

Colossians 1

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Quote

“It is not until a man finds his faith opposed and attacked that he really begins to think out the implications of that faith. It is not until the Church is confronted with some dangerous heresy that she begins to realize the riches and the wonder of orthodoxy.”

William Barclay

Letter Profile

- Possibly the first of Paul’s prison epistles.
- The church at Colosse was not founded or visited by Paul but probably founded by Epaphras.
- Philemon and Onesimus were from Colosse.
- The letter was written to encourage a group of believers who were growing spiritually.
- The letter was written to warn a group of believers who were being confronted with false teaching which undermined the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.
- Very similar in style and vocabulary to Ephesians.

City Profile—Colosse

- Located one hundred miles east of Ephesus.
- Together with Hierapolis and Laodicea, Colosse was part of a tri-city area in the Lychus valley in what is now south central Turkey.
- Once an important city, by the time of Paul, Colosse had become a small market town.
- The population was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles (11,000 Jews by a.d. 62).
- The cities of the Lychus valley were prosperous despite frequent earthquakes.
- Manufacturing and exporting wool products were the principal industries.

Author Profile—Paul

- Jewish-born in Tarsus, near the Lebanese border in modern Turkey.
- Roman citizen.
- Prominent, highly educated Jewish religious leader (Pharisee).
- Dramatically converted to Christianity, a.d. 35.
- Primary apostle to the Gentiles, tireless missionary.
- Imprisoned in Rome, a.d. 67, during Nero's reign.
- Died in prison, a.d. 68.

In a Nutshell

In chapter 1, Paul tells the Colossian believers: Hello, Colossians. Timothy and I are pleased to hear from Epaphras that the gospel which is growing all over the world is bearing fruit in your lives as well. Because of this, we constantly pray that you stay focused on God's will so that your lives will be pleasing to him. Remember that Jesus, our Creator and Reconciler, deserves absolute supremacy in absolutely everything. I endure suffering and hard work on behalf of Jesus and his church to bring believers to maturity.

The Truth about the Gospel and Christ

I. Introduction

The Siren Song of Heresy

*T*he seductive allure of the counterfeit has confounded men throughout the ages. Homer, in his mythological tale *The Odyssey* personified the perils of deception in the story of the Sirens—mythological half-woman, half-bird creatures who lived on an island in the Mediterranean Sea. Their beautiful, melodious songs were so enchanting that passing sailors strayed from their charted course and crashed their ships on the rocky shoreline. The short-lived appeal of the Sirens' song quickly gave way to the horrible reality of a painful death as the creatures came down from the rocks and devoured the flesh of the shipwrecked sailors.

Two men overcame the powerful enticement of the Sirens but in very different ways.

Ulysses, warned of the fatal effect of the Sirens' song, remained fascinated with the prospect of hearing the beautiful sounds with his own ears. Understanding the human frailties of his crew and himself, Ulysses plugged the sailors' ears with beeswax and then had himself lashed to the ship's mast. As the ship sailed

past the Sirens' rocky home, the sailors were unaffected by the sweet-sounding songs while Ulysses was physically restrained from acting on the desires that stirred within him.

Orpheus, a musician of legendary renown, took a different approach to escape the Sirens' snare. When the Argonauts sailed into the treacherous waters surrounding the deadly isle, Orpheus began to play and sing. The exquisite beauty of Orpheus's music was so genuine and compelling that the Sirens no longer held any appeal for the crew.

False teaching is much like the Sirens. It is purposely made to sound sweet. It's enticing. It's alluring. It's deceptive. And it's terribly dangerous. Whose lead should we follow as we navigate our way through the straights of deception—Ulysses or Orpheus?

From a prison cell in the year a.d. 60, a man who wore both the mantle of an apostle and the shackles of a prisoner wrote a letter to a group of believers he had never met. Paul wrote the Colossians the truth so they would not be the victims of false teaching.

While Paul was in prison, Epaphras, one of his most faithful coworkers, visited him and brought him a report on the congregation at Colosse. In many ways the report was good, and for this Paul was thankful (1:3–8). As we read the letter carefully, we detect a sharp note of alarm and concern as well. This letter is written as a piercing rebuttal to the alluring enticements of theological and practical heresy. The heresy running rampant in Colosse attacked and undermined the identity and sufficiency of Jesus the Christ. Paul set the record straight.

How do we overcome the siren song of heresy? Do we plug our ears like the crew of Ulysses? Orpheus shows us a better way. We should be so captivated by the sweet sounds of the truth that the siren song of heresy is easily ignored. That's what Paul does in Colossians 1.

II. Commentary

The Truth about the Gospel and Christ

Main Idea: *Knowing the truth about the power of the gospel and the person of Christ is the believer's best protection against deception.*

A. Greeting (vv. 1–2)

Supporting Idea: *God's grace and peace in a person's life come from knowing the power of the gospel.*

1:1. Paul, the author of the letter to the Colossians, identifies himself as an apostle, one who is sent as a commissioned and empowered representative. Paul is not an apostle because of personal ambition: his title came to him by the will of God. Paul mentions Timothy, his loyal companion.

1:2. Paul's letter is written to a group of believers in Colosse. Paul gives them a threefold identification. First, he calls them holy. This means the Colossian believers, in fact all believers, are "set apart" by and for God. Next, Paul refers to the Colossian believers as faithful. As he does later in the letter, Paul commends the Colossians for their steadfast commitment to the gospel. Finally, Paul says the Colossians are brothers. They are one spiritual family despite differences in background, race, or any other purely human considerations.

Paul's greeting of grace and peace was the standard way of saying "hello" to other believers in the first century. Paul's desire is that the Colossians come to appreciate and appropriate these two blessings which are good gifts from God.

B. The Truth about the Gospel (vv. 3–8)

Supporting Idea: *The gospel message bears fruit in believers and grows all over the world.*

1:3. As Paul begins his letter to the believers at Colosse, he does not immediately take on the false teachers and their teachings. First, he tells the truth about the gospel and its positive effects in the lives of the Colossians.

