

Resources

- "Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians" by John **Calvin** in Volume 21 of *Calvin's Commentaries*
- "An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians" by Matthew **Henry** in *Matthew Henry's Commentary*
- "The Epistle to the Colossians" by Albert **Barnes** in *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (1949)
- "Colossians" by Alexander **Maclaren** in *Maclaren's Expositions of Holy Scripture* (1959)
- "Exposition of Colossians and Philemon" by William **Hendriksen** in *New Testament Commentary* (1964)
- "The Epistle to the Colossians" by E. Earle **Ellis** in *The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (1971)
- Colossians and Philemon* by Ralph **Martin** in *The New Century Bible Commentary* (1973)
- Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians & Philemon* by Homer **Kent** (1978)
- "The Epistle to the Colossians" by Edward **Roustio** in the *Liberty Commentary on the New Testament* (1978)
- "Colossians" by Curtis **Vaughan** in Volume 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (1978)
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- The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* by F. F. **Bruce** in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (1984)
- Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ* by R. Kent **Hughes** in *Preaching the Word* (1989)
- Colossians & Philemon* by Murray **Harris** in the *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (1991)
- Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* by Richard **Melick** in Volume 32 of *The New American Commentary* (1991)
- Colossians & Philemon* by John **MacArthur** in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (1992)
- "Colossians" by Warren **Wiersbe** in *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (2001)
- "Colossians" by Clinton **Arnold** in the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (2002)
- "Greek Exegetical Methods" class notes by Bruce **Compton** (2004)
- The Letters to Colossians and to Philemon* by Douglas **Moo** in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (2008)
- Colossians & Philemon* by David **Pao** in the *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (2012)
- Seeking Things Above: A Study in Colossians* by Steve **Pettit** (2016)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

The book of Colossians is found among the Epistles (letters) of the New Testament.¹ More specifically, it is one of the Pauline Epistles.² Yet more specifically, it is one of the "Prison Epistles" (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon).³ The Prison Epistles were written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:16-31; cf. Colossians 4:3, 10, and 18) for 2 years (Acts 28:30) in the early 60s A.D.⁴ awaiting trial before the Roman Supreme Court. While under house arrest, Paul was chained to a different Roman guard every 6 hours (Acts 28:16; cf. Philippians 1:13), lived in his own rented residence (Acts 28:30), received visitors (Acts 28:17-30), and freely preached the gospel (Acts 28:31; cf. Colossians 4:3-4). Paul's second Roman imprisonment (of the more conventional variety) in the "Mamertime dungeon" in the mid-60s A.D. resulted in his martyrdom.

The Author of the Book

As already indicated, the author of Colossians was the apostle Paul (see Colossians 1:1, 23, and 4:18). Apparently, Paul was not the founder of the church at Colossae (see Colossians 2:1), at least not directly.⁵ Based on Acts 19:10 (cf. Acts 18:23 and 19:26), most are of the opinion that the church was founded during Paul's 3-year (Acts 20:31) stay in Ephesus (recorded in Acts 19) during his 3rd missionary journey (recorded in Acts 18:23-21:16) in the mid-50s A.D. by one of his representatives, Epaphras (see Colossians 1:7).⁶ Based on

¹The New Testament can be subdivided as follows: Gospels (Matthew-John), History (Acts), Epistles (Romans-Jude), and Prophecy (Revelation).

²The Epistles can be subdivided as follows: Pauline Epistles (Romans-Philemon) and General or non-Pauline Epistles (Hebrews-Jude).

³D. Edmond Hiebert (in *An Introduction to the New Testament, Volume Two: The Pauline Epistles*, p. 23) further subdivides the Pauline Epistles as follows: Soteriological Group (Romans-Galatians), Christological Group (Ephesians-Colossians and Philemon; the so-called "prison epistles"), Eschatological Group (1 & 2 Thessalonians), and Ecclesiological Group (1 Timothy-Titus; the so-called "pastoral epistles"). According to Pettit (p. 7), there are approximately 65 references to Christ in the ninety-five verses of Colossians.

⁴Hiebert (p. 206) dates Paul's first Roman imprisonment from 61 A.D. to 63 A.D.

⁵Barnes (pp. ccxxx-ccxxxi), however, makes a case for Paul as the actual founder of the church.

⁶Gromacki (p. 267) calls Epaphras the Colossians' "spiritual father" and Paul their "spiritual

Paul's words in Colossians 4:13, it is likely that Epaphras also founded churches in the neighboring cities of Laodicea (cf. Colossians 2:1, 4:15, and Revelation 3:14-22) and Hierapolis. If and when released from his imprisonment (he eventually was), Paul intended to visit the church at Colossae (see Philemon 22).

The Recipients of the Book

The book of Colossians is so named because 1:2 identifies the book's intended audience as "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae" (according to Colossians 4:16, a secondary recipient would have been the nearby church at Laodicea). As mentioned previously, the church was likely started by one of Paul's associates, Epaphras. Due to Epaphras's apparent imprisonment with Paul in Rome (see Colossians 1:7's "fellow bond-servant," Colossians 4:12's "bondslave," and especially Philemon 23's "my fellow prisoner"), a man by the name of Archippus apparently filled in as pastor (see Colossians 4:17 and Philemon 2). The church apparently met in the home of Philemon (see Philemon 2). Members of the church would have included Philemon and his family (see Philemon 1-2), with Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus to be added to their number (see Philemon 12). The church of Colossae was a relatively insignificant one. As J. B. Lightfoot (quoted in Hiebert, pp. 217-218) once stated: "Without doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St. Paul is addressed." In a similar vein, Hiebert (p. 214) writes: "It is not due to any spectacular events in the secular history of the city of Colossae, but rather to the simple fact that the apostle Paul addressed a letter to the Christian assembly in that small town, that the name of Colossae is today a familiar word throughout Christendom."

The city of Colossae was located approximately 100 miles due east from Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia, in what is today the country of Turkey. It was one of three cities (the other two being Laodicea and Hierapolis) in close proximity to each other in the Lycus Valley. The population of Colossae was a mix of natives (called "Phrygians"), Jews, and Greeks. Today, the city of Colossae lies in ruins, perhaps due to one or several of the many volcanic eruptions or earthquakes known to have hit the area (including an earthquake that hit the area around the time of the writing of Colossians, which is possibly in the background of 1:23 and/or 2:7).

grandfather" (cf. Moo, p. 27).

The Date of Writing

Being one of the Prison Epistles, the book of Colossians was written in the early 60s A.D.⁷ It was likely written early on in Paul's first Roman imprisonment, as there is no indication in the book that Paul anticipated being released anytime soon (as in Philippians). It is likely that Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were written about the same time, Philippians a little later.

The Occasion for Writing

What prompted Paul to write what he wrote when he wrote it? Less than a decade⁸ after its founding, the church at Colossae was being threatened by a false teaching, commonly referred to as the "Colossian heresy." Epaphras made the approximately 1,000-mile⁹ trek to Rome to inform Paul about this threat (see Colossians 1:8), prompting Paul to pen the epistle of Colossians. Paul dispatched a man by the name of Tychicus (Colossians 4:7-8; cf. Acts 20:4, 2 Timothy 4:12, and Titus 3:12) to take the epistle to the Colossians, "killing three birds with one stone" by also sending the epistle of Ephesians (see Ephesians 6:21) and the runaway slave, Onesimus, along with the epistle of Philemon (compare Colossians 4:9 with Philemon 10-12), with Tychicus.

The Purpose for Writing

Why did Paul write what he wrote? Based on the contents of the book, it appears that Paul's purpose for writing the book of Colossians was to combat the so-called "Colossian heresy."¹⁰ What exactly was this heresy? No one

⁷60 A.D. (House, Wiersbe, and Thiessen); 60 or 61 A.D. (Kent, O'Brien, *The New Open Bible*, Harris, Fee and Stuart, Moo, and *Nelson's*); 60-62 A.D. (Geisler, MacArthur, Pao, and Arnold); 60-64 A.D. (Compton); early 60s A.D. (Pettit and Carson, Moo, and Morris); 61 A.D. (Combs and Carson and Moo); 61-63 A.D. (Roustio and Hendriksen); 62 A.D. (Hiebert, Henry, Barnes, and Vaughan).

⁸Wierbse (p. 102) says 5 years; Hiebert (p. 222) says 5-6 years; Gromacki (p. 269) says within 8 years; Melick (p. 164) says 7-10 years.

⁹Martin (p. 25) says 1,200 miles. Going in a straight line, Rome is 900 miles northwest of Colossae.

¹⁰For further study on the "Colossian heresy," see Gromacki (pp. 268-269), O'Brien (pp. xxx-xxxviii), Hendriksen (pp. 18-21), *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (p. 1738), Carson, Moo, and Morris (pp. 335-337), Geisler (p. 668), Vaughan (pp. 166-168), Hiebert (pp. 224-226), Arnold (pp. 375-376), Barnes (pp. ccxxxiii-ccxxxiv), Pettit (pp. 5-6), Martin (pp. 8-19), Pao (pp. 25-31), and Moo (pp. 46-60). Many of the New Testament letters have false teaching as a prominent part of their historical context: Besides Colossians, so also Galatians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, and Jude.

seems to know precisely.¹¹ It appears to have been syncretistic, a mix of several ingredients. There was a Jewish element, as evidenced by Paul's words in Colossians 2:16 (cf. 2:11). There was a philosophical element, as evidenced by Paul's words in Colossians 2:8. There was an ascetic element, as evidenced by Paul's words in Colossians 2:18 ("self-abasement"), 21, and 23 ("self-abasement and severe treatment of the body"). Most interpreters are of the opinion that it also represented an early form of the second century heresy that wreaked such havoc on the early church, Gnosticism. Gnosticism was itself comprised of several ingredients. It was named after the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*, because it taught that salvation came through a secret¹² knowledge possessed by only a select few. One cannot help but notice the prevalence of words pertaining to knowledge scattered throughout the epistle, Paul's way of subtly responding to this aspect of the heresy ("understood" in 1:6; "knowledge," "wisdom," and "understanding" in 1:9; "knowledge" in 1:10; "wisdom" in 1:28; "understanding" and "knowledge" in 2:2; "wisdom" and "knowledge" in 2:3; "knowledge" in 3:10; and "wisdom" in 3:16). Another ingredient of Gnosticism was the belief that the material was evil, while the immaterial was good. Consequently, God could not have directly created the material world, an error that Paul clearly refutes in 1:16, nor could God have taken on human flesh (a denial of the Incarnation), an error that Paul clearly refutes in 2:9 (cf. 1:22). In regards to the first, Gnosticism taught that God created an angelic-type being, which itself created a lesser angelic-type being, a cycle that continued until the final angelic-type being in the chain created the material world. These angelic-type beings were referred to as "aeons." This explains the prominence of angelic worship in the Colossian heresy (see Colossians 2:18), as well as the mention of angels in 1:16 ("thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities"), 2:10 ("rule and authority"), and 2:15 ("rulers and authorities"). God the Son was considered to be merely one of these "aeons." This explains Paul's stress on Christ's supremacy over all creation in 1:15-17, as well as his reminder of Christ's triumph over the demons in 2:15.

The Theme of the Book

¹¹O'Brien (pp. xxx-xxxii) cites J. J. Gunther, who in a 1973 article listed 44 different suggestions of 19th and 20th century New Testament scholars as to the identity of the Colossian heresy.

¹²Notice Paul's use of "mystery" in 1:26, 27, 2:2, and 4:3, likely in response to the secret *gnosis* claimed by the false teachers.

What is the book of Colossians about? "In Colossians [the dominant theme] is the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the Head of all creation and of the Church" (Hughes, p. 13). In like manner, the *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts* (p. 418) states: "The resounding theme in Colossians is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in all things." Vaughan (p. 168) also writes: "Colossians proclaims the absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ." The supremacy of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:21-22a and Philippians 2:10) is the focus as the body of the book begins, in 1:15-18 (cf. 2:10). The sufficiency of Christ is the emphasis in such verses as 1:9, 2:9-10, 17, and 3:11 (see also such words as "filled" in 1:9, "complete" in 1:28, "full" in 2:2, "perfect" and "fully" in 4:12, and "all"¹³; by contrast, see such words as "empty" in 2:8 and "vainly" in the KJV in 2:18). *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (p. 1739) suggests that the theme of Colossians is "the complete adequacy of Christ as contrasted with the emptiness of mere human philosophy."

The Overall Structure of the Book

As with any letter/epistle, Colossians has an introduction (1:1-14), a body (1:15-4:6), and a conclusion (4:7-18).

Like so many of Paul's other epistles, Colossians is divided into two interrelated sections. Chapters 1 and 2 are, for the most part, doctrinal, while chapters 3 and 4 are, for the most part, practical (cf. Romans, where chapters 1-11 are doctrinal, chapters 12-16 practical, and Ephesians, where chapters 1-3 are doctrinal, chapters 4-6 practical). By laying a doctrinal foundation before making practical application, Paul was implying the principle that belief begets behavior (what one believes is reflected in the way one behaves).

Some Outstanding Features of Colossians

1. Its similarity to the book of Ephesians¹⁴

¹³According to Wiersbe (p. 104), the word, "all" is used over 30 times in Colossians.

¹⁴According to Edgar Goodspeed (cited in Vaughan, p. 169), three-fifths of Colossians is reflected in Ephesians. Of the 1,570 words in Colossians, 34% reappear in Ephesians, while 26.5% of the 2,411 words in Ephesians are paralleled in Colossians (Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. xlvi). According to Vaughan (*Ephesians*, p. 11), of the 155 verses in Ephesians over half contain expressions identical with those in Colossians. Similarly, Gromacki (p. 241) says that of the 155 verses in Ephesians, the content of 78 of them is repeated in Colossians with some differences. According to Hendriksen ("Exposition of Ephesians," in the *New Testament Commentary*, p. 27),

Having been written at about the same time (Colossians was probably written first), it is not surprising that there are many similarities between Colossians and Ephesians.¹⁵ Most notable is the similarity between Ephesians 6:21-22 and Colossians 4:7-8, thirty-two identical Greek words being used in both passages (Harris, p. 4). Accordingly, Ephesians and Colossians have been called the "Twin Epistles." Bruce (p. 241) calls Ephesians a "sequel to Colossians." Just as Romans is often considered an expansion of the book of Galatians, 2 Peter of Jude, and 1 Timothy of Titus, so Ephesians may be considered an expansion of the book of Colossians. Whereas in Ephesians, the emphasis is more upon the body of Christ, of which Christ is the Head, in Colossians, the emphasis is more upon Christ as the Head of the church, which is His body.

2. Its Christology

Hiebert (p. 226) calls the Christological emphasis of Colossians "the outstanding characteristic of this epistle." *The New Open Bible* (p. 1404) calls Colossians "perhaps the most Christ-centered book in the Bible." Melick (p. 162) says that "no other epistle is as Christocentric as this one." Pettit (p. 11) likewise says that "no New Testament letter more specifically or majestically focuses on Jesus Christ than does Colossians." As a corrective to the Colossian heresy's deprecation¹⁶ of Christ, Paul emphasizes the supremacy of Christ,¹⁷ especially in the most memorable section of the epistle, 1:15-20.¹⁸

two-thirds of the 95 verses in Colossians are clearly or rather clearly paralleled in Ephesians. Barnes (p. ccxxxv) says that there is more similarity by far between Ephesians and Colossians than between any other two of Paul's epistles.

¹⁵See pages 6-26 of William Hendriksen's commentary on Ephesians for a side-by-side comparison of Ephesians and Colossians. See also similar charts in Kent (pp. 22-23) and Barnes (pp. ccxxxvi-ccxxxvii).

¹⁶Vaughan (p. 168) states that the Colossian heresy did not deny Christ, but dethroned Him. It gave Him a place, but not the supreme place.

¹⁷"A true Christology is the final answer to every heresy that ever has been, or ever will be" (W. Graham Scroggie, quoted in Hiebert, p. 226).

¹⁸"The marvelous passage in 1:15-23, which presents Christ in His threefold relation to God, creation, and the Church, is the distinctive glory of this epistle among the Pauline writings" (Hiebert, p. 226).

An Outline of Colossians

- I. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - A. Introductory greeting (1:1-2)
 - B. Thanksgiving for their past progress (1:3-8)
 - C. Prayer for their continued progress (1:9-14)
- II. Doctrinal (1:15-2:23)
 - A. The supremacy of Christ (1:15-23)
 - 1. Seen in creation (1:15-17)
 - 2. Seen in redemption (1:18-23)
 - a. Christ's work of reconciliation (1:18-20)
 - b. Christ's work of reconciliation applied to the Colossians (1:21-23)
 - (1) Their past condition (1:21)
 - (2) Their present condition (1:22-23)
 - B. The ministry of Christ's servant (1:24-2:5)
 - 1. Towards the church in general (1:24-29)
 - 2. Towards the Colossian church in particular (2:1-5)
 - C. The threat to Christ's supremacy (2:6-23)
 - 1. A general corrective to the threat (2:6-7)
 - 2. The threat exposed (2:8-23)
 - a. A preliminary warning (2:8)
 - b. The real corrective: a proper understanding of the person and work of Christ (2:9-15)
 - c. Further warnings (2:16-23)
 - (1) Warning against legalism (2:16-17)
 - (2) Warning against angelic worship (2:18-19)
 - (3) Warning against asceticism (2:20-23)
- III. Practical (3:1-4:6)
 - A. A general exhortation (3:1-4)
 - B. Specific exhortations (3:5-4:6)
 - 1. Vices to put off (3:5-11)
 - 2. Virtues to put on (3:12-17)
 - 3. Concerning relationships (3:18-4:1)
 - a. Between husbands and wives (3:18-19)
 - b. Between parents and children (3:20-21)
 - c. Between masters and slaves (3:22-4:1)
 - 4. Concerning prayer (4:2-4)
 - 5. Concerning conduct towards outsiders (4:5-6)
- IV. Conclusion (4:7-18)
 - A. A word concerning the bearers of the epistle, Tychicus and

- Onesimus (4:7-9)
- B. Greetings from Paul's associates (4:10-14)
 - 1. His Jewish associates (4:10-11)
 - 2. His Gentile associates (4:12-14)
- C. Greetings from Paul himself (4:15)
- D. Concluding instructions (4:16-17)
- E. Benediction (4:18)

Other¹⁹ Sources Consulted for This Lesson

An Introduction to the New Testament by D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris

An Introduction to the New Testament (Volume 2: The Pauline Epistles) by D. Edmond Hiebert

New Testament Survey by Robert Gromacki

The New Open Bible, Study Edition

The Zondervan NASB Study Bible

Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament by H. Wayne House

Introduction to the New Testament by Henry Thiessen

How to Read the Bible Book by Book by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

The Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts

The MacArthur Bible Handbook

Introducing the New Testament by D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo

"Acts & Pauline Epistles" class notes by William Combs

¹⁹Besides the resources listed earlier.

Introduction to Colossians Review Questions

1. Where was Paul imprisoned and what kind of imprisonment was he under when he wrote Colossians, a “prison epistle”? *Rome; house arrest*
2. What are the 4 “prison epistles”? *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*
3. What is the doctrinal emphasis of the “prison epistles”? *Christology*
4. Who founded the church at Colossae? *Epaphras*
5. Who filled-in as pastor of the church at Colossae while Epaphras was away?
Archippus
6. In whose home did the church at Colossae meet? *Philemon’s*
7. In what modern-day country was the city of Colossae located? *Turkey*
8. Approximately how many years had elapsed between the founding of the church of Colossae and the writing of Colossians? *5-10 years*
9. Who was the “mailman” of Colossians, i.e., the one who delivered it to the Colossians?
Tychicus
10. Whom and what other 2 epistles (besides Colossians) did Tychicus take with him from Rome to Colossae? *Onesimus and Ephesians and Philemon (perhaps also the epistle to the Laodiceans)*
11. What was Paul’s purpose for writing Colossians? *to combat the Colossian heresy*
12. What heresy (in its early form) was a leading contributor to the so-called “Colossian heresy”? *Gnosticism*
13. What is the theme of Colossians? *the supremacy, sufficiency, and centrality of Christ*
14. What other Pauline epistle is Colossians’ “twin”? *Ephesians*

COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

I. Introduction (1:1-14)

A. Introductory greeting (1:1-2)

Paul begins the book of Colossians in typical fashion with a standard epistolary salutation (cf. Ezra 7:12, Daniel 4:1, Acts 15:23, and 23:26) in verses 1-2, consisting of the naming of the writer (verse 1), the naming of the recipients (verse 2a), and a greeting (verse 2b).

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, (1:1) To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (1:2)

Verse 1

Paul calls himself “**an apostle.**” An apostle was a messenger, someone sent to deliver a message on behalf of another (the verbal form of the Greek noun translated “apostle” means “to send”).²⁰ Paul’s vocation/calling²¹ in life was to be an apostle (Romans 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 1:1); this was God’s will for his life (“**by the will of God**”; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, and 2 Timothy 1:1, as well as Galatians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:1, and 2:7). Perhaps this conviction was one of the factors that sustained Paul in the midst of his many hardships (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28) as an apostle. Paul was an apostle “**of Jesus Christ,**” meaning Christ was the One who had sent Paul (cf. Galatians 1:1).

Timothy (“**and Timothy**”) is mentioned alongside Paul (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, and Philemon 1), potentially giving the impression that he co-authored Colossians. However, as the book unfolds, it is clear that Paul was its sole author (see the “I” in 1:23-25, 29, 2:1, 4-5, 4:3-4, 8, 13 and 18; the “my” in 1:24, 4:7, 10, 16, and 18; and the “me” in 4:11).

The reason why Timothy’s name is listed alongside Paul’s may be that he was Paul’s “amanuensis,” a secretary of sorts who wrote

²⁰Henry (p. 748) calls an apostle a “prime-minister.” There seems to be two categories of apostle in the New Testament. Paul and the Twelve were apostles in an official sense, others (such as Barnabas in Acts 14:14 and James in Galatians 1:19) in a secondary sense. According to Robert Thomas (*Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 77), to be an apostle in the official sense, one had to meet three criteria: personal contact with Christ while on earth, a witness of Christ’s resurrection, and direct appointment by Christ. “Secondary apostles” (such as James) did not meet the third requirement. For Paul, all three requirements were met at the same time on the road to Damascus in Acts 9 (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8).

²¹Our English word, “vocation” comes from the Latin verb, *vocare*, meaning “to call.” “Each one of us has a ‘vocation,’ a calling from God that we are to carry out to his glory . . .” (R.C. Sproul, *Romans*, p. 23).

down the contents of the book as Paul conveyed them to him (see Romans 16:22). Based on 4:18 (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:21, Galatians 6:11, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17), it appears that Paul did use an amanuensis in writing Colossians.

Based on Galatians 1:2, the more likely reason why Timothy's name is mentioned alongside Paul's in the salutation is because Timothy was with Paul in Rome at the time of writing. Paul calls Timothy "**our brother**"²² (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, and Philemon 1, as well as Romans 16:23, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 16:12, 2 Corinthians 8:18, and 12:18), signifying that Timothy was not only a brother in Christ to Paul and the Colossians, but also one of Paul's partners in the spread of the gospel.

Verse 2

Paul names the recipients of the epistle as "**the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae.**"

Paul calls the Colossians "**saints**" (cf. Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, and Philippians 1:1), meaning "holy/sanctified/consecrated/set apart ones," those set apart for a special purpose, for Christ and His cause. Contrary to Roman Catholic theology, a "saint" is not a special class of believer, but a "rank-and-file Christian" (R. C. Sproul, *Romans*, p. 28).

Paul also calls the Colossians "**faithful brethren**" (cf. 1:7, 4:7, 9, as well as Ephesians 1:1), meaning that their behavior (faithfulness) matched their belief (faith).

Though their geographical location was "**at Colossae,**" the Colossians' spiritual position was "**in Christ**" (Kent, pp. 29-30). The phrase, "in Christ" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:1, and Philippians 1:1) is Paul's²³ way of saying that the Colossians, being believers, were united to Christ. Union with Christ is the

²²Elsewhere (in 1 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 2:22, 1 Timothy 1:2, 18, and 2 Timothy 1:2), Paul calls Timothy his "child"/"son," meaning that he had led Timothy to the Lord and/or that he had disciplined Timothy.

²³According to Vaughan (p. 172), "in Christ" (and its related forms) is found more than 160 times in the Pauline Epistles. William Hendriksen ("Exposition of Ephesians" in *New Testament Commentary*, pp. 70-71) calls it "the most important [phrase] in all the Pauline epistles."

inseparable spiritual bond that exists between Christ and the believer.

Paul concludes his salutation with an unusual (though not for Paul) greeting (“**grace to you and peace from God our Father**”; cf. Numbers 6:24-26). The typical greeting was *chairen* (“greetings”—Acts 15:23, 23:26, and James 1:1). Paul, however, was fond of using *charis* (“grace”) instead²⁴, coupled with “peace” (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, Titus 1:4, and Philemon 3; cf. Daniel 4:1) or with “mercy” and peace (1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2). Grace is God’s giving us what we do not deserve, most notably salvation. Peace is a state of overall spiritual well-being, a serenity of soul knowing God is in control. The believer is positionally at “peace *with* God” (Romans 5:1). He experiences the “peace *of* God” (Philippians 4:7) as a result. “Peace” was a common Oriental greeting (see Ezra 4:17, 5:7, and Daniel 4:1). Commenting on the relationship between grace and peace, William Hendriksen (“Exposition of Ephesians” in *New Testament Commentary*, p. 71) states: “Grace is the fountain. Peace belongs to the stream of spiritual blessings which issues from this fountain.” Grace is the root, peace the fruit; grace is the cause, peace the consequence.

Paul rightly identifies the source of grace and peace. Both are “**from God our Father**,” the “God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10) and the “God of peace” (Romans 15:33, 16:20, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Hebrews 13:20; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16). God is the believer’s Father by virtue of the fact that He created the believer (Deuteronomy 32:6, Malachi 2:10, and Acts 17:28-29) and by virtue of the fact that He saved the believer (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6).

B. Thanksgiving for their past progress (1:3-8)

Paul’s usual pattern in his epistles is to follow his salutation with a prayer report by means of which he lets his readers know that he is praying for them and tells them specifically what he is praying for

²⁴Gordon Fee, commenting on Paul’s similarly-worded salutation in Philippians (*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 70), states: “Here is a marvelous example of Paul’s ‘turning into gospel’ everything he sets his hand to.”

them. Colossians is no exception to this pattern. The prayer report of Colossians is found in 1:3-14. Chapter 1:3-8 comprise one sentence in the original.

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, (1:3) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; (1:4) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel (1:5) which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; (1:6) just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, (1:7) and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. (1:8)

Verse 3

Paul was fond of expressing thanks to God for his readers (cf. Romans 1:8, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4). Thanksgiving is a prominent concept in Colossians (see 1:12, 2:7, 3:15, 17, and 4:2). Paul rightly directs his thanksgiving **“to God.”** “Paul knew that God is the One who is ultimately responsible, and to Him belongs our unending gratitude” (Kent, p. 31).

