

Colossians 1:1–23

PAUL'S GREETING / 1:1–2

Paul wrote Colossians, along with Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon, from prison in Rome. He was allowed to write letters and to have visitors (Acts 28:16, 30–31). The letter to the Ephesians was sent at the same time as this letter to the Colossians, carried by the same messenger, Tychicus (see Ephesians 6:21).

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. As at the beginning of all of his letters, Paul identified himself by name. Unlike most personal letters of today, ancient letters often began with the writer's name instead of adding it at the end. This was true in Paul's letters to friends (such as 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus), letters to church congregations that he knew well (such as Ephesians and Philippians), and letters to church congregations whom he had never met (such as Romans and this letter to the Colossians). Paul's letter to his friends in Philippi was less formal than others, and he identified himself merely as a servant of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:1). But because Paul did not know the Colossian believers and because he needed to write to them about some specific doctrinal issues, he identified himself as an *apostle of Jesus Christ*. Later in this letter he would reinforce that Jesus is the head of the body, the ultimate authority of the church (1:18). By contrast, an apostle had authority to teach, lead, and guide congregations of believers.

Paul was an "apostle" (*apostolos*) meaning "one who is sent." Because Paul was not one of the original twelve disciples (who were called apostles after Jesus' resurrection), some doubted his credentials; yet Jesus had appeared to Paul personally and had commissioned him (Acts 9:1–6; 26:12–18). Paul did have the right to claim authority as an apostle.

God had chosen Paul for special work: "He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15 nrsv). Paul did not seek this apostleship; instead, he was chosen by God when he was converted on the road to Damascus. He wrote that he was an apostle *by the will of God*. Paul's apostleship was not a matter of his own personal aspirations.

And Timothy our brother. Timothy had grown up in Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia. Paul and Barnabas had visited Lystra on Paul's first missionary journey (see Acts 14:8–21). Most likely, Paul had met the young Timothy and his mother, Eunice, and grandmother Lois (see 2 Timothy 1:5) during that visit, perhaps even staying in their home.

On Paul's second missionary journey, he and Silas returned to several cities that Paul had already visited, including Lystra, "where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer.... He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him" (Acts 16:1–3 nrsv). Timothy probably came to believe in Christ through Paul, for Paul later calls him his true son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). Timothy became Paul's assistant and emissary—traveling with him and sometimes for him. Timothy was not imprisoned with Paul, but he stayed in Rome to encourage Paul and to help with ministry needs. Thus, Paul's letter to the church in Colosse includes greetings from Timothy, a *brother* in the faith. Paul and Timothy had traveled together through Phrygia, where Colosse was located (see the map in the introduction). Although neither had visited the church in Colosse, they had, during their earlier travels, met individual Colossians such as Epaphras, Philemon, Archippus, and Apphia who, after their conversion, had returned with the gospel to their native city.

Paul mentions Timothy in other New Testament letters as well: 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Paul also wrote two letters to Timothy (1 and 2 Timothy).

1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae. The word *saints* was a common term designating believers. It referred to their status because of their relationship with Christ and their separation from the world, not to any attainment of holiness. The word *and* does not signify another group; rather, Paul is saying, "To the saints, that is, the faithful." Paul called the believers in Colosse *faithful* although

the contents of the letter could indicate that they were not being very faithful at all. However, Paul often praised the recipients of his letters for what they should be, despite the deficiencies they might have exhibited at the time.

The believers were *in Christ*. Their new identity as Christians made them part of Christ's family; they had found meaning for life in Christ; they had become citizens of heaven (see Philippians 3:20). But they were also *in Colossae* (preferred spelling is "Colosse"). While they had joined a new spiritual kingdom that was separate from the world, they were expected to live out their faith and share the gospel in the physical city of Colosse.

The word order in Greek is "to the in Colosse saints in Christ." The sense of "in Christ" is positional, not mystical. Just as the believers were in the city of Colosse, they were also in Christ. They were placed in both realities to serve as citizens of heaven on site in Colosse. Their position in Christ should not render them so spiritual as to be out of touch with their peers.

TWO PLACES AT ONCE

"You can't be in two places at once" sounds a warning about letting one's schedule become too busy. Yet Paul suggested that Christians at Colosse do just that. They must live both "in Colosse" and "in Christ."

The first refers to a geographic location—a place to farm, raise a family, and conduct business. The second refers to a spiritual location, to be placed in Christ's care and control. This relationship "in Christ" signals the transfer believers took when they came to God for mercy and forgiveness—they migrated from death to life, darkness to light, and the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God.

How can we be two places at once? As Christians, we must serve God responsibly wherever we live. The Bible calls us stewards and caretakers of this world for God. Christians are also called to grow closer to the Savior, to practice and enjoy our new life as children of God and citizens of heaven. We must have both feet in two worlds.

The city of Colosse was one hundred miles east of Ephesus on the Lycus River, and over one thousand miles from Rome, where Paul was writing this letter. Colosse had early been a stopover along the main road from the east on the way to Ephesus. However, under the Roman Empire, the preferred route was through Laodicea, so Colosse declined in importance although it was still a large and busy city. As a trading center it was a crossroads for ideas and religions. Colosse had become the home of many Jews who had fled there when they were forced out of Jerusalem under the persecutions of Antiochus III and IV, almost two hundred years before Christ. The church in Colosse had been founded by Epaphras (1:7), one of Paul's converts. Although Paul had not yet visited this church, he wanted to write this letter to refute heretical teachings about Christ that were confusing many of the Christians there.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father. Letters in Paul's day frequently began by identifying the writer and the readers, followed by a greeting of peace. Paul usually would add Christian elements to his greetings, reminding his readers of his call by God to spread the gospel, emphasizing that the authority for his words came from God, and giving thanks for God's blessings. *Grace* means God's unmerited favor; *peace* refers to the peace that Christ made between us and God through his death on the cross. In these two words of greeting Paul combined expressions from Jewish and Gentile customs. Jews wished each other "peace" (*eirene* or the Hebrew *shalom*); Gentiles wished each other "grace" (*charis*). Each of these common expressions gained considerable value in Christian use. Christ offers grace in the form of life's great blessings and the ability to handle difficulties; he offers peace that is an inner calm no matter what the outward circumstances.

Only *God our Father* can grant such wonderful gifts. Paul wanted his readers to experience God's grace and peace in their daily living.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS / 1:3–14

Paul made it a habit to pray for the churches—some he had visited, some he had not. He knew that the churches had to withstand difficulties from without and within. Paul wasn't able to go to the churches, and his letters would take weeks to arrive, but he could pray—regularly and persistently—for the strength and growth of the believers. Never underestimate the power of intercessory prayer. Who prays regularly for you? For whom do you regularly pray?