The gospel should do for us what it did for the Colossians. The gospel of Jesus Christ, like a seed, is a dynamic force that shatters the hard, stony soil of sin and takes root as new life. By complimenting the Colossians on how the gospel had taken root and grown in them, as it has in all the world (v. 6), Paul encouraged them to remain faithful to the message of truth they heard and not be seduced into error by the alluring lies of the false teachers (see “Deeper Discoveries”).

Paul assured the Colossians that when he prayed for them his prayers took the form of thanksgiving. Paul will tell them why in verses 4–8.

1:4. Just like a harvest of ripe apples or a rich cluster of grapes is evidence of life in the seeds from which they sprang, so the seed of the gospel bears fruit—a cluster of virtues—that proves there is spiritual life.

Paul lists these virtues in verses 4–5. He points out three fundamental traits of Christian character that ought to be evident in the life of those in whom the gospel seed has taken root: **faith, love, and hope**. These virtues should be increasingly evident in our lives if the seed is doing what it is designed to do. Faith begins the process.

Paul is initially thankful for the saving **faith** of the Colossian believers. Contrary to the belief of some, faith is not “believing what you know ain’t so.” Faith is not a blind jump into the dark. In biblical vocabulary, *to believe*, is a strong word. Faith is being persuaded or convinced that something is true and trusting it with your life. This faith is **in Jesus Christ**.

Faith is only the beginning. Faith in Jesus Christ should produce inclusive **love** for others in the faith. The false teachers at Colosse were telling the Colossians that the fruit or evidence of spirituality was keeping rules, being initiated into secret knowledge, or having ecstatic experiences. Paul counters this by saying that the real fruit of faith is love.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” The love that faith in Christ produces possesses a unique quality. It’s inclusive, and it’s nonselective. We don’t pick and choose whom we love: Paul specifically says that it is love **for all the saints**. It’s easy to love the lovely or those who love you. Genuine Christianity is evident when we love the undeserving the same way God has loved us. Love is not a feeling; it is an attitude and an action. Love is sincerely wishing for another person’s best interest and taking whatever action is necessary to see that it is accomplished.

1:5. The next fruit Paul mentions is **hope**. What is hope? Again, contrary to the belief of some, hope is not “wishing for something you know won’t happen.” Biblical *hope*, like biblical faith, is a strong word. Hope is looking forward with eager anticipation and strong confidence to the sure promises of God. Paul also says that our hope is secure because it is **stored up for [us] in heaven**. Our hope is safe and secure, locked away in heaven far above anything that may threaten its integrity. This confident expectation is what motivates us to be able to love inclusively and nonselectively. Paul tells us that faith and love **spring from the hope**.

Paul then reminds us of the source of this rich bounty of fruit in the lives of believers. The source is **the word of truth, the gospel**. The message of the gospel is **truth**. Paul emphasizes the truth aspect of the gospel by mentioning it twice in this passage (vv. 5–6).

This truth is good news. The term **gospel** means “good news” or “good message.” The good news is that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of sin through his death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3–4). This message of truth and good news bears fruit in the lives of believers and should not be abandoned for the alluring lies of false teaching.

1:6. The gospel bears fruit not only in the lives of individual believers but **all over the world**. Paul wanted the Colossians to understand that the gospel is not just another mystery religion isolated in the

Lychus Valley and Asia Minor. These Colossians were part of a grand movement of God because the message they had believed and embraced was the seed of truth that was springing up with rich fruit all over the world. It's just as true today as it was in a.d. 60. As Eugene Peterson translates this verse, "[The message] doesn't diminish or weaken over time. It's the same all over the world" (*The Message*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993).

The gospel message is not just true and good; it's also a message of **grace**. *Grace* means "unmerited favor or undeserved kindness." Mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. He gives us heaven when we deserve hell; he grants us forgiveness when we deserve to be forgotten; he offers us life when we deserve death. It's all grace. None of the good things we receive from God are earned. Salvation didn't come to the Colossians because of their attachment to a complicated series of intermediate spirit emanations, or their adherence to a set of demanding rituals, or their adventures into the realm of ascetic experience. Those were the experiences the false teachers said were necessary to be truly saved and spiritual. Paul says, "No, it's just grace." Jesus died for us, and he offers us life. That truth, when adequately understood, takes root in our heart and bears fruit.

1:7–8. The gospel seed, which bears fruit in individual believers and grows all over the world, must be planted. God's plan is that those who have received the seed are to plant the seed. That was the case for the Colossians. The gospel came to them when they **learned it from Epaphras**. The most significant day in the history of Colosse was not the day Xerxes rested in the city on his march against Greece, nor was it the day Cyrus marched his Greek army through the city. No, the most significant day in the history of Colosse was the day Epaphras came to town and planted the seed of the gospel. No banners unfurled in the wind, nor did trumpets blare in the breeze; but lives were changed and destinies were eternally altered when the gospel was planted.

Epaphras came to Paul in prison with a good report on the spiritual progress of the Colossian believers. Part of that report was their **love in the Spirit**, which refers to the love that is produced by the enabling of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

C. The Truth about Pleasing God (vv. 9–14)

Supporting Idea: *God is pleased when believers grow in knowledge and character and when they express gratitude for their salvation.*

1:9. Paul's letter to the Colossians began with a prayer of thanksgiving. That prayer, based on the good report of Epaphras, reminded the Colossian believers of the power of the gospel so they would not be seduced by the siren song of heresy. The theme of prayer continues in verses 9–14, but the focus shifts from thanksgiving to intercession. Paul prays that the believers will live lives that are pleasing to God. Does it take deep knowledge, strict living, or a rapturous experience to please God? That's what the false teachers were telling the Colossians. We, like the Colossians, need to know the truth about what pleases God so we won't be enchanted by error.

