because he had difficulties at home. He was not a very well-educated man and sometimes got his words confused. He told me that he and his wife were having “martial problems” when he meant to say “marital problems.” (Later I found out that they really were “at war” with each other, so maybe he was right after all!) But the word that caught my attention was in this sentence: “Pastor, me and my wife need a recancellation.”

He meant to say *reconciliation*, but the word *recancellation* was not a bad choice. There can be peace and a reunion of those who are at war *only when sin has been cancelled*. As sinners before a righteous God, we need a “recancellation.” Our sins were cancelled on the cross.

As we review this profound section (and this study has only scratched the surface), we notice several important truths.

First, Jesus Christ has taken care of *all things*. All things were created by Him and for Him. He existed before all things, and today He holds all things together. He has reconciled all things through the Cross. No wonder Paul declared that “in all things He might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18).

Second, all that we need is Jesus Christ. We have all of God’s fullness in Him, and we are “filled full” (complete) in Him (Col. 2:10). There is no need to add anything to the person or work of Jesus Christ. To add anything is to take away from His glory. To give Him prominence instead of preeminence is to dethrone Him.

Third, God is pleased when His Son, Jesus Christ, is honored and given preeminence. There are people who tell us they are Christians, but they ignore or deny Jesus Christ. “We worship the Father,” they tell us, “and that is all that is necessary.”

But Jesus made it clear that *the Son* is to be worshiped as well as the Father “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him” (John 5:23–24, NIV).

The late Dr. M.R. DeHaan, noted radio Bible teacher, told about a preacher who was confronted by a cultist who rejected the deity of Jesus Christ.

“Jesus cannot be the eternal Son of God, for a father is always older than his son,” the man argued. “If the Father is not eternal, then He is not God. If Jesus is His Son, then He is not eternal.”

The preacher was ready with an answer. “The thing that makes a person a father is having a son. But if God is the *eternal* Father, then He must have an *eternal* Son! This means that Jesus Christ is eternal—and that He is God!”

Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Creator, the Head of the church, and the Beloved of the Father. He is eternal God ... and in Our lives He deserves to have the preeminence.

Is Jesus Christ preeminent in your life?

Colossians 1:21–1:29

If you received a letter from a man you had never met, a man who was a prisoner, accused of being a troublemaker, how would you respond?

The Colossian believers faced that exact problem. They knew that Paul had been instrumental in leading their pastor, Epaphras, to saving faith in Christ. They also knew that Epaphras had gone to Rome to consult with Paul and had not yet returned. The church members had received Paul’s letter, brought to them by Tychicus and Onesimus. But the false teachers in Colossae had been discrediting Paul and causing doubts in the people’s minds. “Why listen to a man who is a political prisoner?” they asked. “Can you trust him?”

Paul no doubt realized that this would be the situation, so he paused in the first part of this letter to give some words of explanation. He had been so wrapped up in exalting Jesus Christ that he had not shown any interest in writing about himself! In this section, Paul explained his three ministries.

Sharing the Gospel (Col. 1:21–23)

Even though Paul had not personally evangelized Colossae, it was his ministry in Ephesus that led to the founding of the Colossian church. Paul was “made a minister” (Col. 1:25). A large part of his ministry consisted in preaching the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. His was a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17–21). Paul reviewed for his readers their own spiritual experience.

Their past alienation (v. 21a). The word translated *alienated* means “estranged.” These Gentiles in Colossae were estranged from God and separated from the spiritual blessings of Israel (Eph. 2:11ff). The gods that they worshiped were false gods, and their religious rituals could not take care of their sin or guilt.

But this estrangement was not only a matter of Gentile position; it was also a matter of sinful practices and attitudes. The Gentiles were *enemies*, which means they were “actively hostile to God.” Even though they had not received a divine law, such as God gave to Israel, these Gentiles knew the truth about God through creation and conscience (Rom. 1:18ff). They could not plead ignorance before the bar of God’s justice.

The enmity of their minds led to wicked works. Both in attitude and action, they were at war with God. “Because the carnal mind [the mind of the unbeliever] is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). This explains why the unbeliever must repent—change his mind—before he can be saved.

Their present reconciliation (vv. 21b–22). They did not reconcile themselves to God; it was God who took the initiative in His love and grace. The Father sent the Son to die on a cross that sinners might be reconciled to God. Jesus died for us when we were “without strength” (Rom. 5:6) and could do nothing for ourselves. He died for us “while we were yet sinners” and “when we were enemies” (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Paul emphasized the physical body of Jesus Christ that was nailed to the cross. The false teachers denied the Incarnation and taught that Jesus Christ did not have a real human body. Their philosophy that all matter was evil made it necessary for them to draw this false conclusion. But the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus *did* have a fully human body, and that He bore our sins on that body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

The purpose of this reconciliation is *personal holiness*. God does not make peace (Col. 1:20) so that we can continue to be rebels! He has reconciled us to Himself so that we may share His life and His holiness. We are presented to God “holy and unblameable and unproveable” (Col. 1:22).