Paul calls God **“the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (cf. Romans 15:6, 2 Corinthians 1:3, 11:31, Ephesians 1:3, and 1 Peter 1:3, as well as Matthew 26:39 and 42), indicative of the fact that Christ is God (cf. John 5:17-18).

The Greek adverb translated **“always”** is, in the opinion of most interpreters, misplaced. Rather than modifying the verb “praying” (so KJV and NASB), it is more likely modifying the verb “give thanks” (so NIV and ESV). The idea is that whenever Paul prayed for the Colossians, he gave thanks for them. Ask yourself: Am I the kind of person that causes others to thank God for me whenever they pray for me?

Verse 4

Paul gives the reason why he thanked God for the Colossians whenever he prayed for them. Paul had **“heard”** (presumably from the lips of Epaphras—see 1:7-8) of the Colossians’ **“faith in Christ Jesus”** and love **“for all the saints.”** Paul often thanked God for his readers’ faith (Romans 1:8, Ephesians 1:15, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:5, and Philemon 5) and love (Ephesians 1:15, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and Philemon 5). Are these the kinds of things that make others thank God for us? The faith of the Colossians was **“in Christ Jesus,”** meaning (among other things) that it was placed in the right object. Their love was for **“all”** the saints. Do we truly love each and every one of our fellow believers? Faith towards God and love towards God’s children are inseparable, the second (love) flowing out of the first (faith) (see Galatians 5:6 in the NIV: “faith expressing itself through love”). Faith is the root; love the fruit; faith is the cause, love the consequence.²⁵

Verse 5

Paul gives an underlying cause of the Colossians’ faith towards God and love towards God’s children (verse 4): **“because of the hope laid up for you in heaven”** (verse 5a). What Paul seems to be saying is that the believer’s hope of glorification (“hope of the glory of God” in Romans 5:2 and “hope of glory” in Colossians 1:27)/of receiving eternal life in its full and final sense (“hope of eternal life” in Titus 1:2 and 3:7) is a catalyst for such virtues as faith and love (cf. 1 John 3:2-3). As elsewhere in Scripture (cf. especially 1 Corinthians 13:13, as well as 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 5:8, and Hebrews 10:22-24), faith, hope, and love form a triad here in Colossians 1:4-5.²⁶

The Greek verb translated **“laid up”** has the idea of stored up like a treasure (cf. 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Peter 1:4).²⁷ Paul goes on to say

²⁵“The same Magnet, Christ Jesus, who attracts sinners to himself and changes them into saints simultaneously draws them into closer fellowship with each other” (Hendriksen, p. 47). A similar analogy would be the spokes on a wheel, that draw closer to each other the closer they draw to the wheel’s hub.

²⁶“Faith is the soul looking upward to God; love looks outward to others; hope looks forward to the future” (Geisler, p. 669).

²⁷“The Colossian Christians are assured that everything contained in their hope is kept for them in

that the Colossians had heard about this treasure of hope stored up for them in heaven **“in the word of truth, the gospel”** (cf. Galatians 2:5, 14, and Ephesians 1:13). Paul calls the gospel “the word of truth” (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:7, 2 Timothy 2:15, and James 1:18, as well as verse 6’s “in truth”), his way of contrasting it with the falsehood of the Colossian heresy (called a “deception” in 2:8).

Verse 6

When the gospel came to Colossae (**“which has come to you”**) through Epaphras (verse 7), it took root, just as it had throughout the entire known world (**“just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also”**; cf. 1:23). The Greek verbs translated **“bearing fruit”** and **“increasing”** respectively connote intensive (internal) growth/growth within and extensive (external) growth/growth without (Hendriksen, p. 50). In other words, the seed of the gospel takes root in the hearts of individuals, producing fruit (the “fruit of righteousness,” Philippians 1:11; the “fruit of the Spirit,” Galatians 5:22-23) and resulting in the spread of the gospel throughout ever-widening geographical circles (see, for example, Acts 6:7, 12:24, and 19:20).²⁸

The Greek verb translated **“bearing fruit”** is in the middle voice (literally: is bearing fruit of itself), indicative of the self-generating power inherent in the gospel seed (cf. Mark 4:26-28 and Romans 1:16). It is only as the gospel seed is scattered (when it “come[s] to you”), however, that its power can be unleashed (cf. Romans 10:13-14). When Epaphras scattered the gospel seed in Colossae, God the Holy Spirit did His supernatural work of illumination, causing the spiritually-deaf and spiritually-ignorant Colossians to truly (**“in truth”**) hear (**“heard”**) and understand (**“understood”**) the **“grace of God”** found in the gospel (cf. Acts 20:24’s “the gospel of the grace of God”).

Verse 7

Based on the opening words of this verse (**“just as you learned it from Epaphras”**), most interpreters believe that Epaphras founded

its right place—in heaven where no power, human or otherwise, can touch it” (O’Brien, pp. 11-12).

²⁸“The Word of God is the only seed that can be planted anywhere in the world and bear fruit” (Wiersbe, p. 107).

the Colossian church. Paul calls Epaphras "**our beloved fellow bond-servant**" (cf. 4:7). The apostles were fond of giving themselves the title, "**bond-servant**" (Paul elsewhere in Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:10, Philippians 1:1, and Titus 1:1; James in James 1:1; Peter in 2 Peter 1:1; and Jude in Jude 1). All believers, not just apostles, are bond-servants of Christ (Romans 6:22, 1 Corinthians 7:22, Ephesians 6:6, and 1 Peter 2:16). Salvation is a change of slave masters (Romans 6:16-22).

Paul also calls Epaphras "**a faithful servant of Christ**" (cf. 4:7, as well as Matthew 25:21). The Greek noun translated "**of Christ**" is most likely an "objective genitive," meaning that Christ was the object of Epaphras's service. Epaphras's ministry was on Paul's behalf ("**on our behalf**"), implying that Epaphras evangelized the cities of the Lycus valley under the auspices of Paul.

Verse 8

When Epaphras came to Rome to inform Paul about the situation in Colossae, he not only told Paul about the negative (the Colossian heresy), but also about the positive. In regards to the second, Epaphras informed Paul about the faith and love of the Colossian believers (verse 4). Here in verse 8, Paul identifies the source of that love as the Holy Spirit ("**love in the Spirit**"²⁹). See also Romans 5:5, 15:30, and Galatians 5:22 in this regard.

²⁹Harris (p. 23) translates: "love inspired by the Spirit."

1:1-8 Review Questions

1. What is a “saint” (1:2)? *literally a holy one, set apart one, sanctified one (any and every believer)*
2. What does it mean to be “in Christ” (1:2)? *to be connected to Him (united to Him)*
3. What significance is there in the order of 1:2b (grace ⇒ peace)? *grace is the cause/root, peace the consequence/fruit*
4. What is Paul saying about Christ in 1:3 by calling God “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”? *Christ is God*
5. What significance is there in the order of 1:4 (faith ⇒ love)? *Faith (the vertical element) is the cause/root, love (the horizontal element) the consequence/fruit*
6. What does “love in the Spirit” in 1:8 mean? *love inspired by the Spirit*

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

C. Prayer for their continued progress (1:9-14)

Back in verse 3, Paul told the Colossians that he was praying for them.³⁰ Interceding for other believers in prayer was a hallmark of Paul (cf. Romans 1:9-10, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4).

In this section of the letter, 1:9-14, Paul continues his prayer report, begun in verse 3, by telling the Colossians exactly what he is praying for on their behalf. As we study this Pauline prayer, it is good to ask ourselves: Do we pray for others like this?³¹

³⁰Later in the letter (in 4:3), Paul will ask the Colossians to pray for him. Mutual intercessory prayer between Paul and his readers was typical (see chart on page 56 of Hendriksen).

³¹“Typically when we pray for ourselves or for others, we pray for physical health, well-being, social relationships, and spiritual growth. But part of our intercessory prayers ought to be for ‘the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.’ Have you prayed like this for others” (Hughes, p. 23)? “Learn to pray with Paul. Such study will help us identify what to pray for, how to approach God, the proper grounds for our petitions. To restrict ourselves for a moment to the petitions in the prayers of Paul, we must ask ourselves how far the petitions we commonly present to God are in line with what Paul prays for. Suppose, for example, that 80 or 90 percent of our petitions ask God for good health, recovery from illness, safety on the road, a good job, success in exams, the emotional needs of our children, success in our mortgage application, and much more of

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, (1:9) so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (1:10) strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously (1:11) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (1:12) For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, (1:13) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (1:14)

Verse 9

In light of the good report (“**For this reason**”) that Paul received from Epaphras (“**since the day we heard of it**”), Paul, besides thanking God for the Colossians (verse 3), also (“**also**”) prayed to God for the Colossians.

Notice how the Colossians’ spiritual vitality was the catalyst for Paul’s prayer for them. By contrast, we tend to pray for others only when their spiritual vitality is waning. Our brothers and sisters in Christ need our prayers at all times, the spiritually good times, as well as the spiritually bad times (our prayers are a means of their perseverance). Accordingly, Paul prayed for the Colossians unceasingly (“**we have not ceased to pray for you**”; cf. Romans

the same. How much of Paul’s praying revolves around equivalent terms? If the center of our praying is far removed from the center of Paul’s praying, then even our very praying may serve as a wretched testimony to the remarkable success of the process of paganization in our life and thought” (D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, pp. 96-97; Carson examines the prayer of Colossians 1:9-14 in chapter 6 of his book). Eugene Peterson (cited in Pao, p. 79) chides: “Left to ourselves, we are never more selfish than when we pray. With God as the Great Sympathizer, the Great Giver, the Great Promiser, we go to our knees and indulge every impulse for gratification.” Pao (p. 79) asks: “Do our prayers reveal that we worship no one but ourselves? Are we praying simply to ‘use’ God to accomplish our will? Do such prayers reveal that we are nothing but materialists who care only about our well-being in this earthly existence?”

1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and 2 Timothy 1:3), meaning regularly and frequently (Harris, p. 29).

Paul's prayer for the Colossians was that they would "**be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**" (cf. Ephesians 1:17-18).

The Greek verb translated "**filled**" is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that Someone (God) and/or something else (God's Word) does the filling and that the believer must yield to it. The believer is to fill his mind with Scripture, the only means by which anyone can know God's will in this day and age³², in a spirit of submission to Its teaching. Letting one's mind be filled with Scripture causes one's mind to be controlled by It (see Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16).

It is only through the Holy Spirit's supernatural work of illumination ("**in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**"), however, that the believer is able to fully³³ know God's will ("in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" may be translated "by means of all spiritual wisdom and understanding"). In illumination, the Holy Spirit convinces the believer of the significance of biblical truth, the meaning of which the believer gleans through diligent Bible study.

Because illumination is something that God the Holy Spirit alone can do, Paul rightly asks ("**ask**") God to do this work on the Colossians' behalf. The fact that Paul mentions "knowledge" (*epignosis*), "wisdom," and "understanding" in this verse is likely an allusion to the Gnostic-like heretics in Colossae and the premium they put on "gnosis," knowledge. As Hendriksen (p. 57) states: "No doubt we have here an intentional allusion to the gnostic error with which false teachers were striving to lead the Colossians astray."

Verse 10

³² "... [B]y which expression [the knowledge of the divine will] he [Paul] sets aside all inventions of men, and all speculations that are at variance with the word of God. For his will is not to be sought anywhere else than in his word" (Calvin, p. 142).

³³ Paul uses *epignosis* (translated "knowledge" by the NASB), an intensified form (intensified with the Greek preposition, *epi*) of the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*.

Belief/learning ("filled with the knowledge of His will" in verse 9) determines behavior/living ("walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" in verse 10).³⁴ As a result of ("**so that**") the believer's submissive study of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit's supernatural work of illumination (verse 9), the believer will "**walk**," i.e., live (see 3:7) "**in a manner worthy of the Lord**" (cf. Ephesians 4:1, Philippians 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, and 3 John 6).

The Greek adverb translated "**worthy**" has the idea of being of equal weight (Geisler, p. 671). For starters, to live a life worthy of the Lord is "to live a life that is commensurate with what the Lord has done for us and is to us" (Vaughan, p. 178). However, because God is "infinitely weighty" (the Hebrew word used of God so often in the Old Testament, "glory," literally means "heavy"), "tipping the scales" to an infinite degree, the believer will need an infinite duration of time, eternity in heaven, to worship the Lord in a manner befitting Him (cf. Revelation 4:11).

To live in a manner worthy of the Lord is "**to please Him in all respects**" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9, Galatians 1:10, Ephesians 5:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 4:1, and Hebrews 11:5). In verses 10-12, Paul mentions four characteristics of one who is living in a manner worthy of the Lord and pleasing Him in all respects: "bearing fruit in every good work" (verse 10); "increasing in the knowledge of God" (verse 10); "strengthened with all power" (verse 11); and "giving thanks to the Father" (verse 12).

The first characteristic is "**bearing fruit in every good work.**" Prior to their conversion, the Colossians were characterized by the fruit of "evil deeds" (1:21). Paul prays that they will continue to be characterized by the fruit of good works, such as faith and love (1:4; cf. Galatians 5:22-23).

The second characteristic is "**increasing in the knowledge of God**" (cf. 2 Peter 3:18). There is some debate among interpreters as to the proper meaning of this one. Kent, based on 1:6 ("bearing fruit and increasing"), interprets it in conjunction with the previous characteristic to mean bearing fruit and increasing in good works by means of the knowledge of God. Most interpreters, however,

³⁴“The Hebrews saw an absolute connection between knowledge and conduct. From their perspective, a person did not know something unless he or she did it” (Hughes, p. 24).

distinguish the two. From a purely grammatical standpoint, the second option seems preferable. If so, knowledge is both a cause (verse 9) and a consequence (verse 10) of walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. As Augustine (quoted in Geisler, p. 671) once said: "Faith is understanding's step, and understanding is faith's reward." "**Knowledge of God**" is most likely to be understood as knowledge of God Himself.

Verse 11

A third characteristic of one who is living in a manner worthy of the Lord and pleasing Him in all respects is "**strengthened with all power**" (Moo, p. 97 translates: "strengthened by God with the greatest strength imaginable"). The Greek verb translated "strengthened" is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that Someone else (God) is the One who supplies the strength (cf. Philippians 4:13 and 1 Peter 4:11). How powerful is the power that is at work within the believer (Ephesians 3:20 and Colossians 1:29)? It is power that is "**according to [God's] glorious might**" (cf. Ephesians 3:16), infinite power, the power that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20; cf. Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12).

By virtue of possessing such power ("**for**"), the believer is able to be steadfast in the midst of any difficult circumstance and patient with every difficult person³⁵ and to do so with an attitude of joy. The Greek noun translated "**steadfastness**" has the idea of abiding or remaining under the pressure of a trial, letting it run its full course³⁶ (the verbal form of the noun is *hupomeno*, the Greek preposition, *hupo*, "under" + the Greek verb, *meno*, "to abide or remain"). See James 1:4a in this regard. God gives the believer the strength to be steadfast (Romans 15:5). "**Patience**" has the idea of being longsuffering with problem people (the Greek noun is *makrothumia*, from the Greek adjective, *makros*, "long" + the Greek noun, *thumos*, "anger," thus signifying someone who is long-

³⁵Commenting on the "all" in "all steadfastness and patience," Pao (pp. 72-73) reminds that "being strengthened by God will bring about every 'endurance' and 'patience' in every way and in everything."

³⁶Someone has said that when facing trials, our attitude should be "what can I get out of this," rather than "how can I get out of this."

tempered, as opposed to short-tempered). See Ephesians 4:2 and Colossians 3:12-13 in this regard. The Greek prepositional phrase, "with joy," translated adverbially as "**joyously**" in the NASB, which ends verse 11, can legitimately be taken as modifying the verb, "giving thanks" in verse 12 (so NASB, NIV, O'Brien, Melick, Harris, Moo, Compton, and Pao) or the nouns, "steadfastness" and "patience," in verse 11 (so KJV, ESV, Kent, Henry, Calvin, and MacArthur). Based on such passages as Matthew 5:10-12//Luke 6:22-23, Acts 5:41, 16:25, Hebrews 10:34, James 1:2, and 1 Peter 4:13, the second option seems preferable.

Verse 12

A fourth and final characteristic of one who is living in a manner worthy of the Lord and pleasing Him in all respects is "**giving thanks to the Father**" (cf. 1:3 and 3:17). Paul proceeds to give two reasons why believers should give thanks to God. First, because He "**has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.**" The Greek verb translated "**qualified**" is elsewhere (in 2 Corinthians 3:6) translated "made adequate." "**The inheritance of the saints in Light**" (cf. Matthew 19:29, Acts 20:32, 26:18, Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18, Colossians 3:24, Hebrews 9:15, and 1 Peter 1:4, as well as Romans 8:17) is a reference to the believer's heavenly home.

Verse 13

A second reason why believers should give thanks to God is because ("**for**") "**He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.**" God "**rescued,**" saved, liberated, freed, delivered the believer "**from the domain of darkness**" (cf. "power of darkness" in Luke 22:53). The word, "**domain**" carries with it the idea of domination. The believer was once (prior to conversion) under the sway of sin and Satan (John 8:34, Romans 6:17, 2 Timothy 2:26, Titus 3:3, and 2 Peter 2:19). God rescued the believer from this domain.³⁷ There are two (and only two) domains, the domain of "**darkness**" and the domain of light (see Luke 16:8, John 3:19-21, Acts 26:18, Romans 13:12, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 5:8-14, 6:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:5, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 1:6-7, and 2:10-11). Believers have been freed from the first and transferred into the

³⁷"Helpless, hopeless slaves were we, chained by our sins in Satan's prison . . . until the Conqueror came to our rescue" (Hendriksen, p. 63).

second (Acts 26:18, Ephesians 5:8, and 1 Peter 2:9).

The Greek verb translated “**transferred**” was used to refer to “removing persons from one country and settling them as colonists and citizens in another country” (Vaughan, p. 180). Most often, this involved going from being free to becoming enslaved. In the case of the believer, however, it involves just the opposite, going from being enslaved to becoming free (John 8:32 and 36) (Hendriksen, p. 63).

The realm into which the believer has been transferred is “**the kingdom of His beloved Son.**” By “**kingdom,**” Paul is, among other things, communicating the truth that, at salvation, one goes from being under the sway of sin and Satan (“the domain of darkness”) to being under the sway of the Son (cf. Romans 6:18, 1 Corinthians 7:22b, Ephesians 6:6, and 1 Peter 2:16). The words “**of His beloved Son**” are reminiscent of God the Father’s words at both the baptism (Matthew 3:17 et. al.) and transfiguration (Matthew 17:5 et. al.) of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:6).

Verse 14

Verse 14 serves as a bridge of sorts between this section and the next. Paul ends verse 13 by mentioning God the Son (“His beloved Son”). In verse 14, he says that by virtue of being united to Christ (“**in whom**”; see comments on 1:2), the believer is having (the Greek verb translated “**have**” is in the present tense) “redemption” and “the forgiveness of sins.”

The Greek noun translated “**redemption**” was used to describe the emancipation of slaves and the release of prisoners of war. Theologically, it entails the release of the sinner from sin’s bondage through the payment of a ransom³⁸ price, the death of Christ (Matthew 20:28//Mark 10:45, Acts 20:28, Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 1:7, 1 Timothy 2:6, 1 Peter 1:18-19, and Revelation 5:9). Since “have” is in the present tense, Paul likely has the believer’s present deliverance from the power of sin (progressive sanctification) in mind.

If the ransom price for sin is paid, then sin can be forgiven.

³⁸The idea of ransom is inherent in the Greek word for redemption. The Greek word for redemption is *apolutrosis*. The Greek word for ransom is *lutron*. The ransom is paid to God the Father.

“Forgiveness” (cf. 2:13 and 3:13, as well as Ephesians 1:7) carries with it the idea of “a sending away” (Vaughan, p. 180). When God forgives us, he sends our sins as far away as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

1:9-14 Review Questions

1. What does it mean to pray unceasingly for another (1:9; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17)? *regularly, consistently, frequently*
2. How does one become filled with the knowledge of God’s will (1:9)? *through His Word*
3. What significance is there in the order of 1:9-10 (knowledge, wisdom, and understanding in verse 9 ⇒ walk in verse 10)? *belief before behavior; learning leading to living*
4. How worthy is God of our living for Him (1:10)/worshipping Him (Revelation 4:11)? *infinitely, immeasurably*
5. What’s the difference between “steadfastness” and “patience” in 1:11? *steadfastness is persevering through problems, while patience is putting up with problem people*
6. What does “joyously” in 1:11 modify? *steadfastness and patience*
7. What does redemption (1:14) mean? *to be set free from sin’s slavery by the payment of a ransom (Christ’s death)*

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

II. Doctrinal (1:15-2:23)

As mentioned in the introductory lesson (under “The Overall Structure of the Book”), the bodies of Paul’s epistles are typically composed of two major sections, a doctrinal section followed by a practical section (a reminder that belief begets behavior, that learning leads to living). Colossians is no exception.

A. The supremacy of Christ (1:15-23)

Paul’s doctrinal concern in Colossians is clearly Christological (the doctrines concerning Christ are typically organized by theologians under the heading, “Christology”). The Colossian heretics had been deprecating Christ. In response, Paul stresses the supremacy of Christ in this, one of the most, if not the most, significant Christological passages in all of Scripture³⁹ (for more, see #2 under “Some Outstanding Features of Colossians” in the introductory lesson).

According to this passage, Christ is preeminent (not just prominent)/supreme in His person (verses 15a and 19), in His position (verses 15b, 17a, and 18), and in His performance (verses 16, 17b, and 20-22a). One interesting feature about this passage is the belief of many interpreters that 1:15-20 is an early Christian hymn (of 2 stanzas: verses 15-17 and verses 18-20), or perhaps just a poem, which Paul incorporated into the text in its totality or, more likely, in modified form.⁴⁰

1. Seen in creation (1:15-17)

³⁹Hughes (p. 30) calls this section “the most closely reasoned presentation of the supremacy of Christ anywhere in the Bible.”

⁴⁰O’Brien makes the case that 1:15-20 is an original composition from Paul’s hand at the time of writing. Other passages in the Pauline Epistles that are thought to be early Christian hymns by some include Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 2:6-11, and 1 Timothy 3:16. That the Colossian church sang such hymns may be seen by 3:16 (cf. Ephesians 5:19).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (1:15) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (1:16) He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (1:17)

Verse 15

At the end of his prayer report in 1:3-14, Paul makes mention of Christ in 1:13b-14, a segue of sorts into the section of 1:15-23.

Paul wastes no time establishing the supremacy of Christ, declaring the preeminence/supremacy of His person in verse 15a (“**He is the image of the invisible God**”; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4). The essential difference between Christ and men is that men are “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7, and James 3:9), while Christ “is the image of God.”

The Greek verb translated “**is**” is significant. Rather than using the Greek verb that would signify becoming, *ginomai* (He became the image of the invisible God), Paul uses the Greek verb that signifies being, *eimi*. The verb is in the present tense, thus signifying timelessness (He always has been, is, and always will be the image of the invisible God).

On the surface, the word, “**image**” might be misunderstood to indicate something less than an exact replica (like an image in a mirror). However, the Greek noun translated “image” has a wide “semantic range,” meaning it has many different shades of meaning, depending on the context.⁴¹ While the word can mean in certain contexts a resemblance, but not an exact replica, in this context it means an exact replica (compare 1:19 with 2:9; cf. Hebrews 1:3 and 10:1⁴²),

⁴¹“The degree of resemblance between the archetype and the copy must be determined by the word’s context but could range from a partial or superficial resemblance to a complete or essential likeness” (Harris, p. 43).

⁴²In Hebrews 10:1, the author of Hebrews says that the Law has only a “shadow” as opposed to

the very substance or essential embodiment of something or someone (Geisler, p. 672).⁴³ It signifies two concepts, not only likeness, but also manifestation (Vaughan, pp. 181-182); an "exact and visible expression" (Harris, p. 53). Based on Paul use of the adjective, "**invisible**" to describe God (cf. 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16, and Hebrews 11:27), the second seems to be the more prominent concept in this text.

Christ is the projection of God onto the canvass of humanity (Martin, p. 57); "in him the invisible has become visible" (O'Brien, p. 43). See especially John 1:18 and 14:9 in this regard.⁴⁴

Not only is Christ preeminent/supreme in His person, but also in His position (He is "**the firstborn of all creation**"; cf. 1:18 and Hebrews 1:6). The Jehovah's Witnesses have used this statement in support of their heretical teaching that Christ was a created being (the first to be "born," i.e., created).⁴⁵ Their interpretation is flawed for at least three reasons: 1) the Greek noun translated "**firstborn**" signifies "positional priority" (Kent, p. 47; cf. Psalm 89:27). The word was used to describe the right of preeminence bestowed upon the first male child born into a family (Deuteronomy 21:17). Thus, the idea is not so much first in time, but first in rank, i.e., having a place of privilege or primacy. If Paul had wanted to say that Christ was the first being created by God the Father, he would have used the Greek word, *protoktistos*, rather than the one he did use, the Greek word,

the very "form" of the good things to come. "Form" is literally "image" (see NASB marginal note).

⁴³A similar phenomenon is found in Philippians 2:6 (Christ "existed in the form of God"; "form"=essence, so NIV: "in very nature God").

⁴⁴This is what Rolland McCune is alluding to when he speaks of "the Christlikeness of God." If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 1:271).

⁴⁵The JW's try to do the same with Revelation 3:14 (where Christ is called "the Beginning of the creation of God"). Their interpretation of this verse is to be rejected for many of the exact same reasons their interpretation of Colossians 1:15b is to be rejected (misinterpretation of "beginning"; misinterpretation of "of the creation" as a partitive ablative instead of an ablative of comparison; etc.).

prototokos; 2) the Greek noun translated “**of creation**” can be interpreted several different ways, depending on the context. It is in the “ablative” case. As such, it potentially could be understood as a “partitive ablative” (Christ as part of creation), the way the JW’s wrongly understand it. It can also be understood as an “ablative of comparison” (Christ in comparison to creation; so NIV: “firstborn over all creation”), a meaning much more in keeping with the context of not only the passage at hand, but also the Scriptures as a whole; and 3) Christ cannot be part of the created order if He Himself is the One doing the creating, as verse 16 clearly states. It is quite interesting to notice what the JW’s do to try to get around this fact: they insert the word, “other” (which is not found in the Greek) five times in this passage in their *New World Translation* (all “other” things were created by Christ, etc.).

