

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Chapter One

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Introductory Information

- Colossians is considered the “twin epistle” of Ephesians due to overlapping themes.
 - Key Differences:
 - Ephesians emphasizes God’s eternal plan of salvation through Christ (**Eph. 1-3**) and our individual responsibilities toward Him (**Eph. 4-6**).
 - Colossians answers various false doctrines and contends for the deity of Christ.
 - Both letters were written while Paul was imprisoned (**Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:20; Col. 1:24, 4:3, 10**) and were delivered by Tychicus (**Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-9**).
 - Scholars suggest the letters were written during Paul’s Roman imprisonment (**Acts 28**) around 62 AD.
 - Whereas Ephesians emphasizes God’s eternal plan of salvation through Christ (**Eph. 1-3**) and our individual responsibilities toward Him (**Eph. 4-6**), Colossians answers various false doctrines and contends for the deity of Christ.

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Introductory Information

- We do not know if Paul ever visited Colossae.
 - Some suggest Epaphras first taught the gospel there. Internal evidence supports this theory (**Col. 1:7, 2:1, 4:12-13**).
 - Some suggest Paul did teach in Colossae due to its geographical proximity to areas we know he did visit (**Col. 4:13-14, 16**).
 - Whether or not Paul ever set foot in Colossae or not, he clearly had a relationship with the church and played an integral part in its foundation (**Acts 19:10**).
- Philemon and Onesimus bore a connection with the Colossian church.
 - Both men may have been members of this congregation or at least had some sort of connection with the church (**Phile. 1:1, 10, 23; Col. 4:7-9**).
 - The church in Colossae may have met in Philemon's house (**Phile. 1:2; Col. 4:9**).

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Introductory Information

- Spiritual problems were present in Colossae.
 - Scholars suggest the city was a hub for a cult who worshipped angels, specifically Michael. Internal evidence seems to support this assumption (**Col. 2:18**).
 - Brethren were falling prey to various deceptive philosophies based on traditions of men (**Col. 2:8**).
 - Such deception through human philosophy remains an ever-present danger for Christians of all generations (**Eph. 5:6**).
 - Brethren were being led astray by Judaizing teachers (**Col. 2:11-12, 14, 16-17**).
 - The issue of Judaizing teachers was a constant problem in first century churches (**Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 1:6-8, 3:1-2, 4:9-11, 5:1-4**).
 - A Jewish-influenced primitive form of Gnosticism existed (**Col. 2:10-23; 3:5-7**).

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Introductory Information

- The two primary themes of this epistle are:
 - The deity and preeminence of Christ (**Col. 1:15-20, 2:9-10**).
 - The hope and redemption found in Christ (**Col. 1:13-14, 27**), as contrasted with the lack of hope found in doctrines and traditions of men.
- All rebukes of error, defenses of the gospel, and exhortations to live faithfully are primarily written in view of these two themes.

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Salutation (1:1-2)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

- Paul emphasized his apostleship, as he did in the beginning of most of his letters (**Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1**).
- Paul stressed that his apostleship was “*by the will of God*.”
 - Any power that Paul possessed was delegated by God.
 - He did not act on his own authority. We must follow his example in only doing those things approved by the Lord (**Col. 3:17**).
- Paul also acknowledged the presence of Timothy.
 - Evidently, Timothy was with Paul at the time of writing and, therefore, was included in salutation greeting for that reason.
 - Although we might view Timothy as a “big name” Christian and preacher, Paul did not elevate Timothy’s status beyond the position of “*brother*.”

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Salutation (1:1-2)

2^a To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse:

- The letter is addressed to “*saints*” and “*brethren*.”
 - “*Saint*” – Set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred (Strong).
 - The word for “*saints*” is also translated “*holy*” (**1 Pet. 1:15, 2:9; Col. 1:22, 3:12**).
 - “*Saints*” are contextually defined as “*faithful brethren in Christ*.” Saints “*are*” (not were) faithful in Christ Jesus. Therefore, “*saints*” are all living faithful Christians.
- Although some (or all) of the Christians in Colossae had not seen Paul’s face (**Col. 2:1**), he still identified them as his “*brethren*,” he viewed them as part of God’s holy family.
 - This family is dependent on being “*in Christ*.”
 - One cannot be “*faithful in*” Christ Jesus unless he is actually in Him (**Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; John 3:3-5**).