Paul tells us why he prays and what he prays for. When Paul says **for this reason**, he is looking back to the good report he received from Epaphras. Paul prays for believers who are doing well. He asks that they continue in the process of growth. The focus of much prayer is on those who are struggling and not doing well. While those are good prayers, Paul reminds us of the need to pray for those who are doing well since they are prime targets for enemy attacks. Many of our prayers ask for immediate relief from circumstantial or personal difficulties. While some of these prayers are good, Paul wants us to include prayers for spiritual growth and long-term development.

Paul's prayer is that God **fill** believers **with the knowledge of his will**. Paul wants the Colossians to know God's will and then let that knowledge control them. God's will is not a spiritual Easter egg he hides from us. No, God wants us to know **his will** and so clearly reveals that will in his Word. A mere knowledge

of God's Word is not what will please him. We need to be controlled by that knowledge. The word **fill** means to control. To be filled with something (an emotion like fear or jealousy) means to be under its controlling influence that causes us to do things we might not do otherwise. Being controlled by God's will should cause us to do things we might not otherwise do—things like enduring rather than giving up, like being patient with others rather than getting angry with them.

The knowledge and control of God's will comes **through all spiritual wisdom and understanding**. This is more than simple intelligence. **Wisdom** refers to the comprehension of truth, while **understanding** refers to the application of truth. Being controlled by God's will means believers comprehend the principles of Scripture and then put them into practice.

1:10. Being controlled by God's will is not an end in itself; it is only a means to an end. The goal is to **live a life worthy of the Lord and ... please him in every way**. The request of verse 9 was made so that the Colossians would live lives which please God. The word **worthy** refers to conduct that is expected and appropriate for God's children.

If pleasing God is the goal, how do we achieve it? Paul spells that out very clearly in verses 10–12. By bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, being strengthened for adversity, and giving thanks for salvation, we please God.

First, believers please God when they are **bearing fruit in every good work**. Good works are not a means to achieve salvation, but a natural result of it. Good works in the life of the believer please God because good works are God's plan for the believer (Eph. 2:8–10).

Second, God is pleased when believers are **growing in the knowledge of God**. The more we know of God's character, his ways, and his expectations, the more we are able to bring our lives into conformity with what pleases him.

1:11. Third, our lives please God when they are characterized by **endurance and patience**. Life is often difficult and challenging. At times, circumstances are less than friendly. At those times we need **endurance**—the ability to pass through any experience and trust God to see us through. At times, people are less than friendly. At those times we need **patience**—the capacity to be long-suffering with people and not retaliate when we are wronged or irritated.

We all know from experience, however, that staying steadfast through the circumstances and being patient with people is tough stuff. It's often beyond our ability. Right! The good news is that we aren't left alone with only our own resources to meet the challenge. Paul reminds us that God's power is available. Believers can please God with endurance and patience as they are **strengthened with all power according to his glorious might**. It is proper for a Christian to ask God to strengthen him to do God's will. God will do this. Sometimes it is immediate, and other times it is gradual, similar to the way a person is strengthened over time physically. As we yield ourselves to God in trust and obedience, we will be strengthened to do his will.

1:12. Finally, believers please God when they are **joyfully giving thanks to the Father** for the blessings of salvation. Just as Paul was clear to spell out specific means to please God, he is equally clear about the blessings of salvation for which we are to give thanks. This time we are given a list of three: God qualified us, rescued us (v. 13), and brought us into a new kingdom (v. 13).

God, the Father, has **qualified** believers for sharing in the blessings of salvation. We don't qualify ourselves by our moral achievements or personal worthiness. In grace, God qualifies us when we trust Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. That this salvation is ours by grace is seen in our participation in the **inheritance**. We don't earn an inheritance. We receive it.

1:13. Being qualified is only one reason to be thankful. He has **rescued us from the dominion of darkness**. God delivered us from the ruling power of darkness, and the good news doesn't end there. God has also taken a positive step: he has **brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves**. God has transferred us; he has moved us from one place to another. He has taken us from Satan's dark realm and placed us into the bright light of Jesus' kingdom.

1:14. God's work of salvation, for which believers are joyfully to give thanks, is pictured further with **redemption** and **forgiveness**. To redeem someone means "to buy them back and set them free." Jesus' death was the price paid to buy us back and set us free from sin. Because of Christ's death on our behalf, we are set free from both the penalty and the power of sin.

Forgiveness parallels redemption. *Forgive* literally means "to send away, to cancel." Through the death of Jesus, God has canceled the debt of our sin. It was a debt we could never repay; but since Jesus paid the debt for us, God has forgiven the debt.

Paul wants us to know the truth about pleasing God so that we won't be victims of the well-disguised lies of those who might lead us astray.

D. The Truth about Jesus (vv. 15–23)

Supporting Idea: *Jesus is the visible manifestation of God and our eternal Creator and Reconciler, who has supremacy in the universe and the church.*

1:15. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was countering a clever company of false teachers who sought to replace the Colossians' enthusiastic devotion to Christ with only a mild approval of him. They didn't encourage anyone to forget Jesus altogether; they just said he wasn't the only show in town. According to these false teachers, Jesus got equal billing with a vast number of emanating spirits flowing out of God. They said Jesus could be prominent, but he certainly wasn't preeminent. In contrast, Paul—along with telling believers the truth about the gospel and pleasing God—tells us the truth about Jesus.

Jesus is the **image** of God. The word for *image* was used in Paul's time for likenesses placed on coins, portraits, and for statues. It carries the idea of correspondence to the original. It is the nearest equivalent in ancient Greek to our modern photograph. Jesus is the perfect representation of God. This verse and others (John 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17) tell us that God is **invisible**. J. B. Phillips translates verse 15, "Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God." Hebrews 1:3 tells us that the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

Not only is Jesus the perfect picture of God, but he also holds the highest rank in the universe. Jesus is **the firstborn over all creation**. **Firstborn** is a term of rank more than it is a word of time (see Ps. 89:27). The right of the firstborn was the right of privilege and priority. It was the honored position in the family. In the case of the patriarchs, we know that the honored position didn't always go to the first son born in time. Jesus is the firstborn—the highest rank—in all of creation.