Verse 16

Paul now gives the reason why (“**for**”) Christ is preeminent/supreme in His position, first in rank over all creation (verse 15b): It is because of His performance of creation (“**by Him all things were created**”). The Greek prepositional phrase translated “**by Him**” in the NASB should, in the opinion of most interpreters, be translated “in Him,” i.e., in connection with Him (cf. Ephesians 1:4), meaning that “apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3b). Christ played a pivotal role in the divine work of creation.

Verse 16 goes on to specify His role: “**all things have been created through Him**” (cf. John 1:3a, 10b, and Hebrews 1:2). All three persons of the Godhead played a role in the divine work of creation (Genesis 1:26).⁴⁶

Paul specifies what the “**all things**” Christ created were, first

⁴⁶God the Father was the “architect” of creation (Genesis 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 8:6). God the Holy Spirit was also involved (Genesis 1:2). The functional relationship of the 3 persons in the Godhead has been likened to the relationship between an architect (God the Father), builder (God the Son), and construction worker (God the Holy Spirit). The Father is the source (from the Father), the Son the channel (through the Son), the Spirit the active agent (by the Spirit) (Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 1:289).

in terms of location, then in terms of essence. All things include things **"in the heavens"** and things **"on earth"** (location). They also include things **"visible"** (\approx earthly things) and things **"invisible"** (\approx heavenly things) (essence). The heavenly/invisible things include **"thrones," "dominions," "rulers,"** and **"authorities."** These four terms are designations for angels (cf. Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 15:24, Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12, Colossians 2:10, 15, and 1 Peter 3:22).⁴⁷ The Colossian heresy apparently made angels superior to Christ, worshipping them (2:18) instead of Him. By specifically mentioning these various varieties of angels as having been created by Christ, Paul is refuting *this* aspect of the heresy, putting both Christ and angels in their proper place (cf. Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 2:10, and 15).⁴⁸

The Greek verb translated **"have been created"** is in the perfect tense, signifying that all things not only have been created, but also stand created through Christ. Paul will make this point more explicitly in verse 17b.

Not only have all things been created through Christ, but also **"for Him"** (cf. Isaiah 43:7, Romans 11:36, and Hebrews 2:10). This phrase signifies that all things have been created "to serve His will, to contribute to His glory Their whole being, willingly or unwillingly, moves ... to Him; whether, as His blissful servants, they shall be as it were His throne; or as His stricken enemies, 'His footstool'" (H. C. G. Moule, quoted in Vaughan, p. 182); creation is moving towards the goal of total subjugation to Christ (Kent, p. 48). See 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:10, and Philippians 2:10-11.

⁴⁷Some are of the opinion that Paul is giving the hierarchy of these angelic beings by the order in which he mentions them. Kent (p. 47), however, cautions otherwise: "The variety and lack of precise order in these lists [the lists of angelic classifications found in several New Testament passages] is a caution against adopting too rigid a classification of angelic orders. Undoubtedly the angelic hosts are organized, but revelation is not detailed enough to warrant any complete description."

⁴⁸"In making these assertions, Paul refuted the Colossian errorists, in whose system angelic mediators usurped the place and function of Christ" (Vaughan, p. 181).

Verse 17

Christ's preeminent/supreme position is reiterated (cf. verse 15b) in verse 17a ("**He is before all things**"). The "**He**" is emphatic—the original literally reads: "He He is before all things," the "He" being repeated, for emphasis. The idea is that He and He alone is before all things (cf. verse 18, where the same phenomenon occurs twice). As in verse 15, the "**is**" is in the present tense, signifying timelessness (He always has been, is, and always will be before all things). "**Before all things**" could signify Christ's pre-temporal (prior to or before time) existence, a truth taught in John 1:1 ("in the beginning," i.e., when time began, Christ already was). However, based on the context, it more likely signifies Christ's supremacy over all things (cf. James 5:12 and 1 Peter 4:8, where the Greek prepositional phrase translated "before all" in Colossians 1:17 is translated "above all").

Christ's preeminent/supreme performance is reiterated (cf. verse 16) in verse 17b ("**and in Him all things hold together**"). Christ is the One in Whom (for the significance of "**in Him**," see the explanation of "by Him" in verse 16) the universe is sustained (cf. Hebrews 1:3, as well as Job 34:14-15). He is both the source and sustainer of creation, its creator and keeper.

As with the Greek verb translated "have been created" in verse 16, the Greek verb translated "**hold together**" here in verse 17 is in the perfect tense (have been and continue to be held together), indicative of the sustaining work of Christ in the past, as well as His continuous, ongoing sustaining of creation. Christ is "the principle of cohesion" who makes the universe "a cosmos instead of a chaos" (J. B. Lightfoot, quoted in Vaughan, p. 183); "Apart from [Christ's] *continuous* sustaining activity all would disintegrate" (O'Brien, p. 47; emphasis his).

2. Seen in redemption (1:18-23)

Christ's preeminence/supremacy is not only seen in the realm of physical creation (verses 15-17), but also ("also" in verse 18) in the realm of spiritual creation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17), the church (verses 18-23).

a. Christ's work of reconciliation (1:18-20)

He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (1:18) For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, (1:19) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (1:20)

Verse 18

Paul reiterates (cf. verses 15b and 17a) Christ's preeminent/supreme position throughout verse 18. Speaking of Christ, Paul says that **"He is the head of the body, the church."** As in verse 17a, the **"He"** here in verse 18a is emphatic—the original literally reads: "He He is the head of the body," the **"He"** being repeated, for emphasis (He and He alone is the head of the body, the church). **"Head"** could signify one of two things: organic headship, that is, Christ as the source of the church's life (cf. Ephesians 4:15-16 and Colossians 2:19) or sovereign headship, that is, Christ as the ruler of the church (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23 and 5:23-24). Once again, based on the context, it seems clear that Paul has the second in view here.

The reason why Christ is the ruling head of the church is because **"He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,"** a reference to Christ's resurrection. **"Beginning"** signifies Christ's temporal priority (see footnote 49) among the resurrected, the fact that He was the first to break death's grip, the first to rise from the dead with a glorified body, never to die again (Romans 6:9; cf. Acts 26:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-23) (unlike others, such as Lazarus, who were resurrected before Christ was, yet retained their natural bodies and eventually succumbed to death).

"Firstborn from the dead" (cf. Revelation 1:5) signifies Christ's positional priority⁴⁹ among the resurrected (NIV: "firstborn from among the dead"). Christ's resurrection is what caused Him to become preeminent over the spiritual realm (cf. Acts 2:36, Romans 1:4, and Philippians 2:9). Coupled with the preeminence He already had over the physical realm (verses 15-17), by His resurrection Christ became preeminent over everything⁵⁰ ("**so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything**"). Accordingly, Paul uses the Greek verb, *ginomai* ("**will come to have**") instead of the Greek verb, *eimi* (for the difference between the two, see comments on verse 15).

As in verse 17a and earlier in this verse, the "He" is once again emphatic (hence, the NASB's "**He Himself**"). Christ and Christ alone is preeminent; He alone is supreme!

Verse 19

Paul reiterates (cf. verse 15a) the preeminence/supremacy of Christ's person with what Geisler (p. 673) calls "one of the most powerful descriptions of Christ's deity in the New Testament." The reason why Christ is preeminent/supreme over everything (end of verse 18) is because ("**For**") "**it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.**" According to interpreters, the Greek noun translated "**fullness**" was used by the Colossian heretics to describe the totality or entirety of the angelic-like beings they worshipped. According to Paul, however, this fullness dwelled not in these beings, but in Christ. According to 2:9, the fullness Paul is speaking of is "all the fullness of Deity"; "God in all His fullness" (O'Brien, p. 51).

⁴⁹Both "beginning" (cf. Revelation 3:14) and "firstborn" (cf. verse 15b and comments on) signify priority. See especially Genesis 49:3 in this regard.

⁵⁰"In relation to the universe Christ is and always was supreme, but in relation to the Church he became supreme by his resurrection to immortality" (Harris, p. 49).

The Greek verb translated “ **dwell** ” signifies a permanent indwelling, to “abide lastingly or permanently” (Geisler, p. 674). Had Paul wanted to indicate a temporary indwelling, he would have used the Greek verb, *paroikeo* rather than the one he did use, *katoikeo*.

Verse 20

Paul reiterates (cf. verses 16 and 17b) the preeminence/supremacy of Christ’s performance here in verse 20 and following (through the middle of verse 22), focusing on Christ’s work of cosmic reconciliation.⁵¹

Verses 19 and 20 are connected through the conjunction, “ **and** ,” signifying that Christ’s work of reconciliation (verse 20) would not be possible apart from Who He is (verse 19). Because Christ is God, His death was infinitely valuable and, thus, able to pay the infinite debt incurred by the infinite crime of sin committed against an infinitely-valuable God. Reconciliation is the act of God by which those at enmity are brought into a state of peace, foes of God becoming His friends.

Reconciliation takes place through Christ (“ **through Him** ”; cf. Romans 5:11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18), specifically “ **through the blood of His cross** ” (cf. Ephesians 2:13 and 16), signifying Christ’s violent, bloody death⁵² on the cross of Calvary.

Christ’s death reconciles “ **all things** ” to God. In what

⁵¹MacArthur (p. 56) points out that the Greek verb translated reconcile in verses 20 and 22 is *apokatallaso*, an intensified form of the normal Greek verb for reconcile, *katallasso* (intensified with the Greek preposition, *apo*), signifying thoroughly, completely, or totally reconciled.

⁵²That “blood” is metaphorical for Christ’s violent, bloody death is seen by a comparison of Colossians 1:20 (reconciled by His blood) with Colossians 1:22 or Romans 5:10 (reconciled by His death).

sense are all things reconciled to God through the death of Christ?⁵³ Christ's death reconciles all believers to God (see verse 22). Furthermore, a day is coming when the created order will be reconciled to God (Romans 8:19-22, a reversal of the curse imposed in Genesis 3:17-18). Unbelievers, however, are reconciled to God only in a potential sense. Christ's death makes the reconciliation of every man possible, but actual only in the case of believers.

b. Christ's work of reconciliation applied to the Colossians (1:21-23)

(1) Their past condition (1:21)

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

⁵³O'Brien (pp. 54-56) outlines 6 different views in answer to this question.

As he does so memorably in Ephesians 2, here in verses 21-22 of Colossians 1 Paul contrasts the past blight (verse 21; cf. Ephesians 2:1-3 and 5:8's "you were formerly darkness") of his readers with their present bliss (verse 22; cf. Ephesians 2:4-6 and 5:8's "but now you are Light in the Lord").⁵⁴ Paul describes the Colossian believers in their pre-conversion days as "**alienated**" (from God), antagonistic in attitude ("**hostile in mind**"), and evil in action ("**engaged in evil deeds**"). Unbelievers are God's enemies (cf. Romans 5:10); they are not neutral in their stance towards God, but are hostile towards Him, a hostility that is rooted in their minds (cf. Romans 8:7). The unbeliever's ungodly attitude produces ungodly actions ("hostile in mind" ⇒ "engaged in evil deeds"; cf. Ephesians 4:17-19).

(2) Their present condition (1:22-23)

yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— (1:22) if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (1:23)

Verse 22

In spite of the antagonism of the Colossian believers towards God in their pre-conversion days ("**although**" in verse 21), God still ("**yet**")

⁵⁴“ . . . [T]he gravity of their previous condition serves to magnify the wonder of God's mercy. The past is recalled not because the emphasis falls upon it, but to draw attention to God's mighty action—here in the reconciling death of his Son—on the reader's behalf” (O'Brien, p. 66).

graciously reconciled the Colossian believers to Himself (cf. Ephesians 2:11-13), making their alienation from Him a thing of the past (“**formerly**” in verse 21; cf. Ephesians 2:2, 3, 11, 12, and 13).

The means by which God reconciled the Colossian believers to Himself was the death of Christ on the Cross (cf. Romans 5:10). Notice how explicitly Paul expresses the physicality of Christ at His death (“**fleshly body**”). This is undoubtedly a corrective to the Colossian heresy and its denial of the incarnation of Christ (see under “The Purpose for Writing” in the introductory lesson). As Martin (p. 67) says: “The phrase is heavily loaded with polemical overtones.”

Having made mention of the Colossians’ past (verse 21) and present (verse 22a), Paul makes mention of their future in the last half of verse 22. God reconciled the Colossians (verse 22a) for the purpose of (“**in order to**”) one day presenting them before Him “**holy and blameless** [NIV: “without blemish”] **and beyond reproach**” [NIV: “free from accusation”] (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:8, Ephesians 1:4, 5:27, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, and Jude 24). Though God progressively makes the believer more and more holy, blameless, and beyond reproach throughout this life (a process called progressive sanctification), He will not fully and finally do so until the believer gets to heaven (a point called perfect sanctification or glorification).

Verse 23

Though God is the One who sanctifies the believer (verse 22b), the believer still has a necessary, active, and responsible part to play in the process.⁵⁵ The believer’s full and final

⁵⁵“Divine preservation always presupposes human perseverance” (Hendriksen, p. 85).

sanctification is dependent upon his or her perseverance in the faith (“**if you continue in the faith**”⁵⁶; cf. Romans 11:22, Hebrews 3:6, and 14). A true believer will invariably persevere in the faith (1 John 2:19). Perseverance is one link in the multi-link chain of salvation, each link of which will infallibly come to pass, God Himself seeing to it (cf. Romans 8:29-30 and Philippians 1:6).

The Greek words, “**firmly established**” and “**steadfast**” are architectural in flavor, the first connoting foundation and the second connoting superstructure. One can remain steadfast in the faith (1 Peter 5:9) only if his faith is built upon the proper foundation, Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). See the parable of Matthew 7:24-27. Later in the epistle (in 2:5), Paul will commend the Colossian believers for the firmness of their faith.

The winds of heresy were blowing in Colossae. As long as the Colossians remained firmly established and steadfast in their faith (cf. 2:7), they would not be “**moved away from the hope of the gospel**” (cf. 1:5), a gospel that the Colossians heard from Epaphras (“**that you have heard**”; cf. 1:7), a gospel that was being proclaimed in all the population centers of the Roman Empire (“**proclaimed in all creation under heaven**”; cf. 1:6, as well as Romans 10:18), and a gospel of which Paul was made a minister (“**of which I, Paul, was made a minister**”; cf. Colossians 1:25, as well as Romans 1:1, Ephesians 3:7, and Philippians 1:16).

⁵⁶Pao (p. 109) understands “faith” here in Colossians 1:23 to be more specifically faithfulness.

1:15-23 Review Questions

1. When Paul begins the body of the Colossian epistle in 1:15, why does he make the preeminence/supremacy of Christ his first concern? *because it is his theme/main point*
2. What does the word, “image” in 1:15 signify? *exact replica*
3. What does “firstborn” in 1:15 (and in 1:18) signify? *first in rank/positional preeminence*
- 4.-6. What modern-day cult misinterprets “firstborn of all creation” to mean that Christ was the first being created by God the Father? What are some of the reasons their interpretation is faulty? What word do they illegitimately insert throughout this section in their translation in order to avoid contradicting themselves? *Jehovah’s Witnesses; it is contrary to the surrounding context and Scripture as a whole; it misinterprets “firstborn”; and it misinterprets “all of creation”; other*
- 7.-8. To what are “thrones,” “dominions,” “rulers,” and “authorities” in 1:16 a reference? Why does Paul make specific mention of them? *angelic beings; to show Christ’s superiority over them to combat the Colossian heresy’s worship of them*
- 9.-10. In what 2 ways was the resurrection of Christ distinct from all previous resurrections? *Christ rose never to die again; Christ rose with a glorified body*
- 11.-12. In reference to what did the Colossian heretics use the word, “fullness”? To what does it actually refer (1:19)? *as a reference to the totality of angelic beings they worshipped; the full deity of Christ*
13. In 1:20, Paul says that all things are reconciled to God through the death of Christ. In what sense are unbelievers reconciled to God? *potentially*
14. Why is Paul so explicit about the corporeality of Christ at His death (“fleshly body”) in 1:22? *to combat the Colossian heresy’s denial of His incarnation*

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5

B. The ministry of Christ’s servant (1:24-2:5)

Having concluded the previous section (1:15-23) by alluding to his having been made a minister of the gospel (verse 23), Paul uses this statement as a segue into this section, 1:24-2:5, in which he speaks of his ministry, towards the body of Christ⁵⁷ in general

⁵⁷The “body of Christ” is composed of all believers during the “church age” (from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture). Some call it the “universal” or “invisible” church. However, since inherent in the Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) is the concept of assembly (see Acts 19:32, 39, and 41, where “assembly” is the NASB’s rendering of *ekklesia*—see marginal notes) or congregation, it is better to use “body of Christ” (though Paul does call the body of Christ “the church” in Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18, and 24). For obvious logistical reasons (some in heaven, some on earth;

(1:24-29) and towards the local church of Colossae in particular (2:1-5).

1. Towards the church in general (1:24-29)

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. (1:24) Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of* the word of God, (1:25) *that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, (1:26) to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (1:27) We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. (1:28) For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (1:29)

Verse 24

those on earth scattered throughout the earth), this church cannot assemble or congregate. It will not do so until after the Rapture, when it assembles or congregates in heaven. By then, however, the church age will be over and a new dispensation (the kingdom age) inaugurated. The biggest error to avoid in all of this is to view oneself solely as a member of the “universal” or “invisible” church and, in so doing, fail to unite oneself to (i.e., become an official member of) a local church, local churches being the visible expression of the body of Christ.

In what Hughes (p. 45) calls “one of the most debated verses in all of Scripture,”⁵⁸ Paul speaks of his suffering on behalf of the body of Christ.

Paul’s attitude towards his suffering is startling, yet scriptural (“**rejoice**”; cf. Matthew 5:10-12, Acts 5:40-41, Romans 5:3, Philippians 2:17-18, Hebrews 10:32-34, and 1 Peter 4:12-16) and in keeping with what he had prayed for the Colossians (see 1:11). So, Paul practiced what he prayed. Paul’s “**sufferings**” (notice the plural) were legion (see Acts 9:16, 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, 2 Corinthians 1:8, 11:23-27, and 2 Timothy 3:11). They were not, however, without purpose, being for the benefit of the Colossians in particular (“**for your sake**”; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:6, Ephesians 3:1, 13, and 2 Timothy 2:9-10) and of the body of Christ in general (“**on behalf of His body**”). How so? “The sufferings, therefore, were for their sake in the sense that they shared in the benefit of the ministry that brought on those sufferings” (Vaughan, p. 189). Paul’s suffering “came with the territory” of his commission, and his obedient fulfilling of his commission greatly benefitted not only the local church at Colossae, but also all the other the local churches to which he was privileged to minister. Paul did his share (“**I do my share**”); are we doing our share?

The most controversial aspect of this verse is Paul’s final assertion that his suffering was “**filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.**” Paul is not saying that Christ’s suffering for sin was in some sense deficient and that the sufferings of saints makes up the deficiency (as Catholicism teaches⁵⁹). We know this is not the case for at least two reasons: 1) The Scriptures clearly teach that the suffering of Christ on the Cross was fully sufficient in and of itself to atone for sin (see, for example, John 19:30 and Hebrews 10:11-14, as well as Paul’s words a few verses previous in

⁵⁸Harris (p. 66) states that this verse contains a “bewildering variety” of interpretive options. O’Brien (pp. 77-80) outlines five different ones.

⁵⁹For a refutation of this Roman Catholic dogma, see pages 260-261 of *The Roman Catholic Controversy* by James White and pages 371-372 of *The Gospel According to Rome* by James McCarthy.

Colossians 1:20-22 and later in 2:14-15) and 2) the Greek word Paul uses, translated "afflictions," is never used in Scripture to refer to Christ's sufferings on the Cross. In what sense, then, did the sufferings of Paul (and, by extension, the sufferings of believers) fulfill the lack in Christ's sufferings? Because Paul and all other church age saints are united to Christ (He being the Head and they being the members of His body), there is a mysterious mutuality, an invisible identity between them and Him. Thus, their sufferings are in a real sense His sufferings (see Isaiah 63:9, Acts 9:4, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 1:5, 7, 4:10-11, Galatians 6:17, Philippians 3:10, and 1 Peter 4:13). "Christ continues to suffer in His members" (O'Brien, p. 80). "'What is still lacking' is not an intimation of deficiency in Christ's own sufferings but a reference to what is yet lacking in Christ's suffering *in Paul* (Vaughan, p. 190).

Verse 25

In verse 23, Paul spoke of having become a minister of the gospel. Here in verse 25, he speaks of having become a minister⁶⁰ of the church ("**Of this church I was made a minister**"). The two are interrelated. Paul's faithfulness to his commission as a vocational minister⁶¹ of the gospel (in the specific role of a pioneer missionary/church planter) directly and indirectly (in the case of the church at Colossae, which was planted by Paul's associate, Epaphras) resulted in the establishment of local churches throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul speaks of his ministry in terms of a "**stewardship from**

⁶⁰The Greek word translated "minister" is *diakonos*, from which we get our English word, "deacon." In a generalized sense, every deacon is a "minister," and every minister a "deacon." In a specialized sense, however, these two offices are distinguished in the context of a local church, with the pastor given the additional responsibility of oversight, superintendence, authority, etc.

⁶¹I say "vocational minister" (pastors, missionaries, etc.) in distinction from "non-vocational ministers." In a generalized sense, every believer is a full-time minister, having been entrusted with one or more divinely-given abilities to be used for God's glory (1 Peter 4:10-11) under the auspices of a local church (a stewardship/trust for which he or she will one day be held accountable, Luke 12:42-48 and 16:1-2). The only real difference between vocational and non-vocational ministers is that the first have been entrusted with a specialized task (pastoring, church planting, etc.).

God" (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:1, Galatians 2:7, Ephesians 3:2, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 1 Timothy 1:11-12, 2 Timothy 2:2, and Titus 1:3). Paul recognized that ministry is a privilege graciously granted by God ("**bestowed on me**"; cf. Romans 15:15-16, Galatians 2:9, and Ephesians 3:7-8).

Just as Paul's sufferings were for the benefit of the Colossians ("for your sake" in verse 24), so was his stewardship ("**for your benefit**"; cf. Ephesians 3:1-2).

God's specific commission for Paul was to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13, 15:16, Galatians 2:7-9, Ephesians 3:8, and 1 Timothy 2:7), a commission that Paul was to carry out completely ("**fully carry out**"; cf. Acts 20:24, Colossians 4:17, 2 Timothy 4:5, and 7) by establishing churches in all the major population centers of the Roman Empire (cf. Romans 15:19 and 2 Timothy 4:17, as well as comments on 1:6 and 23).

Verse 26

The message Paul preached was a "**mystery**." Biblically, a mystery is not something difficult to figure out (though there are such things in the Bible, 2 Peter 3:16), but something previously unrevealed ("**hidden . . . but has now been manifested**"; cf. Romans 16:25-26, Ephesians 1:9, 3:4-5, and 9-10). It is something once concealed, but now revealed (Geisler, p. 675), a truth undiscoverable except by divine revelation (Vaughan, p. 191). In Colossians, Paul's use of this concept takes on added significance, as one element of the Colossian heresy was the claim to a secret, mysterious "gnosis" (knowledge) possessed by only a select few (see under "The Purpose for Writing" in the introductory lesson).

Verse 27

In verse 27, Paul "reveals" the "mystery" of which he speaks in verse 26. According to verse 27, the mystery is a matter of divine revelation ("**God willed to make known**⁶²"; cf. verse 26 and comments on). It is a magnificent mystery,

⁶²This is the case with all divine revelation; man cannot know God's Truth unless God willfully chooses to make It known/reveal It.

being gloriously rich (so O'Brien, Harris, and NIV) ("**what**⁶³ **is the riches of the glory**"; cf. Ephesians 1:18).⁶⁴ It is a mystery that had particular relevance for the Gentiles⁶⁵ ("**among the Gentiles**"). In the broadly parallel passage of Ephesians 2:11-3:13, Paul speaks of the mystery as being the inclusion of Gentiles on equal terms/footing with the Jews in a newly-created entity, the church. Here in Colossians, Paul speaks of the mystery in a slightly different way in keeping with the Christological focus of the book. It is "**Christ in you**" (cf. Romans 8:10, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 2:20, and Ephesians 3:17), "Christ in all his glorious riches actually dwelling through his Spirit in the hearts and lives of the Gentiles" (Hendriksen, p. 89). While Gentile salvation was virtually unheard of in previous dispensations (Ruth being one notable exception), the church age "opened the flood gates" to it.

The presence of Christ within the believer gives the believer the confidence ("**the hope**") that heaven awaits him ("**of glory**⁶⁶"). See Colossians 1:5 and comments on.

Verse 28

Though Paul begins a new sentence here in verse 28, the paragraph of 1:24-29 continues. Having concluded verse 27 by identifying the indwelling presence of Christ (by His Spirit; see Romans 8:9's "Spirit of Christ") in the Gentile Colossians as the mystery he was commissioned to reveal, Paul continues this Christological train of thought by identifying Christ as the central theme of apostolic preaching ("**We**⁶⁷

⁶³According to Harris (p. 70), the Greek pronoun translated "what" here communicates the idea of "what sort of," "how great," or "how vast."

⁶⁴Kent (p. 60) is certainly right when he states: "The glory of this mystery is certainly the glory of God which is displayed in it."

⁶⁵"It was in the Gentile mission that the riches and splendor of God's plan of salvation were evident" (Harris, p. 71).

⁶⁶"Of glory" is most likely an "objective genitive," meaning that "glory" is the object of the believer's hope/what the believer is hoping for.

⁶⁷The "we" here is emphatic. The original literally reads: "whom we we are proclaiming," the

proclaim Him"; cf. Acts 17:3, 1 Corinthians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 4:5, and Philippians 1:15-18).

Paul identifies two means by which this proclamation of Christ was being accomplished, "**admonishing**"⁶⁸ (cf. Acts 20:31 and Colossians 3:16) and "**teaching**" (cf. Acts 28:31 and Colossians 3:16). Admonition is more exhortational in nature; its primary appeal is to the will through the use of imperatives (commands). Teaching, by contrast, is more instructional in nature; its primary appeal is to the mind through the use of indicatives (statements of fact). In our day, the first would be called "preaching," the second "teaching." Both are essential to the effective communication of God's Word, with the first (admonition) built on the second (teaching). The imperatives of Christian living are built upon the indicatives of the Christian life.

Paul's proclamation of Christ through admonishing and teaching was "**with all wisdom**" (cf. 3:16). Most likely, this means that it was in dependence on the Holy Spirit's illuminating work by which the hearer is convinced of the certainty and significance of the Word proclaimed (cf. comments on 1:9).

The purpose of Paul's proclamation was "**so that we may present every man**"⁶⁹ **complete in Christ**" (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2b). Paul desired that those under his ministry of the Word would become what they already

"we" being repeated, for emphasis. Most likely, this is Paul's way of signifying the difference between his preaching and that of the Colossian heretics. Paul and his associates ("we") were preaching Christ; the heretics were not. Paul wants to emphasize/draw attention to this fundamental distinction.