1:3 **In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** One characteristic of Paul was his constant prayers for the churches—those he knew well and those he did not. The word *always* could modify thankfulness (as here) or it could modify prayers, referring to Paul always praying for the churches (and specifically the Colossian church) during his regular prayer times (see also 1:9). Some scholars believe that Paul prayed three times each day—morning, noon, and evening. We can picture Paul and Timothy (and others who might have joined with them) regularly kneeling in fervent prayer on behalf of specific congregations and even individual believers who sought to grow in their faith, sometimes in hostile environments. In those prayers, the believers thanked God—Paul explained what they gave thanks for in the following verses.

Paul made his greeting strongly Christian by calling God *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Right at the start, the readers learned not only of Paul's faith in "God our Father" (1:2) but also about his focus that God is Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The triple name expresses Jesus' divinity, humanity, and messianic office. He is divine Lord, he is the man Jesus, and he is the Christ (the Messiah).

1:4 **For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.** Paul had not been to Colosse; he had *heard* of their faith from Epaphras, the probable founder of the Colossian church (1:7). The *faith* was not just any general faith; rather, the Colossians had faith *in Christ Jesus*. These believers had accepted Christ as Savior, and they were living out their faith through their *love ... for all the saints* ("saints" refers to Christians; see note on 1:2). Their love was not some abstract, self-absorbed, intellectual "love" for God. Instead, it was real love acted out toward real people. "Faith" refers to the vertical component of the Christian life—our trust and reliance on Christ. "Love" refers to the horizontal—our relationships with other believers.

"All the saints" could refer just to the Colossian congregation, but more likely it meant believers in the nearby churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis, as well as believers everywhere.

LOVING ALL THE SAINTS

In any church, you can find a younger couple with a child who cries loudly during the prayer or sermon, or an older couple whose crying takes the form of complaints about how the church lawn is cut or the pulpit flowers arranged. Our reactions to them drive us screaming for the nearest Sunday morning brunch.

For more aggravation, attend a church committee meeting, especially the finance committee, or take up a crusade to make worship services even slightly more relevant. You'll meet adults who could take lessons in getting along from the baboons at your city zoo.

Is it unreasonable for Jesus to ask us to love such people? It can't be done—except that God puts us together and changes hearts. He calls us brothers and sisters. That should make a difference to any church—a difference that sets it apart from all other groups, clubs, and organizations. Jesus wants us to show unconditional and inclusive love for all the congregation.

In our days of complex formulas, this simple program for Christian living still holds true. (Verses quoted from niv. Italics ours.)

Romans 5:1–5	“We have gained access by <i>faith</i> We rejoice in the <i>hope</i> of the glory of God. ... God has poured out his <i>love</i> into our hearts.”
1 Corinthians 13:13	“And now these three remain: <i>faith, hope and love</i> . But the greatest of these is love.”
Galatians 5:5–6	“By <i>faith</i> we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we <i>hope</i> The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through <i>love</i> .”
Ephesians 1:15–18	“Ever since I heard about your <i>faith</i> ... and your <i>love</i> ... I have not stopped giving thanks. ... I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the <i>hope</i> to which he has called you.”
Ephesians 4:2–5	“... bearing with one another in <i>love</i> You were called to one <i>hope</i> ... one <i>faith</i> .”
1 Thessalonians 1:3	“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by <i>faith</i> , your labor prompted by <i>love</i> , and your endurance inspired by <i>hope</i> in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1 Thessalonians 5:8	“Let us be self-controlled, putting on <i>faith</i> and <i>love</i> as a breastplate, and the <i>hope</i> of salvation as a helmet.”
Hebrews 6:10–12	“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the <i>love</i> you have shown him. ... We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your <i>hope</i> sure. ... Imitate those who through <i>faith</i> and patience inherit what has been promised.”
Hebrews 10:22–24	“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of <i>faith</i> Let us hold unswervingly to the <i>hope</i> we profess. ... Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward <i>love</i> and good deeds.”
1 Peter 1:3–8	“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! ... He has given us new birth into a living <i>hope</i> ... who through <i>faith</i> are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation. ... Though you have not seen him, you <i>love</i> him.”
1 Peter 1:21–22	“Your <i>faith</i> and <i>hope</i> are in God.... Have sincere <i>love</i> for your brothers, <i>love</i> one another deeply, from the heart.”

Only faith in Christ can draw people together in a loving “community” —people who don’t know one another, and sometimes people who otherwise might not get along at all. Faith proves its genuineness in its love for others. In an earlier letter to the Galatian believers, Paul had written, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6 niv).

1:5–6 The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. Paul knew that the Colossians’ faith in Christ Jesus and love for others had a definite source. These were not human-generated emotions; instead, they *spring from the hope that is stored up ... in heaven*. Why have faith in Jesus Christ if there is no hope for a glorious future? Why love others if it doesn’t matter in the end? Why not, instead, find a “faith” that says you can do whatever you want? If we have no hope in heaven, “if being a Christian is of value to us only now in this life, we are the most miserable of creatures” (1 Corinthians 15:19

tlb). Paul, writing from the perspective of a persecuted believer, realized that he would have no reason to face persecution for the sake of his faith if that faith did not anticipate a great hope.

But “hope” makes all the difference. This is not tentative, as when people say, “I hope she’ll be at the party.” It is confident expectation. As such, it is an inward attitude and an objective reality. Our hope is “stored” in heaven, where Christ returned to be with the Father. That hope will be fulfilled in the future: Paul wrote to Titus that believers must live godly lives “while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13 niv). To Timothy he wrote, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8 niv). Yet it is also a present reality, a “living hope” (1 Peter 1:3 niv). We look forward to a hope that is awaiting us; yet we also have that hope within us, enabling us to live our Christian lives with unhindered faith and love. All believers are promised a glorious eternity in heaven with God. We are confident that what we hope for is stored (or “laid up”) there, and that we will one day receive it. That confidence, in turn, gives us stronger faith in God and a deeper love for others.

This trilogy of Christian virtues—faith, hope, and love—is used often enough in the New Testament to reveal that it was a major theme for Christianity (see the chart). But it is not some kind of formula. Instead, each word is vitally important in every Christian’s life. Faith, hope, and love are tied together like a three-corded braid; one alone cannot signify the Christian life.