The word *holy* is closely related to the word *saint*. Both of these words express the idea of “being set apart, being devoted to God.” In the New Testament, saints are not dead people who during their lives performed miracles and never sinned. New Testament saints were living people who had trusted Jesus Christ. Paul wrote this letter to living saints (Col. 1:2).

Unblameable means “without blemish.” The word was applied to the temple sacrifices which had to be without blemish. It is amazing that God looks at His children and sees no blemish on them! God chose us to be “holy and without blame” (Eph. 1:4).

Unproveable means “free from accusation.” Once we have been reconciled to God, no charges can be brought against us (Rom. 8:31–34). Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:1–12), would like to hurl charges at us; but God will not accept them (see Zech. 3). People may have accusations to bring against us, but they cannot change our relationship with God.

The most important thing in our Christian lives is not how we look in our own sight, or in the sight of others (1 Cor. 4:1–4)—but how we look in God’s sight. I recall counseling a Christian who was in the habit of reminding herself of her past sins and failures. She seemed to enjoy

having other people criticize her. I kept reminding her of what she was *in God's sight*. Her constant emphasis on her failures denied the work that Jesus Christ had done for her on the cross. It took time, but eventually she accepted her wonderful new position in Christ and began to get victory over criticism and depression.

Paul's emphasis on our holy standing before God was certainly an attack on the false teachers, for they promised their followers a kind of "perfection" that nothing else could give. "You already have a perfect standing in Christ," Paul wrote, "so why seek for it anywhere else?"

Their future glorification (v. 23). "The hope of the Gospel" means that blessed hope of our Lord's return (Titus 2:13). Paul had already mentioned this hope: "The hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Col. 1:5). Later in the chapter, he called it "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

There was a time when these Gentile Colossians were without hope (Eph. 2:12). The reason? They were without God. But when they were reconciled to God, they were given a wonderful hope of glory. All of God's children will one day be with Christ in heaven (John 17:24). In fact, so secure is our future that Paul stated that we have *already been glorified!* (Rom. 8:30) All we are waiting for is the revelation of this glory when Jesus Christ returns (Rom. 8:17–19).

Paul's statement to the Colossians seems to cast a shadow on the assurance of our future glory (see Col. 1:23). Is it possible for a believer to lose his salvation? No, the *if* clause does not suggest doubt or lay down a condition by which we "keep up our salvation."

Paul used an architectural image in this verse—a house, firmly set on the foundation. The town of Colossae was located in a region known for earthquakes, and the word translated "moved away" can mean "earthquake stricken." Paul was saying, "If you are truly saved, and built on the solid foundation, Jesus Christ, then you will continue in the faith and nothing will move you. You have heard the Gospel and trusted Jesus Christ, and He has saved you."

In other words, we are not saved by continuing in the faith. But we continue in the faith and thus prove that we are saved. It behooves each professing Christian to test his own faith and examine his own heart to be sure he is a child of God (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10ff).

Suffering for the Gentiles (Col. 1:24–27)

Paul's enemies made much of the fact that the great apostle was a prisoner of Rome. The false teachers in Colossae probably ridiculed Paul and used this as a weapon to fight the truth of the Gospel. But Paul turned this weapon around and used it to defeat his enemies and to build a closer relationship with the church in Colossae.

Paul's rejoicing (v. 24). "Instead of being ashamed of my suffering, I am rejoicing in it!" How could anyone rejoice in suffering? To begin with, Paul was suffering because of Jesus Christ. It was "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). Like the early Apostles, Paul rejoiced that he was "counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). A Christian should never suffer "as a thief or as an evildoer"; but it is an honor to "suffer as a Christian" (1 Peter 4:15–16). There is a special blessing and reward reserved for the faithful believer who suffers for the sake of Christ (Matt. 5:10–12).

Paul had a second cause for rejoicing in his suffering: he was suffering because of the Gentiles. Paul was the chosen apostle to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1–13). In fact, he was a prisoner in Rome because of his love for the Gentiles. He was arrested in Jerusalem on false charges, and the Jews listened to his defense until he used the word *Gentiles* (see Acts 22:21ff). It was that word that infuriated them and drove them to ask for his execution. (The full account is given in Acts 21–28, and an exciting account it is.)

So the Gentile believers in Colossae had every reason to love Paul and be thankful for his special ministry to them. But there was a third cause for Paul's rejoicing: he was suffering for the sake of Christ's body, the church. There was a time when Paul had persecuted the church and caused it to suffer. But now Paul devoted his life to the care of the church. Paul did not ask, as do some believers, "What will *I* get out of it?" Instead he asked, "How much will God let me put into it?" The fact that Paul was a prisoner did not stop him from ministering to the church.