⁶⁸The Greek verb translated "admonishing" is *noutheteo*, from which we get our English word, "nouthetic," a word used to describe the counseling methodology prescribed in Scripture. "Nouthetic counseling" has been popularized in our day by Jay Adams and is explained in chapter 4 of Adams' book, *Competent to Counsel*.

⁶⁹Three times in this 28th verse Paul says "every man." This is likely an allusion to the Colossian heresy and its exclusivity, the message of the heretics being accessible to only a select few. By contrast, Paul's message was accessible to all; no one was excluded from its proclamation.

were⁷⁰, “**complete**” (in the sense of spiritually mature; so ESV’s “mature”). This is one reason why God gave to the church proclamational officers, including “evangelists” (i.e., church planters) like Paul (Ephesians 4:11-13). This is also one of the things Epaphras was praying for on the Colossians’ behalf (Colossians 4:12). Proclamation of the Word and prayer are the two primary means God uses to make the believer spiritually mature, a maturity that cannot be attained apart from being connected to Christ (“**in Christ**”). See the vine-branch metaphor of John 15.

Verse 29

Paul was purpose-driven. With the purpose of presenting every man complete in Christ (verse 28) before him (“**For this reason**”), Paul drove towards this goal with every ounce of his being (cf. Philippians 3:12-14). Paul’s drive is seen in two verbs, “**labor**” and “**striving**” (cf. 1 Timothy 4:10, where the same two Greek verbs are used in conjunction with one another). The Greek verb translated “**labor**” has the idea of wearisome toil, of labor to the point of exhaustion. This same verb is used in John 4:6, where Jesus is said to have been “wearied” from his journey from Judea to Galilee (via Samaria). The ministry of the Word (picking up the context from verse 28) is hard work (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 5:17, both of which use the same Greek verb translated “labor” here in verse 29).

⁷⁰According to 2:10, the Colossians, by virtue of their union with Christ (“in Him”), were already complete (in a positional sense). Paul’s ministry of the Word was intended to make them complete in a practical sense, as well. This emphasis on completeness was most likely a counter to the Colossian heresy’s claim that completeness was found in its teachings.

The Greek participle translated "**striving**" has as its root the Greek noun, *agonia*, from which we get our English word, "agony." This same participle is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:25 (translated "competes") to describe the effort exerted in an athletic competition. A related noun is used in Colossians 2:1 (translated "struggle"). Based on 1) passages elsewhere in Scripture that use this word and its cognates in the context of prayer (such as Luke 22:44, where a related noun is translated "agony"; Colossians 4:12, where the same Greek participle is translated "laboring earnestly"; and Romans 15:30, where a related verb is translated "strive together") and 2) Paul's circumstances while writing (under house arrest and, thus, more able to pray than to proclaim), many interpreters are of the opinion that "striving" is a reference to Paul's prayers on behalf of the Colossians. If so, Paul is communicating the principle that prayer, like proclamation, is also hard work.⁷¹

The strength that drove Paul to labor and strive for the Colossians' spiritual maturity did not come from within, but from without. Paul did so "**according to His power, which mightily works within me**" (cf. Ephesians 3:7).

Paul uses some interesting Greek words to describe the divine power energizing his efforts. "**Power**" is the Greek noun, *energeia* (from which we get our English word, "energy"), with "**works**" being the verbal form of this noun. The object of the preposition in the Greek prepositional phrase translated adverbially as "**mightily**" is the Greek noun *dunamis* (from which we get our English word, "dynamite"). The power that was working in ("**within me**") and through Paul and that works in and through every believer is potent (compare Ephesians 1:19-20 with Ephesians 3:20 and notice that the power at work within the believer is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead)!

Contrary to popular misconception, human dependence on divine help does not dampen human initiative, but drives it (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10 and Philippians 2:12-13).

⁷¹As the famous missionary to the Muslims, Samuel Zwemer, once said: "Prayer is the gymnasium of the soul."

Confidence that He who had begun the good work of salvation in the Colossians would infallibly bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6; cf. Colossians 1:22b) was a catalyst to Paul. This confidence should also energize our efforts to bring those we serve to spiritual maturity “by the strength which God supplies” (1 Peter 4:11).

2. Towards the Colossian church in particular (2:1-5)

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, (2:1) that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*, (2:2) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (2:3) I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. (2:4) For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. (2:5)

Verse 1

In the previous verse (1:29), Paul mentioned the divinely-energized effort he exerted in pursuing the purpose of presenting every man complete in Christ (1:28). Paul continues this thought here in verse one of chapter two (notice the “**for**” that begins this verse, connecting it with the previous one). Once again (as in 1:29), Paul uses terminology often associated with prayer elsewhere in Scripture (the Greek noun, *agon*, translated “**struggle**”; cf. comments on 1:29), leading several interpreters (such as Kent and Harris) to conclude that Paul is primarily speaking of his struggle in prayer on behalf of the Colossians. That Paul struggled on behalf of the Colossians is clear; how he did so (whether by his ministry of the Word to them through this epistle, his prayers for them, or both) is not. In light of the ambiguity involved, perhaps both are in view.

Paul's struggle was a significant ("**how great**") one. It was for the benefit of the Colossians ("**on your behalf**"; cf. "for your sake" in 1:24 and "for your benefit" in 1:25), as well as for the benefit of the Laodiceans⁷² ("**and for those who are at Laodicea**"), another church in the Lycus valley that was indirectly founded by Paul through his associate, Epaphras (cf. Colossians 4:13, 15-16, and Revelation 3:14-22), and all other believers who, like the Colossian and Laodicean believers, had yet to personally meet Paul ("**and for all those who have not personally seen my face**"). May we, like Paul, struggle in prayer, etc. for other believers, even for those we have never had the privilege of personally meeting.

Verse 2

Paul struggled on behalf of the Colossians, et. al. (1:29 and 2:1) in order "**that their hearts may be encouraged,**" i.e., that their inner man might be strengthened (cf. Ephesians 3:16, 6:22, Colossians 4:8, and 2 Thessalonians 2:17). The Colossians needed some good, old-fashioned intestinal fortitude to withstand the heresy threatening them.

Another reason why Paul struggled on behalf of the Colossians was so that they might be unified ("**having been knit together**"). Such a unity has as its bond the glue of love ("**in love**"; cf. 3:14). Such a unified front would be yet another defense against heretical attack, which undoubtedly sought to divide and conquer. Saints sticking together strengthens their souls.

Yet another reason why Paul struggled on behalf of the Colossians was so that they might be more fully persuaded/convicted that they knew Christ (2:2b), that by knowing Him they possessed true knowledge (2:3), and that by possessing such true knowledge, the false knowledge espoused by the heretics (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20) need not threaten them (2:4). Conviction ("**full assurance**"⁷³ of

⁷²As with the Colossians, Paul's struggle on behalf of the Laodiceans was by his ministry of the Word to them through two epistles (see 4:16), through his prayers for them (see 4:12-13, where some of the same prayer-related terminology is used to describe the prayers of Epaphras on behalf of the Laodiceans), or both.

⁷³The Greek noun translated "full assurance" in Colossians 2:2 is translated "conviction" in 1

understanding"; "true knowledge"⁷⁴) that one knows Christ is of utmost value ("all the wealth"; cf. Philippians 3:8).

Earlier, Paul spoke of the mystery of Christ's indwelling (through His Spirit) of the Gentiles (see 1:27 and comments on). Here in 2:2, he speaks of the mystery of Christ Himself ("God's mystery, *that is, Christ Himself*"; cf. 4:3). Christ is "God's mystery" in that He is the revelation of God in human flesh (see "image of the invisible God" in 1:15 and comments on).

Verse 3⁷⁵

The Colossian heretics claimed to be the only ones "in the know." According to Paul, however, all knowledge is found solely in Christ ("in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:24 and 30)⁷⁶; therefore, none is found in any other source, whether in the Colossian heresy or in any other non-Christian system of thought.⁷⁷ Because the Colossian believers knew Christ, the only source of all knowledge, they were the ones "in the know."⁷⁸ The wisdom of the heretics was an illusory one (see

Thessalonians 1:5.

⁷⁴The Greek noun translated "true knowledge" is *epignosis*, an intensified form (intensified by the Greek preposition, *epi*) of the Greek noun for knowledge, *gnosis* (cf. footnote 33), and is indicative of a heightened knowledge, a knowledge that has passed into the realm of conviction, a state of being convinced as to the truth, reality, and significance of the object known.

⁷⁵Moo (p. 169) calls this verse "the christological high point of the letter."

⁷⁶"Christ is the one in whom is to be found *all* that one needs in order to understand spiritual reality and to lead a life pleasing to God" (Moo, p. 169; emphasis his).

⁷⁷This truth has profound implications in the realm of education. In reality, the only true education is a Christian education. Insert any word other than "Christian" before "education" and you have created an oxymoron. See Psalm 111:10a, Proverbs 1:7a, 2:6, and 9:10 in this regard.

⁷⁸Because of the "noetic" effects of sin, i.e., the effects of sin upon the mind ("noetic" comes from the Greek word for "mind," *nous*), every unbelieving sinner is ignorant regarding ultimate reality (see 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 4:17-18, and 1 Peter 1:14). Only by accepting Christ, "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24) and the "wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30), as one's Savior can

2:23's "appearance of wisdom"). Commenting on this verse, Hughes (p. 55) states that Paul is taking "a swing at the Gnostic heretics"; his swing is no mere jab, but a knockout punch!

The Greek adjective translated "**hidden**" has the idea of laid up or stored away as a treasure (Vaughan, p. 195). If you possess Christ, you possess all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Him, treasures that will take all eternity to mine (see Ephesians 3:8's "the unfathomable riches of Christ"). How are these treasures mined? As Kent (p. 71) states: "Inasmuch as the treasures are hidden in Christ, believers must grow in their understanding of Christ in order to enjoy the treasures." While here on earth, this happens through contact with the written Word (the "dim mirror" of 1 Corinthians 13:12); while in heaven, it will happen through contact with the living Word Himself (the "face to face" of 1 Corinthians 13:12).

Verse 4

Paul says what he says in 2:3 (the "**this**" of 2:4) in order that ("**so that**") the Colossians would not be duped ("**delude**") by the message of the Colossian heretics. While Paul will go on (later in this chapter) to refute the Colossian heresy directly, for now he is content to do so indirectly by continuing to remind the Colossians of the superiority of what they have. Because they have Christ, they have everything they need ("all the fullness" in 1:19 and in 2:9, "complete" in 1:28 and in 2:10, "all" in 2:2 and in 2:3); therefore, they do not need what the heretics have to offer.

Paul acknowledges that the message of the heretics was attractive ("**persuasive argument**"). The Greek noun translated "persuasive argument" was used to describe arguments that were plausible, but false (O'Brien, p. 97). Heresy is usually cloaked in a persuasive verbal veneer (cf. Romans 16:18); much discernment is needed to detect the

the noetic effects of sin be reversed (2 Corinthians 3:14-16) and "the wisdom of the world" (1 Corinthians 1:20)/the wisdom "of this age" (1 Corinthians 2:6) be exchanged for "God's wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:7). Only then can one become truly knowledgeable, understanding, and wise, seeing things for what they really are.

underlying error. Hughes (p. 56) rightly points out that in today's world we need to be especially vigilant, for the means of persuasion are so highly developed.

Verse 5

Though in body Paul was approximately 1,000 miles away from the Colossians in Rome ("**absent in body**")⁷⁹, in spirit he was right there with them ("**with you in spirit**"; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:3-4 and 1 Thessalonians 2:17). Just as there is a mysterious mutuality between the head (Christ) and the body (the church) (see comments on 1:24), so there is a mysterious mutuality between the members of the body. Though Paul currently was not, nor ever had been (2:1), with the Colossians in body, he could be with them in spirit (the "**for**" that begins 2:5 is a connector, connecting the beginning of 2:5 with the end of 2:1).

Due to the "vivid" report Epaphras apparently gave Paul (1:8), though Paul had never seen the Colossians (2:1), Paul was able to "**see**" the Colossians' "**good discipline**" and "**the stability of [their] faith in Christ**" (cf. 1:23). According to many interpreters, the Greek nouns translated "**good discipline**" and "**stability**" are military metaphors (Paul's use of them perhaps being due to his "close connection" with several members of the Roman military—see the first paragraph of the introductory lesson), the first connoting an orderly array of a band of disciplined soldiers (Vaughan, p. 195), the second a "solid front" (J. B. Lightfoot, cited in Vaughan, p. 195). "Each believer was still in his place and collectively the church was maintaining a solid front against the foe" (Kent, p. 74).

⁷⁹Kent (p. 74) perceptively points out one of the ways by which God in His providence used Paul's imprisonment for good: "Paul could not instruct the Colossian church in person, but the epistle he was sending would be a worthy substitute. And it would have one additional advantage: it could be used by other churches when they too faced such a problem. Nineteen centuries later it is still a formidable weapon."

1:24-2:5 Review Questions

- 1.-3. What religious group claims that 1:24 is teaching that the suffering of Christ for sin was deficient and that the sufferings of saints makes up the deficiency? What are some of the reasons their interpretation is faulty? What does the last statement of verse 24 mean? *Roman Catholicism; Scripture teaches the sufficiency of Christ's death (John 19:30 and Hebrews 10:11-14) and the word used in 1:24 is never used elsewhere in Scripture of Christ's suffering on the Cross; because of the identity between Christ and His church, their sufferings are His sufferings*
4. How did Paul "fully carry out the preaching of the word of God" (1:25)? *by establishing churches in all the major population centers of the Roman Empire*
5. What is a "mystery" (1:26)? *something previously concealed, but now revealed*
6. What's the difference between admonishing and teaching (1:28)? *exhortation vs. information; the will vs. the mind; preaching vs. teaching; imperatives vs. indicatives*
7. According to 1:29, does human dependence on divine help dampen or drive human initiative? *it drives it*
8. How would what Paul says in 2:3 prevent the Colossians from being taken in by the Colossian heresy (2:4)? *by reminding them that in Christ they have everything they need and, therefore, the Colossian heresy has nothing for them*

COLOSSIANS 2:6-15

At the close of the previous section (1:24-2:5), Paul implied that the Colossians, by virtue of their possession of Christ, had everything they needed (2:3) and, therefore, need not be tempted by the teachings of the heretics in their midst (2:4). Paul continues this train of thought in 2:6-15, making this same point even more explicitly.

- C. The threat to Christ's supremacy (2:6-23)
 1. A general corrective to the threat (2:6-7)

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, (2:6) having been firmly rooted *and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.* (2:7)

Verse 6

In light of the supremacy of Christ stressed throughout the body of the letter up to this point (particularly in 1:15-20 and 2:3) (the reason why the **“therefore”** here in verse 6 is there for), and the Colossians’ personal acceptance of it (**“as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord”**; cf. John 1:12), Paul exhorts (the Greek verb translated **“walk”** is in the imperative mood; note: this is the first command in the letter, not unlike Romans, where the first command does not appear until 6:11) the Colossians to continue (**“walk”** is in the present tense) living (**“walk”**; cf. 3:7) in a manner consistent with this truth, to have conduct consistent with their commitment to Christ, behavior befitting their belief.⁸⁰

When the Colossians received Christ at the moment of their conversion (the Greek verb translated **“received”** is in the aorist tense, indicative of a past, point-in-time event), they received Him for who He really is, **“Christ Jesus the Lord”** (NIV: “Christ Jesus as Lord”⁸¹), **“Lord”** in this context primarily signifying His supremacy. To sum: the Colossians were to continue to live in light of Whom they realized Christ to be, the Lord/supreme. If they continued to do so, the Colossian heresy would not faze them.

Verse 7

Here in verse 7, Paul identifies (through the use of four participles) four phenomena that characterize one who is **“walking in Him [Christ],”** i.e., living in a manner consistent with Who Christ is, Lord/supreme (verse 6).⁸²

⁸⁰O’Brien (p. 106) makes the following insight: “He [Paul] has already interceded for his readers (1:10) that they might *live* in a manner worthy of the one whom they confess as Lord, by pleasing him in all things. Having prayed to that end he now exhorts them along similar lines. His pastoral activity of praying did not obviate the necessity for exhortation. Indeed, the latter may well have been one of the means used by God to bring about the answers to Paul’s petitions.”

⁸¹In order to be saved, one must accept Jesus for all that He is, including Lord (see, for example, Romans 10:9 and 2 Corinthians 4:5). “No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior and Master” (Billy Graham, quoted in Hughes, pp. 60-61).

⁸²A similar phenomenon was noted in 1:10-12, where the one who is living in a manner worthy of

First, such an individual is characterized by **“having been firmly rooted.”** The Greek participle translated “having been firmly rooted” is in the perfect tense, indicative of an action that took place at a point in time in the past with ongoing effects; the moment the Colossians were converted, they were, so to speak, planted in the soil of salvation (cf. Psalm 1:3), remaining permanently rooted in it (eternal security implied). They had been and continued to be. This participle is also in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that Someone else has done the planting.

Second, such an individual is characterized by **“being built up in Him.”** Paul (as in 1 Corinthians 3:9) moves from an agricultural metaphor to an architectural one, with being grounded (“rooted”) giving way to growth (“built up”). Upon the foundation of salvation is built the superstructure of sanctification. Just as Christ is the One upon Whom the believer’s life is built (1 Corinthians 3:11), so also is He the One in connection with Whom it is built (**“in Him”**; cf. the vine-branch metaphor of John 15). Once again, the Greek participle is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that God is the One who is ultimately doing the building. It is also in the present tense, indicating that it is an ongoing activity.

Third, such an individual is characterized by being **“established in [the]⁸³ faith”** (cf. 1:23). This one is similar in thought to the first one. As the believer grows in the faith, his roots go down deeper (cf. Psalm 1:2-3 and James 1:21). Again, the participle is in the passive voice, indicative of ultimate divine causation (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:21). God sent Epaphras to the Colossians, not only to lead them to faith in Christ, but also to establish them in the faith (**“just as you were instructed”**; cf. 1:7).

the Lord and pleasing Him in all respects is characterized by four phenomena (represented by four Greek participles).

⁸³Though the NASB reads “your faith” at this point, the original reads “the faith” (so KJV and NIV). “The faith” is descriptive of the totality of doctrines that comprise Christianity.

Fourth, such an individual is characterized by “**overflowing with gratitude**”⁸⁴. Gratitude is an attitude Paul mentions several times in Colossians (also in 1:12, 3:15, 16, 17, and 4:2). In light of the divine causation of the preceding three phenomena, gratitude to God should flood our souls to the point of “**overflowing.**” One who is grounded and growing will be grateful.

Paul wanted the Colossians to be well-anchored, lest the winds of heresy blowing in Colossae uproot them and blow them around like tumbleweeds (cf. Ephesians 4:14, as well as 1:23 and comments on).

2. The threat exposed (2:8-23)
 - a. A preliminary warning (2:8)

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

The Colossian heresy posed a real threat to the Colossians. The Greek verb translated “**see to it**” is a strong one, translated elsewhere “be on your guard” (Mark 13:9), “beware” (Philippians 3:2), and “watch” (2 John 8). The New Testament often warns against the danger of false teaching (see Matthew 7:15, Acts 20:29-31, and Philippians 3:2).

This heresy sought to take the Colossians “**captive,**” like a prisoner of war (cf. 2 Timothy 3:6). The Colossian heresy was captivating in more ways than one, being captivating (see 2:4 and comments on) and taking captive (here in verse 8). Heresy is spiritually enslaving. To avoid being taken captive by such

⁸⁴The Greek word translated “gratitude” is *eucharistia*, the root of which is *charis*, the Greek word for “grace.” This is indicative of the fact that one who is grateful is one who realizes that he is a recipient of grace, i.e., one who has been given something he does not deserve.

teaching, believers should instead take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The Colossian heresy was a system of thought/a world view/a “**philosophy**” that was “**empty**” (NIV: “hollow”), contra the “fullness” found in Christ (1:19 and 2:9).

It was deceiving (“**deception**”; cf. 2:4), contra the “word of truth” (1:5).

It was humanly-contrived (“**according to the tradition of men**”). In this regard, the problem was not its being a “**tradition**” (see 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 3:6, which speak of the right kind of tradition(s)), but its being a tradition “**of men**” (cf. Matthew 15:2, Mark 7:8, and Colossians 2:22).

It was demonically-derived (“**according to the elementary principles of the world**”; cf. Galatians 4:3, Colossians 2:20, and 1 Timothy 4:1). Many interpreters are of the opinion that the Greek noun translated “elementary principles” is better translated “elemental spirits” (so Vaughan, Harris, and O’Brien⁸⁵; so also the NIV and ESV). It was not divinely-derived (“**rather than according to Christ**”). This was its ultimate demerit. “The essential weakness of this ‘philosophy’ was that Christ was neither its source nor its substance” (Harris, p. 94). That which is not pro-Christ is anti-Christ (Matthew 12:30).

- b. The real corrective: a proper understanding of the person and work of Christ (2:9-15)

⁸⁵See O’Brien’s extended note (pp. 129-132).

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, (2:9) and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; (2:10) and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; (2:11) having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (2:12) When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (2:13) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (2:14) When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (2:15)

Verse 9

In verses 9 and 10a, Paul gives the reason why (“**For**”) he does not want the Colossians to be “captivated” by anyone other than Christ. It is only in Christ that all the fullness of deity dwells (verse 9), and it is only by being connected to Him that one can be full (verse 10a).

The Greek prepositional phrase translated “**in Him**” is placed first in the Greek sentence, for emphasis. The idea is that in Christ, and in Christ alone, all the fullness⁸⁶ of deity dwells (for the significance of “**fullness**” and “**dwells**,” see comments on 1:19). In this verse, Paul emphasizes the dual nature of Christ, the fact that He is both fully God (“**all the fullness of**

⁸⁶At least one interpreter has pointed out the tautologous nature of the words, “all the fullness” (“all” implies “fullness,” and vice versa), suggesting that Paul did so intentionally, his way of making this point more explicit.

Deity") and fully man ("in bodily form"⁸⁷).

Verse 10

By being united with/connected to Christ ("in Him"⁸⁸), the One in whom all the fullness of deity dwells (verse 9), the believer is made "**complete**" (literally "full"—see NASB marginal note) (cf. John 1:16, Ephesians 3:19, and 4:13). As in verse 9, the Greek prepositional phrase translated "**in Him**" is placed first in the Greek sentence, for emphasis, signifying that it is only in union with/connection to Christ that one can be made full. Christ is an all-satisfying, all-sufficient Savior!⁸⁹ How foolish to seek satisfaction in the broken cisterns of humanly-contrived, demonically-derived philosophies that cannot hold water, rather than in the fountain of living waters (Jeremiah 2:13), Christ (John 7:37).

The Greek participle translated "**have been made complete**" is in the perfect tense, signifying a past, point-in-time event with ongoing effects. In Christ, the believer has been made positionally complete/full (at the moment of conversion) and continues to be made complete/full (in the process of sanctification)⁹⁰ (cf. footnote 70). The participle is also in the passive voice, indicative of ultimate divine causality (cf. comments on verse 7).

⁸⁷For the significance of this phrase, see comments on "fleshly body" in 1:22.

⁸⁸O'Brien (p. 104) comments that this "'in Christ (him)' motif ... runs like a scarlet thread through the whole passage" (2:6-15). Notice its occurrence in verses 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 ("with Him" 2x), 13 ("with Him"), and 15 ("through Him").

⁸⁹"Thou, O Christ, art all I want, More than all in Thee I find" (Charles Wesley, quoted in Vaughan, p. 199). "'Ye are made full' does not mean that the perfection of Christ is transfused into us, but that there are in him resources from which we may be filled, that nothing be wanting in us" (John Calvin, quoted in Vaughan, p. 199).

⁹⁰O'Brien (p. 114) rightly states in this regard: "The possession of all things in Christ in no way absolved them [the Colossians] from the need for continual growth."

In shades of 1:15-16, Paul concludes this verse by reasserting the supremacy of Christ by means of His sovereign headship ("**He is the head**"; cf. 1:18 and comments on "head") over the demonic forces⁹¹ ("**over all rule and authority**"; cf. Ephesians 1:21 and 1 Peter 3:22, as well as Colossians 1:16 and comments on), a not-so-subtle reminder of the superiority of Christianity over the Colossian heresy, which worshipped angels (2:18) and was demonically-derived (see 2:8 and comments on).

Verse 11

Having pointed to the Colossians' completeness in Christ⁹² in verse 10, Paul continues riding this train of thought in verse 11 and following by showing the Colossians what this entails. According to verse 11, it entails being spiritually circumcised by Christ. This is so because the Colossians were in union with Christ ("**in Him**"). To be spiritually circumcised/circumcised in heart ("**circumcised with a circumcision made without hands**"; cf. Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4, 9:26, Ezekiel 44:7, 9, Acts 7:51, and Romans 2:28-29) is a metaphor for conversion (accordingly, the Greek verb translated "were circumcised" is in the aorist tense, indicative of a past, point-in-time event).⁹³ From 2:16, it is evident that the Colossian heresy taught the necessity of observing certain Jewish religious rites, and it is likely that circumcision was among them. If so, this may be Paul's way of telling the Colossians that they have already been circumcised in the only way that matters (1 Corinthians 7:19, Galatians 5:6, and 6:15),

⁹¹A headship that is by reason of creation (1:15b-16) and conquest (2:15) (Harris, p. 100).

⁹²"In Christ" is the Pauline way of speaking of the soteriological (soteriology is the doctrine of salvation, based on the Greek word for salvation, *soteria*) doctrine known as union with Christ, the inseparable spiritual bond between Christ and the believer.

⁹³That the circumcision of conversion is one "made without hands" signifies the fact that conversion is a supernatural work that only God can perform. Accordingly, the Greek verb translated "were circumcised" is in the passive voice.

spiritually, and, therefore, need not worry about physical circumcision.

Just as physical circumcision results in a removal, so does spiritual circumcision. At conversion, the believer experiences "**the removal of the body of the flesh.**" The Greek noun translated "**removal**" connotes the casting aside of filthy clothing (cf. Zechariah 3:4). That which is cast aside at conversion, "**the body of the flesh,**" is the sin nature (so NIV), "the fallenness that rules in and through the physical body" (Melick, p. 258). Paul is speaking in positional terms. Practically, this removal takes place gradually through the process of progressive sanctification. As Romans 6 and other New Testament texts teach, understanding this positional truth is vital to this process (for the positional aspect of this, see Galatians 2:20, 5:24, and Colossians 2:20; for the practical aspect of it, see Romans 13:14 and Ephesians 4:22 and 24 with 4:25; for both, see Romans 6:6, Romans 6:11 with 6:12, Colossians 3:3 with 3:5, and Colossians 3:9-10 with 3:12). When a person is saved, though the sin nature is not eradicated, its power is removed (see Romans 6:6).