A SURE DESTINATION

When Paul says that our hope is stored up in heaven, he is emphasizing the security of the believer. God is in charge of the storehouse. Because we know that our future destination and salvation are sure (1 Peter 1:3–4), we are free to live for Christ and to love others. When you find yourself doubting or wavering in your faith or love, remember your destination—heaven.

Notice that Paul *omitted* “knowledge” in this introduction of virtues. “Knowledge” was added to the Christian trilogy (faith, hope, and love) by a heresy that was gaining ground in Colosse. (A heresy is a teaching that denies one or more essential biblical doctrines.) Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians to combat this heresy that was similar to *Gnosticism*, which was to come later. This heresy is referred to as proto-Gnosticism, an early form of Gnosticism that was combined with the teachings of Judaism. Gnostics believed that it took special knowledge to be accepted by God; for them, even for those who claimed to be Christians, Christ alone was not the way of salvation (see 1:19–20). Like the Gnostics, those subscribing to the heresy in Colosse would add a fourth item: faith, hope, love, and knowledge. (See the chart “The Colossian Heresy” on page 162 for more information.)

In his introductory comments, therefore, Paul commended the Colossians for their faith, love, and hope—three main emphases of Christianity—but he deliberately omitted the word “knowledge” because of the “special knowledge” aspect of the heresy. It is not *what* we know that brings salvation, but *whom* we know. Knowing Christ is knowing God. In 1:9, Paul did pray that they would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, not some speculative or intellectual knowledge (*gnosis*) of the heretics and their false teaching.

BEARING FRUIT

Wherever Paul went, he preached the gospel—to Gentile audiences, to hostile Jewish leaders, and even to his Roman guards. Whenever people believed in the message that Paul spoke, they were changed. God’s Word is not just for our information, it is for our transformation! Becoming a Christian means beginning a whole new relationship with God, not just turning over a new leaf or determining to do right. New believers have a changed purpose, direction, attitude, and behavior. They are no longer seeking to serve themselves, but they are bearing fruit for God. How is the gospel reaching others through your life?

You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Christ gave this *hope* that is stored up in heaven to the believers in Colosse when they heard and believed *the word of the truth, the gospel*. Paul brought them the “truth” of the gospel as opposed to the heresy of the false teachers. No matter what interesting teaching or ideas they heard, the believers must hold on to the truth as it was taught to them, rejecting anything that contradicted that truth. They could trust Paul’s teaching because they could trust the truth of the gospel.

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing. Paul spoke of the gospel as an entity unto itself—something alive, growing, spreading, bearing fruit, and spreading some more. Paul was not exaggerating when he wrote the words, *all over the world*. He did not mean that every location on earth had been evangelized, but that the gospel was making headway across racial, national, and geographical barriers throughout the Roman Empire. Indeed, nothing could stop it from *bearing fruit and growing*. Like the good seed in Jesus’ parable, the gospel “came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times” (Mark 4:8 niv).

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19 nkjv). The apostles had followed Jesus’ command and had spread the gospel beyond the confines of Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, but they weren’t solely responsible for the gospel’s incredible growth. Paul himself had taken the gospel across Macedonia and Achaia, but it had reached Rome before he even got there, and it was in Colosse although he had never visited that city. Many believers took the gospel from where they had heard it back to their homes, where new churches began and flourished. Acts 2:41 gives us the amazing account of three thousand people believing in Christ after Peter’s sermon. Many of those people were foreigners who would return to their homelands with this living gospel (Acts 2:9–11). Philip (not the apostle, but one of the members of the church in Jerusalem) spoke in Samaria (Acts 8:4–8), then had the privilege of sharing the gospel with a lone man from Ethiopia who believed and surely returned to share the gospel in his country (Acts 8:26–39).

So it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. Not only was the gospel growing and bearing fruit across the known world, it was doing the same right in the city of Colosse. When Epaphras first brought them the Good News of the gospel (1:7; 4:12–13), the Colossians *truly comprehended the grace of God*. The niv translates this “understood God’s grace in all its truth.” Commentators debate whether “truth” refers to the gospel and the full reliability of it, or to grace and our full comprehension of it. It seems most natural to interpret the phrase as the nrsv (above) does.

Here, in short summary, Paul emphasized what makes the Christian gospel so wonderfully helpful to us and so different from every other religion in the world. Through that gospel, God enabled us human beings to understand, with our limited ability, his grace upon us—his unmerited favor to his lowly creation. When we hear that gospel and understand that grace, the truth almost overwhelms us: God has invited us to an eternal banquet that we do not deserve! No wonder the gospel grows and bears fruit all over the world. People who really listen find this invitation irresistible. Of all the world religions, Christianity alone offers salvation without demands for pious works. Followers of Christ set down their load of sin and guilt at the cross and begin a life of pleasing God, who lovingly guides and directs them. Who can resist such an opportunity? Who can say no to such a God? Who would desire something other?

Unfortunately, many do. Satan is very powerful and has led some to believe that they can be saved by being good. Paul knew that for those who hear and understand, the gospel of God’s grace is truly Good News. It brings faith, hope, love, security, and a desire to share the incredible news with others.

1:7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf. Paul reminded the Colossians that they had first heard the gospel from one of their own, a native of Colosse (4:12). Epaphras had founded the church at Colosse while Paul was living in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Epaphras may have been converted in Ephesus and then had returned to Colosse, his hometown.

Paul called Epaphras a *dear fellow servant* and a “fellow prisoner” (Philemon 23). The letter to the Colossians and the personal letter to Philemon were written at about the same time and sent to the same destination (the Colossian church met in Philemon’s house). It is unclear from this verse whether Epaphras was actually in prison with Paul, or if Paul’s words were metaphors of warfare or “captivity to Christ.” It is more likely that Epaphras was with Paul voluntarily and would return to Colosse.

In any case, Epaphras was a *faithful minister of Christ*. Paul’s words emphasize Epaphras’s trustworthiness. He returned to his hometown to bring the Good News, and he had begun the church. Paul’s comment that Epaphras was a minister *on our behalf* was his endorsement of Epaphras’s ministry to cities that Paul and the other apostles had not been able to visit. The Colossian believers could trust Epaphras, and they could trust his message. Paul was saying that Epaphras was speaking on behalf of the apostle himself. Epaphras’s authority gave them good reason to *not* accept teachings that had come to them later and which were contradictory to Epaphras’s teaching.

1:8 **And he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.** Undoubtedly, Epaphras had told Paul all about the church in Colosse. Some concern from Epaphras about the false teaching that had come into Colosse prompted Paul’s response through this letter. But Epaphras had also told Paul about the character of the church—they loved one another, they showed love outside the fellowship, and they loved the well-known Paul as a brother in Christ, even though they had never met him. Such love comes from our relationship with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit because this love is a fruit of the Spirit.