It is important to note, however, that these sufferings had nothing to do with the sacrificial sufferings of Christ on the cross. Only the sinless Lamb of God could die for the sins of the world (John 1:29). Paul was "filling up in his turn the leftover parts of Christ's sufferings" (Col. 1:24, literal translation). The word *afflictions* refers to the "pressures" of life, the persecutions Paul endured. This word is never used in the New Testament for the sacrificial sufferings of Jesus Christ.

The sacrificial sufferings of Christ are over, but His body, the church, experiences suffering because of its stand for the faith. The Head of the church in heaven feels the sufferings that His people endure. ("Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" [Acts 9:4]) Paul was taking his turn in sharing these afflictions, and others would follow in his train. But Paul did not complain. "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ" (2 Cor. 1:5).

Paul's responsibility (vv. 25–27). Had Paul compromised with the Jews and stopped ministering to the Gentiles, he could have been spared a great deal of suffering. But he could not abandon his calling just for personal safety and comfort. He had been made a minister by God; he had been given a "stewardship" (dispensation) and he had to be faithful to his calling (1 Cor. 4:2). It was not a matter of choice: he was called to fulfill the Word of God. This can mean, "I must preach the Word fully and not compromise any truth." It can also mean, "I am commissioned by God's Word and I must be faithful to discharge my office."

Paul's special message regarding the Gentiles had to do with what he called *the mystery*. To us today, a mystery is something eerie and perhaps frightening; but this was not the way the word was defined in Paul's day. The false teachers used this word to describe the inner secrets of their religions. A *mystery* is a "sacred secret," hidden in the past and now revealed by the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 3:1–13).

God called the nation of Israel to be His people, He gave them His Law (including the priesthood and sacrifices), and He gave them a wonderful land. He promised them a King who would one day establish a glorious kingdom and fulfill the many promises made to Abraham and David. The Old Testament prophets wrote about a Messiah who would suffer, and a Messiah who would reign. They could not explain the seeming contradiction (see 1 Peter 1:9–12). They did not understand that the Messiah first had to suffer before He could enter into glory (Luke 24:13–27).

Jesus Christ came to earth, was rejected by His people, and was crucified. He arose again and returned to heaven. Did this mean that God's promised kingdom for Israel was now abandoned? No, because God had initiated a new program—His *mystery*—that was not explained by the Old Testament prophets. The mystery is that today God is uniting Jews and Gentiles in the church (Eph. 2:11–22). When the church is completed, then Jesus Christ will return and take His people to heaven (1 Thes. 4:13–18). Then He will again deal with Israel as a nation and establish the promised kingdom (Acts 15:12–18).

Imagine what this message meant to the Gentiles. They were no longer excluded from the glory and riches of God's grace! During the Old Testament dispensation, a Gentile had to become a Jewish proselyte in order to share in the blessings of Israel. But in the new

dispensation, Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:12–13). No wonder the Jewish false teachers opposed Paul. He dared to say, “There is no difference!”

We who have grown up in somewhat Christian surroundings have a tendency to take all of this for granted. But think of the excitement this message must have generated in a church composed of new believers who had no background in the church. Once they were outside the covenants of God, but now they were members of His family. Once they were living in spiritual ignorance and death, but now they were alive and sharing in the riches of God’s wisdom in Christ. Once they had no hope, but now they had a glorious hope because Christ now lived within! It would be good for us today to recapture some of that “first love” excitement.

I was privileged to minister in Africa for three weeks, and there I was introduced to some of the finest Christians I have ever met. I taught the Word to over 500 national pastors in Kenya for almost a week, and each service was a challenge and blessing to me. Many of the pastors still had the marks of paganism and idolatry on their bodies; yet their faces were aglow with the joy of the Lord. I went to Africa to minister to them, *but they ministered to me!* They reminded me not to take for granted the glorious riches I have in Jesus Christ.

Striving for the Saints (Col. 1:28–2:3)

We have met Paul the preacher, sharing the Gospel and Paul the prisoner, suffering for the Gentiles.

Now we meet Paul the prayer-warrior, striving in prayer for the individual saints that they might mature in the faith. The words *striving* (Col. 1:29) and *conflict* (Col. 2:1) are athletic terms. They refer to the strenuous effort put forth by the runner to win the race. Our English word *agony* comes from this Greek word.

Paul’s instruction (v. 28a). *Whom* refers, of course, to Jesus Christ. “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5). The false teachers exalted themselves and their great “spiritual” attainments. They preached a system of teaching, but Paul preached a Person. The Gnostics preached philosophy and the empty traditions of men (Col. 2:8), but Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ. The false teachers had lists of rules and regulations (Col. 2:16, 20–21), but Paul presented Christ. What a difference in ministries!