There is some debate among interpreters as to the meaning of the final phrase of verse 11, "**by the circumcision of Christ.**" Though there are some (such as Pao, p. 166) who view it as a metaphorical way of referring to the death of Christ, it is probably best to view it as identifying the One who spiritually circumcised the Colossians (in keeping with the passive voice of the verb translated "circumcised" in this verse).

Verse 12

Another truth that being complete in Christ entails is being united with Him in His work. Through union with Christ, the believer, in a mysterious, but nevertheless real, sense, is vitally connected to the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session/enthronement of Christ (see Ephesians 2:5-6,

which mentions several of these connections). Here in verse 12, Paul mentions two of them, the believer's participation in the burial ("**having been buried with Him**") and resurrection ("**raised up with Him**") of Christ. Because Christ died (in relation) to sin (Romans 6:10), and the believer is united to Christ ("in Christ Jesus" in Romans 6:11), so the believer has died to sin (Romans 6:11; cf. 1 Peter 2:24), meaning died to its domination. Because Christ arose, and the believer is united to Christ, the believer is alive to righteousness (cf. 1 Peter 2:24; see Colossians 3:1-2 for Paul's practical outworking of this positional truth).

When Paul speaks of baptism in this verse ("**in baptism**"), he is not speaking of water baptism, as if to imply baptismal regeneration⁹⁴ (the belief that one is saved by being baptized); rather, he is speaking of Spirit baptism (the non-experiential, permanent placing of the New Testament believer into the body of Christ at the moment of conversion) and the union with Christ so closely connected with it, a spiritual reality that water baptism (by immersion) so superbly pictures (cf. Romans 6:3-4).

When a sinner exercises saving faith, inherent in such faith is belief that God is more than powerful enough to release the sinner from sin's chains ("**through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead**"). The same infinite, omnipotent power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead physically, giving Him new life, raises the sinner from the dead spiritually, giving him new life (see Ephesians 1:19-20).

Just as we are saved by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. By faith, believer, believe that the God who was powerful enough to save you is powerful enough to sanctify you. The Colossian believers, like every believer, were complete (verse 10) because through union with Christ (verses 11-12) they were connected

⁹⁴Notice the words, "through faith" later in the verse.

to everything Christ did and the spiritual realities associated with what He did.

Verse 13

Having concluded verse 12 by pointing to the Colossians' participation in the resurrection of Christ, Paul continues riding this train of thought here in verse 13. As he does so memorably in Ephesians 2:1-10 (he does the same earlier in this epistle of Colossians, in 1:21-22), Paul magnifies the present bliss of his readers by reminding them of their past blight.⁹⁵

Prior to their conversion, the Colossians were spiritually dead ("**dead**"; cf. Ephesians 2:1 and 5). The Colossians' spiritual murder was not a homicide, but a suicide, attributable to their own sin ("**in**⁹⁶ **your transgressions**⁹⁷") and sin nature ("**and the uncircumcision of your flesh**"; NIV: "uncircumcision of your sinful nature"; cf. verse 11 and comments on, as well as Acts 7:51).

Against this dark background of the Colossians' past, the brilliance of God's grace is all the more magnified. It was such spiritually dead individuals as the Colossians whom God spiritually raised from the dead. Once again, this was accomplished in connection with Christ, namely, His resurrection ("**He made you alive together with Him**"; cf. Ephesians 2:5).⁹⁸

⁹⁵Part of this magnification is the fact that Paul begins the Greek sentence with the words, "and you," for emphasis.

⁹⁶The NASB offers as an alternative translation: "dead by reason of your transgressions ..." Both O'Brien and Harris translate similarly: "because of your transgressions ..."

⁹⁷Paul certainly does not minimize the Colossians' pre-conversion sin, using one of the strongest Greek words for sin ("transgression"), descriptive of willful violation of known law.

⁹⁸"The resurrection of Christians from spiritual deadness to new life is grounded in, and a consequence of, Christ's own rising from the realm of the dead to immortal life" (Harris, p. 106).

Concurrent with the believer's regeneration (the impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead) is forgiveness of every sin ("**having forgiven us all our transgressions**"; cf. 1:14 and comments on). The Greek participle translated "**having forgiven**" comes from a Greek verb (*charizomai*⁹⁹) that has as its root the Greek word for "grace" (*charis*). Forgiveness is certainly a gracious (undeserved) gift from God's hand! This gift is also the result of our union with Christ (see Ephesians 1:7).

Verse 14

Paul continues the train of thought with which he ended verse 13. God's forgiveness of the sinner involves the cancellation of a debt (cf. Matthew 18:23-35 and Luke 7:41-42a). The sinner's sin debt is infinite, because sin is a crime committed against an infinite God.

Paul pictures the sinner's sin debt as recorded on a legal document, a "**certificate of debt**," which "denotes a 'document,' especially a 'note of indebtedness' written in one's own hand as a proof of obligation" (O'Brien, p. 124), an IOU of sorts (cf. Philemon 19). This certificate was comprised of decrees ("**consisting of decrees**"), primarily signifying the Mosaic Law (cf. Ephesians 2:15), secondarily the moral law written on the heart (Romans 2:14-15).

⁹⁹O'Brien (p. 123) defines this verb as "give freely or graciously as a favor."

Due to sinfulness, no one is able to meet the Law's demand of perfection (James 2:10); therefore, the Law becomes a curse to man ("**against us ... hostile to us**"; cf. Acts 15:10 and Galatians 3:10).¹⁰⁰

The only way God can forgive the infinite debt incurred by the sinner is through a payment of infinite value, the death of Christ on the Cross; thus, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE'" (Galatians 3:13). Christ "**canceled out**"¹⁰¹ the certificate of debt/took it out of the way ("**has taken it out of the way**"¹⁰²) by, as it were, nailing the certificate to the Cross upon which He died ("**having nailed it to the cross**").¹⁰³ "A more forcible way of depicting man's release from sin's debt can hardly be imagined" (Kent, p. 88).

Verse 15

Christ's death on the Cross not only did a number on the believer's sin debt (verse 14), but also on another of his enemies, the forces of evil (verse 15). Through His death, Christ "**disarmed**" the demons ("**rulers and authorities**"; cf. Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 1:16, and 2:10). While it is true that the forces of evil are still skirmishing, the war has already been won.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰“God's broken law hounds the sinner at every turn, pursuing him through an accusing conscience as well as by Scriptural warnings” (Kent, p. 88).

¹⁰¹The Greek verb translated “canceled out” is also translated “wiped away” in Acts 3:19 (cf. Revelation 7:17 and 21:4) and “erase” in Revelation 3:5. Harris (p. 107) translates it “completely obliterated.”

¹⁰²The Greek verb translated “has taken” is in the perfect tense (indicative of a past, point-in-time action with ongoing effects), signifying the fact that the believer's redemption from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13) is a permanent thing.

¹⁰³“He [Christ] had not only canceled the debt but also destroyed the document on which it was recorded” (O'Brien, p. 133).

¹⁰⁴As Martin Luther said regarding Satan in his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”: “his doom is sure.” See 1 Corinthians 15:24.

Borrowing the imagery of a triumphal procession¹⁰⁵ (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Ephesians 4:8), in which a victorious general would parade the defeated foe before his countrymen, Paul states that the death of Christ on the Cross (along with His subsequent resurrection, ascension, and session—see Ephesians 1:20-21 and 4:8) “**made a public display of**” the defeated demonic forces, making it clear to all that Christ is the Victor (“**having triumphed over them**”). “To the casual observer the cross appears to be only an instrument of death, the symbol of Christ’s defeat; Paul represents it as Christ’s chariot of victory” (Vaughan p. 202). Christ is supreme! Even His death is an exclamation point of this truth.

¹⁰⁵See pages 79-80 of Hughes for a good description of one.

Colossians 2:6-15 Review Questions

1. What does “having been firmly rooted” in 2:7 picture? *being planted by God in the soil of salvation*
2. What does “being built up in Him” in 2:7 picture? *the superstructure of sanctification*
3. What does “established in [the] faith” in 2:7 picture? *roots going deeper as the believer grows*
- 4.-5. How might the Greek phrase translated “according to the elementary principles of the world” in 2:8 be otherwise translated? In saying this, what point is Paul making about the Colossian heresy or any other such system of thought that is not “according to Christ”? *elemental spirits; it is demonically-derived*
6. What’s the “connection” between 2:9 and 2:10? *if you are connected to the One who is complete, you are complete*
7. For what is “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands” (i.e., spiritual circumcision/circumcision of the heart) in 2:11 a metaphor? *conversion*
- 8.-9. To what does “body of flesh” in 2:11 refer? In what sense is it “removed” at conversion? *the sin nature; positionally (its power is removed, not its presence)*
10. What is union with Christ, the doctrine that is so prevalent throughout this section of the epistle (2:6-15)? *the inseparable spiritual bond between Christ and the Christian, which results in Christ’s work being imputed to the Christian*
11. When Paul says in 2:15 that Christ’s death on the Cross “made a public display of” the demonic forces, what imagery is he using? *the triumphal procession*

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

c. Further warnings

In the section under study in this lesson, 2:16-23, Paul, for the first time in the epistle, deals directly with the heresy threatening the Colossian believers, identifying and refuting some of its specific tenets. The Colossian heresy¹⁰⁶ seems to have been an amalgamation of several elements. Three of them are prominent in this section of the letter: legalism (verses 16-17), worship of angels (verses 18-19), and asceticism (verses 20-23).

¹⁰⁶For more on the Colossian heresy, see under “The Purpose for Writing” in the introductory lesson.

(1) Warning against legalism (2:16-17)

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— (2:16) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (2:17)

Verse 16

One of the elements of the Colossian heresy was a Jewish element. It appears that the heretics were pressuring the Colossians to submit to certain Jewish religious rituals in order to be spiritually complete. In principle, these heretics were akin to the Judaizers, those who insisted that the keeping of the Mosaic Law, especially the rite of circumcision, was essential to salvation (see Acts 15:1). Both were “legalists¹⁰⁷” in that they taught that salvation came by observing law. SALVATION IS NEVER BASED UPON WHAT WE DO, BUT UPON WHAT CHRIST DID. He achieved it; we receive it. Due to Christ’s death on the Cross (verse 14), and their union with Him in His death (verse 20), the Colossians were dead to the Law (Romans 7:4), and, therefore, no longer indebted to It (verse 14; cf. Galatians 4:9-10).

In light of their freedom from the Law¹⁰⁸ (the reason the “**Therefore**” that begins this verse is there for), the heretics had no basis to “pass judgment on” (O’Brien, p. 138; cf. Romans 2:1

¹⁰⁷MacArthur (p. 116) calls legalism “the religion of human achievement.”

¹⁰⁸The believer’s freedom from the Mosaic Law does not mean freedom from all law, what is called “antinomianism” (Romans 6:15). The believer is under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2), what Compton (p. 90) calls “the teachings of Christ and the apostles recorded in the New Testament.”

and 3, where the same Greek verb is translated respectively “passes judgment” and “pass judgment”) the Colossians for their failure to observe such regulations (“**no one is to act as your judge**”). The regulations that the heretics were trying to force upon the Colossians involved foods and festivals (Geisler, p. 678) or diet and days (Hughes, p. 82).

The Mosaic Law contained dietary regulations (see Leviticus 11:1-23); it appears that the Colossian heretics either insisted on the same ones or came up with their own (“**in regard to food or drink**”). With the passing of the dispensation of law and the dawning of the dispensation of the church age, any such dietary regulations became passé (see Mark 7:19b, Acts 10:9-16, Romans 14:1-4, 1 Corinthians 8:8, and 1 Timothy 4:3-4).

Likewise, the Mosaic Law prescribed the observance of certain holy days (see Leviticus 23), such as the yearly “**festivals**” of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, as well as the monthly “**new moon**” and the weekly “**Sabbath day**” (cf. Exodus 20:8-11, 31:12-17, 2 Kings 4:23, 1 Chronicles 23:31, 2 Chronicles 2:4, 31:3, Nehemiah 10:33, Isaiah 1:13, 66:23, Ezekiel 45:17, 46:1, and Amos 8:5). The heretics were apparently insisting on the observance of all such days.

Verse 17

Paul points out why any such legalistic regulations as the ones the heretics were trying to impose upon the Colossians (verse 16) were, indeed, passé. All such regulations (“**things**”) were “**a mere shadow of what is to come,**” meaning they foreshadowed something future to them, that something being a Someone, Christ. Once the “**substance**” (Christ) came, the shadow (the Law) passed away (see especially

Hebrews 10:1, as well as Galatians 3:23-25). The Law "foreshadowed" Christ in that It pointed to Him. Consider, as one example, the festival of Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). As another example, consider the manna in the wilderness (John 6:48-51). These heretics were foolishly concerned with the shadow, rather than with the Substance that cast the shadow. Once again, Paul is pointing out the chief demerit of this heresy, its deprecation of Christ. The Colossians, for their part, had the Substance (Christ); therefore, why concern themselves with the shadow (the Law)?

(2) Warning against angelic worship (2:18-19)

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, (2:18) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (2:19)

Verse 18

Another element of the Colossian heresy was worship of angels, mentioned explicitly here in verse 18. Verse 18 "has been described as one of the most contested passages in the NT" (O'Brien, p. 141) and "arguably the most difficult verse in Colossians to interpret" (Moo, p. 224). Verses 18 and 19 have been called "two of the most puzzling verses in the NT" (Vaughan, p. 205).

Paul exhorts the Colossians to not allow the heretics to "**keep defrauding you of your prize.**" The Greek verb is *katabrabeuo*. Etymologically, it consists of the Greek

preposition, *kata*, meaning "against," and the Greek verb, *brabeuo*, meaning "to act as umpire or one who gives the prize" (O'Brien, p. 141). The idea seems to be similar (but a bit stronger—O'Brien translates the verb "condemn," p. 141) to the one expressed in verse 16. The heretics were apparently passing judgment on the Colossians, claiming that the Colossians would not receive the "**prize**" of heaven (see Philippians 3:14) unless they embraced their teachings. "It was as if the heretics assumed the role of spiritual referees and disqualified the Colossians for not abiding by their rules" (MacArthur, p. 120).

The participle translated "**delighting in**" can perhaps be better understood as "insisting on" (Harris, p. 121; Pao, p. 182; so also ESV). The heretics insisted on "**self-abasement**" (cf. verse 23), literally "humility." In light of what Paul says at the end of this verse and in verse 23, this was evidently a false humility (so NIV) (a la Matthew 6:16-18?). True humility is not evidenced by self-deprecation, etc., but by disregard for self.

The heretics also insisted on "**the worship of the angels.**" Rather than worshipping the Creator (Matthew 4:10), they worshipped the creature (Romans 1:25; cf. Revelation 19:10 and 22:8-9, as well as Colossians 1:16 and comments on). Once again, this heresy's deprecation of Christ is clearly evident. As Ellis (p. 794) says, this was "an activity of worship which, like the devotion of present-day Roman Catholics to the Virgin Mary, displaced the centrality of Christ."

The Colossian heretics had, as it were, both feet planted firmly in mid-air, placing their faith in alleged visions ("**taking his stand on visions he has seen**"), perhaps visions they claimed to

have experienced while attempting to worship angels. Paul knew something about visions. Even though he had experienced a genuine one (2 Corinthians 12:1-4), he did not even speak about it, let alone make it a basis of his belief system.

Though the Colossian heretics presented a persona of humility ("self-abasement" here in verse 18; cf. verse 23), they were in reality quite proud¹⁰⁹ ("**inflated**"), an arrogance arising from minds that were unregenerate ("**by his fleshly mind**"; cf. Romans 8:7).

Verse 19

Once again, the fundamental problem with the Colossian heresy was the fact that it was not Christ-centered (see 2:8 and comments on). The heretics were "**not holding fast to the head.**" That "**the head**" is clearly a reference to Christ is not only seen by 1:18, but also by the fact that "**whom**" is a masculine pronoun in the original, rather than a feminine, the feminine being expected since the antecedent, "head," is a feminine noun (in Greek, a pronoun usually agrees with its antecedent in gender).

The Greek participle translated "**holding fast**" connotes a firm grasp; it is (in its verb form) translated elsewhere in Scripture as "arrest" (Matthew 14:3) and "seize" (Matthew 18:28 and 21:46). The Colossian heretics, being unbelievers, were not connected to Christ. The headship of Christ Paul is speaking of in this verse is His organic headship (cf. Ephesians 4:15-16), as opposed to His sovereign headship (see comments on 1:18).

¹⁰⁹Hendriksen (p. 34) speaks of those who "conceal their revolting conceit behind a mask of humility."

Just as the rest of one's physical body cannot grow unless it is connected to the head (the pituitary gland, which is attached to the brain, causes physical growth), so the body of Christ cannot grow unless its members (individual Christians) are connected to the Head, Christ (see also Ephesians 4:16; cf. the vine-branch metaphor of John 15). Christ as Head supplies ("**supplied**") and supports ("**held together**"; cf. 2:2, where the same Greek participle is translated "knit together") His body through its individual members ("**by the joints and ligaments**").¹¹⁰ Every individual Christian has a role to play in building up the body of Christ (through local church ministry; see footnote 57); every Christian is a spiritual "body builder."

The growth of the body of Christ is ultimately attributable to God ("**grows with a growth which is from God**"). The Colossian heretics were growing in a different way—their heads were swelling ("inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" in verse 18).

- (3) Warning against asceticism (2:20-23)

¹¹⁰Harris (p. 124) rightly points out: "We should not expect to find physiological precision here."

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, (2:20) "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (2:21) (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? (2:22) These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.* (2:23)

Verse 20

Yet another element of the Colossian heresy was asceticism. "Asceticism is that religious philosophy which teaches that depriving the physical body of its normal desires is a means of achieving greater holiness and approval from God" (Kent, p. 97). Ascetic practices might include such things as abstaining from sexual relations (celibacy; see 1 Corinthians 7:1-2¹¹¹ and 1 Timothy 4:3); abstaining from food (fasting; see 1 Timothy 4:3); abstaining from social relations (monasticism), including speaking; abstaining from material possessions (vow of poverty); abstaining from sleep; and self-flagellation. Though there may be some biblical warrant for the occasional practice of some of these things under certain conditions (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 7:5), regular practice of them as a means of salvation and/or sanctification is unbiblical.

¹¹¹This was apparently a slogan of the false teachers in Corinth, as seen by the NIV's and ESV's use of quotation marks in the second half of the verse. In other words, these false teachers were teaching celibacy.

Paul reminds the Colossians that by virtue of their death with Christ ("**If**¹¹² **you have died with Christ**"; cf. Romans 6:3-6, 8, Galatians 2:20, 6:14, Colossians 2:12, and 3:3), they had died to the dominion, not only of the Law (cf. 2:14), but also of demons (cf. 2:15), and to any demonically-derived ("**to the elementary principles of the world**"; cf. 2:8 and comments on, as well as Galatians 4:3 and 9) ideology (any ideology that is not Christ-centered), such as the one espoused by the Colossian heretics¹¹³ (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-5). In light of this truth, it would be incongruous ("**why**") for them to place themselves under the dogma¹¹⁴ of the heretics ("**submit yourself to decrees**"). To do so would be "**living in the world**" (O'Brien: "as if you still lived in a worldly way"), incongruous for those who are "dead to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

Verse 21

Here in verse 21 Paul specifies some of the ascetic "decrees" that the Colossian heretics were espousing (notice how the NASB, NIV, and ESV put these slogans in quotes, indicating that they were likely the exact words of the heretics).

Most interpreters see these regulations as primarily diet-related, due to the words of 2:16 and 2:22a. In light of the Gnostic flavor of the Colossian heresy (see under "The Purpose for Writing" in the introductory lesson), with its

¹¹²The "if" clause that begins this verse is an instance of a Greek grammatical construction in which the "if" clause is assumed to be true. Thus, one could translate: "**Since** you have died with Christ ..." (so NIV).

¹¹³Whether they realized it or not, the angels that the Colossian heretics were worshipping (verse 18) were in reality demons (verse 20)!

¹¹⁴The Greek verb translated "submit yourself to decrees" in verse 20 is *dogmatizo*, from which we get our English word, "dogma."

deprecation of anything material (claiming that anything material was by nature unspiritual), such regulations as those found here are not surprising.

Verse 22

Most interpreters believe that the first half of verse 22 (“**which all refer to things destined to perish with use**”) is a parenthetical remark (so NASB) regarding the regulations listed in verse 21. In a sense, Paul is ridiculing these regulations/showing how ridiculous they are. Assuming the regulations of verse 21 to be dietary ones, Paul’s point seems to be much the same as Christ’s in Matthew 15:17-20//Mark 7:15-23. Dietary regulations have no salvific and/or sanctifying value (cf. Paul’s culminating statement at the end of verse 23). Furthermore, such regulations are humanly-contrived (cf. 2:8 and comments on); they are “**in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men**” (cf. Matthew 15:9//Mark 7:7 and Titus 1:14). Harris (p. 130) summarizes verses 20-22 well: “It is incongruous for the citizens of another, heavenly world to submit to petty regulations concerning perishable items in this world, out of conformity to merely human precepts and tenets.”

Verse 23

The asceticism (“**severe treatment of the body**”) practiced by the Colossian heretics was deceiving. Though it was outwardly impressive (“**These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom**”), it was inwardly delinquent (cf. Matthew 23:25-28); it had the reputation, but not the reality (O’Brien, p. 152).

Once again, Paul points out the fact that it was humanly-contrived (“**self-made religion**”; cf. 2:8 and 22).

Also once again (cf. verse 18), Paul points out that the Colossian heretics “prided” themselves in their humility (“**self-abasement**”). The bottom line, however, is that such asceticism was useless (“**of no value**”) in winning the fight with the flesh (“**against fleshly indulgence**”). Contra the Gnostic flavor of the Colossian heresy with its deprecation of the material and elevation of the immaterial (see under “The Purpose for Writing” in the introductory lesson), the root cause of human sin is not physical, but spiritual; the body is not the problem, the heart is.

The way to be spiritually complete is to not get caught up in some humanly-contrived, demonically-derived ideology, but to get connected to Christ (see 2:11). The first may have the “appearance of wisdom,” but only in the second “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom” (2:3). “Any system of religion which is unwilling to accept Jesus Christ as the only and all-sufficient Savior is an indulgence of the flesh, a giving in to man’s sinful conceit, as if he, by his own contrivances, were able to perfect Christ’s imperfect (?) work” (Hendriksen, p. 133; emphasis his).

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

II. Practical (3:1-4:6)

As in several of his other epistles (such as in Romans and Ephesians), Paul in Colossians lays a doctrinal foundation (1:15-2:23) upon which he builds a practical superstructure (3:1-4:6).

A. A general exhortation (3:1-4)

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (3:1) Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. (3:2) For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (3:3) When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (3:4)

Verse 1

Paul begins the practical part of the epistle by exhorting the Colossians to live in light of the truth of 2:12-13 (why the **“therefore”** that begins this verse is there for), the fact¹¹⁵ that they have been raised with Christ (cf. Romans 6:4-5, 8-11, and 13b) through their union with Him¹¹⁶ (**“if you have been raised up with Christ”**). This is a prime example of Paul’s common practice of basing the imperatives of Christian living (acts) upon the indicatives of the Christian life (facts).

The command is to “keep seeking the things above.” **“Things above”** are heavenly, eternal things as opposed to earthly, temporal things (“things that are on earth” in verse 2). The Greek verb translated **“keep seeking”** means “to seek or strive for earnestly” (Geisler, p. 680). By means of regeneration (the act of

¹¹⁵The “if” clause that begins this verse reflects a Greek grammatical construction in which the “if” clause is assumed to be true; thus, one could translate: “since you have been raised up with Christ ...”

¹¹⁶Similarly, in 2:20 Paul exhorted the Colossians to live in light of their union with Christ in His death.

God at the moment of the sinner's conversion whereby those who are spiritually dead are made spiritually alive), the sinner's aspirations are completely changed, from earthly ones to heavenly ones.

The believer's union with Christ extends beyond identification with Him in His death (2:20), burial (2:12), and resurrection (2:12-13 and here in 3:1) to identification with Him in His ascension and session (cf. Ephesians 2:6). Due to His ascension (Acts 1:9-11), Christ is already in Heaven ("**where Christ is**"). His ascension led to His session¹¹⁷ ("**seated at the right hand of God**"¹¹⁸"; cf. Psalm 110:1, Matthew 26:64//Mark 14:62//Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33-34, 5:31, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 1:3, 13, 8:1, 10:12¹¹⁹, 12:2, and 1 Peter 3:22). Because Christ is in Heaven, and believers are united with Him, they are in Heaven spiritually (cf. Philippians 3:20). This is further incentive to "keep seeking the things above" (a la Abraham in Hebrews 11:9-10). Believers live in the world physically, but not spiritually (2:20; cf. John 17:16).

Verse 2

Paul reiterates the thought of verse 1, but with a slightly different emphasis. In verse 1, he exhorted the Colossians to "keep seeking the things above." Here in verse 2, he exhorts them to set their mind on the things above ("**set your mind on the things**

¹¹⁷Sometimes, this concept is referred to as "enthronement." The reason it is often called "session" is because the word, "session" at one time meant "the act of sitting down" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 618).

¹¹⁸To be "seated at the right hand" is "a metaphor for the place of supreme privilege and divine authority" (Vaughan, p. 209); it is "the place of unrivaled prestige and unparalleled authority" (Harris, p. 138). See, for example, 1 Kings 2:19. This is another reminder in the letter of the supremacy of Christ.

¹¹⁹Significantly, there were no seats upon which the priests could sit, either in the Tabernacle or in the Temple. The priests, therefore, had to stand (Hebrews 10:11). When Jesus, however, entered the heavenly tabernacle (Hebrews 8:2, 9:11, and 24), He sat down, signifying that the work of redemption was complete (Hebrews 10:12). As Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 618) states: ". . . [S]itting at God's right hand is a dramatic indication of the completion of Christ's work of redemption. Just as a human being will sit down at the completion of a large task to enjoy the satisfaction of having accomplished it, so Jesus sat at the right hand of God, visibly demonstrating that his work of redemption was complete."

above"). J. B. Lightfoot (quoted in Vaughan, p. 209; emphasis his) says it well: "You must not only *seek* heaven; you must also *think* heaven." Many interpreters are of the opinion that this second exhortation is foundational to the first one, i.e., that what you set your mind on will determine what you seek; one's preoccupation will become one's pursuit (Harris, p. 142).