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Salutation (1:1-2)

2^b Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul's greeting is purposeful (**2 Thess. 3:16-18**).
- "*Grace*" and "*peace*" are derived from both "*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*"
 - "*Grace*" – Good-will, loving-kindness, favor (Strong).
 - "*Peace*" – Tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot (Thayer).
 - True peace comes from being in God's grace (**John 14:27, 16:33; Phil. 4:4-7; James 1:17**).
 - God delivers grace and truth to man through Jesus Christ in these last days (**John 1:14, 17; Heb. 1:1**).
- Though God and Christ are one (**John 10:30**), they remain distinct with the Son being subservient to the Father (**1 Cor. 11:3, 15:28**).

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Thanksgiving for the Brethren (1:3-5)

³ We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.

- Paul was grateful for his fellow saints, but it is notable that his thanksgiving prompted him to regularly pray for them.
 - When blessed to see or hear of our brothers and sisters in Christ growing in faith and love, thanks is due God (**2 Thess. 1:3**).
 - There ought to be immense joy in knowing the body of Christ is flourishing, growing, and abounding in faith and love (**1 Thess. 3:6-10**).
 - Paul frequently gave thanks for fellow Christians (**Col. 1:3, 9; Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2, 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phile. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:3**).
 - Christians today should follow Paul's example in regularly giving thanks and praying for fellow Christians (**2 Thess. 2:13**).

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Thanksgiving for the Brethren (1:3-5)

⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;

- Paul expressed thanks for the faith of his brethren in Christ.
 - There ought to be immense joy in knowing the body of Christ is flourishing, growing, and abounding in faith and love (**1 Thess. 3:6-10**).
- Paul also expressed thanks over the love his brethren possessed "*for all the saints.*"
 - This could be an allusion to the fact that the Gentiles in the church were not falling into the trap in which many Galatian Christians were ensnared (**Gal. 5:1-15**).

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Thanksgiving for the Brethren (1:3-5)

^{5a} because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven,

- Paul described the hope the Colossians had was residing in heaven.
 - God's blessings for man derive from heaven, lead man to heaven, and await man in heaven (**Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3; Heb. 12:23**).
 - The hope that the Colossians possessed was only present because they were faithful saints in Christ (**Col. 1:1-2**).
 - If a Christian does not remain faithful, he has no hope of eternal life (**1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 10:26-27**).
 - One who possesses the hope of eternal life (**Tit. 1:2, 3:7**), which God has laid up for him in Heaven, will continually seek to purify himself from sin through the means God provides (**1 John 3:3, 1:6-9**).

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Thanksgiving for the Brethren (1:3-5)

5b of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

- The Colossians heard and responded to “*the word of the truth of the gospel.*”
 - The gospel, not the philosophies or traditions of men, is what provides us faith, hope, and salvation from sin (**Col. 1:23; Rom. 1:16, 10:17**).
 - Paul's use of the term “*gospel*” differs from those today who call for a distinction between gospel and doctrine.
 - No such distinction is made here. The “*gospel*” is both the “*word*” and “*truth.*”
 - The “*gospel*” involves more than just the first principles (**Gal. 2:14; 2 John 9**).

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Thanksgiving for the Proclamation of the Gospel (1:6-8)

^{6a} which has come to you, as it has also come to all the world, and is bringing forth fruit,

- Paul expressed gratitude that the gospel not only reached the Colossians, but also had come to “*all the world*.”
 - This echoes the intent of the Great Commission (**Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16**).
 - If Paul is speaking literally, the gospel reaching “*all the world*” by this point was possible due to:
 - The apostles converting people on Pentecost (**Acts 2**) who then went back home and taught what they learned.
 - Such would be replicated throughout the first century with converts from distant lands (Ethiopian eunuch, etc.). All who obeyed the gospel – not just apostles – needed to do their part fulfilling the Great Commission (**Acts 8:4**).

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Thanksgiving for the Proclamation of the Gospel (1:6-8)

6a which has come to you, as it has also come to all the world,

- Consider several historical “evidences” supporting the idea that Paul spoke literally:
 - Paul wished to visit Spain (**Rom. 15:24**). Records show first century Christians apparently making similar journeys that far west.
 - Records describe Thomas as evangelizing and later being killed in India. Some accounts say he traveled as far east as China and Indonesia.
 - Some records suggest Andrew traveled into modern-day Ukraine and Russia to preach the gospel, although these accounts have been increasingly contested as legend.
 - Due to Roman rule, the world was more interconnected than ever in history, allowing the gospel to spread more easily than we might realize. Wherever the Christians in the first century journeyed to fulfill the Great Commission would have been virtually impossible to reach without the highway systems that began being created by Rome in approximately 300 BC. These highways went as far west as Spain, north as Germany and the British Isles, east as Iraq (the Silk Road ran to the eastern coast of China), and south as Egypt, making it possible for the gospel to have literally reached “*all the world*” by the time Paul wrote Colossians.