Paul not only *preached* (the word means “to announce with authority as a herald”), but he also *warned*. While it is good to proclaim positive truth, it is also necessary to warn God’s people against the lies of the enemy (Acts 20:31). In fact, God’s people should be alert to warn one another (*admonish* in Col. 3:16, NIV). Paul considered himself a spiritual father to the local churches, and it was his duty to warn his children (1 Cor. 4:14).

But Paul was also a *teacher* of the truth. It is not enough to warn people; we must also teach them the positive truths of the Word of God. How far would we get in our travels if the highway signs told us where the roads were *not* going? Not very far! It is good to *win* a man to Christ, and then to *warn* him about the dangers ahead; but it is also important to *teach* that convert the basic truths of the Christian life.

Paul not only preached Christ, but he also “taught Christ,” for in Christ are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). It was not necessary to introduce any new teaching, for all that a believer needs to know is related to Jesus Christ. “Teaching every man in all wisdom” was Paul’s concern (Col. 1:28). Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. The false teachers promised to give people a “hidden wisdom” that would make them “spiritually elite.” But all true spiritual wisdom is found only in Jesus Christ.

Paul's intent (v. 28b; 2:2–3). He wanted to present every believer “perfect in Christ Jesus.” The word *perfect* was a favorite word with the gnostic teachers. It described the disciple who was no longer a novice, but who had matured and was fully instructed in the secrets of the religion. Paul used it to mean “complete, mature in Christ.” This is the goal of all preaching, warning, and teaching.

What are the evidences of this spiritual maturity? Paul described them next (Col. 2:2).

Encouragement—“that their hearts might be comforted.” Our English word *encourage* means “with heart.” To encourage people is to give them new heart. Shallow sympathy usually makes people feel worse, but true spiritual encouragement makes them feel better. It brings out the best in people.

Endearment—“being knit together in love.” The mature Christian loves the brethren and seeks to be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. He is a part of spiritual unity in the church. An immature person is often selfish and causes division.

Enrichment—“unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding.” Paul mentioned the riches of Christ earlier (Col. 1:27). Too many Christians are living like paupers when they could be living like kings. Mature Christians do not complain about what they don't have. Rather, they make use of the vast resources that they do have in Jesus Christ.

Enlightenment—“full assurance of understanding.” The mature believer has assurance in his heart that he is a child of God. The spiritual knowledge that he has in Christ constantly enlightens him and directs him daily. I have often counseled believers who told me they lacked assurance of their salvation. Invariably, they have been neglecting God's Word and living in ignorance.

God wants us as His children to have “understanding” and “wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2–3). The word translated “understanding” literally means “to place together.” It is the ability to assess things. *Wisdom* implies the ability to defend what we understand. *Knowledge* suggests the ability to grasp truth. All of these terms were also used by the gnostics.

Paul's intercession (1:29–2:1). “For this I labor to the point of exhaustion, agonizing” is a literal translation of the first part of Colossians 1:29. What a picture of prayer! So much of our praying is calm and comfortable, and yet Paul exerted his spiritual muscles the way a Greek runner would exert himself in the Olympic Games. He also taught Epaphras to pray the same way (Col. 4:12).

This does not mean that our prayers are more effective if we exert all kinds of fleshly energy. Nor does it mean that we must “wrestle with God” and wear Him out before He will meet our needs. Paul described a *spiritual* striving: it was *God's* power at work in his life. True prayer is directed to the Father (Matt. 6:9), through the Son (in His name, John 14:13–14), in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). When the Spirit is at work in our lives, then we can pray mightily in the will of God.

How does the Spirit assist us in our praying? For one thing, the Spirit teaches us the Word and shows us the will of God (John 16:13–15). Prayer is not our trying to change God's mind. It is learning what is the mind of God and asking accordingly (1 John 5:14–15). The Holy Spirit constantly intercedes for us even though we do not hear His voice (Rom. 8:26–27). He knows the Father's will and He helps us pray in that will.

There are times when we simply do not feel like praying—and that is when we must pray the most! The Spirit gives us divine energy for prayer, in spite of the way we feel. The resurrection power of Jesus Christ is made available to us (Eph. 3:20–21).

In these verses Paul explained his ministry, and in so doing, he silenced the accusations of the enemy. He also stirred the affections of the believers as they realized how much Paul had done for them.

All of us are not called to be apostles, but each one of us does have a God-given ministry. We can share the Gospel and be soul-winners. We can suffer for Christ and fulfill the ministry God has given us. We can strive in prayer for God's people and encourage them to mature. Paul took time to minister to *individuals*; note the repetition of "every man" in Colossians 1:28. If we minister to only a few believers, we are helping the whole church.

Are you fulfilling your God-given ministry?