The Greek verb translated "**set your mind on**" means to "constantly fix your thoughts on" (Harris, p. 138), to "focus your attention and your thoughts exclusively and constantly on" (Harris, pp. 141-142). Believers are to be heavenly minded (but, as the saying goes, not in such a way that they are of no earthly good, but in such a way that they do more earthly good¹²⁰), setting their minds on heavenly, eternal things ("**the things above**"), not on earthly, temporal things ("**the things that are on earth**"). See also Romans 8:5, 2 Corinthians 4:18, and Philippians 3:19. "The believer's whole disposition should orient itself toward heaven, where Christ is, just as a compass needle orients itself toward the north" (MacArthur, p. 128).

What is your mindset/on what are you setting your mind? Are you living as if this world is all that there is (a limited, earth-bound perspective), or are you living in light of eternity? "... [F]rom now on the Christian will see everything in the light and against the backdrop of eternity He will no longer live as if this world was all that mattered; he will see this world against the background of the large world of eternity" (William Barclay, quoted in Vaughan, pp. 209-210).¹²¹

Verse 3

Paul gives two reasons why Christians are to set their minds on heavenly things, rather than on earthly things (verse 2). One is because ("**for**") Christians are "dead to the world" ("**you have died**"; cf. Galatians 6:14 and Colossians 2:20). Believers have died to sin (Romans 6:2-11), meaning sin's grip on the believer has been loosed. Included in this death to sin is death to the world, Satan, and the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:24, Ephesians 2:1-3, and

¹²⁰Craig Keener (cited in Pao, p. 231).

¹²¹"If you read history, you will find that those who did the most for the present world were just those who thought the most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither" (C. S. Lewis).

Colossians 2:20-23). It is incongruous for one who has died to the world to set his mind on worldly/earthly things (cf. Colossians 2:20).

The flip side of the believer's death with Christ to sin, etc. is his life with Christ, another reason why he should set his mind on heavenly, rather than on earthly, things (cf. verse 1). Paul describes the believer's union with Christ in His life as "**your life is hidden with Christ in God.**" Most interpreters see two ideas here, concealment (with verse 4's "revealed" being a contrast; see also 1 John 3:2) and security. In regards to the second, Kent (p. 109) states: "To describe the believer's life in this manner is to indicate that it is doubly safe. It is hidden away with Christ, and He is seated on the right hand of God (v. 1) in heaven. Surely there could be no safer refuge than this. To have one's life hid with Christ in God is to be in vital association with the One who is in heaven as a forerunner, guaranteeing the safe arrival in due time of all who are in Him (Heb 6:20)."

Because the believer is "**with Christ**" (John 6:56, 14:20, 17:21, 1 John 2:5-6, and 24), and vice versa (John 6:56, 14:20, 23, and 17:23), and Christ is "in God," and vice versa (John 10:38, 14:10-11, and 17:21), therefore, the believer is "**in God**," and vice versa (1 John 3:24, 4:13, and 15-16). Because Christ is in Heaven, and the believer is there with Him spiritually, the believer should keep seeking (verse 1) and set his mind on (verse 2) heavenly things.

Verse 4

Though the believer is now "hidden" (verse 3), there is coming a day when he will be "revealed" (verse 4). Because the believer is united with Christ, he will be glorified with Christ ("**with Him in glory**"; cf. Romans 8:17). When Christ returns at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17), both He and those united with Him, believers, will be "revealed" ("**When Christ ... is revealed, then you also will be revealed**"). See Romans 8:19. Christ will be seen for who He really is, and believers will be seen for who they really are. The glory of Christ and believers will be visible by "a glorified glow," the brilliance of their glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:43, Philippians 3:20-21, and 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Paul calls Christ "**our life**," meaning "Christ is the source, center, and goal of the individual and corporate lives of believers" (Harris,

p. 140). See 1 Corinthians 8:6, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21, and Colossians 1:16.

B. Specific exhortations (3:5-4:6)

1. Vices to put off (3:5-11)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (3:5) For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, (3:6) and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. (3:7) But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. (3:8) Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, (3:9) and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— (3:10) a *renewal* in which there is no *distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.* (3:11)

Verse 5

Once again (as in verse 1), Paul exhorts the Colossians to live in light of a doctrinal reality.¹²² In light of the fact that the Colossians had died to sin, etc. (2:20 and 3:3) (the reason the “**therefore**” that begins this verse is there for), Paul exhorts the Colossians to put the sin in their lives to death¹²³ (“**consider the members of your earthly body as dead**” could be more literally and accurately translated

¹²²Commenting on this verse, Hughes (p. 95) states: “For Paul, doctrine determines duty; creed determines conduct; facts demand acts.”

¹²³Paul does the same in Romans 6, laying the doctrinal foundation of the believer being dead to sin through his union with Christ in His death and his being alive to righteousness through his union with Christ in His resurrection (verses 1-11) before exhorting the Romans to live in light of these realities (verses 12-14).

“put to death the members of your earthly body”; so NIV).¹²⁴ The Greek verb translated “put to death” in the NIV is in the aorist tense, signifying the need for urgent action. In exhorting the Colossians to put the members of their earthly bodies to death, Paul is exhorting them to put the sins committed or expressed through the members of their earthly bodies to death (cf. especially Romans 8:13, as well as Matthew 5:29-30, 18:8, Romans 6:13, 7:5, 23, and James 4:1).

Through the use of a “vice list,” Paul specifies what some of these sins are.¹²⁵ The list moves from outward acts to the inward attitudes that underlie them (O’Brien, p. 178). It is a list dominated by sexual sins: “**immorality**” (cf. “immorality” in 1 Corinthians 6:18 and Galatians 5:19 and “sexual immorality” in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, same Greek word); “**impurity**” (cf. “impurity” in Romans 1:24, 2 Corinthians 12:21, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:7, same Greek word; cf. also “impure” in Ephesians 5:5, the verbal form of this noun); “**passion**” (cf. “passions” in Romans 1:26 and “passion” in 1 Thessalonians 4:5, same Greek word, with both passages being in contexts of sexual sin); “**evil desire**” (cf. “lust” in Matthew 5:28, the verb form of the noun translated “desire” here, and “lusts” in Romans 1:24, 6:12, and 13:14 and “lustful” in 1 Thessalonians 4:5, both words being the same Greek noun translated “desire” here, with several of these passages being in contexts of sexual sin). The final vice on the list, “**greed**” (cf. “greed” in Ephesians 5:3, same Greek word) likely also has sexual overtones (cf. Exodus 20:17//Deuteronomy 5:21). It literally means “to have more” (the Greek word is *pleonexia*, from the Greek adjective, *pleon*, “more” + the Greek verb, *exo*, “to have”). Greed is tantamount to idolatry (“**which amounts to idolatry**”; cf. Ephesians 5:5), for the object desired becomes one’s god (cf. Matthew 6:24). Based on the overall context of this verse, this is a reminder that sexual sin is ultimately a

¹²⁴John Owen, the 17th century English theologian, famously said: “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.”

¹²⁵Other Pauline vice lists are found in Romans 1:29-31, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, 2 Timothy 3:2-4, and Titus 3:3.

worship problem (cf. Romans 1:25 in its immediate context, as well as 1 Corinthians 6:9, which likewise mentions idolatry in the midst of a list of sexual sins).

Verse 6

As a further incentive to putting such sexual sins as those mentioned in verse 5 to death, Paul reminds the Colossians that the continual committing of such sins exposes one to the wrath of God (cf. Ephesians 5:5-6).¹²⁶ Paul's words here are reminiscent of his words in Romans 1, where he states that sexual sins are a form of idolatry, meriting the wrath of God.

The Greek verb translated "**will come**" is in the present tense; thus, a more literal translation would be: "is coming." This could be understood in a couple of ways. It could mean that God's wrath is already being poured out on those who commit such sins, poured out by means of a judicial hardening of heart (as in Romans 1:18, where "is revealed" is a present tense verb, most likely indicative of the fact that God's giving over of the unbeliever to his sin, as Romans 1:24, 26, and 28 states, is an expression of His wrath being outpoured). More likely, in this context it means that the wrath of God that will be outpoured in the future upon such sinners (see Romans 2:5 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10) is so certain that it can be spoken of as already on its way. See also John 3:36 and Ephesians 5:6.

The last phrase of this verse, "**upon the sons of disobedience**" is not found in some of the earliest Greek manuscripts, those closest in time to the original (see NASB marginal note); consequently, the NIV and ESV do not contain it (some textual scholars surmise that the words were added by later scribes in order to assimilate this verse

¹²⁶“These sins attract God's displeasure like a magnet attracts iron or like a high steeple on an isolated hill draws lightning” (Hendriksen, p. 147). In commenting on this verse, O'Brien (p. 185) makes some beneficial comments in regards to the wrath of God: "... [O]nly the person who understands something of the greatness of [God's] wrath will be mastered by the greatness of his mercy. The converse also is true: only he who has experienced the greatness of God's mercy can understand something of how great that wrath must be.”

with Ephesians 5:6). If this phrase is original, it is identifying the objects of God's wrath as being those characterized by disobedience, "sons of" being a Hebraism describing what one is characterized by (cf. "obedient children" in 1 Peter 1:14, which is literally "children of obedience"; see NASB marginal note).

Verse 7

As he does back in 1:21, Paul reminds the Colossians of their past¹²⁷ (cf. Ephesians 2:2-3 and 1 Peter 4:3). In their pre-conversion days, they "walked" (cf. 1:10 and 2:6) and "were living" (cf. 2:20) in such sins as those mentioned back in verse 5 ("**in them**"). By being converted, the Colossians avoided the wrath of God headed their way (see verse 6 and comments on) due to their committing of the sexual sins mentioned in verse 5.

The two verbs ("**walked**" and "**were living**") are roughly synonymous. Some interpreters do distinguish them, however. Hendriksen (p. 148) views the first as descriptive of behavior, the second as descriptive of disposition. Similarly, Harris (p. 149) views the first as descriptive of actual conduct, the second as descriptive of general lifestyle. Likewise, O'Brien (p. 186): "Their outward behavior corresponded with their established attitudes and sentiments." See Galatians 5:25.

Verse 8

In verse 5, Paul exhorted the Colossians to put to death various sexual sins that were characteristic of their pre-conversion days (verse 7). He says much the same here in verse 8, using different imagery and a different vice list. In contrast to their pre-conversion days ("**but now**"; cf. Romans 6:22, Galatians 4:9, Ephesians 2:13, and 5:8) and in addition to ("**also**") the vices mentioned in verse 5, Paul exhorts the Colossians to rid themselves of some other vices. Whereas in verse 5 he used the imagery of putting to death, here in verse 8 he uses the imagery of removing a garment ("**put aside**"; cf. Acts 7:58 for the literal use of this verb and

¹²⁷Paul's reminder is an emphatic one. The original literally reads: "In them also you you walked once," the "you" being repeated, for emphasis.

Romans 13:12, Hebrews 12:1, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 2:1 for its figurative use, as here).

The vices the Colossians are to remove are sins of anger and sins of speech, the first leading to the second¹²⁸ (cf. Ephesians 4:22-32, a passage parallel to Colossians 3:8-14, where sins of anger and speech are among those to be “put off”). According to most interpreters, “**anger**” signifies internal animosity, “**wrath**” its visible expression (cf. Galatians 5:20, where the same Greek noun translated “wrath” here is translated “outbursts of anger”). “**Malice**” (cf. Ephesians 4:31 and 1 Peter 2:1, where the same vice is also commanded to be put aside) is manifestation of a malevolent (as opposed to benevolent) mindset. “**Slander**” (cf. Ephesians 4:31, where the same vice is also commanded to be put aside) is the maligning or defaming of the character of another (the verbal form of this Greek noun is translated “malign” in Titus 3:2).

Verse 9

Having concluded verse 8 by mentioning some sins of the tongue, Paul adds one more here at the start of verse 9, lying (“**Do not lie to one another**”). Significantly, Paul adds the qualifier, “**to one another.**” His reason for doing so is likely the same as his reason for doing so in Ephesians 4:25, to emphasize the detrimental effect lying has upon interpersonal relationships with fellow believers (cf. Proverbs 6:19; by way of contrast, see Ephesians 4:15-16).

The reason why (“**since**”) the Colossians were not to lie to one another is because lying was characteristic of who they were prior to conversion, “**the old self.**” The “old self” (the “old man” in the KJV) is man in his unregenerate/unconverted state, characterized by one disposition/nature, the “sin nature.”¹²⁹ By contrast, the “new

¹²⁸Whereas the vice list of verse 5 seems to move from the external to the internal (see comments on verse 5), the vice list of verse 8 seems to move from the internal to the external. Hatred in the heart leads to murdering others with the tongue (see Christ’s words in Matthew 5:21-22). The tongue is a weapon, likened in Scripture to a sharp razor (Psalm 52:2), a sword (Psalm 64:3), a fire (James 3:6), and a deadly poison (James 3:8).

¹²⁹O’Brien (p. 190) describes the old self as “the whole personality of man when he is ruled by

self” (the “new man” in the KJV) is man in his regenerate/converted state, characterized by two competing (Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:17) dispositions/natures, the sin nature and the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), with the second being dominant. When the Colossians were converted¹³⁰, this “old self” was “**laid aside**” (≈ Romans 6:6's “crucified”; cf. Colossians 2:11 and comments on; see also 2 Corinthians 5:17). While the Colossians’ sin natures and their corresponding “**evil practices**” had been positionally laid aside at conversion (verse 9), they also needed to be practically laid aside (verse 8; cf. Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 4:22). Similarly, compare Galatians 5:24 with Romans 13:14b.

Verse 10

Not only did the Colossians lay aside their old self at conversion (verse 9), but they also “put on the new self.” The Greek verb translated “**put on**” signifies the putting on of a garment. When a person gets saved, he changes his wardrobe: off go the dirty clothes of sin and on go the clean clothes of righteousness (cf. Isaiah 61:10 and Zechariah 3:1-5). Conversion is not a reformation of the old self; it is a replacement of it. For an explanation of “**the new self**,” see comments on verse 9.

Just as the positional laying aside of the old self that occurs at conversion needs to result in its practical laying aside through sanctification¹³¹ (see comments on verse 9), so the positional putting on of the new self that occurs at conversion (here in verse 10) needs to result in its practical putting on through sanctification (verse 12; cf. Romans 13:12 and Ephesians 4:24). Similarly, compare Galatians 3:27 with Romans 13:14a. This practical putting on of the new self

sin.”

¹³⁰The Greek participle translated “laid aside” is in the aorist tense, indicative of a point-in-time action in the past, signifying the Colossians’ conversion.

¹³¹Sanctification is the process between the points of conversion and glorification whereby God progressively sets the believer apart from the power of sin. Accordingly, the participle translated “being renewed” in verse 10 is in the present tense.

through sanctification is described by Paul as “**being renewed**” (“renovated,” NASB marginal note) (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16). The renewal of the new self that takes place in sanctification is effected by the Holy Spirit¹³² (Titus 3:5) renewing the mind of the believer (Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23) by the Word of God.¹³³

The renewal of the new self is “**to a true knowledge.**” This prepositional phrase is better translated by William Barclay (cited in Harris, p. 153) as “until it reaches fullness of knowledge.” Based on this rendering and Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:13 and Colossians 2:2, the knowledge Paul is speaking of here is most likely the knowledge of Christ. The renewal of the new self takes place as the believer matures in his knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

The renewal of the new self is “**according to the image of the One who created him.**” The new self (“**him**”) is a creation of God (“**the One**”) (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 2:10, and 4:24). In renewing the new self, God renews it according to His image by conforming the believer to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18).¹³⁴

Verse 11

All those created spiritually (verse 10) are created spiritually equal (verse 11). Under the old dispensation of law, Jews had an advantage over Gentiles (Romans 3:1-2). In the new dispensation (the church age), however, there are no such national, ethnic, or racial preferences (“**no distinction between Greek and Jew**”; cf. Acts 10:34-35, Romans 3:22, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:28). Neither are

¹³²Accordingly, the Greek participle translated “being renewed” is in the passive voice, indicative of the fact that Someone else is doing the renewing.

¹³³The Word of God is the primary means God uses to sanctify the believer (Psalm 1:1-3, 119:9, 11, John 17:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 5:26, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 2:2). Other means include prayer (Matthew 6:13) and local church involvement (Hebrews 10:24-25).

¹³⁴Because Christ is the image of God (see Colossians 1:15 and comments on), by conforming believers to the image of Christ, God is conforming them to His image.

there religious (“**circumcised and uncircumcised**”; cf. Galatians 6:15), cultural (“**barbarian**¹³⁵, **Scythian**¹³⁶”), or socio-economic (“**slave and freeman**¹³⁷”; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28) advantages.

The reason why all church age believers are on equal spiritual footing is because “**Christ is ... in all**” church age believers by means of His union with them (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:27-28). Not only is Christ in all, but He “**is all.**” As Harris (p. 154) puts it: Christ is “all that matters.”¹³⁸ Because Christ is all, and all church age believers have all of Him, racial, religious, cultural, and socio-economic distinctions are superfluous (cf. comments on 2:4 and 2:10).

¹³⁵A “barbarian” was one who was uncultured in the Greco-Roman culture of the day, one who didn’t speak the language, etc. (cf. Romans 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 14:11).

¹³⁶“Scythians” were the most barbaric of the barbarians. Geisler (p. 681) describes the Scythian as “a wild, savage nomad.” To get an idea of just how barbaric the Scythians were, see Kent (pp. 120-121) and Hendriksen (p. 154).

¹³⁷It is interesting to consider the fact that these words would have reached the ears of Philemon, Philemon’s home being the meeting place for the church at Colossae (see under “The Recipients of the Book” in the introductory lesson), a reminder to Philemon to treat Onesimus, his runaway slave, as a spiritual equal.

¹³⁸Unknown to the English reader is the fact that, in the original, the Greek word for “Christ” is the last word in verse 11, for emphasis. The original literally reads: “but all and in all Christ.”

Colossians 3:1-11 Review Questions

1. How could the “if” in 3:1 be more clearly translated? *since*
2. What is the connection between “seeking the things above” in 3:1 and “set your mind on the things above” in 3:2? *the second leads to the first*
3. The NASB translates the verb at the start of 3:5 “consider as dead.” How might this verb be more literally and accurately translated (so NIV)? *put to death*
4. How does the “vice list” of 3:5 flow, internal to external, or vice versa? *external to internal*
- 5.-6. Why do some translations (such as the NIV) “omit” the words “upon the sons of disobedience” in 3:6? Why do some think they were added to the Greek text, rather than omitted from it? *they are not found in the Greek texts closest in time to the originals; to assimilate Colossians 3:6 to Ephesians 5:6*
7. What imagery does Paul use in 3:8-10, seen in the verbs, “put aside” (v. 8), “laid aside” (v. 9), and “put on” (v. 10)? *the taking off of dirty clothes and putting on of clean ones*
8. How does the “vice list” of 3:8 flow, internal to external, or vice versa? *internal to external*
9. Why does Paul add the qualifier, “to one another” to “do not lie” in 3:9? *to remind of how lying negatively impacts interpersonal relationships*
10. What is “the old self” (3:9)? *unregenerate man, with only one nature/the sin nature*
11. What is “the new self” (3:10)? *regenerate man, with two natures, the sin nature and the divine nature, with the second one dominant*
12. How is the new self “renewed” (3:10)? *by the Holy Spirit using the Word of God*

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

2. Virtues to put on (3:12-17)

In 3:5-11, Paul exhorted the Colossians to practically put to death (verse 5)/put aside (verse 8) various vices in light of the fact that they had positionally died to them (2:20 and 3:3)/laid them aside (3:9). In like manner, here in 3:12-17, he exhorts the Colossians to practically put on various virtues (verses 12-14) in light of the fact that they had positionally put them on (3:10). Just as sin is a matter of commission (doing wrong) and omission (not doing right, James 4:17), so sanctification is a matter of omission (absence of vice) and commission (presence of virtue). See Isaiah 1:16-17.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (3:12) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (3:13) Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (3:14) Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (3:15) Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (3:16) Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (3:17)

Verse 12

Paul exhorts the Colossians to “practice their position” by practically putting on the virtues corresponding to¹³⁹ the “new self” they positionally put on at conversion (3:10). The “**so**” that begins the verse is a connector, connecting this verse with verse 10 (see the previous sentence for an explanation of the connection). Within verse 12 itself, Paul gives the Colossians a similar incentive for practically putting on the virtues he will mention in verse 12 and following: living in light of who they are (“**as**”). Because they are “those who have been chosen of God, holy, and beloved” (cf. Romans 1:7’s “beloved of God” and “called as saints”; 1 Thessalonians 1:4’s “beloved by God” and “His choice of you”; and 2 Thessalonians 2:13’s “beloved by the Lord” and “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation”; cf. also Deuteronomy 7:6-7), they are to act like it.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Just as there are “evil practices” corresponding to the old self (3:9), so there are righteous practices corresponding to the new self.

¹⁴⁰The expanded paraphrase of Harris (p. 172) communicates the concept: “So then, since you are God’s chosen people, his Elect, dedicated to his service and the objects of his special love, clothe yourselves appropriately.”

The Colossians were “**chosen of God.**” Paul is speaking of the doctrine of election, the act of God in eternity past in which He freely chose those who would receive the gift of eternal life.¹⁴¹ See also Mark 13:20//Matthew 24:22, Mark 13:22//Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:27//Matthew 24:31, Luke 18:7, John 15:16a, Acts 13:48b, Romans 8:33, 9:11, Ephesians 1:4-5 (cf. Ephesians 1:11), 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 2:10, Titus 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1, 2:9, 2 Peter 1:10, 2 John 1, and Revelation 17:14.

The Colossians were “**holy,**” meaning they had been set apart (the meaning of the Greek adjective translated “holy”). They had been set apart positionally at the moment of conversion (cf. “saints” in 1:2 and comments on); Paul exhorts them to set themselves apart practically by the putting on of the virtues of verse 12 and following.

The Colossians were “**beloved**” (cf. Romans 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, and 2 Thessalonians 2:13), meaning they were the objects of God’s special love. The Greek verb translated “have been ... beloved” is in the perfect tense, signifying a past action with ongoing effects. The believer becomes the object of God’s special love at the moment of conversion and remains so forevermore (cf. Romans 8:38-39).

Corresponding to the “vice lists” of 3:5 and 3:8, Paul gives a “virtue list” (cf. Galatians 5:22-23 and 1 Peter 3:8) here in 3:12.¹⁴² The virtues that the Colossians were to “put on”¹⁴³ (as articles of clothing; NIV: “clothe yourselves with”; see

¹⁴¹A. H. Strong (quoted in Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, p. 117) defines election as “that eternal act of God, by which in his sovereign pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, he chooses certain out of the number of sinful men to be the recipients of the special grace of his Spirit, and so to be made voluntary partakers of Christ’s salvation.”

¹⁴²It is interesting to note that all three lists have five items, what Vaughan (p. 214) calls a “pentad.”

¹⁴³The Greek verb translated “put on” is in the aorist tense, signifying the urgency with which these virtues are to be put on (cf. comments on the verb translated “put to death” in the NIV in 3:5).

3:10 and comments on) were “a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (cf. Galatians 5:22-23, where the 2nd, 4th, and 5th are listed among the nine-fold “fruit of the Spirit,” and Ephesians 4:2, where the 3rd, 4th, and 5th are listed). As will be pointed out in the notes below, the virtues listed here in verse 12 and in verses 13-14 are virtues that are characteristic of God (Christ) in His vertical relationship with us. Consequently, such virtues are to be manifested in our horizontal relationships with others. If God has been and continues to be characterized by all these things in His relationship to us, we should be characterized by all these things in our relationships to others.

One of the virtues that the Colossians were to put on and that should be a characteristic of the Christian in his relationships with others is a compassionate heart (“**a heart**¹⁴⁴ **of compassion**”). Compassion is not only being moved by the plight of another, but being moved to the point of doing something about it. That compassion is a divine characteristic is seen by such passages as Matthew 9:36//Mark 6:34, Mark 8:2, Luke 1:78, 6:36, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 1:3¹⁴⁵, Philippians 1:8, and James 5:11¹⁴⁶.

Another virtue that the Colossians were to put on and that should be a characteristic of the Christian in his relationships with others is “**kindness**” (cf. Ephesians 4:32). That kindness is a divine characteristic is seen by Luke 6:35, Romans 2:4, 11:22, Ephesians 2:7, and Titus 3:4.

Another virtue that the Colossians were to put on (cf. 1 Peter 5:5's “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another”)

¹⁴⁴The Greek noun translated “heart” is literally the intestines (KJV: “bowels of mercies”; see Acts 1:18 for the literal use of the word). In this context, it is being used metaphorically for the seat of the emotions (hence, the NASB rendering, “heart”).

¹⁴⁵The Greek noun translated “mercies” in Romans 12:1 and 2 Corinthians 1:3 is the same one translated “compassion” in Colossians 3:12.

¹⁴⁶The Greek adjective translated “merciful” in James 5:11 is the adjectival form of the Greek noun translated “compassion” in Colossians 3:12.

and that should be a characteristic of the Christian in his relationships with others is "**humility**" (cf. James 4:10 and 1 Peter 5:6). Humility is an often misunderstood concept. It is an attitude/mindset/outlook/viewpoint ("humility of mind" in Philippians 2:3) that views self properly (Romans 12:3), i.e., from God's perspective as revealed in His Word.¹⁴⁷ True humility is disregard for self, not the false humility of deprecation of self (cf. the false humility of the Colossian heretics in 2:18 and 23). Humility was not considered a virtue by the unbelieving world of Paul's day (Vaughan, p. 215)¹⁴⁸, nor is it by the unbelieving world of our day. That humility is a divine characteristic is seen by Matthew 11:29 and Philippians 2:5-8. Humility will be evident in one's relationships with others as one treats others as more important than oneself (Romans 12:10b, 1 Corinthians 10:24, and Philippians 2:3-4). "[I]t places self last, and regards self as least (Eph 3:8)" (Roustio, p. 569).

Another virtue that the Colossians were to put on and that should be a characteristic of the Christian in his relationships with others is "**gentleness**" (cf. Ephesians 4:2 and Titus 3:2). That gentleness is a divine characteristic is seen by Matthew 11:29, 21:5, and 2 Corinthians 10:1. This characteristic is often described as meekness, strength under control. It is "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (BDAG¹⁴⁹, cited in Moo, pp. 277-278). Like humility, gentleness was not considered a virtue by the unbelieving world of Paul's day (Vaughan, p. 215).

The fifth virtue that the Colossians were to put on and that should be a characteristic of the Christian in his relationships with others (cf. Ephesians 4:2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:14) is

¹⁴⁷According to God's Word, we are nothing (Galatians 6:3), God is everything (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). The only reason why we are anything is because of God's grace (1 Corinthians 15:8-10 and Ephesians 3:8). Therefore, there is no room for boasting (1 Corinthians 4:7).

¹⁴⁸According to O'Brien (p. 200), the few times the word was used in the Greek literature of the day, it was used in a derogatory sense.