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Thanksgiving for the Proclamation of the Gospel (1:6-8)

^{6b} and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

- In addition to declaring the gospel had reached “*all the world*,” Paul was thankful it was “*bringing forth fruit*.”
 - Like with the Thessalonians (**1 Thess. 2:13**), the gospel was effectively working in the Colossians.
 - Today, we may not feel that God’s word is bringing forth fruit whenever we try planting the seed, but, ultimately, if the gospel is taught then the seed is being planted (**Isa. 55:11; Matt. 13:18-23**).
 - Whatever fruit produced from this planted seed is ultimately the responsibility of the one who hears (**James 1:21-25**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Thanksgiving for the Proclamation of the Gospel (1:6-8)

6b and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

- The Colossians “*knew*” (“*understood*” NASB) the grace of God.
 - It is not enough to merely know about the grace of God; we must understand it.
 - Sadly, many today – even some of God’s people – misunderstand the grace of God, viewing it as an excuse for freely engaging in all manner of disobedience, contradicting the the truth of God’s word (**Tit. 2:11-14; Rom. 6:1-4**).

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Thanksgiving for the Proclamation of the Gospel (1:6-8)

*⁷ as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,
who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,*

- The Colossians were taught by Epaphras, who is here identified as “*a faithful minister of Christ*” and “*fellow servant*;” he directly informed Paul of the Colossians’ love.
 - It is very possible that Epaphras began the work in Colossae (**Col. 2:1**).
 - Epaphras was with Paul in Rome at the time of writing (**Col. 4:12-13**). Paul’s approval of Epaphras here may have been intended to emphasize how any doctrine the Colossians might hear that did not harmonize with Epaphras’s teaching was ultimately false.

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Thanksgiving for the Proclamation of the Gospel (1:6-8)

⁸ *who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.*

- The Colossians' love that Paul earlier praised (**Col. 1:3-4**) is further identified as "*love in the Spirit.*" This may mean:
 - Their love was spiritual rather than fleshly.
 - Their love was not insincere but genuine and heartfelt.
 - Their love was produced by the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-23**).
 - All three interpretations have scriptural merit.
- Whatever were Paul's intentions, if Christians love our brethren as we are commanded (**1 Pet. 2:17**), even unbelievers will be able to recognize us as true followers of Christ (**John 13:34-35**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

^{9a} For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you,

- The report Epaphras brought to Paul caused him to not only be thankful but also pray for the Colossians' further spiritual growth and development.
 - A similar prayer is found in **Eph. 1:17-19**.

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

***^{9b} and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of
His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;***

- Paul's request for the Colossians to possess knowledge of the Father's will suggests that all people can know and understand the truth (**John 8:32; Eph. 3:4**).
 - Such knowledge is not miraculously poured out, but is received through diligent study of God's word (**2 Tim. 3:16-17; Acts 17:11**), accompanied by prayers for wisdom (**James 1:5**).
- Paul did not request that the Colossians would have some knowledge but, rather, he requested they be "*filled*," or reach maturity.
 - Spiritual maturation is necessary for knowing how to walk worthy (**Col. 1:10; Eph. 4:1**) and conduct a life worthy of the Lord (**2 Pet. 1:5-8; Eph. 5:15-16**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

10^a that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him,

- No person will ever be worthy or deserving of what God has done for man (**Luke 17:10**), but we are still commanded to conduct our lives in such a way that “*pleases Him in all respects*” (NASB).
- To walk worthy of the Lord means to conduct oneself in a way which is fitting the name of Christian (**Phil. 1:27; Eph. 5:1-10**).
- Our goal in life is not to please ourselves or seek the approval of others (**Luke 9:23; Gal. 1:10**). Instead, our goal must always be to do whatever pleases the Lord (**2 Cor. 5:9; Ecc. 12:13**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