Geisler, N.L. (1985). *Colossians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 672-676) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

D. Exaltation of Christ (1:15–20)

From Paul's petition that the Colossians be enlightened about God's redemptive working in their lives, he moved naturally into his epistle's main emphasis—the exaltation and preeminence of Christ. In this paragraph (vv. 15–20) Paul mentioned seven unique characteristics of Christ, which fittingly qualify Him to have "the supremacy" (v. 18). Christ is: (1) the image of God, (2) the Firstborn over Creation, (3) Creator of the universe, (4) Head of the church, (5) Firstborn from the dead, (6) the fullness of God, and (7) the Reconciler of all things. No comparable listing of so many characteristics of Christ and His deity are found in any other Scripture passage. Christ is the supreme Sovereign of the universe!

1:15. First, Christ is **the image of the invisible God**. Besides the obvious meaning of likeness (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), "image" implies representation and manifestation. Like the head of a sovereign imprinted on a coin, so Christ is "the exact representation of [the Father's] being" (Heb. 1:3). As Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Anyone who saw Christ, the visible manifestation of the invisible God, has thereby "seen" God indirectly. For "no one has ever seen God, but God the only Son ... has made Him known" (John 1:18). Paul wrote of the "invisible" God (1 Tim. 1:17), but Christ is the perfect visible representation and manifestation of that God. Though the word "image" (*eikōn*) does not always denote a perfect image (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7), the context here demands that understanding. Indeed, like the word "form" (*morphē*; translated "nature" in Phil. 2:6–7), *eikōn* means the very substance or essential embodiment of something or someone. In Hebrews 10:1 "shadow" and "the very image" (*eikōn*), which is Christ, are contrasted (cf. Col. 2:17). So Christ's supremacy is first shown in His relationship with God the Father. Christ is the perfect resemblance and representation of God.

Second, Christ's supremacy is shown in His relationship to Creation. He is **the Firstborn over all Creation**. Though it is grammatically possible to translate this as "Firstborn *in* Creation," the context makes this impossible for five reasons: (1) The whole point of the passage (and the book) is to show Christ's superiority *over* all things. (2) Other statements about Christ in this passage (such as Creator of all [1:16], upholder of Creation [v. 17], etc.) clearly indicate His priority and superiority over Creation. (3) The "Firstborn" cannot be part of Creation if He created "all things." One cannot create himself. (Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly add the word "other" six times in this passage in their *New World Translation*. Thus, they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created! But the word "other" is not in the Gr.) (4) The

“Firstborn” received worship of all the angels (Heb. 1:6), but creatures should not be worshiped (Ex. 20:4–5). (5) The Greek word for “Firstborn” is *prōtotokos*. If Christ were the “first-created,” the Greek word would have been *prōtoktisis*.

“Firstborn” denotes two things of Christ: He preceded the whole Creation, and He is Sovereign over all Creation. In the Old Testament a firstborn child had not only priority of birth but also the dignity and superiority that went with it (cf. Ex. 13:2–15; Deut. 21:17). When Jesus declared Himself “the First” (*ho prōtos*; Rev. 1:17), He used a word that means “absolutely first.” “Firstborn” also implies sovereignty. The description “firstborn” was not a fairly common Old Testament designation of the Messiah-God. “I will also appoint Him My Firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27). While this regal psalm refers to David, it also designates the Messiah, as seen in Revelation 1:5, where Christ is called “the Firstborn from the dead (cf. Col. 1:18) and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.” So “Firstborn” implies both Christ’s priority *to* all Creation (in time) and His sovereignty *over* all Creation (in rank).

1:16–17. The third characteristic of Christ is that **by Him all things were created**. In fact **all things were created by Him** (*di’ autou*, instrumental Cause) **and for Him** (*eis auton*, final Cause), and **in Him** (*en autō*) they **hold together** (He is the constituting or conserving Cause). Christ is not only the One through whom all things came to be, but also the One by whom they continue to exist. Two other New Testament verses parallel this description of Christ: “Through Him all things were made” (John 1:3), and Christ the Son is the One “through whom [the Father] made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). The Father, then, is the ultimate Source (efficient Cause), and the Son is the mediating Cause of the world. The Son was the “master Workman” of Creation, “the beginning (*archē*) of the Creation of God” (Rev. 3:14, NASB).

The Son’s Creation includes “all” **things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible**. These indicate the *entire* universe, both material and immaterial. The hierarchy of angelic beings—**thrones** (*thronoi*) **or powers** (*kyriotētes*) **or rulers** (*archai*) **or authorities** (*exousiai*)—indicate a highly organized dominion in the spirit world, a sphere in which the Colossians were engaged in the worship of angels (Col. 2:18) and over which Christ reigns supreme (cf. Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Phil. 2:9–10; Col. 2:10, 15).

1:18. Fourth, Christ **is the Head of the body, the church**. Besides being the Lord of the universe He is also the church’s Head (cf. Eph. 1:22–23; 5:23). The reference here is to the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). This work of the Spirit began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1–2; 11:15–16). It is a special body in which there is “neither Jew nor Gentile” (Gal. 3:28) but a whole new creation of God (Eph. 2:15). The church is a “mystery ... which was not made known to men in other generations” (Eph. 3:4–5; cf. Rom. 16:25–26; Col. 1:26).