1:16. Jesus holds the highest rank in creation because he is the Creator of **all** things. There is nothing in the created order that Jesus did not create (see also John 1:3). Because he is the Creator, Jesus has absolute supremacy over all creation, including any spirit beings who were being worshiped by the local heretics. Since only God can be the Creator, this means that Jesus, the perfect image of God, is even more than an image. He is divine. He is God.

1:17. Jesus is eternally existent (an attribute that can only be true of God) because he is **before all things**. Jesus is also the powerful sustainer of the universe. Because of him all things **hold together**. His power guarantees that the universe is under control and not chaotic.

1:18. Jesus is sovereign over creation. He is also sovereign over the **church**, the new creation. Jesus is sovereign over the church because he is the **head**. While scholars debate whether **head** should be understood as "origin" or "authority," both are certainly true of Jesus in relationship to the church. Jesus began his church, and HE is its source of life and vitality. Jesus is also sovereign over his church. The church takes its direction from Jesus and is under his authority. While both concepts are true, the context of supremacy certainly lends itself to the idea of authority.

The church is the **body** of believers who owe their allegiance to Jesus. The position of supremacy in everything (and particularly the church) belongs to Jesus because of his resurrection and work of reconciliation. He is the **firstborn from among the dead**. Again, **firstborn** here has nothing to do with time. Others preceded Jesus in rising from the dead. Lazarus is one example (John 11:38–44). Jesus is first in rank. Others were raised only to die again. Jesus was the first person to rise, never to die again. He is the first person to conquer death, and all other resurrections are based on his.

The glorious truth for us is this: because of his resurrection, we are assured of our own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20–23).

1:19–20. Jesus has supremacy over all things because all of God’s **fullness** resides in Jesus: He is the full embodiment of God’s attributes and saving grace. Through Jesus, God is able to **reconcile to himself all things**. Reconciliation is the removal of hostility and the restoring of friendly relations to parties who have been at war. Paul also calls reconciliation **making peace through his blood, shed on the cross**. What God has done is to move toward us to restore harmony, patch things up, cease hostilities, bury the hatchet, smoke the peace pipe, and heal the breach.

1:21–22. This concept of reconciliation is not just a universal theory; it is a personal truth. Jesus’ death allows God’s enemy to become God’s friend. Before the miracle of reconciliation, the Colossians, and all unbelievers, were at odds with God. We were **alienated**, that is we were separated, estranged. We were alone, an outsider, exiled, shut out, cut off, locked out. Ephesians 2:11–12 gives us another sad perspective on our estranged position before reconciliation.

Paul then tells us we were once God’s **enemies** in two ways. First, we were **enemies in [our] minds**. Our thoughts and our attitudes were hostile to God. Before we trusted Christ, our entire way of thinking was contrary to God’s. For us, and for those who have yet to be reconciled, the problem was and is simple. We refused to accept God’s evaluation of us as being sinners. We would also not accept God’s remedy for the situation—dependence on Christ.

Second, we were enemies in [our deeds], **because of [our] evil behavior**. It’s not just that we thought wrong; we also acted wrong. Despite our active opposition to God, he **reconciled** us through the **death** of Jesus. Jesus died for a race of rebels to offer them a chance to become his allies.

The outcome of this reconciliation is present peace and a future presentation of ourselves before God. The slate of sin has been wiped clean, and we look forward to the day we will stand before God **holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation**.

1:23. The **if** of verse 23 should not be misunderstood. This verse is not saying that we will be presented holy and blameless **if** we remain faithful, as if our eternal salvation depends on our performance. The Greek construction of the **if** is not an expression of doubt but an expression of confidence and is better translated as since. Paul is not in doubt about whether the Colossians will remain faithful (see Col. 2:5). He is confident that because they have understood what it means to be reconciled they will remain faithful to the gospel that reconciled them. He writes this as an expression of confidence and as a warning to avoid the religious fads of the false teachers of Colosse.

E. The Truth about Ministry (vv. 24–29)

Supporting Idea: *Ministry is the hard work of bringing all believers to maturity in Christ.*

1:24–25. In his effort to keep believers from falling prey to the seductive sounds of false teaching, Paul tells us the truth about authentic ministry. It involves suffering. Its aim is maturity. It’s hard work.

It is not surprising to find Paul talking about suffering for the sake of the gospel since he knew suffering “up close and personal.” He wrote the letter to the Colossians from prison. He wasn’t there because prison was a great place for Paul to work through writer’s block. He wasn’t there because he found it such a pleasant place. Paul had encountered suffering. Yet Paul was able to **rejoice** in what he suffered. Why?

Because he suffered on behalf of others and because his suffering allowed him to identify with Jesus Christ. When Paul says he is filling up **what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions**, he isn't saying that Jesus' suffering on the cross was insufficient. Paul was enduring suffering on behalf of Christ. The world hated Jesus Christ; and now that he is not around to persecute, they persecute his followers (see John 15:18–21). Paul's attitude is Jesus took the blows meant for me; I'll take the blows meant for him. Suffering brings about an identification with the Savior that nothing else can (see Phil. 3:10).

Paul endured his sufferings **for the sake of the body**. Paul was willing to suffer on behalf of the church because he saw himself as the church's **servant**. God gave him a **commission** to proclaim the gospel, and suffering was included with the commission.

1:26–27. Paul calls the message he was responsible to announce a **mystery**. The word **mystery** should not evoke images of Agatha Christie or Sherlock Holmes. The term really means secret. It is something that was **kept hidden for ages and generations** but is **now disclosed to the saints**. What's the secret? That God has chosen to include the **Gentiles** in the blessings of salvation (see Eph. 3:1–6). What's the secret? Jesus Christ is the secret. He opens the door to everyone. The unprecedented secret is that all are included. The unprecedented truth is that Jesus Christ lives in all who trust him. Not only does he live in us; he is our **hope of glory**.

1:28–29. Authentic ministry isn't just about suffering. It's also hard work. Paul makes this clear by calling his work **labor** (to work to the point of exhaustion) and **struggling** (literally, agonizing). The good news is that this hard work is motivated and enabled by God's **energy, which so powerfully works in [us]**.