10^b being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- In order to fully please the Lord, one must be “*fruitful in every good work.*”
 - Man is not at liberty to define for himself what is or is not a “*good work.*”
 - Such standards of goodness do not come from man but, rather, God (**2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17**).
- Good works in and of itself cannot save man (**Eph. 2:8-9**), yet they are so vital that God re-created saved men and women specifically to do them (**Eph. 2:10**).
- Our works determine whether we know God and belong to Him or deny Him and stand apart from Him (**Tit. 1:16, 3:14; Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12; James 2:14-26**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

10^b being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- In order to fully please the Lord, one must also be progressing in his faith by “*increasing in the knowledge of God.*”
 - One who has no concern for the will of God is unwise; he is a fool (**Psalm 14:1; Prov. 1:7, 2:6**).
 - Notice that general knowledge (the knowledge of man) is not what Paul specified in this text; he specified “*the knowledge of God.*”
 - The knowledge of man and the knowledge of God are two very different types of knowledge (**1 Cor. 1:18, 2:14**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

¹¹ *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;*

- In order to fully please the Lord, one must become “*strengthened with all might*.”
 - This strength comes via God’s “*glorious power*” and His Son (**Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13**).
 - God’s power is infinite (**Eph. 3:20**), and His power is evident to all (**Rom. 1:20**).
 - The strength is intended to help us obtain “*patience and longsuffering with joy*,” even amid various trials (**James 1:2-4**).
 - “*The Christian who is strengthened with all might rejoices in spite of the trials, temptation, and ill treatment of others. He will not let either type of problem stir a sour or gloomy heart*” (Donnie Rader, *The Book of Colossians*, p.16).
 - “*One made strong by God is able to withstand temptations and trials and sufferings with patience and joyfulness*” (David Lipscomb, *Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, p.256).
- The inward man finds its greatest strength through God and His word (**2 Cor. 4:1-2, 16**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

- When one is filled with the knowledge of God's will and receives from Him the strength He freely offers to fruitful laborers, this person will be prompted to joyously give thanks to God (**Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:16-18**).
- Such a heart of thanksgiving should abound when we remember that God has "*qualified us to be partakers*" of the heavenly inheritance.
 - Man is not capable of qualifying himself; only God is capable of accomplishing this marvelous feat (**Rom. 3:23-25, 5:18-19**).
 - It by the power of God that one can be delivered from the "*power of darkness*" (**Col. 1:13**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

- The Colossians are described as “*saints in the light.*”
 - Contrast this with **v.13** – they were once under the “*power of darkness.*”
 - The Ephesians were described similarly in **Eph. 5:8**.
- All Christians were once consumed by darkness, but we must change once we surrender to the Lord (**1 Cor. 6:11**), who is the source of all light (**Eph. 5:14; John 8:12**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

¹³ *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*

- When one acts upon his faith in the first steps of obedience, he is delivered from the punishment of his past sins and “conveyed” (“translated” KJV; “transferred” NASB) into the kingdom of the Son of God (**Acts 2:38, 41, 47**).
- The Greek word for “conveyed” carries with it the notion of causing one to be able to stand (Vine).
 - The image of being able to stand due to Christ is also found in **Rom. 5:1-2**.
- Jesus’s kingdom is not to begin at some point in the future, as premillennialists claim, because His kingdom was already in existence by the time Paul penned this epistle.
 - The kingdom of Christ existed in the first century (**Luke 17:20-21; Mark 9:1; Acts 2:30-33; Rev. 1:9**).
 - To deny that Christ is now reigning and ruling over His kingdom (**1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20-23**) robs Him of the glory that is presently due Him (**Luke 24:26**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

¹³ *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*

- All Christians have been transferred from darkness to light (**1 Pet. 2:9; Acts 26:15-18**).
- We do not dwell on our past (**Phil. 3:12-14**), but we dare not forget that prior to becoming "*saints in the light*" we lived in darkness (**Eph. 4:17-24; 1 Tim. 1:13**).
- Upon being transferred from darkness into light, Christians must continually radiate the light of Christ and bring light to the world (**Matt. 15:14-16; Phil. 2:15**).
- We must walk in accordance with what provides light (**Psalms 119:105**).
- Reborn as saints in the light ("*children of light*" **Eph. 5:8**), Christians must walk in the light and avoid falling back into darkness (**1 John 1:5-10**).
- All Christians occasionally fail in refraining from falling back into darkness. The key is recognizing when we do fail so we can repent and confess those failures to God.
 - All sin (**1 John 1:8; Rom. 3:23**), but all must repent (**Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31**) and confess those sins to God (**1 John 1:9**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