Fifth, Christ **is the Beginning** (*archē*) **and the Firstborn from among the dead** (cf. Rev. 1:5). Christ was the first to rise in an immortal body (1 Cor. 15:20), and as such He heads a whole new order as its Sovereign (cf. “Firstborn” in Col. 1:15). Also Christ’s resurrection marked His triumph over death (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). He was the “Firstfruits” of those who die (1 Cor. 15:20) since, unlike others, He rose never to die again. He “was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). So He continues to live “on the basis of the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16). All this is **so that in everything He might have the supremacy**. Christ is given first place over all Creation. He is preeminent. The same eternal *Logos* (John 1:1) who “became flesh” (John 1:14) and “humbled Himself” (Phil. 2:8) is now “exalted” by God the Father “to the highest place” and has been given “the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

1:19. The sixth description of the exalted Christ is that **all** God's **fullness dwell[s] in Him**. Later Paul wrote, "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9). Colossians 1:19 is one of the most powerful descriptions of Christ's deity in the New Testament (cf. Heb. 1:3). "Fullness" (*plērōma*), a key word in Colossians, is used in 1:19 and 2:9. (The verb *plēroō* is used in 1:9, 25; 2:10; and 4:17.) The noun means "completeness" and is used of a wide range of things including God's being (Eph. 3:19), time (Gal. 4:4), and grace in Christ (John 1:16). This full and complete Deity is said to "dwell" (*katoikēsai*, "abide lastingly or permanently") in Christ.

1:20. The seventh feature of Christ is that He is the Reconciler. Through Christ God will **reconcile to Himself all things**. The phrase "all things" is limited to good angels and redeemed people since only **things on earth** and **things in heaven** are mentioned. Things "under the earth" (Phil. 2:10) are not reconciled. On God's restoring of nature, see comments on Romans 8:19–21; and on the reconciling of sinners, see comments on Romans 5:10–11 and 2 Corinthians 5:17–20. It is important to note that people are reconciled to God ("to Himself") not that God is reconciled to people. For mankind has left God and needs to be brought back to Him. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 "reconciliation" was used by Paul in a judicial (vs. an actual) sense in which the whole "world" is made savable through Christ's death. Paul spoke of "the many" (i.e., "those who receive God's abundant provision of grace") being "made righteous" through the Cross (Rom. 5:19). To make **peace through His blood** means to cause God's enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21) to become, by faith, His friends and His children (cf. Eph. 2:11–19).

E. Reconciliation by Christ (1:21–23).

1:21. Having struck the note of reconciliation as the seventh characteristic of the exalted Christ, Paul then developed that theme. Reconciliation is necessary because people are **alienated** ("cut off, estranged") **from** life and **God** (Eph. 2:12; 4:18). Before conversion the Colossian believers also **were enemies** or hostile to God **in their minds** as well as in their behavior, internally and externally. Sin begins in the heart (Matt. 5:27–28) and manifests itself in overt deeds (Gal. 5:19). ("In the sphere of your evil deeds" is better than NIV's **because of your evil behavior**. People are not inwardly hostile vs. God because of their outward acts of sins; they commit sins because they are inwardly hostile.)

1:22. Reconciliation of sinners to God is **by Christ's physical body through death**. The Gnostic tendency of the Colossian heresy, with its Platonic orientation, denied both Christ's true humanity and His true deity. As John explained, it is necessary to confess "that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). Spirits cannot die, and "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). In order to redeem humans, Christ Himself must be truly human (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:17). Thus, Christ's real physical body and death were necessary for man's salvation (cf. Rom. 7:4; Heb. 10:10).

The result of Christ's death is redemptive—**to present you holy in His sight**. This may mean judicially perfect as to a believer's position, or spiritually perfect as to his condition. Ultimately God envisions both for believers, and Christ's death is the basis for judicial justification (Rom. 3:21–26), progressive sanctification (Rom. 6–7), and even ultimate glorification (Rom. 8). As Paul wrote the Ephesians, "He chose us in Him before the Creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph. 1:4). Christians are **without blemish** (*amōmous*; correctly translated "blameless" in Eph. 1:4 and Phil. 2:15; cf. "without ... blemish" in Eph. 5:27 and "without fault" in Jude 24) in Christ, and also are **free from accusation** (*anenklētous*). This latter Greek word is used five times in the New Testament and only by Paul (here and in 1 Cor.

1:8; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6–7). It connotes one who is unaccused, free from all charges. Satan is “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10, KJV), but Christ is their “Advocate” (1 John 2:1, KJV) or “Defense” (1 John 2:1, NIV) before the Father. Therefore, by the merits of Christ believers are free from every charge (cf. Rom. 8:33). In Christ the accused are unaccused and the condemned are freed.