Paul tells us his objective or aim in enduring the suffering and hard work—to **present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ**. The goal of spiritual experience is not to chase the fads or jump on every new religious bandwagon. The goal is spiritual maturity. By reminding believers of this simple truth, Paul hopes to help us avoid the enticing sounds that might lead us away from maturity and into deception.

Main Idea Review: *Knowing the truth about the power of the gospel and the person of Christ is the believer's best protection against deception.*

III. Conclusion

Countering the Counterfeit with Truth

Counterfeits are dangerous because they can look so much like the genuine article. The casual observer sees no obvious difference between real and imitation. For example, a counterfeiter prints bills that look enough like real money that the victim accepts them at face value when, in fact, they are worthless. False teaching is pretty much the same way.

How can we learn to recognize deception when it is intentionally cloaked in the appearance of truth? Here is how that problem is handled in the banking industry. Bank tellers attend a training class to learn how to identify counterfeit money. During the entire course of training they never study a counterfeit bill. Instead, they spend all their time studying the genuine article. They learn to recognize the texture of the paper, the colors of the ink, the clarity of the images, and the design of the bill. When they finish their training, the tellers have such an intimate knowledge of authentic currency that counterfeits are obvious by comparison.

We can learn to recognize false teaching in much the same way. If we devote ourselves to studying the genuine article, the truth of Scripture, then we don't need to know the particulars of every heresy we encounter. An intimate knowledge of the Word of God is the only defense we need against all the different deceptions in our world.

The truth about the gospel and Christ is that the gospel changes lives all over the world and Christ has supremacy over all of creation.

Principles

- The gospel is a dynamic force which grows in individuals all over the world.
- Believers who are doing well need our prayers.
- Pleasing God is possible only when his will is the controlling influence in our lives.
- Jesus has the right of absolute supremacy since he created us and reconciled us.
- Believers should expect suffering.
- Increasing spiritual maturity ought to be the aim of every believer.

Applications

Thank God for the blessings of his salvation:

- Sunday—Grace
- Monday—Rescue
- Tuesday—Inheritance
- Wednesday—Redemption
- Thursday—Forgiveness
- Friday—Reconciliation
- Saturday—Hope

Honestly ask yourself, “Does Jesus have absolute supremacy in my life?”

Determine to be so saturated with God’s truth that you won’t be tantalized by religious error.

IV. Life Application

Mild Approval of Jesus?

In *The Joyful Christian*, C. S. Lewis writes, “We may note in passing that [Jesus] was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects: Hatred-Terror-Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval” (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977, 72, 74).

Mild approval. Mild approval is what you give to a book you just read, a film you just watched, or a restaurant you visited recently. Mild approval is good, to be sure, but mild approval is not a “rave review.” It’s nothing to get really excited about. It’s casual. It’s restrained.

It’s impossible to give Jesus Christ mild approval when you understand him. Jesus Christ can be ignored or adored, but you can’t give him mild approval. Jesus is our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Judge. You can’t be casual about that.

Paul tells us in Colossians 1 that Jesus has the right of absolute supremacy because of who he is and what he has done. Absolute supremacy. That means first place in everything. That means Jesus deserves preeminence and not mere prominence in our lives. As believers we must always be on guard against allowing anything to occupy the place in our lives which only Jesus deserves. We must also be on guard against the more subtle danger of allowing Jesus a place of equal standing along with the other things that clutter our lives.

Often it’s the good things that nudge Jesus aside. Ministry and religious activity can take the place of utmost importance. Our children can occupy the top spot. Our dates or our mates can be idolized. Acquisition of stuff or achievement and status can become the things for which we live. None of these are bad in themselves, but if Jesus stands in line behind or beside them, we’re just giving Jesus mild approval.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the eternal Creator and powerful Sustainer of the universe. Jesus is our Redeemer whose death rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of light. We may ignore him. We should adore him. But mild approval? Never!

V. Prayer

Gracious Father, we are grateful for the continuing work of the gospel in our lives. May the truth of that good news provoke in us faith, hope, and love, protect us from deception, and provide for us a focus on Christ as supreme and sufficient for all our needs. Amen.

VI. Deeper Discoveries

A. The Colossian Heresy

The letter to the Colossians was written to warn believers against the seductive and dangerous presence of doctrinal heresy. On that scholars agree. However, they do not agree on the precise nature of the heresy. Some argue for a teaching of a specific, identifiable group. (J. B. Lightfoot suggests it is a radical form of Essene thought; F. F. Bruce implies it was possibly Merkabah Mysticism; while many believe it to be an early form of Gnosticism.) Others argue that the Colossian heresy is religious syncretism, a kind of blending together of several elements, a sort of hodgepodge of heresy. Still others understand the heresy to be the reflection of the cultural milieu of the area without any specific focus. In this view the general culture would have threatened to distract the Colossian believers from the centrality of Christ in their faith (see P. T. O'Brien, Word Biblical Commentary).

Whether the error Paul warned believers against was a specific system, a hodgepodge, or simply the reflection of a non-Christian culture, we can look at the letter and ascertain the elements of error. In some of his other books like Galatians and 1 Corinthians, Paul sets forth the teachings of the heresy. In Colossians, however, he simply offers a rebuttal to the heresy. In so doing he provides enough information for us to deduce the basic teachings of the heresy. At its core the heresy undermined the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Heretics told believers they needed something more than their relationship with Jesus to bring them to genuine spiritual experience. What were the elements of the error?

1. Background: Philosophical Dualism. One of the central notions of Gnosticism was that all of reality could be divided into the categories of spirit and matter. Spirit was good, and matter was evil. This notion led to the belief that God could not have created the world since it was matter and matter was evil. Therefore, a series of intermediary spirit beings emanating out of God was postulated, each one being less God than the one preceding. This notion of dualism also spawned the idea of rigid self-denial. If matter was evil, then matter was to be avoided. Heretical teachers forbid people to marry and ordered them to abstain from certain foods (see 1 Tim. 4:3a).