¹³ *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*

- Jesus as "*the Son of His love*" is not merely indicative of Christ being God's "*beloved Son*" (**Matt. 3:17; Eph. 1:6**), but illustrates how the Son is the representative image and depository in which the Father's love is manifested (**1 John 4:8-10; Tit. 3:4-7**).
- Jesus Christ is the ultimate manifestation of God's love for man (**John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4-5**).
- Without God manifesting His love to man through His Son the Colossians and all people of all generations would:
 - Lack the hope Paul described earlier (**Col. 1:5**).
 - Not be partakers of the inheritance offered by God (**Col. 1:12**).
 - Be unable to obtain "*redemption*," i.e. "*the forgiveness of sins*" (**Col. 1:14**).

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

- Due to sin, man needs “*redemption*” (**Rom. 3:23-24**).
 - Specifically, the “*redemption*” that has been provided is “*the forgiveness of sins*” made possible through the “*blood*” of Jesus Christ.
 - “*Redemption*” – Liberation procured by the payment of a ransom (Thayer).
 - “*Forgiveness*” – Release from bondage or imprisonment (Strong).
- Since the Law of Moses, it has always been true that blood serves as the means for atonement (**Lev. 17:11**).
- But it was only through the perfectly sinless blood of Jesus Christ that forgiveness of sin was made available to man (**Heb. 9:14, 10:4; 1 Pet. 1:18-19**).
 - It is strictly through Jesus Christ that men can be redeemed from their sins (**Acts 4:12**). Salvation from sin exists in no other name.

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Petition for Blessings on Behalf of the Colossians (1:9-14)

14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

- How does one come into contact with the blood of Christ so he can receive forgiveness for his sins?
 - Through faith acting in obedience by submitting to Christ in water baptism (**Acts 22:16, 2:38**).
 - For the Christian who succumbs to sin and needs the Savior's blood to wash away his sin, he need not be re-baptized. Instead, he must repent (**Acts 8:13, 18-24**) and confess his sin to God (**1 John 1:7-9**) to contact the blood of Christ and receive forgiveness.

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The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

- Jesus is “*the image of the invisible God*.”
 - No one has seen God (**John 1:18, 5:37; Exo. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16**); He is “*invisible*.”
 - We are, however, able to see God through Christ’s “*image*” (**2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Cor. 11:7**).
 - “*Image*” – Essentially and absolutely the perfect expression and representation of the Archetype, God the Father (Vine).
 - Jesus is the exact representation of God due to sharing His “*form*” (**Phil. 2:5**) and possessing the “*express image of His person*” (**Heb. 1:3**).
 - The Son is the physical manifestation and visible representation of the invisible Father (**John 14:9**).

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The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

- Jesus is “*the firstborn over all creation.*”
 - Many believe “*firstborn*” is used to indicate that Christ was the first being ever created. However, “*firstborn*” simply indicates Jesus is supreme over all creatures, not that He is a created being.
 - “*Firstborn*” – Expressing His priority to, and preeminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the ‘first’ to be born (Vine).
 - Consider the example of Ephraim and Manasseh (**Jer. 31:9; Gen. 48:14**).
 - We do not deny that Jesus experienced an earthly birth (**Luke 2:1-20**). Instead, we are contending that He was not created by God because Jesus is God (**John 20:28**) and He has always existed, even prior to the creation (**John 1:1-3**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

16a For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

- Paul's intent in describing Jesus as "*the firstborn over all creation*" is made evident here. Everything was created "*by*" Jesus; the Lord Christ is supreme.
- "*All things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers*" were created by Christ.
 - "*This encompasses all that is in the universe. That includes all on the earth that we can see and all that is in the heavens beyond our sight. Some think that the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers refer to angels (or ranks of angels). Whether or not it does, angels are certainly included in 'all things' created, for they are created beings*" (Donnie Rader, *The Book of Colossians*, p.19).
- If Jesus is a created being, He created Himself ("*by Him all things were created*"). Yet, Jesus Christ was not created; to the contrary, He is the Creator (**John 1:1-3; Gen. 1:26**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

16b All things were created through Him and for Him.