SHORT ON LOVE?

The Bible speaks repeatedly about God’s love for us, Christians’ love for each other, and love of family and friends. Yet not everyone feels love; not everyone knows how to enjoy it or even find it.

What should you do if your experience really doesn’t match the Bible’s description of love? What if you’re too lonely, abused, or introverted to reach out to find friends?

First, understand that coming to Christ does not bring instant change to your life situation or personality type. God fills the real you with his Spirit; not some ideal you. God redeems *you*—the lonely, introverted, loveless you. You may not always feel like loving others.

Second, know that God brings the real you into a new set of relationships. This can be difficult as well as wonderful. The difficulty occurs when some believers don’t meet our expectations or don’t respond as we feel they should. They may be grumpy, tired, or “stressed-out” and not in the mood to be friendly. The wonderful part is God’s constant work in the Spirit to make these relationships deep and selfless.

Third, realize that whatever your personality, God calls you to a new life of service. Suddenly you realize that a genuinely loving church depends on you. If you want friends, be friendly. Take the initiative, be consistent, and trust God’s Spirit completely to replenish your love-bank. Then you will know what love in the Spirit can be.

Because of their Spirit-empowered love for one another, Christians can have an impact far beyond their neighborhoods and communities. Christian love comes from the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). The Bible speaks of it as an action and attitude, not just an emotion. Love is a by-product of our new life in Christ (see Romans 5:5; 15:30; 1 Corinthians 13). Christians have no excuse for not loving because Christian love is a decision to *act* in the best interests of others. See 1:4–5 for more on the source of this love.

1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. In 1:3, Paul had already mentioned that he was praying for these believers (as he did for all the churches; see for example Romans 1:8–9 and Philippians 1:3–6, 9–11). Here Paul explained that the encouraging report from Epaphras about the Colossians’ love in the Spirit had prompted Paul (perhaps Timothy is included in the *we*) to pray constantly for these believers. Paul didn’t know about a church in Colosse until he had heard from Epaphras, and Paul rejoiced to be able to pray for another growing church. That Paul had *not stopped* praying since he first heard about the Colossian church refers to his vigilant habit of praying for all the churches.

The church is to be stocked with good teaching as a palace is filled with treasures.

N. T. Wright

Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Paul did not stop at saying that he prayed constantly for the Colossian believers; he went on to explain exactly what he prayed for them. He asked God that they be filled with *knowledge*—but not the secret knowledge advocated by the heresy. This was the knowledge *of God’s will* available to all who believe.

This knowledge of God’s will comes from *wisdom and understanding*. These are not merely abstract concepts; instead, Paul was referring to the true wisdom and understanding made available by God’s Holy Spirit. In a similar prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:17–18), Paul asked God to give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation to understand all the spiritual blessings that they had been given in Christ. The Colossians also needed to be *filled* with this type of spiritual wisdom and knowledge, leaving no room for any other type of false “knowledge” advocated by gnostic heretics. Only by being filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding could believers apply that knowledge to their daily lives. Knowledge must be tempered by spiritual understanding if the Colossians were to make wise decisions and correct judgments. Then they could

- lead lives worthy of the Lord (1:10)
- fully please the Lord (1:10)
- bear fruit in every good work (1:10)
- grow in the knowledge of God (1:10)
- endure everything with patience (1:11)
- joyfully give thanks to the Father (1:11–12)

God measures true wisdom and understanding by our practical obedience. Wisdom and understanding refer to discretion and discernment. When believers possess those, they will be able to discern the truth from false teaching.

1:10 So that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. True knowledge of God’s will is inseparable from living in harmony with it. True knowledge leads to obedience; complete obedience cannot occur without the knowledge of God’s will given by the Holy Spirit.

PLEASING GOD

How do we please God? (Verses quoted from niv, italics ours.)

- Genesis 8:21, “The Lord smelled the *pleasing* aroma” of the sacrifice. In the Old Testament, God’s pleasure in the aroma of a sacrifice meant that he accepted the sacrifice for sin. Thus, pleasing God means making the acceptable sacrifice to him.
- Psalm 19:14, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be *pleasing* in your sight.” Our love for God should guide what we think and what we say (see also Psalm 104:34).
- John 5:30, “I seek not to *please* myself but him who sent me.” Jesus taught us not to try to please ourselves but to please God (see also John 8:29).
- Romans 12:1, “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and *pleasing* to God.” God wants us to turn over our lives to him daily, renouncing our own desires and trusting him to guide us (see also Romans 14:8–18).
- Ephesians 5:10, “Find out what *pleases* the Lord.” We must live in contrast to those who live immorally.
- Philippians 4:18, “The gifts you sent ... are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, *pleasing* to God.” Our offerings of money please God.

- Hebrews 11:6, “Without faith it is impossible to *please* God.” God rewards, with his presence, those who trust him fully.
(See also Colossians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:3; 5:4; 1 John 3:22.)

The Colossians’ lifestyles should be *worthy* of their high calling as God’s children. Their behavior should match their status as God’s holy people. They ought to be following God closely—their lives being transformed to Christlikeness. A Christian must be active in order to grow spiritually and to live worthy of the Lord. When a Christian is inactive, stagnation and even regression set in. Paul did not hesitate to urge the Colossians to extra effort. We must not use the grace of Christ as an excuse for inaction.

Is it possible for Christians to be *fully pleasing* to God? Apparently so, for Paul prayed exactly that for the Colossian believers. Perfection will not be achieved in this life, yet believers press on toward the goal of God’s high calling (Philippians 3:12–14). In the meantime, believers can be fully pleasing to God by virtue of their relationship with him and their attempts to “live in order to please” him in all areas of life (1 Thessalonians 4:1 niv).

Paul prayed that the believers in Colosse would *bear fruit in every good work*. As the gospel is bearing fruit and growing (1:6), so believers in that gospel ought also to “bear fruit” and *grow in the knowledge of God*. As believers bear fruit (this could refer to the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22–23, or to growth in the Colossian church by adding members), they will grow in their knowledge of God. Knowing God is progressive. Just as we don’t fully know a person upon meeting him or her, so we don’t fully know God the minute we are saved. Instead, we grow to know him better and better as we seek to serve him and bear fruit in our lives and in our ministry.