¹⁴⁹BDAG is short for the last names of Walter Bauer, Frederick Danker, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, men who produced the leading Greek lexicon (dictionary).

"patience." That patience is a divine characteristic is seen by Romans 2:4, 9:22, 1 Timothy 1:16, 1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 3:9, and 15. The Greek word literally means "long anger" (*makrothumia*, the Greek adjective, *makros*, "long" + the Greek noun, *thumos*, "anger"). It is being long-tempered, as opposed to short-tempered; having a long fuse, as opposed to a short one. It is being patient with problem people, longsuffering (see 1:11 and comments on).¹⁵⁰ It is patience under provocation (Roustio, p. 569). Oh, how longsuffering God is with us! May we be so with others.¹⁵¹

Verse 13

To the virtues mentioned in verse 12, Paul adds two more here in verse 13. The first is "**bearing with one another**" (cf. Ephesians 4:2's "showing tolerance for one another," same Greek word). This is similar to verse 12's "patience." It means being able to tolerate/put up with seemingly unbearable people.¹⁵² Just as God tolerates/puts up with us¹⁵³ (cf. Romans 2:4), so we should tolerate/put up with the foibles of others.

Another virtue that the Colossians were to put on and that

¹⁵⁰"It denotes that 'longsuffering' which endures wrong and puts up with the exasperating conduct of others rather than flying into a rage or desiring vengeance" (O'Brien, p. 201).

¹⁵¹"In view of the fact that God has been so longsuffering toward me, even though in *his* holy eyes my sins must stand out far more clearly than do my brother's blemishes in *my* eyes, I must surely be patient with my brother" (William Hendriksen, "Exposition of Ephesians," in the *New Testament Commentary*, p. 184; emphasis his).

¹⁵²"To live above with the saints we love, Oh, that will be glory. But to live below with the saints we know, Well, that's another story" (cited in Hughes, p. 105).

¹⁵³"It is said that Jonathan Edwards, third president of Princeton and America's greatest thinker, had a daughter with an ungovernable temper. As is often the case, the problem was not known to the outside world. A young man fell in love with this daughter and sought her hand in marriage. 'You can't have her,' was the abrupt answer of Jonathan Edwards. 'But I love her,' the young man replied. 'You can't have her,' said Edwards. 'But she loves me,' replied the young man. Again Edwards said, 'You can't have her.' 'Why?' asked the young man. 'Because she is not worthy of you.' 'But,' he asked, 'she is a Christian, is she not?' 'Yes, she is a Christian, but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live'" (cited in Hughes, p. 98).

should be characteristic of the believer in his relations with others is forgiveness (“**forgiving each other**”). With this one, Paul makes the comparison explicit. Just as God had forgiven the Colossians (cf. 1:14 and 2:13 and comments on each), so should they forgive others (“**just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you**”). See especially Matthew 18:21-35 and Ephesians 4:32 in this regard. The particular Greek verb Paul uses for forgiveness is the one that emphasizes the gracious nature of forgiveness (see comments on the same Greek verb used in 2:13). Forgiveness should be freely given to others, though they do not deserve it, just as God freely forgave us, though we did not deserve it.

Verse 14

Before proceeding to various other exhortations in verse 15 and following, Paul mentions one last virtue that the Colossians were to put on and that should characterize every believer in his relations with others, “**love**.” Like humility, love is another concept that is often misunderstood. Love has been defined simply as doing what is best for another. It is a choice, not a feeling; a function of the will, not of the emotions (though feelings of love do follow the choice to love). This is seen by the fact that it is something that the believer is commanded to do (“**put on**¹⁵⁴”). Love is not something you “fall” into; rather, it is something you “jump” into (and with both feet!). Love is the supreme virtue, the crowning article of clothing in the Christian’s closet (“**beyond all these things**”).¹⁵⁵ In keeping with the clothing imagery throughout this section of the epistle, Paul is portraying love as being like the final article of clothing put on over the top of all the others (cf. NIV’s “and over all these virtues put on love”; cf. Kent, p. 123). Because God so loved us, we ought to readily love others (see John 15:12 and 1 John 4:11; cf. Matthew 5:43-48, John 13:34, Ephesians 5:1-2, 25, and 1 John 4:19).

¹⁵⁴These words are in italics, signifying that they have been supplied by the translators. The translators have rightly “borrowed” them from verse 12.

¹⁵⁵“In one’s catalog of virtues love should be the cover” (Geisler, p. 682).

Paul's final statement in verse 14 is somewhat unclear. Love is "**the perfect bond of unity.**" While earlier in the epistle (in 2:2), Paul points out the pivotal role love plays in unifying a body of believers, particularly in the face of heretical attack, this is likely not his emphasis here. The Greek literally reads "bond of completeness." Love is the bond that perfects, i.e., completes or brings the parts together to form a whole. The question then becomes: What does love perfect or complete? The answer given by most interpreters is that it perfects or completes all the other virtues previously mentioned. This is another way of saying that love is the supreme virtue (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:13). Love's supremacy is seen by its lead position in the nine-fold "fruit of the Spirit" of Galatians 5:22-23 and by its culminating position in the virtue list of 1 Peter 1:5-7. The command to love one's fellow man governs all other commands regarding human relationships (Matthew 22:39 and Romans 13:8-10). One who loves his fellow man will have no problem practicing the virtues of verses 12 and 13 (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). The extended paraphrase of Harris (p. 172) of this verse is good: "And in addition to all these garments just mentioned, clothe yourselves with the robe of love, for when this final, outer garment is put on, it binds together and perfects all the other virtues." Another way of visualizing the virtue of love is "as a belt which secures and holds in place all the other virtues" (Compton, p. 102).

Verse 15

Paul's next exhortation is to "**let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.**" The "**peace of Christ,**" the peace that Christ gives (John 14:27 and 2 Thessalonians 3:16) is analogous to the "peace of God" (Philippians 4:7), the harmony of heart, the serenity of soul, the sense of overall well-being the believer enjoys as a result of his being at peace with God (Romans 5:1 and Colossians 1:20). Peace with God is the root, the peace of God the fruit. Though the peace of Christ/God does not result in the absence of outward conflict, it does result in the presence of an inward calmness and confidence in the midst of conflict.

This peace is to "**rule**" in the hearts of believers. The Greek

verb translated “rule” was used in Greek literature of an umpire rendering a decision (cf. comments on a related verb in 2:18). Harris (p. 165) captures the idea: “In making your decisions, in choosing between alternatives, in settling conflicts of will, a concern to preserve the inward and communal peace that Christ gave and gives should be your controlling principle.”¹⁵⁶

The importance of inner peace is suggested by Paul’s next statement, “**to which indeed you were called in one body**” (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:15 and Ephesians 4:3-4). Just as war within the soul leads to war without (James 4:1), so peace within the soul leads to harmonious relations with others within the body of Christ.

Prominent in the epistle of Colossians are the concepts of gratitude and thanksgiving (cf. 1:12, 2:7, 3:16, 17, and 4:2). What makes this fact all the more remarkable are the circumstances under which Paul wrote Colossians, house arrest (see the first paragraph of the introductory lesson). Paul concludes verse 15 with the simple exhortation: “**and be thankful**” (cf. Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Greek adjective translated “**thankful**” (*eucharistos*) signifies both the inner attitude of gratitude and the outer expression of thanksgiving (Harris, p. 166; O’Brien, p. 205). It has as its root the Greek word, *charis*, meaning “grace.” The more one realizes that everything he has has been graciously given to him by God, the more thankful he will be (cf. footnote 84).¹⁵⁷ Ingratitude to God is a serious offense

¹⁵⁶This is not to suggest that a decision is the correct one simply because one “has peace about it.” The peace that follows a decision is usually due to the fact that a decision has finally been made one way or the other. Peace or the absence thereof should not be a factor in determining whether or not a particular course of action is the right one. Jay Adams (*A Theology of Christian Counseling*, p. 31; emphasis his) writes: “The misinterpretation of Col. 3:15 (as *individual* peace—‘I have peace about the matter’—as the basis for decision-making must be rejected). The entire passage speaks of *corporate* relations among the members of the church. Peace is the ‘umpire’ for the interpersonal relations of the parts of the body to the whole. This is peace *in the church*; there is nothing about guidance in the passage.”

¹⁵⁷“It is when God’s grace has been forgotten that the joy of thanksgiving disappears from the Christian’s life” (Kent, p. 124).

(cf. Romans 1:21, as well as 2 Timothy 3:2, where ingratitude is embedded in a vice list).

Verse 16

Paul's next exhortation is to "**let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.**" The "**word of Christ**" (cf. Romans 10:17, 1 Timothy 6:3, and Hebrews 6:1) may be either source, the message from Christ (Christ as the giver of the Bible, the One through whom¹⁵⁸ the special revelation of Scripture was given) or subject, the message about Christ (Christ as the One around whom the message of the Bible revolves). Interpreters are divided between the two, with the second being slightly favored. Regardless, God's Word is to be at home in the heart of the believer (Kent, p. 124) ("**dwell within you**"; cf. John 15:7), as well as in the corporate gatherings of believers¹⁵⁹ (see NIV's "among you"), and in a big way ("**richly**"). It is to be at home the way the length and strength of the stay of a family member exceeds the length and strength of the stay of a guest.

To the degree that God's Word takes up residence in the heart of the believer, to that degree the believer will be enabled to effectively minister the Word to others ("**with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another**"; for the meaning of these words, see comments on 1:28; cf. Romans 15:14, where the ability to admonish others is based on one's being filled with all knowledge, i.e., knowledge of Scripture).

Another outflow of the Word's indwelling within the believer is singing ("with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God"; cf. Ephesians 5:19). Some interpreters see no definitive difference between the three types of compositions listed here ("**psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**"), while others do, distinguishing between them. Psalms are

¹⁵⁸Christ is the One through whom are all things (1 Corinthians 8:6; cf. comments on 1:16, especially footnote 46).

¹⁵⁹"Let there be ample scope for the proclamation of the Christian message and the importance of Christian teaching in their meetings" (Bruce, p. 157). "Paul is urging the community as a whole to put the message about Christ at the center of its corporate experience" (Moo, p. 286).

commonly thought to be Scripture put to music, hymns (cf. Matthew 26:30, Acts 16:25¹⁶⁰, and James 5:13) original compositions of praise to God (Colossians 1:15-20 may be an example), and spiritual songs original compositions of Christian experience.

Singing is to be done "**with thankfulness**," singing being an excellent vehicle for expressing one's attitude of gratitude to God. Singing is to be heartfelt, to be done wholeheartedly. The Greek prepositional phrase translated "**in your hearts**" by the NASB can also be understood as "with your hearts," meaning with all your hearts (Harris, p. 170) or with all your being (O'Brien, p. 195). The purpose of singing is God's glory ("**to God**"), as the songs of Scripture attest (see, for example, the song of Moses in Exodus 15 and Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1; cf. Revelation 5:9-10 and 15:3-4); human enjoyment is not the purpose of singing, though it is a by-product of pursuing this purpose.

Verse 17

Paul concludes this section of the epistle with a catchall ("**whatever you do**"; cf. 3:23) exhortation. Everything ("**all**") the believer does¹⁶¹, whether by lip/word ("**in word**") or life/work ("**or deed**") is to be done "**in the name of the Lord Jesus.**" In Scripture, "name" signifies all that a person is. Thus, to do something in the name of the Lord Jesus is to do it consistent with who He is.¹⁶² Before doing anything, ask yourself: Can I legitimately do this in the name of the Lord Jesus?

Everything the believer does is to be done with thanksgiving ("**giving thanks**"; cf. Ephesians 5:20, Philippians 4:6, and 1 Thessalonians 5:18), what might be called "thanksgiving." Before doing anything, ask yourself: Can I legitimately thank

¹⁶⁰In Acts 16:25, we find Paul (along with Silas) singing while imprisoned. Here in Colossians, we find him writing about singing while imprisoned.

¹⁶¹"There is no sacred-secular split in God's eyes" (Geisler, p. 682). Everything is to be done for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

¹⁶²"To do something in the name of another means to identify with that individual and do things that are consistent with who he is and what he deserves" (Compton, p. 103).

God for what I am about to do? The One to whom the believer gives thanks is God the Father ("**to God the Father**"). The One through whom the believer gives thanks is God the Son ("**through Him**"; cf. Romans 1:8 and 7:25, as well as Ephesians 5:20). God is the source from whom all blessings flow; Christ is the conduit through whom all blessings flow. Therefore, "Jesus is the mediator of our praises, as well as of our prayers" (Henry, p. 765). See Hebrews 13:15 and 1 Peter 2:5.

Colossians 3:12-17 Review Questions

- 1.-2. What 2 motivations for putting on the virtues of 3:12-14 does Paul give the Colossians in 3:12, seen by the words “so” and “as”? *they have positionally put on the new self (verse 10); living in light of what you are (being leading to behavior)*
3. The vertical reality of the 8 virtues in 3:12-14 are to become a horizontal reality. Explain. Hint: See 3:13b. *we are to treat others the way God treats us*
4. What is compassion (3:12)? *being moved by the plight of others and doing something about it (so, not just pity)*
5. What is humility (3:12)? *a perspective that views self properly (from God’s perspective); self-forgetfulness*
6. What is gentleness (3:12)? *meekness (strength under control)*
7. What is patience (3:12)? *being patient with problem people by being longsuffering*
8. What is love (3:14)? *doing what is best for another*
9. How is love the supreme virtue (3:14)? *it perfects or completes all the other virtues (if you love, you will be all the rest)*
10. What’s the significance of the words, “to which [peace] you were called in one body,” coming as they do on the heels of an exhortation to inner peace (3:15)? *peace within leads to peace without*
11. What’s the connection between “let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” and “with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another” (3:16)? *to the degree that God’s Word is in the heart of the believer, to that degree will the believer will be able to teach and admonish effectively*
12. What does it mean to do something “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17)? *to do it consistent with who He is*

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

3. Concerning relationships (3:18-4:1)

Paul continues the “practical” section of the Colossian epistle (3:1-4:6) by exhorting the Colossians regarding reciprocal responsibilities in the realm of relationships: husband-wife (3:18-19), parent-child (3:20-21), and master-slave (3:22-4:1). Many interpreters (such as Harris, p. 177; O’Brien, p. 219; and Melick, p. 308) see a progression in the three, from the more intimate to the less intimate. This section of Colossians closely parallels Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Prominent in this section is the word, “Lord” (3:18, 20, 22, 23, and 24; cf. “Master” in 4:1, same Greek word). This is in keeping

with the theme for the book of Colossians, the supremacy of Christ. As O'Brien (p. 219) states: "... [T]he whole life, thought and conduct of believers is submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ." In other words, this section shows how the believer exhibits the supremacy of Christ over his life in the realm of relationships.

- a. Between husbands and wives (3:18-19)

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (3:18) Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. (3:19)

Verse 18

In each of the three pairs of relationships Paul deals with in this section of the epistle, the subordinate is addressed first. Here in verse 18, wives are commanded to submit to their husbands ("**Wives, be subject to your husbands**"; cf. Ephesians 5:22, 24, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1-6; cf. also 1 Corinthians 11:3). Because such submission is commanded, it is not conditional. It is "not to be based upon the way her husband treats her. Nor is it to be conditioned by the husband's talents, wisdom, education, or spiritual state" (Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, p. 18). The only time a wife is at liberty to disobey her husband is if her husband commands her to do something God proscribes (prohibits) or forbids her to do something God prescribes (Acts 4:19 and 5:29).

The Greek verb translated "**be subject**" is *hupotasso*, which literally means "to place under" (the Greek preposition, *hupo*, "under" + the Greek verb, *tasso*, "to place"); submission is willingly placing oneself under the authority of another. Accordingly, the verb is in the middle voice ("subject yourselves"), signifying voluntary action (Vaughan, p. 218; O'Brien, p. 224; Pao, p. 262). The act of obedience includes the attitude of submission. Wives are to sweetly submit to their husbands.

Such submission is “**fitting in the Lord,**” meaning “this is fitting behavior for those who belong to the Lord” (Harris, p. 188; cf. Kent, p. 128).

Verse 19

In any human relationship, there are reciprocal responsibilities. Here in verse 19, husbands are commanded to love their wives (“**Husbands, love your wives**”; cf. Ephesians 5:25, 28, and 33). “**Love**” is a command; thus, it is not conditioned upon whether the husband feels like it or not¹⁶³, nor is it conditioned upon the wife’s loveliness; a husband is to love his wife regardless (accordingly, the Greek word for “love” here is *agape*, a word that especially emphasizes the unconditional nature of true love, the kind of love God has for His own; this verb is also in the present tense, a reminder of the continual nature of true love). Love is doing what is best for another (for a more thorough discussion of what love is, see comments on 3:14). Since love is the supreme virtue (see 3:14 and comments on), loving one’s wife encompasses all the other virtues mentioned in 3:12-13. Thus, a husband who truly loves his wife will treat her with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, etc. (cf. 1 Peter 3:7).

Accordingly, Paul exhorts husbands not to treat their wives harshly (“**do not be embittered against them**”; NIV: “do not be harsh with them”; Vaughan: “don’t be cross with”).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³“By placing the charge in the form of a command, Paul indicates that loving one’s wife is as much a matter of the will as it is of the emotions” (Compton, p. 106).

¹⁶⁴The Greek word translated “embittered” here in verse 19 is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe bitter water (Revelation 8:11) and a sour stomach (Revelation 10:9-10). In this regard, MacArthur (p. 169) reminds that husbands should not call their wives, “Honey,” then treat them like vinegar. Geisler (p. 683) suggests: “Wives, like tender and sensitive flowers (cf. 1 Peter 3:7), may wilt under authoritarian dominance but blossom with tender loving care.” While wives are to sweetly submit to their husbands (verse 18), husbands are to lovingly lead their wives (verse 19). Husbands “are to exercise loving leadership, not dictatorial dominion” (Geisler, p. 683); a husband is not to be a “domestic despot” (Vaughan, p. 218).

The command to love one's wife appears to be a distinctly Christian conception; according to Eduard Lohse (cited in Hughes, p. 117), no such injunction was found in the extra-biblical literature of that day.

- b. Between parents and children (3:20-21)

Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. (3:20) Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. (3:21)

Verse 20

The responsibility of a (non-adult) child, a child who is still under parental protection and care (Moo, p. 305) is obedience ("**Children, be obedient to your parents in all things**"; cf. Ephesians 6:1). As in so many other things, Jesus is the exemplar in this (see Luke 2:51). Contrary to our culture, God takes this responsibility very seriously (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Romans 1:30, and 2 Timothy 3:2).

The Greek verb translated "**be obedient**" literally means "to listen under" (*hupakouo*, the Greek preposition, *huper*, "under" + the Greek verb, *akouo*, "to listen"); children are to listen to what their parents say and do it quickly, completely, and willingly.

Obedience of child to parent is all-encompassing ("**in all things**"), the only exception being unbiblical commands (Acts 5:29; cf. comments on verse 18).

Paul gives a very good reason why children should obey their parents: "**for this is well-pleasing to the Lord**" (cf. the same Greek adjective used in a similar way in Romans 12:1, 14:18, 2 Corinthians 5:9, Ephesians 5:10, Philippians 4:18, and Hebrews 13:21; cf. also a similar concept, but with a different Greek word, in Colossians 1:10). The Greek prepositional phrase translated "**to the Lord**" by the NASB is more literally "in the Lord," signifying, as in verse 18, that such submission "befits those who belong to him"

(Harris, p. 180).

Verse 21

In words reminiscent of Ephesians 6:4, Paul exhorts parents to fulfill their reciprocal responsibility to their children. As in Ephesians 6:4, Paul directs this command specifically to "**fathers**." While the father in particular is singled out, it is safe to assume that the mother is also obligated to heed this injunction. The reason why the father is singled out may be 1) because the father is the head of the home and, thus, the one ultimately responsible for the compliance of both he and his wife to this command or 2) because the father is more predisposed to violate this command.

The command is "**do not exasperate your children**" (Roustio, p. 570: do not vex or rouse them to resentment). The Greek verb is used in a positive sense in 2 Corinthians 9:2 ("stirred up"; cf. a different Greek word, but a similar concept in Hebrews 10:24). There are a myriad of ways by which a parent may exasperate a child (see pp. 126-127 of Hughes, p. 570 of Roustio, and pp. 171-173 of MacArthur for some).

The reason why a parent must not exasperate a child is because doing so will cause a child to become dispirited or disheartened ("**so that they will not lose heart**"). The Greek verb translated "lose heart" is *athumos*, the Greek privative, *a-* + the Greek noun, *thumos*, "passion." This word is descriptive of a sullen, listless, discouraged disposition (Kent, p. 130). While parents must be determined to break a child's rebellious will, they must be careful not to break a child's spirit (see p. 125 of Hughes for a good analogy, the different ways to break a horse).

c. Between masters and slaves (3:22-4:1)

Of the three pairs of reciprocal relationships Paul addresses in this section of the epistle (husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave), the relationship

between master and slave receives the most extensive treatment (5 verses in our English translations compared to 2 verses for each of the other two). Several interpreters (Kent, p. 131; Hendriksen, p. 173; and Moo, p. 298) believe that the reason for this disparity is the situation involving Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave. You may recall that Paul sent the epistles of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, along with Onesimus, from Rome to their intended destinations under the care of Tychicus (see under "The Occasion for Writing" in the introductory lesson). After delivering the epistle of Ephesians to the church at Ephesus, Tychicus would have traveled 100 miles due east to Colossae to deliver the epistle of Colossians to the church at Colossae and the epistle of Philemon, along with Onesimus, to Philemon, a member of the Colossian church (the church met in his home).

Slavery was a prominent thread in the fabric of Roman society.¹⁶⁵ While the New Testament authors did not directly call for its abolition, they indirectly undermined the institution by injecting the Christian ethic into Roman society through the spread of the gospel (see, for example, Colossians 3:11). As Kent (p. 131) states: Paul "taught principles of right and wrong which eventually caused the slave system to die wherever Christianity went."

¹⁶⁵It is good to remember that the slavery practiced in the Roman world differed significantly from the slavery practiced in our nation during the Civil War era, the second being completely coercive in nature, the first often being uncoercive in nature (some actually chose to become slaves in order to improve their socioeconomic standing). In fact, it is likely that the master-slave relationship Paul addresses here in Colossians 3 is much closer to the employer-employee relationship of our modern society than to the master-slave relationship of nineteenth century America.

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who *merely* please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. (3:22) Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, (3:23) knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (3:24) For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (3:25) Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. (4:1)

Verse 22

As with the previous two relationships (husband-wife and parent-child), Paul addresses the subordinate first, exhorting slaves to “**in all things obey those who are your masters on earth**”; cf. Ephesians 6:5, Titus 2:9, and 1 Peter 2:18). Slaves are to “**obey**” (see comments on the same Greek verb used in verse 20) their masters “**in all things**” (cf. verse 20). So long as his master does not command him to do something contrary to Scripture or forbid him to do something Scripture commands (cf. comments on verses 18 and 20), a slave is biblically bound to obey his master. By designating such masters “**on earth**” (literally “according to the flesh,” NASB marginal note; cf. Ephesians 6:5), Paul is distinguishing such masters from the Master in heaven (cf. 4:1).¹⁶⁶

Obedience of slave to master is not to be done “**with external service**” (literally “with eyeservice¹⁶⁷,” NASB marginal note; cf. Ephesians 6:6), i.e., “not only when their eye is on you” (NIV).¹⁶⁸ The eye of the Master in

¹⁶⁶“Only in the earthly realm are slave owners [lords]” (Harris, p. 181).

¹⁶⁷The Greek word is *ophthalmoudoulia*, from *ophthalmos*, “eye” + *douleia*, “slavery.”

¹⁶⁸“In gym class, when the coach is watching there are perfect pushups. But when he looks away

heaven is on the slave even when the eye of the master on earth is not. The slave who obeys only when the eye of his earthly master is upon him shows that his focus is misplaced. Rather than obeying his earthly master out of a desire to ultimately please his heavenly Master (cf. verse 20), he obeys to please only his earthly master ("**as those who merely please men**"; cf. Ephesians 6:6).¹⁶⁹

The slave who obeys only when the eye of his earthly master is upon him shows that his obedience is insincere, not "**with sincerity of heart**" (cf. Ephesians 6:5). The slave who obeys only when the eye of his earthly master is upon him shows that he fears man, rather than God ("**fearing the Lord**"; cf. Ephesians 5:21 and 6:5). Rather than fearing the Lord (his heavenly Master), whose eye is always on him, he fears a lord (his earthly master), obeying only when his eye is on him.

Verse 23

Whatever a master commands his slave to do ("**Whatever you do**"; cf. 3:17), the slave is to do it wholeheartedly ("**do your work heartily**"; cf. Ephesians 6:6). The Greek prepositional phrase translated "**heartily**" by the NASB is literally "out of (the) soul" (see NASB marginal note). "Put your soul into the work" (Hendriksen, p. 172) is the idea.

The reason why the slave should do his work in this manner is because he is ultimately working for the Lord ("**as for the Lord rather than for men**"; cf. Ephesians 6:7). From a limited, earthbound perspective, slaves are merely working for an earthly master. From God's perspective (ultimate reality),

... Eye service results in half-done jobs. The room is swept, but the dirt is brushed under the carpet. Work breaks extend until the boss returns" (Hughes, p. 130).

¹⁶⁹It is not wrong to seek to please one's earthly master (see Titus 2:9). The problem is in seeking to please only one's earthly master ("*merely*" in Colossians 3:22) without also seeking to please, first and foremost, the heavenly Master.

however, they are working for the heavenly Master. Employees need to view their seemingly mundane, earthly employment from such a heavenly perspective (cf. 3:1-2). God in His providence places the believer in a particular job for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself ("**for the Lord**"). Having this perspective will transform one's attitude about his job. What was once a drudgery now becomes a delight.

Verse 24

As an incentive for ultimately working for their heavenly Master, rather than for their earthly master (verse 23), Paul reminds Christian slaves of a truth they already knew ("**knowing**"), namely, that their heavenly Master, unlike their earthly master, would reward their labors ("**from the Lord¹⁷⁰ you will receive the reward of the inheritance**"; cf. Ephesians 6:8). The "**reward of the inheritance,**" i.e., the reward which is the inheritance (cf. NASB marginal note and NIV) that awaited these Christian slaves was their heavenly home (cf. 1:12 and comments on, as well as Ephesians 1:14 and 1 Peter 1:4), eternal life in its full and final sense. Truly, labor done for the Lord is not in vain (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58)!

Paul concludes this verse by making explicit what he has been implying, namely, that the One whom Christian slaves are ultimately serving is the heavenly Master ("**It is the Lord Christ whom you serve**").¹⁷¹ Believers are, first and foremost, slaves of Christ (cf. Romans 6:16-22 and Ephesians 6:6); even when serving earthly lords they are in reality serving the Lord.