- Paul asserted that “*all things*” were created:
 - “*By Him*” (**v.16a**) – For all of creation to come into existence “*by*” (“*in*” RSV) Christ indicates everything created came from the desire of not just God but also Christ (**Gen. 1:26**).
 - “*Through Him*” – For all of creation to come into existence “*through*” Christ indicates Jesus is the agent for whom everything in the world owes its existence (**Heb. 1:2**).
 - “*For Him*” – For all the creation to come into existence “*for*” Christ indicates that everything created is intended to serve His divine purposes (**1 Cor. 8:6 Heb. 2:10**).

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The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

- Two more markers illustrate the deity and preeminence of Christ over the creation:
 - “*He is before all things*” – Jesus is “*before*” all things in that “*He existed before anything else did*” (ISV) and possesses authority over heaven and earth (**Matt. 28:18**).
 - On a different note, the Lord must also come “*before*” everything else in our lives (**Matt. 6:33; Gal. 2:20**). We owe Him the preeminence (**Col. 1:18**).
 - “*In Him all things consist*” – Jesus is the controlling force of the entire universe. The reason the earth is able to stand is because of Him (**Heb. 1:2**).
 - “To stand with or fall together, to be constituted, to be compact; it is said of the universe as upheld by the Lord, Col. 1:17, literally, ‘By Him all things stand together’” (Vine).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

18a And He is the head of the body, the church,

- Christ's preeminence is seen in Him being "*head of the body*," which is "*the church*."
 - The word "*church*," as it is used here, refers to the whole number of saved believers the world-over, not just Colossae (**1 Cor. 10:32; Acts 2:47**).
 - There is only one church built by Christ (**Eph. 4:4**) with only one head over it.
 - Headship is a common theme in Paul's writings (**1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23**).
 - Christ is the savior of the body (**Eph. 5:23**). Thus, it is undeniable that if a person desires to be saved by Christ, he must be a member of the Lord's body, i.e. His church.
 - "*To be out of the church is to be out of Christ. To be in Christ is to be in the church*" (David Lipscomb, *Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, p.261).
- The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but Christ is the chief cornerstone and the One with whom all authority resides (**Eph. 2:20**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

18b who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

- Jesus is “the *beginning*.”
 - Jesus is not only “*the beginning*,” but He is also “*the end*” (**Rev. 22:13**).
 - Given the first half of the verse, Paul’s point seems to be that Christ is the originator and builder of the church (**Matt. 16:18**).
- Jesus is the “*firstborn from the dead*.”
 - “*Firstborn*” does not refer to first in time because Jesus was not the first person resurrected from the dead (**1 Kings 17:17-24**).
 - Jesus is “*firstborn from the dead*” in the sense that:
 - He has preeminence over all who were and will be resurrected from the dead.
 - He is the only resurrected person who did not die a second time.
 - Christians look forward to being like Jesus, resurrecting to never die again (**John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

- Paul claimed that “*the fullness*” of God the Father dwells in the Son.
 - All the qualities of deity dwell in Christ. Even when Jesus took on human form and walked the earth, He still possessed the fullness of God (**Col. 2:9**).
 - This cuts to the very core of Gnosticism, completely contradicting those who the deity of Christ. Not only is Jesus deity, He is the “*fullness*” of deity.
- Though Jesus carries the direct image of God, the two entities are distinct persons.
 - Jesus is not seated at His own right hand (**Eph. 1:20-23; Heb. 8:1**).
 - Jesus did not pray to Himself (**Matt. 6:9; Luke 23:34; etc.**).
 - Jesus referenced the Father distinctively (**Matt. 7:21, 28:19; John 10:36; etc.**).
 - The Father and the Son are “*one*” (**John 10:30**), but not in number. They are “*one*” in the same sense all believers must be “*one*” (**John 17:22**); they are united.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

20a and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven,

- It was God's will that Christ would "*reconcile all things to Himself.*"
 - "*Whether things on earth or things in heaven,*" Christ's death destroyed all dividing barriers (**Gal. 3:28; Acts 10:34-35; Eph. 3:14-15**).
 - Those who have been reconciled to God are responsible for proclaiming to the world the Lord's ministry of reconciliation (**2 Cor. 5:18-21**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

20^b having made peace through the blood of His Cross.