FRUIT BEARERS

The false teachers valued the accumulation of knowledge, but Paul pointed out that knowledge in itself is empty. To be worth anything, it must lead to a changed life and right living. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians has two dimensions: (1) that they might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and (2) that they would bear fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. Knowledge is not merely to be accumulated; it should give us direction for living and acting. Paul wanted the Colossians to be wise, but he also wanted them to *use* their knowledge for Christian service. Knowledge of God is not a secret that only a few can discover; it is open to everyone. God wants us to learn more about him and also to put belief into practice by helping others.

1:11–12 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power. The Colossians’ growth in the knowledge of God and the resultant fruit would help to strengthen them. Paul continued his prayer for the believers, asking God that they be *made strong with all the strength* that comes from his glorious power. One can hardly pray a more wonderful prayer. To be made strong with God’s power is to be given incredible strength—it was God’s glorious power that created the universe and that brought Jesus back to life. One can hardly imagine more power. In fact, Paul’s words here show the inadequacy of describing God’s power—it is beyond our words or our human minds to comprehend. Yet that power is available to believers and to the church so they can fulfill their mission in the world. Paul wanted the Colossian believers to be strengthened with God’s power so they would not be pulled away from their faith and their witness to the world.

So that you may have great endurance and patience. *Endurance (hupomone)* is the ability to continue toward a goal regardless of the obstacles. *Patience (makrothumia)* is the ability to stand firm against

opposition without giving up. “Endurance” is often used in relation to difficult circumstances; “patience” is often used in describing one’s dealings with difficult people. Both would be needed by the believers in Colosse, and both come from the empowerment of God’s glorious strength. Paul reminded the Colossians that even when they were surrounded by persecution and false teaching, they had the strength to continue toward the goal of their faith and to stand firm against the opposition.

HOW TO PRAY FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS

How many people in your life could be touched if you prayed this way?

- Be thankful for their faith and changed lives (1:3–4).
- Ask God to help them know what he wants them to do (1:9).
- Ask God to give them deep spiritual understanding (1:9).
- Ask God to help them live for him (1:10).
- Ask God to give them more knowledge of himself (1:10).
- Ask God to give them strength to endure (1:11).
- Ask God to fill them with joy, strength, and thankfulness (1:11).

While joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. Scholars have had difficulty with the placement of the word *joyfully*. Some place it with endurance and patience, meaning that Paul was praying that the Colossians could have endurance and patience, but do so with joy. It is God’s power alone that makes it even possible to be joyful during difficult times. Other scholars place the word “joyfully” as modifying *giving thanks*. Either way, it makes little difference to Paul’s meaning. It is God’s power that helps believers endure and be patient even as they are filled with joy that overflows in thanksgiving.

Thanks is given to God *the Father*. Why? Because through Jesus Christ, he made it possible for the believers to *share in the inheritance of the saints*. They are *enabled* only because God, by his grace, enabled them (see 1:13–14). By using the word “inheritance,” Paul was alluding to the inheritance of the Promised Land, first promised to Abram for his faithfulness to God (Genesis 13:14–17). God’s people, the Old Testament saints, inherited a portion of a bountiful land (Numbers 26:52–56; 34:2, 13). God’s people in the New Testament are the very sons of God, and as such they have the right to inherit Christ and a glorious eternity in *the light*. The promise of land is broadened to include the whole creation (Romans 4:14; 8:17–25). The niv adds the words “kingdom of” on the basis of 1:13, which mentions the “kingdom of the Son,” but the words “kingdom of” are not in the Greek. Paul was most likely setting up the contrast between the state of “light” that the believers have been transferred to from their previous state of “darkness” as described in 1:13. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6 niv).

PRAYING FOR STRANGERS

Sometimes we wonder how to pray for missionaries and other leaders whom we have never met. Paul had never met the Colossians, but he faithfully prayed for them. His prayers teach us how to pray for others, whether we know them or not. We can request that they (1) understand God’s will, (2) gain spiritual wisdom, (3) please and honor God, (4) bear good fruit, (5) grow in the knowledge of God, (6) be filled with God’s strength, (7) have great endurance and patience, (8) stay full of Christ’s joy, and (9) give thanks always. All believers have these same basic needs. When you don’t know how to pray for someone, emulate Paul’s prayer for the Colossians.

1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. This verse continues the thought from 1:12; Paul still had in mind the analogy of Israel inheriting the Promised Land. The book of Exodus tells the story of how God *rescued* (or delivered) his people from Egypt (typifying Satan’s dominion of darkness) and took them to the Promised Land (typifying the kingdom of his Son). (See Exodus 6:6; 12:27; 14:30.) Jesus referred to the dominion of darkness at his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:53), describing the forces of evil that he had to combat in his final hours. In Scripture, *darkness* is a metaphor for evil; it is the dominion of those who are without God. True believers, however, have been transferred from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from guilt to forgiveness, and from the power of Satan to the power of God:

- “I ... am sending you [Paul] to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:17–18 niv).
- “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8 niv).
- “You are a chosen people ... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9 niv).
- “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5–7 niv).

We have been rescued from a rebel kingdom to serve the true King. That King, the Son God loves, is described in the following verses (1:15–20).

The words *Son he loves* allude to Jesus’ baptism, when God anointed Jesus with the Spirit saying, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11 niv). By so doing, God announced Jesus as the anointed king of Israel. Matthew 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” to show that Christ fulfilled the expectation and hope of the Old Testament. The son inherited the kingdom from his Father. Now we are coheirs with him and can share in his kingdom (Romans 8:17).

1:14 In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Believers are qualified “to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” because through Jesus Christ, God’s beloved Son, we have received *redemption*. The word “redemption” has a rich Old Testament meaning and goes back, once again, to the analogy of Israel’s escape from Egypt. The last disaster visited on the Egyptians was the death of the children (Exodus 12:29–30). Every firstborn son of the Egyptians died, but the Israelite children were spared because the Israelites placed the blood of a lamb on their doorframes (Exodus 12:22–23). That’s where the story of “redemption” begins in the Bible.

“Redemption” means “to buy back” or “to save from captivity by paying a ransom.” One way to buy back a slave was to offer an equivalent or superior slave in exchange. That is the way God chose to buy sinful people back—he offered his Son in exchange for us. Paul was reminding the Colossian believers that they were not saved by knowledge or by good works or by inclusion in some sort of secret religious cult; they were saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Through him alone had they received redemption, *the forgiveness of sins*.

If we want to be freed from the deadly consequences of our sins, a tremendous price must be paid. But we don’t have to pay it. Jesus Christ, our substitute, has already redeemed us by his death on the cross. Our part is to trust him and accept his gift of eternal life. Our sins have been paid for, and the way has been cleared for us to begin a relationship with God.