Verse 25

Whereas in verse 24, Paul used God's remunerative

¹⁷⁰The NASB translation of this phrase is according to the word order in the original, with the words, "from the Lord" being first, for emphasis.

¹⁷¹In the original, this sentence can be understood as either an indicative (statement of fact) or imperative (command). The NASB opts for the first. Most interpreters opt for the second.

justice (His rewarding of obedience) as an incentive for slaves to do right, here in verse 25 he uses God's retributive justice (His punishing of disobedience) as the incentive: "**For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done**" (cf. Galatians 6:7-8a). Hendriksen (p. 175) is of the opinion that Paul includes this warning lest slaves do as Onesimus did. God's retributive justice may be meted out in this life or in the afterlife (for the believing slave, immediately following the Rapture at the Judgment Seat of Christ; see 2 Corinthians 5:10, which uses the same Greek verb that is translated "receive" here in verse 25).

Because God is perfectly just, He applies His retributive justice consistently, evenly, and, as Paul says here, without partiality ("**and that without partiality**"; cf. Luke 20:21, Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Galatians 2:6, Ephesians 6:9, and 1 Peter 1:17). The Greek noun translated "partiality" (*prosopolempsia*) etymologically connotes giving credit based on outward appearance (the Greek noun, *prosopon*, "face" + the Greek noun, *lempsis*, "credit"). Though, for example, a human judge may go easier on a white collar criminal than on a blue collar one, both are treated equally in God's courtroom. While Paul's words in this verse are directed to slaves, he gives masters a similar (though less explicit) warning in Ephesians 6:9.

Verse 1

This verse should probably be the last verse of chapter 3, rather than the first verse of chapter 4 (chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original text, but were added centuries later; thus, they are not inspired).

Having addressed the slave, the subordinate in the reciprocal relationship of master-slave, Paul now turns to the master, the superior in the relationship. Slave masters are to treat their slaves justly and fairly ("**Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness**"; Hendriksen, p. 172: "that which is fair and

square"). The Greek verb translated "grant" is in the middle voice, signifying that masters are to personally see to it that their slaves are treated this way, rather than having to be constrained to do so. The Roman government was no such constraint, as Roman law did not give slaves legal recourse when unjustly treated by their masters.

Paul does, however, give the ultimate constraint. As he did with slaves in 3:24, so he does with masters here in 4:1, reminding them of something they already knew ("**knowing**") as an incentive for doing what they have just been told. Earthly masters, like their slaves, have a heavenly Master ("**that you too have a Master in heaven**"), a heavenly Master whose eye is on them at all times and who will judge them just as severely for wrongdoing (cf. "without partiality" in 3:24, as well as Ephesians 6:9). Masters are to "show the same consideration to their servants as they themselves expect to receive from the One who exercises authority over them" (Hendriksen, p. 176).

Colossians 3:18-4:1 Review Questions

1. What does the Greek verb translated “be subject” in 3:18 literally mean? *to willingly place oneself under the authority of another*
2. What does the Greek verb translated “be obedient” in 3:20 literally mean? *to listen under (3:22 uses the same verb)*
3. Why are fathers in particular singled out in 3:21? *because they are the head of the household (and perhaps also because they are more prone to exasperate their children)*
4. What is “the reward of the inheritance” (3:24)? *the inheritance of heaven*

COLOSSIANS 4:2-9

4. Concerning prayer (4:2-4)

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; (4:2) praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; (4:3) that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. (4:4)

Verse 2

Paul returns to giving exhortations of a more universal nature (directed to the Colossian congregation as a whole, rather than to specific subgroups within the congregation, as in 3:18-4:1). Verses 2-4 are one sentence, consisting of one main exhortation and several accompanying ones (in the form of subordinate phrases and clauses). The main exhortation is “**devote yourselves to prayer**” (KJV: “continue in prayer”; ESV: “continue steadfastly in prayer”; cf. Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4, and Romans 12:12, which use the same Greek verb, as well as Ephesians 6:18, which uses the noun form of this verb). The Greek verb translated “**devote**” (*proskartereo*) is an intensified form of the Greek verb, *kartereo*,¹⁷² meaning “be strong, be steadfast, hold out,

¹⁷²Greek verbs are often intensified with the addition of a prepositional prefix. In this case,

endure, persevere.” *Proskartereo* means to adhere strongly to, to stick to/with, to be obstinately persistent in.¹⁷³ To be devoted to prayer means to have a dogged determination to pray. Persistence in prayer is spoken of elsewhere in Luke 11:5-13, 18:1-8, Ephesians 6:18, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

While praying, the believer is to remain mentally and spiritually alert (“**keeping alert in it**”). How often we become mentally and spiritually drowsy in prayer, easily distracted, losing focus. Alertness in prayer is spoken of elsewhere in Matthew 26:41//Mark 14:38, Mark 13:33, Luke 21:36, and Ephesians 6:18. Thanksgiving should be an integral part of prayer (“**with an attitude of thanksgiving**”). Other Scriptures that speak of this truth include Philippians 4:6 and 1 Timothy 2:1.

Verse 3

While the Colossians were devoting themselves to prayer, Paul wanted them to remember to pray for him and his ministry associates (“**praying at the same time for us as well**”). Paul often asked his recipients to uphold him in prayer (besides here, see also Romans 15:30, 2 Corinthians 1:11, Ephesians 6:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1; the author of Hebrews does the same in Hebrews 13:18). Paul had been praying for the Colossians (see 1:3 and 9); now he asks them to return the favor. Paul was humble enough to realize that he needed the prayer support of others and, thus, did not hesitate to ask for it.

Paul specifically asks the Colossians to pray that God would give him and his associates more opportunities to share the gospel (“**that God will open up to us a door for the word**”; cf. Acts 14:27, 1 Corinthians 16:9, and 2 Corinthians 2:12, as well as 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Paul fully realized that this was something only God in His providence could do; thus, he asks the Colossians to make this a matter of prayer.

kartereo is intensified by the addition of the Greek preposition, *pros*.

¹⁷³It is “steadfast continuance,” “giving constant attention to” (Kent, p. 134); it means “adhere to, persist in” (O’Brien, p. 237); it connotes “earnest adherence” (Vaughan, p. 221); it is “to be courageously persistent, to hold fast and not let go” (MacArthur, p. 179).

These prayers would be the means by which God would open the doors, enabling Paul and his associates to walk through and **“speak forth the mystery of Christ.”** The **“mystery of Christ”** (cf. Ephesians 3:4) is the gospel Paul preached (cf. Romans 16:25-26 and Ephesians 6:19), which, due to the work of Christ (Ephesians 2:13-18), brought Jew and Gentile together in one body, the church (see 1:27 and comments on).

It was due to his preaching of this gospel that Paul had been imprisoned (**“for which I have also been imprisoned”**; cf. Ephesians 6:20 and Philemon 13). Paul’s current imprisonment in Rome began several years earlier when the Jews falsely accused him of bringing a Gentile into the area of the temple in Jerusalem reserved only for Jews (see Acts 21:27-29 and 24:6). Paul rightly surmised that the reason the Jews made this accusation was their opposition to the gospel of Jew-Gentile equality that he preached (see Acts 26:19-23). It is interesting to note that Paul does not ask the Colossians to pray for his release from imprisonment (as he does in Philemon 22), but for the release of the gospel (cf. 2 Timothy 2:9). Confined though he was, Paul was still looking for opportunities to get the gospel out. According to Acts 28:30-31 and Philippians 1:12-18, the prayer Paul asked the Colossians to pray was answered.

Verse 4

Besides asking the Colossians to specifically pray that God would open doors of opportunity for him and his associates to spread the gospel (verse 3), Paul also asked the Colossians to specifically pray that, as God opened such doors and Paul walked through them, he would communicate the gospel message clearly (**“that I may make it clear”**).¹⁷⁴ The Greek verb translated “make clear” means to reveal or make manifest. Paul’s desire was to be a clear conduit through whom the gospel message could flow. When presenting the gospel, make every effort to do so clearly, giving the gospel a chance to do its dynamic work (Romans 1:16). Don’t clog the conduit. To Paul, making the gospel manifest was not an

¹⁷⁴In the parallel passage of Ephesians 6:19, Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that he would proclaim the gospel message boldly.

option, but an obligation (“**in the way I ought to speak**”; cf. Romans 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:16).

5. Concerning conduct towards outsiders (4:5-6)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. (4:5) Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (4:6)

Verse 5

Having just asked the Colossians to pray for his evangelistic efforts, Paul gives the Colossians some instructions regarding their own in verses 5 and 6. In their dealings with unbelievers (“**outsiders**”; cf. Mark 4:11, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, 1 Thessalonians 4:12, and 1 Timothy 3:7), the Colossians were to act wisely (“**Conduct yourselves with wisdom**”; cf. Matthew 10:16). “It takes wise walking as well as wise talking to win the lost to Christ” (Roustio, p. 571). “Believers are to be cautious and tactful so as to avoid needlessly antagonizing or alienating their pagan neighbors” (Vaughan, p. 222). See 1 Corinthians 10:32-33 in this regard. When presenting the gospel, every effort should be made to ensure that any offense the unbeliever might take is due to the message, not to the manner in which the messenger presents the message.

By acting wisely in their dealings with unbelievers, the Colossians would thereby be “**making the most of the opportunity**”¹⁷⁵ (cf. Ephesians 5:16). This Greek phrase literally means “redeeming the time,” i.e., buying up the time. Vaughan (p. 222) defines it as to buy out, to purchase completely. This is “an intensive activity, a buying which exhausts the possibilities available” (O’Brien, p. 241), what Martin (p. 127) describes as “a snapping up of all the opportunities.” “[Christians] are to seize eagerly and use

¹⁷⁵“Snapping up every opportunity that comes” (O’Brien, p. 235). “The sense then would be ‘Do not just sit there and wait for opportunity to fall into your lap, but go after it. Yes, buy it’” (Hendriksen, p. 183).

wisely every opportunity afforded them by time to promote the kingdom of God” (Harris, p. 197).

Verse 6

When dealing with unbelievers, what one says and how one says it is vitally important. Thus, Paul exhorts the Colossians: **“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt.”** First, a believer’s speech towards unbelievers should be gracious (**“with grace”**; cf. Luke 4:22 and Ephesians 4:29). In light of how gracious God has been to them in saving them, believers should be the most gracious people on earth. This should be evident in their kind and considerate speech, whether directed towards fellow believers or towards unbelievers.¹⁷⁶ For example, believers should not “talk down” to unbelievers; rather, their attitude should be one of: “I’m just one beggar trying to tell another beggar where to find bread.”

Second, a believer’s speech towards unbelievers should be wholesome (**“as though seasoned with salt”**). In Bible days, salt was not so much a flavor enhancer as it was a preservative, keeping foods from spoiling or losing their wholesomeness. By way of contrast, in Ephesians 4:29, Paul speaks of “unwholesome” speech, i.e., speech that is rotten (see NASB marginal note; the Greek word was used to describe rotten fish). Many a believer has forfeited his testimony because of unwholesome speech.

As the believer’s speech towards unbelievers is gracious and wholesome, he will be able to tailor his speech to fit the particular unbeliever he is addressing.¹⁷⁷ (**“so that you will know how you should respond to each person”**). By speaking gracious and wholesome words, believers are enabled to say the right thing in the right way at the right time to the right person.

¹⁷⁶“Our speech to others (including unbelievers) should be characterized by the same kind of grace whereby God has dealt with us” (Kent, p. 137).

¹⁷⁷Harris (p. 198) translates: “so that you may know how you should give an answer suitable for each occasion and each need to each separate individual.”

IV. Conclusion (4:7-18)

- A. A word concerning the bearers of the epistle, Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9)

As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. (4:7) *For I* have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; (4:8) and with him Onesimus, *our* faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here. (4:9)

Verses 7-8

As mentioned in the introductory lesson (under "The Occasion for Writing"), Paul sent the Colossian epistle to the church at Colossae by a man by the name of Tychicus. Besides delivering the Colossian epistle¹⁷⁸, Tychicus would also inform the Colossians about Paul's condition ("**as to all my affairs, Tychicus ... will bring you information**" in verse 7; "**For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances**" in verse 8; cf. Ephesians 6:21-22). Tychicus accompanied Paul on Paul's 3rd missionary journey (Acts 20:4). Besides this one, Paul sent Tychicus on several other missions: to Ephesus (see 2 Timothy 4:12) and to Crete (see Titus 3:12). There is some speculation that Tychicus was a convert of Paul, either during Paul's brief ministry in Ephesus at the end of his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21) or during Paul's 3-year (Acts 20:31) ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41) while on his 3rd missionary journey.

Paul speaks highly of Tychicus in verse 7, calling him a "**beloved brother**" (cf. Ephesians 6:21, as well as comments on 1:1), a "**faithful servant**" (cf. Ephesians 6:21, as well as comments on 1:7), and a "**fellow bond-servant in the Lord**" (cf. comments on

¹⁷⁸While delivering the Colossian epistle, Tychicus also delivered the epistles of Ephesians (see Ephesians 6:21-22) and Philemon (compare Colossians 4:9 with Philemon 10-12), along with Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus (see Colossians 4:9). He likely also delivered an epistle written by Paul to the church of Laodicea (see Colossians 4:16).

1:7), “**in the Lord**” signifying something like “in the Lord’s service.” The Colossians were no doubt anxious to hear how Paul was doing. By bringing encouraging news about Paul’s situation (cf. Philippians 1:12f), Tychicus would encourage the hearts of the Colossians¹⁷⁹ (“**that he may encourage your hearts**” in verse 8; cf. Ephesians 6:22, as well as comments on 2:2).

Verse 9

Not only was Paul sending Tychicus to the Colossians (verses 7-8), but also Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave (“**and with him Onesimus**”). Tychicus was to escort Onesimus from Rome to Colossae and return him to Philemon. Onesimus had fled to Rome and met Paul, who had led Onesimus to the Lord (see Philemon 10). Thus, Paul could call Onesimus a “**faithful and beloved brother**” (cf. verse 7 and Philemon 16). Onesimus was a Colossian (“**who is one of your number**”¹⁸⁰). Onesimus would join Tychicus in informing the Colossians about Paul’s situation (“**They will inform you about the whole situation here**”; cf. verses 7-8).

¹⁷⁹Harris (p. 203) translates: “and have your hearts encouraged by the news he brings.”

¹⁸⁰Before fleeing Colossae for Rome, Onesimus was “one of [the Colossians’] *number*” only in a physical sense. Now he was so in both a physical and spiritual sense (cf. Philemon 16). He is not only a Colossian, but now also a Christian.

4:2-9 Review Questions

1. What does the Greek verb translated “devote” in 4:2 mean? *a dogged determination*
2. To what is “the mystery of Christ” in 4:3 a reference? *the gospel*
3. Who are “outsiders” (4:5)? *unbelievers*
4. What does “making the most of every opportunity” mean (4:5)? *redeeming or buying up the time*
5. What does Paul mean when he says that the believer’s speech should be “as though seasoned with salt” (4:6)? *it should be wholesome*
6. In what sense(s) was Onesimus “one of [the Colossians’] number” (4:9)? *physically (being from Colossae) and spiritually (now being a Christian)*

COLOSSIANS 4:10-18

- B. Greetings from Paul’s associates (4:10-14)
1. His Jewish associates (4:10-11)

Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas’ cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); (4:10) and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. (4:11)

Verse 10

The first of Paul’s Jewish associates to send greetings to the Colossians was Aristarchus (“**Aristarchus ... sends you his greetings**”; cf. Philemon 24). Aristarchus was a native of the city of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4 and 27:2), located in the Roman province of Macedonia (Acts 19:29 and 27:2). Aristarchus accompanied Paul on his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 19:29 and 20:4) and on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:2) and was with Paul in Rome at the time the epistles of Colossians (Colossians 4:10) and Philemon (Philemon 24) were written. There is some speculation that Aristarchus was a convert of Paul during Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica (Acts

17:1-9) on his 2nd missionary journey.

Paul calls Aristarchus "**my fellow prisoner**" (cf. Romans 16:7 and Philemon 23). There is debate as to whether Paul means this in a literal or metaphorical way. Some interpreters (so Kent, Hendriksen, and Harris) opt for the second, suggesting that it signifies one who has been taken captive by Christ by conversion (cf. Philippians 3:12).

The second of Paul's Jewish associates to send greetings to the Colossians was "**Barnabas' cousin¹⁸¹ Mark**" (cf. Philemon 24). Mark (aka "John Mark") was the writer of the second of the four Gospels. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul's 1st missionary journey, but quit part way into it (Acts 13:13), causing Paul to reject Barnabas' proposal to include Mark on the 2nd missionary journey team (Acts 15:36-40). In time, Mark returned to Paul's favor¹⁸², becoming one of his associates. In his final days, Paul specifically asked for Mark to join him, describing him as "useful to me for service" (2 Timothy 4:11).

Verse 11

The third of Paul's Jewish associates to send greetings to the Colossians was "**Jesus who is called Justus.**" "**Jesus**" was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name, "Joshua." "**Justus**" (meaning "righteous" or "just") was a common Latin nickname (cf. Acts 1:23 and 18:7).

Paul calls Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus "**fellow workers**" (cf. Romans 16:3, 9, 21, 1 Corinthians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 1:24, 8:23, Philippians 2:25, 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Philemon 1, and 24) **for the kingdom of God**" (cf. 1:13). Of Paul's associates at the time of the writing of Colossians, these three men were the only Jewish ones ("**these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from**

¹⁸¹The KJV calls Mark Barnabas' nephew. However, the Greek word did not come to mean nephew until after the time Colossians was written.

¹⁸²Hendriksen (p. 188) suggests three factors that led to Mark's restoration: 1) Paul's "tough love" (Acts 15:38); 2) Barnabas' nurture (Acts 15:37 and 39; cf. Acts 4:36); and 3) the nurture of Peter (1 Peter 5:13), who knew what it was to fail and be restored to a place of usefulness.

the circumcision”), “from the circumcision” meaning of Jewish descent (cf. Acts 10:45, 11:2, Romans 4:12, Galatians 2:12, and Titus 1:10). Paul commends these men for being an encouragement to him (“**they have proved to be an encouragement to me**”). The Greek noun translated “**encouragement**” has the idea of solace, comfort, or consolation.

2. His Gentile associates (4:12-14)

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. (4:12) For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. (4:13) Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. (4:14)

Verses 12-13

The first of Paul’s Gentile associates to send greetings to the Colossians was Epaphras (“**Epaphras ... sends you his greetings,**” verse 12; cf. Philemon 23). Epaphras, like Onesimus (verse 9) was a Colossian (“**who is one of your number,**” in verse 12). Based on a comparison of these verses with 1:7, most interpreters surmise that Epaphras was the founder of three churches in the Lycus Valley: Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea.

In verse 12, Paul calls Epaphras a “**bondsslave of Jesus Christ**”¹⁸³ (cf. 1:7, 4:7, and comments on 1:7). It may be that Epaphras, who many believe to have been the pastor of the Colossian church, went to Rome to inform Paul of the challenges facing the Colossian church (especially the Colossian heresy) and, once there, either voluntarily or involuntarily became a fellow prisoner with Paul in Rome (cf. Philemon 23’s “fellow prisoner”), preventing his return and,

¹⁸³The “of Jesus Christ” in “bondsslave of Jesus Christ” is most likely a “possessive genitive” (belonging to Christ), though it could also be an “objective genitive” (Christ as the One whom the slave serves).

thus, necessitating the sending of Tychicus instead and the elevation of Archippus as interim pastor (4:17).

Epaphras prayed for the Colossian believers frequently and fervently ("**always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers,**" verse 12; NIV: "wrestling in prayer"). The Greek participle translated "laboring earnestly" has as its root the Greek verb, *agonizomai*, from which we get our English word, "agony." The same concept of agonizing in prayer is found in Luke 22:44 and Romans 15:30 (cf. comments on 1:29 and 2:1). The early 20th century missionary to the Muslims, Samuel Zwemer once said that "prayer is the gymnasium of the soul."

The reason Epaphras prayed for the Colossians so frequently and fervently was so that they might "**stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God**" (verse 12; cf. Paul's similar prayer for the Colossians in 1:9). God would use the prayers of Epaphras to help the Colossians "**stand**" against the winds of heresy blowing in Colossae (cf. comments on 1:23 and 2:7). J. Oswald Sanders once said that the Colossians stood because Epaphras kneeled. God would also use the prayers of Epaphras to help the Colossians be "**perfect**" (i.e., "complete" or "mature," NASB marginal note; cf. comments on 1:28) and, thus, able to withstand the winds of heresy (cf. Ephesians 4:13-14). God would also use the prayers of Epaphras to help the Colossians be "**fully assured**"¹⁸⁴ **in all the will of God,**" i.e., to convince them that by having Christ they had all they needed and, therefore, need not be uprooted by the Colossian heresy (cf. comments on 2:2-4).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴The same Greek verb translated "fully assured" here in Colossians 4:12 is also found in Romans 4:21 ("fully assured") and Romans 14:5 ("fully convinced"). The noun form is found in Colossians 2:2 ("full assurance"). Hendriksen (p. 191) describes it as "understanding which not only penetrates the mind but also fills the heart with satisfying conviction."

¹⁸⁵"[Epaphras] prayed that [the Colossians] would 'stand firm in all the will of God.' His prayer was specifically directed against the heretics who falsely offered perfection and fullness through their system. The Colossians already had divine perfection in Christ. 'God, help them to stay there!' prayed Epaphras" (Hughes, p. 151).

Epaphras' prayers for the believers in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis was evidence of his great care and concern for them ("**For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis,**" verse 13). The Greek noun translated "**concern**" literally means "pain" (see NASB marginal note; the word is used of physical pain in Revelation 16:10, 11, and 21:4). Here, Paul is using it to describe psychological pain. It pained Epaphras to be away from his flock(s).

Verse 14

The second of Paul's Gentile associates to send greetings to the Colossians was Luke ("**Luke ... sends you his greetings**"; cf. Philemon 24). Luke was the writer of the third of the four Gospels and the book of Acts.¹⁸⁶ He accompanied Paul on parts of his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys, as well as on his voyage to Rome (notice the first person personal pronouns in Acts 27-28). He was the only one with Paul in Rome during Paul's last days on earth (see 2 Timothy 4:11). It is from this verse that we learn that Luke was a physician by profession ("**the beloved physician**").

The third of Paul's Gentile associates to send greetings to the Colossians was Demas ("**and also Demas**"; cf. Philemon 24). Sadly, Demas would go on to desert Paul, "having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10).

C. Greetings from Paul himself (4:15)

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

Paul instructs the Colossians to greet in his behalf the believers in Laodicea ("**Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea**") and "**Nympha and the church that is in her house.**"¹⁸⁷ The early

¹⁸⁶ By writing the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, Luke wrote approximately 28% of the New Testament, making him the human author who wrote more of the New Testament than any other.

¹⁸⁷ The KJV (based on a different underlying Greek text) reads: "Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." Most textual scholars opt for the rendering of the NASB, NIV, and ESV at this point.

church met in homes (church buildings did not exist until the middle part of the 3rd century A.D.). Such house-churches are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture in Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and Philemon 2 (cf. Acts 2:46, 5:42, 8:3, and Romans 16:23). The church that met in the home of Nympha could have been either the church at Laodicea or the church at Hierapolis.

D. Concluding instructions (4:16-17)

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. (4:16) Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." (4:17)

Verse 16

Each New Testament epistle written to a particular church was apparently read aloud to that church ("**When this letter is read among you**"; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:27). Once the Colossian epistle was read to the Colossian congregation, Paul wanted it (or a copy of it) sent to the church at Laodicea so it could be read there, as well ("**have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans**").

Paul concludes this verse by instructing the Colossians to "**read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea.**" There is much speculation as to the precise identification of this letter.¹⁸⁸ While there are some who argue that Paul is speaking of the epistle to the Ephesians (such as MacArthur, p. 199; Moo, p. 351 argues against this position), it is more likely that he is speaking of a non-extant (extant means known to exist) epistle to the Laodiceans.¹⁸⁹ Besides this one, we know of one other "lost letter" written by Paul (one to the church at Corinth—see 1 Corinthians 5:9).

¹⁸⁸“Much ink has been spilled, to little purpose, endeavoring to determine what this ‘letter from Laodicea’ actually was” (O’Brien, p. 257).

¹⁸⁹There is an “Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans.” However, nearly every textual scholar has deemed this document to be spurious, apocryphal, inauthentic, etc.

Verse 17

Paul gives the Colossians one final instruction, to tell a man by the name of Archippus to **"Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."** It is believed by many that Archippus was the son of Philemon and Apphia (Philemon 1-2). As mentioned above (see comments on verse 12), Archippus likely became the interim pastor of the Colossian church in Epaphras' stead. If so, this is the ministry that he had received in the Lord, **"in the Lord"** signifying from the Lord and for His glory (Harris, p. 214).

The Greek verb translated **"take heed"** means to direct one's attention to, attend to (Harris, p. 214), "pay special attention to" (Harris, p. 217). Archippus was to do so in order that he might fulfill his ministry (**"that you may fulfill it"**; cf. 2 Timothy 4:5, as well as John 17:4, Acts 13:25, 20:24, and 2 Timothy 4:7). The Lord has a task for each believer that he wants him to complete.

E. Benediction (4:18)

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

Paul's usual custom was to dictate his epistles to an "amanuensis" (see Romans 16:22), but write the final greeting himself (**"I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand"**; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:21, Galatians 6:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:17, and Philemon 19), a stamp of authenticity of sorts (which, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:2, was needful). Paul asks the Colossians to remember his imprisonment (**"Remember my imprisonment"**), which some (O'Brien, p. 260; Moo, p. 353; Roustio, p. 572; and Pao, p. 322) interpret as a prayer request. Paul ends the Colossian epistle in typical fashion with a benediction (**"Grace be with you"**; cf. Romans 16:20, 1 Corinthians 16:23, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Galatians 6:18, Ephesians 6:24, Philippians 4:23, 1 Thessalonians 5:28, 2 Thessalonians 3:18, 1 Timothy 6:21, 2 Timothy 4:22, Titus 3:15, Philemon 25, Hebrews 13:25, and Revelation 22:21); thus, he ends the epistle on the same note he started it (see 1:2's "Grace to you").

4:10-18 Review Questions

1. In what sense was Aristarchus Paul's "fellow prisoner" (4:10)? *perhaps in the sense that he was taken captive by Christ at conversion (cf. Philippians 3:12)*
2. Who was Epaphras (4:12-13)? *the likely founder of the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis*
3. What church most likely met in the home of Nympha (4:15)? *either the church in Laodicea or Hierapolis*
4. What letter is Paul speaking of at the end of 4:16? *a no-longer-existent letter he wrote to the church in Laodicea*
5. What was the ministry Archippus had received (4:17)? *pastoring the church in Colossae in the absence of Epaphras*