- The blood that Jesus shed on the cross “*made peace.*”
 - Jesus is the Prince of Peace (**Isa. 9:6**) for all of mankind.
 - Peace between Jew and Gentile is possible due to the cross taking away the enmity (Law of Moses) between them (**Eph. 2:14-18**).
 - Peace between God and man is also possible due to the cross destroying the enmity (sin) that separates man from God (**Rom. 5:9-10**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled*

- Before being reconciled through the blood of Christ, the Colossians “*were alienated and enemies*” of God due to their “*wicked works*.”
 - All sinners, before submitting to Christ in obedience, find themselves in the exact same circumstances (**Eph. 4:18; Rom. 5:10**).
- This text disproves Total Depravity.
 - A person becomes alienated / an enemy of God by engaging in “*wicked works*.”
 - Man is not innately born an enemy of God; he becomes such by using his “*mind*” for purposes going against His will, i.e. engaging in sinful activities (**Ecc. 7:29**).
 - For a man to be “*reconciled*” means he was once in a proper relationship with God, not born lacking a relationship with Him.
 - “*Reconcile*” – Bring back a former state of harmony (Thayer).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

^{22a} in the body of His flesh through death,

- The reconciliation made possible through Christ was manifested “*in the body of His flesh through death.*”
 - The Son of God became flesh (**John 1:14**) to taste death for all men (**Heb. 2:9**).
 - By doing so, He offered His blood as payment for our sins (**Matt. 26:28; 1 John 2:2**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

22b to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

- The death of Christ allows people who were once alienated from God and counted as His enemies to become “*holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight.*”
 - The blood of Christ is powerful enough to absolve man of all sin and cause people who were terrible sinners to be pure and clean, totally free from the punishment of their past sins.
 - Such holiness, blamelessness, and lack of reproach is dependent on those who were reconciled continuing to keep themselves holy, blameless, and without reproach (**1 Pet. 1:13-16, 2:24; James 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:20**).
 - After acting upon the blood of Christ, those who formerly led lives defined by “*wicked works*” must continually purify themselves from these dead works by living for God (**Heb. 9:14**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

23^a if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,

- Continued reconciliation is conditional.
 - To remain reconciled, one must “*continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast.*”
 - Faith must be built upon the proper foundation (**Eph. 2:20; Rom. 10:17**).
 - Only those who are unwavering in their faith have hope (**James 1:12; Gal. 6:9**).
 - To remain reconciled, one also must not allow himself to be “*moved away from the hope of the gospel.*”
 - Hope is the anchor of the soul (**Heb. 6:17-19**).
 - This hope should motivate Christians to remain “*grounded*” and “*steadfast*” in our faith because we know our labors are not in vain (**1 Cor. 15:58**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

The Preeminence of Christ (1:15-23)

23b which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

- Paul reaffirmed (**Col. 1:6**) the gospel had been preached to “*every creature under heaven*” by the time he wrote the epistle.
- Paul identified himself as a “*minister*.”
 - This the same title he ascribed to Epaphras earlier in the letter (**Col. 1:7**).
 - To be a minister is to be a servant, not have a position of rank or office. Anyone can be a minister of the gospel in this sense (**Acts 8:1-4**).
 - Paul’s ministry is different than anyone else’s today because he did not need to grow/mature into becoming a minister. He was “*made*” (NASB) a minister, showing the Lord’s direct involvement (**Acts 9:15-17**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

- Paul endured suffering to “*fill up*” in his flesh what was “*lacking in the afflictions of Christ.*”
 - *“The sufferings of Paul were in a similar sense a continuation of the sufferings of Christ. This is in close harmony with, and further emphasizes, Paul’s constant teaching that Christ’s servants share all that Christ is and has and does (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 3:10)” (David Lipscomb and J.W. Shepherd, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, p.267).*
- Paul’s ministry was filled with suffering (**2 Cor. 11:23-25**).
 - Yet, Paul considered it an honor to suffer for the name of Christ, as did the other apostles and early Christians (**Acts 5:40-41**).
 - Do we feel the same sense of joy today when we experience minor (in comparison) persecution while standing for the Lord (**Phil. 1:29, 3:8-11**)?
 - While Paul remained in his earthly body, his primary goal was not serving the needs of his own physical body but, rather, the needs of the Lord’s spiritual body (**2 Cor. 11:28**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