Paul lists five benefits God gives all believers through Christ:

1. He made us qualified to share in his inheritance.
2. He rescued us from Satan's dominion of darkness and made us his children.
3. He brought us into his eternal kingdom.
4. He redeemed us—bought our freedom from sin and judgment.
5. He forgave us for all our sins.

Thank God for what you have received in Christ.

PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST / 1:15–23

In the Colossian church there were several misconceptions about Christ that Paul directly refuted in this section:

- Believing that matter is evil, false teachers argued that God would not have come to earth as a true human being in bodily form. Paul stated that Christ is the image—the exact likeness—of God and is himself God, and yet he died on the cross as a human being.
- They believed that God did not create the world because he would not have created evil. Paul proclaimed that Jesus Christ, who was also God in the flesh, participated in the creation of the universe.
- They said that Christ was not the unique Son of God but rather one of many intermediaries between God and people. Paul explained that Christ existed before anything else and is the firstborn of those resurrected.
- They refused to see Christ as the source of salvation, insisting that people could find God only through special and secret knowledge. In contrast Paul openly proclaimed the way of salvation to be through Christ alone. Paul continued to bring the argument back to Christ.

1:15 **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.** Many New Testament scholars believe that this section was based on a hymn written before Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. If this was a hymn, we can assume that it was known to the church at Colosse and to other Christians. Paul would not have quoted something unknown to them. However, Paul was very capable of writing such poetic lines, as demonstrated in passages such as Romans 8:37–39 and 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. These verses are regarded as some of the most important verses in the New Testament establishing the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is not only equal to God (Philippians 2:6), he *is* God—the verb is present tense, describing Jesus' position now and forever (John 10:30, 38; 12:45; 14:1–11). As the *image of the invisible God*, Christ is the exact visible representation of God (in Greek, *eikon*). God as spirit is invisible and always will be (1 Timothy 6:16). God's Son is his visible expression. He not only reflects God, but, as God, he reveals God to us (John 1:18; 14:9; Hebrews 1:1–2). Christ's glory expresses divine glory (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is not a copy, but the very embodiment of God's nature. We are given "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6 nrsv). Jesus is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:3 nrsv).

As the *firstborn over all creation*, he has all the priority and authority of the firstborn prince in a king's household (Hebrews 1:2). He came from heaven, not from the dust of the earth (1 Corinthians 15:47), and he is Lord of all (Romans 9:5; 10:12; Revelation 1:5; 17:14). Christ is completely holy (Hebrews 7:26–28; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 3:5), and he has authority to judge the world (Romans 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1). Therefore, Christ is supreme over all creation, including the spirit world. While in English the word "firstborn" (*prototokos*) conveys the eldest child of human birth, 1:16 clarifies that the meaning of Jesus' title is that he is Creator. In Psalm 89:27, God states, "I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (nrsv).

THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

Paul answered the various tenets of the Colossian heresy that threatened the church. This heresy was a “mixed bag,” containing elements from several different heresies, some of which contradicted each other (as the chart shows).

<i>The Heresy</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Paul's Answer</i>
Spirit is good; matter is evil.	1:15–20	God created heaven and earth for his glory.
One must follow ceremonies, rituals, and restrictions in order to be saved or perfected.	2:11, 16–23; 3:11	These were only shadows that ended when Christ came. He is all you need to be saved.
One must deny the body and live in strict asceticism.	2:20–23	Asceticism is no help in conquering evil thoughts and desires; instead, it leads to pride.
Angels must be worshiped.	2:18	Angels are not to be worshiped; Christ alone is worthy of worship.
Christ could not be both human and divine.	1:15–20; 2:2–3	Christ is God in the flesh; he is the eternal One, head of the body, first in everything, supreme.
One must obtain “secret knowledge” in order to be saved or perfected—and this was not available to everyone.	2:2, 18	God’s secret is Christ, and he has been revealed to all.
One must adhere to human wisdom, tradition, and philosophies.	2:4, 8–10; 3:15–17	By themselves, these can be misleading and shallow because they have human origin; instead, we should remember what Christ taught and follow his words as our ultimate authority.
There is nothing wrong with immorality.	3:1–11	Get rid of sin and evil because you have been chosen by God to live a new life as a representative of the Lord Jesus.

Paul explained in no uncertain terms that the Colossian believers had to focus on the deity of Jesus Christ (that Jesus is God) or their Christian faith would fall prey to false teaching. To put Jesus any lower is to lose the central truth of Christianity.

CHRIST IS SUPREME

Multiculturalism refers to a widespread movement which in many ways is very good and in one way is very bad. The good parts recommend that we be open to different traditions and languages, to have growing interest in people of different color and custom. The bad part implies a leveling of all religious beliefs so that the supreme value becomes respect for all, rather than the truth of one. Such relativism regards all religious points of view as equally valid.

Colosse, no less than Des Moines or Kansas City, was a town of diverse cultural traditions. But Paul firmly taught the supremacy and divinity of only one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this letter and the entire Bible, we find no arbitrating this point: Jesus is the God-man; he was Creator and is Redeemer. Christ is Lord of all and superior to all powers, whether good or evil.

Christians should learn from and respect world cultures, urging all people of all colors to find peace with God. That's our missionary calling: to tell all the world the Good News that God loves us and saves us in Christ.

1:16 For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. Lest anyone misunderstand that “firstborn” in the previous verse meant that Jesus was merely the first thing God created, Paul went on here to explain that all things were created *in, through, and for* Christ. That final little word “for” shows us the goal of all creation—to glorify Christ. The apostle John wrote, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3 nkjv). The writer to the Hebrews wrote of Christ, “through whom [God] made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:2–3 niv). Just as all the fullness of Deity is in him (1:19), so in him are all the creative powers that make him the supreme Lord.

Because the false teachers believed that the physical world was evil, they thought that God himself could not have created it. If Christ were God, they reasoned, he would be in charge only of the spiritual world. But Paul explained that all the thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers on heaven and earth, of both the visible and invisible world (physical government and spiritual forces) are under the authority of Christ himself. There is little to be gained by trying to identify each of Paul’s words here, except to see the two main categories: (1) those in heaven are invisible; (2) those on earth are visible. Some scholars have seen in these words hierarchies of angel princes. Others have seen parallels to the spiritual enemies of Christians—law, sin, the flesh, and death. Paul listed these because of people’s belief that the world was inhabited by powers and beings that worked against humanity. The false teachers may have given undue prominence to these, so Paul quickly put them under Christ’s rule. Christ has no equal and no rival. Because Christ is the Creator of the world, all powers, whether the spiritual forces the Colossians wished to study or any material force, were under Christ’s final authority.