1:23. This reconciliation in Christ comes only by an abiding faith—**if you continue in your faith**. The Colossians had a settled faith—**established** (i.e., “grounded” like a building on a strong foundation) **and firm** (*hedraioi*, “seated or settled”; cf. 1 Cor. 7:37; 15:58), so Paul did not doubt that they would continue. In fact he spoke of **the hope** (confident expectation) which this **gospel** of reconciliation provides not only to them but also to the whole world—**to every creature under heaven**. This is obviously a figure of speech indicating the universality of **the gospel** and its proclamation, not that every person on the globe heard Paul preach. In Acts 2:5 this phrase describes a wide range of people from various countries without including, for example, anyone from North or South America (cf. also Gen. 41:57; 1 Kings 10:24; Rom. 1:8).

F. Revelation of the mystery of Christ (1:24–27).

1:24. This reconciliation by Christ of Jews and Gentiles to God in one body is a mystery revealed only in Christ. Paul rejoiced that he was able to suffer **for them what was still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions**. By this he did not mean that Christ’s suffering on the cross was insufficient (cf. Rom. 3:21–26; Heb. 10:10–14). He was speaking not of salvation but of service. Christ’s suffering alone procures salvation (1 Peter 1:11; 5:1; Heb. 2:9). But it is a believer’s privilege to suffer for Christ (2 Tim. 3:11; 1 Peter 3:13–14; 5:9; Heb. 10:32). The word “affliction” (*thlipsis*)—never used in the New Testament of Christ’s death—means “distress,” “pressure,” or “trouble” (which Paul had plenty of; 2 Cor. 11:23–29). Ordinarily it refers to trials in life, not the pains of death. Christ does indeed continue to suffer when Christians suffer for Him. He asked Saul (later called Paul) on the Damascus Road, “Why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4) Since the church is Christ’s body, He is affected when it is affected. For the sake of Christ’s body Paul willingly suffered (Phil. 1:29).

1:25–26. He was a God-ordained servant of the precious truth of **the Word of God in its fullness** (cf. 1:9; 2:9). The Colossian heresy boasted of a “fullness” of knowledge possible only through their mystical experience. But Paul declared that the fullness of **the mystery** is found only in Christ. By “mystery” he meant something once concealed but then revealed. This contrasted with the Colossian heretics’ notion that a mystery was a secret teaching known only to an exclusive group and unknown to the masses. The church was unknown in the Old Testament because it had **been kept hidden for ages and generations**. In fact, said Paul, it is only **now disclosed to the saints**. Since the church is Christ’s body, resulting from His death on the cross, it could not possibly have been in existence in the Old Testament. Indeed, Jesus, when on earth, said it was yet future (Matt. 16:16–18). Since the church is Christ’s body, welded together by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), the church’s birthday occurred when this baptism took place (Acts 1:5; 2). Soon Saul recognized that this mysterious body of Christ, the church, was in existence and that he was persecuting it (Acts 9:4; cf. Gal. 1:13).

The “mystery” of the church, however, does not mean that Gentile salvation and blessing was unforeseen before Christ (cf. Luke 2:29–32; Amos 9:11–12). The mystery was not *that* Gentiles would be saved but *how* they could be “fellow-heirs” (Eph. 3:6, KJV), on the same level with Jews, with no middle wall of partition between them (Eph. 2:12–14). In the Old Testament Gentiles who believed and became a part of Judaism were still considered lower than Jews. This

special union in which there “is neither Jew nor Greek” (i.e., Gentile, Gal. 3:28) was nonexistent before Christ died and the Spirit descended to baptize all believers into this new body. (For a list of other NT “mysteries” see the chart near Matt. 13:10–16.)

1:27. **God has chosen to make known** this mystery to New Testament saints. He willed in His sovereign mercy to reveal His eternal purpose with all its **glorious riches** (i.e., divine effulgence or blazing splendor). The amazing thing is that this is now revealed **among the Gentiles**, whereas previously God’s special revelation was to the Jews (Rom. 2:17; 3:1–2; 9:4). Now those “who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). Those “without hope and without God” (Eph. 2:12) have been given a glorious hope **which is Christ in you** (i.e., in you Gentiles; Col. 1:27). Because of “the glorious riches” (lit., “the riches of the glory”), believers are indwelt by Christ, **the hope of glory**. They are thus “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:4), and Christ is in them (cf. Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5). Because of Christ, believers look forward to sharing His glory (Col. 3:4; Rom. 5:2; 8:18, 30; 2 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 5:5; 1 Peter 5:10; also cf. Rom. 8:24).