The first flaw with this idea is that matter is not evil. God created all food to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. Everything God created is good; nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3b–4). Jesus created everything, including spirit beings: **For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him** (Col. 1:16). The error of denying the full deity of Jesus is confronted in Colossians 1:15: **He is the image of the invisible God.** And in Colossians 2:9: **For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.**

In addition to this philosophical basis for the heresy, the heresy asserted that Christ was not sufficient for salvation; to be complete, a person needed more rules, more knowledge, and more experience.

2. More rules: Legalistic ritualism. Paul claims rigid self-denial looks good but has no true spiritual power: **Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged**

to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Col. 2:20–23). A second ritualistic element of the heresy probably had Jewish origins, similar to the problem Paul faced with Judaizers in Galatians. Judaizers taught that salvation or spirituality were the result of strict adherence to a code of rituals or rules. Paul replied: **Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ** (Col. 2:16–17).

3. More knowledge: Secret hierarchicalism. Gnosticism also thought true spiritual experience was obtained by a “higher” or “secret” knowledge. Not everyone had this special knowledge. Only the initiated—those who had acquired this knowledge by legalism or experiences (see below)—were complete. This teaching established a hierarchy of those who were “in” and those who were “out.” Paul met this error head on: **in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments** (Col. 2:3–4); **see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ** (Col. 2:8).

In Christ (the full manifestation of God) we find all the wisdom and knowledge we ever need. We possess such knowledge as we get to know him and allow his Word to take up comfortable residence in our lives. We don’t need more knowledge. We just need to know Christ more. We don’t need knowledge of more. We need more knowledge of Christ. The path of growth, centered on knowing Christ, is available to all believers (2:19).

4. More experiences: Ascetic mysticism. The teachings Paul attacked included a focus on experience that led them to **false humility and the worship of angels** (2:18). These experiences were based in visions of **what he has seen** as well as **idle notions** (2:18). Such visions took the focus off of Christ and led to a focus on experiences. This threatened to move the Colossian believers to a place where they would lose **connection with the head** (2:19) who is Christ. The false teaching claimed that fullness could not be found in Christ alone. Paul is quite clear in stating that Jesus is the fullness of God and we have fullness in him (2:9). Jesus is God and nothing less, so cancel the quest for something more.

B. Apostle (v. 1)

Paul begins this correspondence, as he does many of his letters, by describing himself as **an apostle of Christ Jesus**. Paul had no personal contact with this particular church (2:1). Except for here and Rome, he wrote as founder of the other churches. One of his associates, Epaphras, was the church planter sent to Colosse (1:7). Paul’s connection to and authority over the church was based solely on his role as an apostle.

What does it mean to be an apostle? A popular explanation appeals to the root of the word and claims that an apostle is a “sent forth” one. An apostle is much more involved than one simply sent forth. The word carries the idea of one sent forth with a message and with the authority of the sender. Richards summarizes the meaning of apostle: “An apostle is an envoy, sent on a mission to speak for the one sending him and having the sender’s authority” (Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985, 60). These two ideas of the apostle’s having authority and being the one who carries a message are foundational for Paul’s role in the church at Colosse where he had never been.

When a replacement was selected for Judas Iscariot, some general guidelines were set down for those who qualified as an apostle (Acts 1). The eleven remaining apostles determined that Judas’s replacement

must have been with them from the time of Jesus' baptism by John until the ascension. The reason for that requirement was that the apostle must be a witness of the resurrection (Acts 1:22). When Paul was defending his apostleship in the book of 1 Corinthians, he focused on the requirement of being a witness to the resurrection (1 Cor. 9:1) as well as his ministry among them (1 Cor. 9:2) as the evidence that he was indeed an apostle.

In Colossians, Paul begins from the position of the authority of an apostle but also from the heart of a pastor. He is thankful for them (1:3), he prays for them (1:9), he is concerned for them (2:1), and finally he writes the letter out of intense concern for their spiritual health and growth (especially 2:19). Paul, the authoritative apostle and compassionate pastor, wrote to a church he had not started but nevertheless one in which he played an important role.

C. Faith, hope, love (vv. 4–5)

The triad of faith, hope, and love are foundational in Pauline theology: "And now these three remain, faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). The three appear together throughout Paul's letters (Rom. 5:2–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Gal. 5:5–6) as well as in Hebrews and 1 Peter (Heb. 6:10–12; 10:22–24; 1 Pet. 1:3–8, 21–22).

In Paul's thanksgiving for the Thessalonians, we see that faith leads to work or action. Love produces labor or toil in the life of the believer. Finally, hope produces endurance (1 Thess. 1:3). These three work together to make us active, hard-working believers able to endure the struggles of living in a fallen world because the higher agenda of God and his kingdom are central.

Faith has to do with the memory of the past. Faith involves God's redemptive acts both in our own lives and in the lives of his people throughout history. Gabriel Marcel defined *hope* as the "memory of the future."

In that sense, hope is that vision of the future that sees the hand of God in continued guidance and protection. Only when the memory of God in the past and the memory of God in the future are operative in the life of the believer can love be an active reality in the present.

Dan Allender provides a look at the other side of faith, hope, and love (Allender, *The Wounded Heart*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990). He shows that far too often the believer is not controlled by a memory of God's redemptive acts in the past but by memories of betrayal and abandonment. Rather than a location of hope and expectation, the future can be a place where we experience the greatest feelings of ambivalence. When betrayal colors our past and ambivalence is the lens through which we see the future, the present is experienced as a place of powerlessness in which we feel unable to love. Without the memory of God in the past, it would be foolish to have faith. Without the memory of God in the future, hope is impossible. Without faith and hope, love will never be a reality.

While the actual events of our past cannot be changed, the way in which we frame those events can be shaped to lead us to faith. This faith, and love, which is the crowning jewel of this triad, have their genesis in hope (Col. 1:5). The Colossians were models of this great triad of Christian virtue and examples for us to follow.