Paul’s words here refuted the false teaching that Christ was one of many intermediaries and that the angels were to be worshiped. All angelic and celestial powers in heaven and on earth are subject to Christ. He is the Lord of all.

1:17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Christ is *before all things*, both in time and in rank. He is not only the Creator of the world, he is also its Sustainer. By him everything came to be, and by him everything continues to be. In him, everything is held together, protected, and prevented from disintegrating into chaos (see Acts 17:28). Because Christ is the Sustainer of all life, nothing in creation is independent from him. *Hold together (sunestaken)* implies being held together in a coherent or logical way, sustained and upheld, prevented from dissolving into chaos. In him alone and by his word, we find the unifying principle of all of life (Hebrews 1:2–3). The Colossians, and all believers, are his servants who must daily trust him for protection, care, and sustenance.

1:18 And He is the head of the body, the church. While 1:15–17 unveiled the Son’s relationship to the “old creation” (the world), this verse describes his relationship to the “new creation”—that is, *the church*. The church (meaning *the body* of believers) existed because Christ was its beginning, its source, its *head*. Just as the parts of the body function under the direction of the brain, so Christians are to work together under the command and authority of Jesus Christ.

The church is composed of many types of people from a variety of backgrounds with a multitude of gifts and abilities. Despite the differences, all believers have one unifying principle—faith in Christ. On this essential truth all believers find agreement. All believers are baptized by one Holy Spirit into one body of believers, the church. Each person doesn’t lose his or her individual identity, but all have oneness in Christ,

the head of the body. The image of the body shows the church's unity. Each member is involved with all the others as they go about doing Christ's work on earth (Ephesians 4:15).

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. Paul repeated again that Christ is *the beginning (arche)*, but he elaborated another aspect of that beginning. Christ is the *firstborn from the dead*. He was the first to die and come back to life. He was "first" both in time and rank; there will be many more who will live forever after physical death (1 Corinthians 15:20). All who trust in Christ will also defeat death and rise again to live eternally with him (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). But he will always be preeminent—that is, holding first place.

There is no contradiction between Paul's words that Jesus "is before all things" (1:17) and that he will *come to have first place in everything*. The explanation is found in Philippians 2:5–11. Christ, although he was preeminent, willingly humbled himself to die on the cross. Because of Christ's death on the cross, he has been exalted and elevated to the status that was rightfully his. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place," raising Christ to his original position at the Father's right hand, where he will reign forever as Lord and Judge.

BEGINNINGS

Schoolchildren know about beginnings: new teachers, new supplies, and new learning goals. The start of school in the fall is a brand new chance to improve your record. Weddings also signal new beginnings joyously. Most people savor the smell of a new automobile. We need and celebrate newness regularly.

We celebrate life at birthdays and baby showers. Yet each of us will one day wear out and die. In Jesus, the world begins a new era and people find new life. What a magnificent gift: it makes all other beginnings sensible and happy.

God's Good News is life eternal in Jesus. Your life begins anew in him. Let this be your reason to celebrate each day with him.

Jesus' resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, the reason that the church even exists. Only Christianity has a God who became human, died for his people, and was raised again in power and glory to rule the old creation and the new creation (the church) forever. The Resurrection assures believers that Christ is not a legend; he is alive and ruling his kingdom.

Because Christ is spiritually supreme in the universe, surely we should give him first place in all our thoughts and activities.

1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. The little word *for* explains why Christ will have first place in everything. God wanted his *fullness* (meaning "completeness" or "totality") to *dwell* (meaning "live permanently") in Christ. This verse has been translated various ways: (1) that Christ was pleased to have God's fullness dwell in him; (2) that the fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ; and (3) as here, that God was pleased to have the whole Godhead dwell in the Son. The Greek supports all three possibilities, but the main point is not lost. Paul wanted to explain to the Colossians that Christ is God's dwelling place; therefore, Christ is divine, sovereign, and preeminent. Christ perfectly displays all the attributes and activities of God: Spirit, Word, wisdom, glory.

By this statement, Paul was refuting the Greek idea that Jesus could not be human and divine at the same time. Christ is fully human; he is also fully divine. Nor is there more than one God; one God, in all his fullness, resides in Christ. Paul was also refuting the false teaching that God's "fullness" meant all the angelic powers that emanate from God, fill the space between heaven and earth, and act as intermediaries between God and humans. Instead, Paul affirmed that God's "fullness" dwells in Christ alone. Christ has always been God and always will be God. All of God (including his attributes, characteristics, nature, and being) indwells the

Son. When we have Christ we have all of God in human form. Any teaching that diminishes any aspect of Christ—either his humanity or his divinity—is false teaching. In him we have everything we need.

1:20 And through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Continuing from 1:19, Paul explained that God’s fullness dwells in Christ and in that fullness he reconciled all things to himself. This reconciliation was accomplished through him (Christ) and *through the blood of his cross*. “Reconciliation” means reestablishing a relationship, causing the relationship to become friendly and peaceable when it had not been so. Because Christ is Creator and Sustainer of “all things” (1:17), his death on the cross provided reconciliation for *all things*. But what did Paul mean by “all”?

First, consider what this reconciliation means for humanity. There can be no peace between sinful humans and a holy God. Because people are born into sin, they cannot become good enough to be acceptable to God. In Old Testament times, God accepted symbolic offerings. Jesus had not yet been sacrificed, so God accepted the life of an animal in place of the life of the sinner. When Jesus came, he substituted his perfect life for our sinful lives, taking the penalty for sin that we deserve. The penalty for sin is death. We are guilty and culpable, but Jesus took the punishment. Thus he redeemed us from the power of sin and reconciled us to God.

WHO IS CHRIST?

Colossians 1:15–20 lists seven characteristics of Christ:

(1) He is the image of the invisible God.	1:15
(2) He is the firstborn over all creation.	1:15
(3) By him all things were created.	1:16
(4) He is the head of the body, the church.	1:18
(5) He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.	1:18
(6) All God’s fullness dwells in him.	1:19
(7) Through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.	1:20

Because of who Christ is

- we ought to worship him with praise and thanks;
- we ought to learn about him, for he is God;
- we ought to obey him, for he is the ultimate authority;
- we ought to love him for what he has done for us.

Second, does this reconciliation of “all things” mean that everyone will be saved? From other passages, we know that Paul understood salvation to be something accepted or rejected by humans, who are given the choice (for example, see 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10). The *scope* of God’s reconciliation is universal—it is offered to all people. But reconciliation is accomplished only for those who accept Christ as Savior: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17–18 nrsv).