G. Perfection in Christ (1:28–29).

1:28–29. Paul, in proclaiming this **Christ** who now also dwells in Gentile believers was **admonishing** (*nouthetountes*, “counseling”) and **teaching** (*didaskontes*, “instructing”) **everyone** (cf. 3:16). No doubt he did this “admonishing” and instructing because of the false teaching about Christ in Colosse. He did so wisely (cf. 4:5–6) since his purpose was not to drive them into the hands of the heretics but to **present everyone perfect** (*teleion*, “mature”; cf. James 1:4) **in Christ**. Paul was interested in believers not remaining spiritual babies (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–2) but in becoming spiritually mature (cf. Heb. 5:11–14). Elsewhere Paul prayed for complete sanctification of believers (1 Thes. 5:23). Paul preached the “fullness” of the gospel so that believers could have the fullness of life Jesus promised (John 10:10). **To this end** Paul expended all his God-given strength. Developing maturity in believers took great **labor** (*kopiō*) or wearisome toil (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10, 58; Gal. 4:11; 1 Thes. 1:3) and even **struggling** (*agōnizomenos*; cf. Col. 2:1; 4:12) or agonizing like an athlete in an arena (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Tim. 6:12). The power for this struggle came from Christ (cf. Phil. 4:13).

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 589-591). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

CHRIST’S SUPREMACY (1:15–23)

The false teachers challenged the true nature and deity of Jesus Christ. Their teaching possibly involved the worship of angels or some other beings (2:15, 18, 20) who negated or minimized the supremacy of Christ. The false teachers declared that salvation was achieved by knowledge rather than faith. Paul’s answer to these matters begins in this important section.

Many think that 1:15–20 was a pre-Pauline hymn that Paul used and applied for the Colossian situation. Regardless, whether reworked or original, Paul presented Christ as preeminent in relation to the entire creation and in relation to humanity and the church because of His resurrection. This hymn or early creed celebrated Christ as the sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things.

Paul described Jesus as Lord of creation, the “firstborn.” The term “firstborn” stresses uniqueness and sovereignty rather than priority in time. Jesus is the “firstborn” because He is the agent of creation and the heir of creation.

Paul developed a physiological metaphor to establish the relationship of head over the body. As the head Christ sends life into the whole body. The church responds in humble adoration, acknowledging that Christ is head over all. God was pleased for His fullness to dwell in Christ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself. The reconciliation spoken of in verses 19–20 is discussed with reference to humankind. Through Christ’s physical death they have been reconciled to God. The purpose of Christ’s reconciliation is to achieve a new creation in which estranged people may know and approach God.

MINISTRY FOR THE CHURCH (1:24–1:29)

The second major part of the letter described Paul’s apostolic ministry for the church. Paul’s ministry task involved making known the mystery of God concerning Christ to the Gentiles in general and to the churches of Colosse in particular. Paul’s service was to make known to Gentiles the “mystery” that God had kept hidden from the world but has now revealed to people like Paul. Paul worked to bring about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church so he could “present everyone perfect in Christ”.

Paul’s efforts on behalf of the Gentiles were intended to help them know the meaning of God’s “mystery” about Christ. By mystery Paul meant that God has now revealed something formerly concealed. The mystery is the fact that Gentiles are now made fellow members with Jewish Christians.

Fields, W. C. (1972). Colossians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 754-755). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Nature and Work of Christ (Col. 1:15–23)

In a profound theological sequence Paul sets forth the preeminence of Jesus. Apparently the false teachers in the church had been advocating inadequate views. Paul lists seven superiorities. As translated in *Today’s English Version*, Christ is (1) “the visible likeness of the invisible God” (v. 15). He is (2) the firstborn Son, “superior to all created things” (v. 15). (3) “By him God created everything” (v. 16). (4) “He existed before all things” (v. 17). (5) “In union with him all things have their proper place” (v. 17). (6) He is the head and source of life for the church (v. 18). (7) He was raised from the dead (v. 18). Contrary to what the Gnostics were teaching, “It was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God” (v. 19). Through him God is at work reconciling all of the disharmony in his creation (vv. 20–23).

Paul’s Concern (Col. 1:24–2:7)

Here the apostle inserts a statement of his credentials for presuming to correct their doctrine. His own ministry is partly one of suffering to prove as well as to proclaim God’s redeeming love for the church.

The apostle ends this statement regarding his own ministry by a review of his purpose for them. It is that they may be “knit together in love,” that they may have the “riches of the full

assurance of understanding” (2:2), and possess “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v. 3). He therefore warns them against being led astray by enticing words (vv. 4–7).

Special points—Paul regards his own sufferings as a means to an end. “For by means of my physical sufferings I help complete what still remains of Christ’s sufferings on behalf of his body, which is the church” (1:24, TEV).

“The mystery which hath been hidden” (v. 26) is phraseology taken from the Gnostics. In Paul’s understanding, a mystery is a truth peculiar to Christianity not discoverable by human reason but revealed by God.

Paul’s words, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27) refer to the fact that God is visible now to the world as he appears in the lives of Christians.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Colossians 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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