- The next few verses (**v.25-27**) share many similarities with **Eph. 3:1-13**.
- Paul was a minister according to the “stewardship” from God.
 - Paul's stewardship was primarily for preaching to the Gentiles (**Acts 9:15**).
 - *“A steward of the gospel should preach the word and not his own thinking, or human wisdom (2 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:13). Today, preachers must preach the word. That means sermons should be filled with scripture. Messages filled with pop psychology, lengthy quotes of men, jokes, stories or illustrations that overshadow the truth being taught is not preaching the word” (Donnie Rader, The Book of Colossians, p.23).*
- Paul fulfilled the word of God by proclaiming the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Jesus Christ (**Eph. 3:1-7**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

^{26a} the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations,

- Broadly speaking, the “*mystery*” is the gospel message itself (**Eph. 6:19; 1 Tim. 3:16**).
 - Even more broadly, the mystery is Christ (**Col. 1:27**).
- The “*mystery*” is the inclusion of Gentiles as one with the Jews in receiving equal opportunity and rights in the salvation offered by Christ (**Eph. 2-3**), which was “*hidden*” for generations.
 - The Gentiles being accepted as equals in the kingdom of God was prophesied throughout the Old Testament (**Isa. 11:10, 49:6, 60:1-3, 65:1; Hos. 1:10, 2:23**).
 - However, this message was spoken in a way that God's people, and likely the prophets themselves, did not fully understand. In this sense, the mystery was “*hidden*,” or “*not made known to the sons of men*” (**Eph. 3:5**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

26b but now has been revealed to His saints.

- The “*mystery*” described by Paul was not impossible to understand; it was simply a message once “*hidden*” from man but was eventually “*revealed*.”
 - The “*mystery*” was once purposely veiled, but had been unveiled by the time Paul penned the Colossian letter (**Eph. 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:18-20**).
 - This same message is unveiled to all who read God's word (**Eph. 3:4**).
 - The “*mystery*” alluded to, and the Bible as a whole, can be understood. If not, God is unjust for requiring obedience to a revelation that is impossible to understand.
 - Furthermore, Paul would have contradicted the words of Christ, who plainly stated that the word of God can and must be understood (**John 8:32, 12:45; Matt. 7:21**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- The primary aspect of the “*mystery*” that Paul revealed to the Ephesians was the fact that Gentiles were equal heirs and partakers in Christ. In this Colossian letter, however, the primary aspect of the “*mystery*” unveiled by Paul is the fact that Christ is “*in you*.”
 - This seems to allude to the fact that Christ, is the source of hope for man (**1 Tim. 1:1; Rom. 5:1-2**), dwells in God's people by faith (**Eph. 3:17**).
 - Christ – in the fullness of His deity – dwells in His people as long they abide in Him (**John 14:23; 1 John 4:13**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

- To preach Christ is to preach not just “the Man,” but all that He requires from those who desire to follow Him (**Acts 8:35-36**).
- The whole counsel must be preached (**Acts 20:27**), which includes both “*admonishing*” (KJV) and “*teaching*.”
 - “The difference between ‘admonish’ and ‘teach’ seems to be that, whereas the former has mainly in view the things that are wrong and call for warning, the latter has to do chiefly with the impartation of positive truth, cf. Col. 3:16” (Vine).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

- If the Bible speaks of a subject, we must speak of it. If the Bible warns of something, we must warn people of it (**Acts 20:31; 1 Thess. 5:14, 21**).
- If we leave out aspects of the word of God in our preaching due to some in the audience viewing these Bible subjects to be too difficult, controversial, or taboo, we will stand before God guilty of their blood on the day of judgment (**Acts 20:26**).
- The solution to audiences who do not want to hear certain warnings or teachings from truth is not to pacify them by leaving out these subjects. Instead, the solution is to preach the truth anyway (**2 Tim. 4:3-5**)!
- Such is required for them to gain “*all wisdom*” provided by the scriptures (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**) and attain perfection/maturity (**Eph. 4:13-15; Heb. 5:14**).

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's Labor (1:24-29)

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

- The plural pronoun “we” was used in the previous verse, but here the singular pronoun “I” was used by Paul to describe his own tireless “labor” towards the goal of presenting “*every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*”
 - Paul did not sit on the sidelines while younger, healthier, or better speaking men did all the work. He personally toiled and labored for the cause of Christ.
 - The Lord provided Paul the means and ability to engage in this glorious work (**Phil. 2:13, 4:13**).
 - “*To do this, I work and struggle, using Christ’s great strength that works so powerfully in me*” (NCV).