Third, what does this reconciliation mean for “all things” (besides humans)? Just as all of creation fell when Adam sinned, so all of creation will be reconciled. Sin has caused all creation to fall from the perfect state in which God created it. Thus the world is subject to decay so that it cannot fulfill its intended purpose. One day, all creation will be liberated and transformed. This is described in what Paul wrote to the Romans:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:19–21 niv)

The original sense of perfect order in the world was marred by sin. The created order functions in spite of its flaws, but diseases, deformities, and suffering constantly remind us that all is not right with us or with the world. All creation looks forward to its liberation from the effects of the Fall. God has plans for a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

In addition, Paul's reference to things *on earth or in heaven* was meant to be another blow to the false teachers. Nothing in the universe escapes Christ's reach. There is no neutral ground; everything falls under his power. No alien force of darkness can undermine his work or his church. Satan and demons *will not* be reconciled to God; instead, their end is certain (see Revelation 20:7–10).

A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

Christ's death provided a way for all people to come to God. It cleared away the sin that keeps us from having a right relationship with our Creator. This does not mean that everyone has been saved, but that the way has been cleared for anyone who will trust Christ to be saved. We can have peace with God and be reconciled to him by accepting Christ, who died in our place. Is there a distance between you and the Creator? Be reconciled to God. Come to him through Christ.

It *pleased* God to do this! Christ willingly shed his blood on the cross so that we could have a relationship with him and live eternally. The Fall did not come as a surprise to God; in his eternal purposes, he allowed sin so that he might come and bring salvation to those who loved and followed him. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.... We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:6, 8, 11 niv). The only way of reconciliation is the way of the Cross.

1:21–22 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death. Paul gave the reason why we need reconciliation. The believers in Colosse had, at one time, been *alienated* (separated, estranged) from God and they were his *enemies*. Their thoughts and behaviors had revealed, not apathy or ignorance, but hostility toward God because of sin. They were strangers to God's way of thinking. Wrong thinking leads to sin, which further perverts and destroys thoughts about him. When people are out of harmony with God, their natural condition is to be totally hostile to his standards.

God made peace by Jesus' blood on the cross (1:20). In order to answer the false teaching that Jesus was only a spirit and not a true human being, Paul explained that Jesus' fleshly, physical body actually died. Jesus suffered death fully as a human; thus we can be assured that he died in our place. Since Jesus, as perfect God, faced death, we can be assured that his sacrifice was complete and that he truly removed our sin.

How did Jesus' death remove sin? Jesus became human and lived on earth among people. Although he was without sin, he experienced life and temptation as we do. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment for our sin. At the same time, Jesus is God. Therefore, in Jesus, God identified with our sin, meeting it head-on at the cross, taking the total punishment (death) and breaking its power over humanity. Those who are part of Christ's body, the church (1:18), can also claim victory over sin and are now *reconciled* with God.

The "how" is answered, now for the "why." What is the goal of this reconciliation?

To present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. Some scholars have understood *present* to mean “to offer a sacrifice” (as in Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19). More likely, it refers to believers being presented pure and faultless, acquitted of all charges (Ephesians 5:27; Jude 24). Christ’s act of reconciliation put believers in perfect standing with God. By Christ’s death on the cross, God already dealt with sin. His goal is to make believers his holy people, to transform their character so they can live consistent with their faith. The pattern is the perfect life lived by Jesus Christ. In one sense, the Colossian believers were already perfect because they had been made acceptable to God; yet they were still being perfected so that, in the end, they would truly be:

- *Holy*—“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:14–16 niv).
- *Without blemish*—“So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Philippians 2:15–16 niv).
- *Free from accusation*—“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:33 niv).

The process of living the Christian life will end with the resurrection and will result in believers being presented to God as his dear and beloved children. There will be no fear, for God has already reconciled us to himself and made us acceptable *in his sight*.

NO WAY!

No one is good enough to save himself or herself. If we want to live eternally with Christ, we must depend totally on God’s grace. This is true whether we have been murderers or honest, hardworking citizens. We have all sinned repeatedly, but *any* sin requires us to come to Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life. Apart from Christ, there is no way for us to be forgiven.

1:23 **Provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.** The certainty of believers’ present and future status with God should not be an excuse for careless living or dabbling in heresy. Paul warned the Colossian believers to *continue securely established and steadfast in the faith*. As they built their lives upon the foundation laid by the gospel, they ought to build carefully through obedience. Then their “building” would stand firm. “Continue securely” means to remain stable, to persevere. The Colossians should not wander off into false teaching that contradicted the gospel they had heard and the hope they had believed for salvation. Paul urged all believers, like those in Colosse, to build carefully, persevering in their faith. (For more encouragement in perseverance, see John 8:31; 15:1–8; Acts 14:21–22; James 1:1–4.) Genuine faith perseveres to the end, focusing on *the hope promised*, which is the very content of the gospel. Hope is both the inward attitude of expectancy and the objective reality of the gospel. Christ is Lord, and he has promised that one day we will be with him.

As Paul closed his introductory section, he made one final stab at the doctrine of the false teachers by proclaiming that the gospel *has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven*. This did not mean that every person had heard the gospel. Rather, Paul was pointing out the scope (as in 1:20) of that gospel—it is available to all people, regardless of class, group, age, race, gender, etc. Spiritual reality was not, as the false teachers claimed, available only to a select group of intellectually elite people. The hope of the gospel is available to the whole world.

I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. Instead of repeating the word “apostle” (see 1:1), Paul here called himself a *servant*. Paul may have wanted to use the same title that he had used for Epaphras in 1:7, where he

called Epaphras a “dear fellow servant.” To align himself in this way with Epaphras, Paul was defending and endorsing Epaphras’s teaching and ministry in Colosse. He was also defending and endorsing Tychicus, the deliverer of this letter (4:7).

This gospel was what Paul had outlined thus far in this letter. This was the gospel to which Paul had become a servant; this was the only true gospel. This was what the Colossians had heard and believed. There ought to be no excuse for wandering away into false teaching.

GOD’S SOLUTION

The way to be free from sin is to trust Jesus Christ to take it away. We must remain established and steadfast in the truth of the gospel, putting our confidence in Jesus alone to forgive our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way he desires. When a judge in a court of law declares the defendant not guilty, the person has been acquitted of all the accusations or charges. Legally, it is as if he or she had never been accused. When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. From his perspective, it is as though we had never sinned. God’s solution is available to you. No matter what you have done or what you have been like, God’s forgiveness is for you.

Life Application Bible Commentary Barton, B. B., & Comfort, P. W. (1995). [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#) (pp. 154–172). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.