D. Gospel (v. 6)

What is the gospel? *Gospel* (*euangelion*) means "good news." We encounter many kinds of good news. Occasionally, we read a story in a newspaper or view a report on television that truly is good news. As positive as these might be, they fade in comparison to the good news of the gospel found in the pages of the Bible. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of sin through his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul tells us exactly what the gospel is:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached

to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (1 Cor. 15:1–8).

That is good news. Christ died for our sins. The gospel isn't the bad news of condemnation; it's the good news of salvation.

E. Spiritual wisdom and understanding (v. 9)

The knowledge of the will of God comes through spiritual wisdom and understanding. Wisdom that comes from the world cannot apprehend the nature of God's design for us. Human intellect does not grasp the outworking of that design. Only spiritual wisdom and understanding can understand and grasp God's work. Wisdom (*sophia*) involves knowing the true nature of reality and knowing how truth can be applied to life. Such wisdom must be combined with understanding (*suneisis*), the ability to see relationships between truths and come to correct conclusions about life. Paul's wording here flies in the face of the false teaching at Colosse. The heretics looked for a secret knowledge available to only a few initiated members (see above "the Colossian heresy") who had knowledge (*gnosis*). Paul showed that believers do not need a special knowledge; believers need a full knowledge (*epignosis*) of God's will. God makes this full knowledge available to them. The spiritual nature of the wisdom indicates that it is an inward ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer's spirit.

F. Strengthened, power, might (v. 11)

In verse 11, Paul brings together a number of words for power and strength to show that growth must come from a powerful source outside the believer. Only God's power and glorious might provide such a source.

Paul prayed that we will be **strengthened with all power**, using two forms of the word *power* (*dunamis*): literally, "powered by power." The connotation of the Greek word *dunamis* is "transforming power." The nature of this power is not explosive, as some would indicate by showing that our word *dynamite* developed from the Greek word. Reading a later development of a word into the New Testament is often misleading. The focus of this word in the New Testament is on the transformation that comes when this power is present. This power is often associated with the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:8).

Paul relates this power to the standard (*kata*) of God's glorious might. The might (*kratos*) required for growth is power able to overcome resistance (see Heb. 2:14 where the power of death is overcome). In the New Testament this word indicates that God's glorious might is needed for growth in light of the many factors opposing it. The power available to believers is transformative and mighty, able to overcome anything that would stand in its way. Only as a result of that kind of power can endurance, patience, and joy be an integral part of the believer's life.

G. Inheritance (v. 12)

See Ephesians 1:14, "Deeper Discoveries."

H. Rescued (v. 13)

Paul uses a stark word (*ruomai*) to describe God's deliverance of the believer from darkness. The force of this word indicates that the believer was in acute danger and has been delivered from an alien power in a highly dangerous situation. Paul uses the word three times in 2 Corinthians 1:10 to catch the drama

of the deliverance: “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.”

I. Domain of darkness, kingdom of the Son he loves (v. 13)

Believers were under the authority (*exousia*) of darkness before their conversion. The non-Christian lives life under the authority of darkness in contrast to the light available to believers (1:12). Darkness is the realm of opposition toward God (John 3:19, especially Eph. 6:11–12) and the place of sin (1 John 1:6; 2:11), the realm where Satan enforces his authority. The realm of darkness is a place of authority and rule without true relationship, while the realm of light is a community of relationship headed by the Son of God. The kingdom is Christ’s kingdom, of which believers are citizens (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). The Christian has been rescued from the dangerous rule of darkness and transferred into a community which is indeed a kingdom of light, headed by Christ.

Peter O’Brien summarizes the thought well:

Like a mighty king who was able to remove people from their ancestral homes and to transplant them (metesthsen; the same verb is used in Josephus [Ant. 9:235] of Tiglath-pileser’s removal of the Transjordanian tribes to his own kingdom: ...) into another realm, God has taken the Colossians from the tyranny of darkness (Chrysostom aptly noted that “power” equals “tyranny” here) where evil powers rule (Luke 22:53) and where Satan’s authority is exercised (Acts 26:18), transferring them to the kingdom in which his beloved Son held sway (WBC, 27–28).

J. Images of salvation (v. 14)

Throughout his letters, Paul uses a number of images related to salvation. Here he speaks of redemption. Each of these metaphors, like the many sides of a radiant diamond, add to the beauty and glory of the believer’s salvation.

1. From the court room (justification) Romans 3:21–31
The sinner stands before God accused and guilty. God declares the sinner righteous.
2. From the marketplace (redemption) 1 Corinthians 6:20 (see “Deeper Discoveries” on Eph. 1:7)
The sinner stands before God as a slave. God grants freedom by payment of a ransom.
3. From the bank (forgiveness) Ephesians 1:7
The sinner stands before God in debt, and the debt, having been paid by another, is canceled.
4. From the home (adoption) Ephesians 1:5 (see “Deeper Discoveries” on Eph. 1:5)
The sinner stands before God as a stranger; God makes the sinner a member of his family.
5. From the battlefield (reconciliation) 2 Corinthians 5:18
The sinner stands before God as an enemy and becomes a friend when God makes peace.

K. Image (v. 15)

Christ does not bear the image in the same way that man bears the image of God. Man is made in the image of God, and in that he is similar to God. Christ is not made in the image, but he actually is the image of God. The word for *image* (*eikon*) contains the idea of representation and manifestation. Christ represents God in the same way a portrait represents a person. The portrait is not intended to be seen as an inferior copy but an actual representation of the real person. The image is also a manifestation of the real person as well. While God is invisible, he is manifested in the incarnation of Christ.

For every one who is alive today, Abraham Lincoln is an invisible figure in one sense. Our eyes have never seen him. We have never met him. However, we all know what he looks like because we have seen images of him on portraits; a quick look in most pockets will reveal his image on a penny. His image on the penny is his representation and manifestation. It is actually Abraham Lincoln we see there. In the same

way, God, who is invisible, is represented and manifested in Christ. It is actually God we see. Christ being the image of God does not mean he is like God but that he is God.

This concept reminds us of a story of a little boy who looked up in the sky and asked his mother if God was up there. When she assured her inquisitive son that he was, he replied, "Wouldn't it be nice if he would put his head out and let us see him?" God has put his head out; we have seen him. He has done more than that. He stepped out of heaven, became a man, and lived among us. He could not only be seen, but he could also be touched. Jesus is God in a body. He is the perfect picture of God.

L. Firstborn (v. 15)

Over the years the term "firstborn over all creation" has been misunderstood, creating doctrinal heresies. In the first century, Arius, and in modern times, the Jehovah's Witnesses, understood the phrase to mean that Jesus was the first created being. They concluded that Jesus is not eternal and, therefore, he is not God. The context will not support this understanding. Verse 17 clearly states that he was before all things, and verse 16 tells us that he created all things. If he was before all things and created all things, then he cannot be part of that creation; thus, he is not a created being at all. He is eternal.

When Paul states that Christ is the firstborn over all creation, he is not making the assertion that Christ is a created being. Rather, *firstborn* (*prototokos*), in this context, indicates supremacy and priority in rank as it does in numerous other verses (Acts 26:23; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20; Rev. 1:5). Wilhelm Michaelis (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968, VI, 879) states that this word indicates Christ's unique supremacy over all creatures as the Mediator of their creation. The clear thrust of Paul's argument is that Christ should have supremacy (1:18), and this designation of Christ being the firstborn supports that argument.

M. Thrones, powers, rulers, authorities (v. 16)

Part of the Colossian heresy included the worship of angels (2:18). The hierarchical list of thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities is likely a listing of the rankings within the angelic host (compare Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; 1 Cor. 15:24). The differences among the lists indicates that Paul was not necessarily trying to be exhaustive in his list or even setting forth a rigid order within the angelic host. The other references to these angelic forces present them as hostile toward God. In making the assertion that Christ is the Creator of the angelic host, the point is clearly made that the angels are not to have a place of priority or even equality with Christ. Only Christ can have the place of supremacy.

N. Supremacy—preeminence (v. 18)

The theological goal in this entire section is to demonstrate that Christ is to have supremacy (*proteuon*) in all things. He is to take first place in all realms. This was precisely the problem at Colosse. Christ was in danger of taking an equal or even subservient place. No! Paul cries. He must be first. The great third-century preacher Chrysostom writes, "For everywhere he is first; above first; in the church first; for he is the head; in the resurrection first."

O. Peace (v. 20)

In the New Testament, peace is not merely the absence of hostility, but it also includes the presence of a relationship. Over the years the United States has been at war with various countries. Clearly, when war is present there is no peace. The United States, however, has had various relationships with other countries that, although far short of war, cannot be described as peaceful. During the early 1990s, the president of the United States withdrew "most favored nation" status from the People's Republic of China because of human rights violations. Making application of the biblical idea of peace, we can say that the

United States would not have been at peace with China during that period of time. While there was no war per se, there was still no peace because the relationship was being withheld.

Christ has made peace with us. This not only means he is no longer at war with us and we are not at war with him, but it also means we have relationship with him. We have “most favored people” status as a result of the peace which his blood purchased.

P. Reconciliation (v. 22)

The reconciliation Christ brought about is more than a theological term. Such an active term should have an impact on how we live. The Scripture makes three things clear about reconciliation:

1. Reconciliation is a reason to rejoice.

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Rom. 5:9–11).

2. Reconciliation is a blessing to be practiced.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Eph. 2:14–16).

3. Reconciliation is a message to share.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:17–21).

VII. Teaching Outline

A. Introduction

1. Lead story: The Siren Song of Heresy
2. Context: In the first chapter of Colossians, Paul reminds believers of two positive truths to stabilize them as they face false teaching. Paul tells the believers at Colosse that the gospel of Christ was a powerful force which was bearing fruit in their individual lives as well as all over the world. This gospel was not to be abandoned. Paul also tells believers that Jesus Christ has absolute supremacy over all of creation since he is the Creator and Redeemer. When believers understand these truths, they will not be caught in the tantalizing traps of false teaching.
3. Transition: As we look at this chapter, we see the need to maintain a steadfast commitment to knowing the truth in order to be able to detect and resist error. The gospel is the truth. The truth about Jesus is that because of who he is, and what he has done, he deserves first place everywhere and in everything.

B. Commentary

1. Greeting (vv. 1–2)
 - a. Author—Paul (v. 1)
 - b. Recipients—believers in Colosse (v. 2)
 - c. Greeting—grace and peace (v. 2)
2. The Truth about the Gospel (vv. 3–8)
 - a. The gospel is the truth (vv. 3–5)
 - b. The gospel bears fruit in believers (vv. 4–6)
 - c. The gospel grows all over the world (vv. 7–8)
3. The Truth about Pleasing God (vv. 9–14)
 - a. Pleasing God is being controlled by his will (v. 9)
 - b. Pleasing God is growing in character (vv. 10–11)
 - c. Pleasing God is being grateful for salvation (vv. 12–14)
4. The Truth about Jesus (vv. 15–23)
 - a. Jesus is the perfect picture of God (v. 15)
 - b. Jesus is the eternal Creator (vv. 16–17)
 - c. Jesus is the universal Reconciler (vv. 18–23)
5. The Truth about Ministry (vv. 24–29)
 - a. Ministry involves suffering (vv. 24–27)
 - b. Ministry aims at maturity (v. 28)
 - c. Ministry is hard work (v. 29)

C. Conclusion: Countering the Counterfeit with Truth

VIII. Issues for Discussion

1. What is the relationship between faith in Christ and love for the saints?
2. What kinds of prayers do you make for your church?
3. What have you learned about Jesus from Colossians 1? How would you teach this to a new Christian?
4. What does reconciliation mean? How are you reconciled to God?
5. What is lacking in Christ's affliction? How can you fill it up?
6. What mystery was kept hidden for ages? How was it disclosed?

Holman New Testament Commentary Anders, M. (1999). [*Galatians-Colossians*](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 295–298). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.