

Reconciled in Christ

Colossians 1

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
FELLOWSHIP**

Colosse is located in southwest Phrygia in Asia Minor near Laodicea, was beset with both oriental mysticism and Greek Gnosticism. The message of Colossians is that pure Christianity lives between two dangers ever present:

- that it will evaporate into a philosophy of the atonement
- that it will freeze into a religious form.

Jesus said that He is the water of life. He did not say that He was the ice or steam of life. We are not told to add something to Christ nor to subtract from Him.

Colossians 1:1-8 – Paul greets the Christians in Colosse

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

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

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

³We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

v1 – What was Paul’s authority in writing this letter?

An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God: Paul was qualified to write this letter of instruction to the Colossians, though he had never met them personally, because he was an apostle.

- The literal meaning of apostolos is ‘one sent’; it denotes an authorized spokesman for God

Who was Timothy?

Timothy was an honored companion of Paul, but he was not an apostle. He has been considered as the scribe of the apostle.

v2 – Is there a distinction between *the saints and faithful brethren in Christ*?

Every true Christian is a saint. However, Paul may refer to those who haven’t embraced the false teaching that concerned Paul so much in this letter.

What do we know about Colosse?

The city of Colosse was probably the smallest and least important city that Paul ever wrote to. It might surprise us that Paul would turn his attention to the Christians in Colosse at a time when he had so many other concerns. Yet he apparently thought the situation in Colosse was important enough for apostolic attention.

- Paul wrote because of their doctrinal problem, “The Colossian Heresy.” It was a corruption of Christianity with elements of mystical and legalistic Judaism combined with Gnosticism.
- Historically, Colosse was a prosperous city, and famous (along with other cities in its region) for its fabric dyes. Yet by Paul’s time the glory it had as a city was on the decline.
- Colosse perished by an earthquake around A.D. 60, a short time after the date of this epistle per Eusebius and Tacitus.

How was the first century religious environment much like our own today?

It was a time of religious mixing, with people borrowing a little from this religion and a little from that religion. The only difference was that in the first century, one joined a group who did the borrowing. In our modern culture one does the borrowing one’s self.

What is the solution to not being deceived by doctrinal corruption?

Paul dwelt on the solution: a better understanding of Jesus. Knowing the real Jesus helps us to stay away from the counterfeit, no matter how it comes packaged.

v3 – Why was the Colossians on Paul’s mind?

Praying always for you: Though he had never met most of them, the Christians of Colosse were on Paul’s prayer list. He prayed for them not only often, but always.

We give thanks: When Paul did pray for the Colossians, he did it full of gratitude. Perhaps those who pray the most end up having the most reasons to thank God.

v4 – Why was Paul was thankful for the Colossians?

Paul was thankful for their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for all the saints. Genuine faith in Jesus will always have a true love for God’s people as a companion.

v5 – What was the hope for which Paul was thankful?

Paul was thankful for the hope laid up for them in heaven. He was thankful when he considered the destiny of the Colossian Christians.

- We notice the familiar triad of faith, hope, and love. These were not merely theological ideas to Paul; they dominated his thinking as a Christian.

What was the truth for which Paul was thankful?

Paul was thankful that their eternal destiny was affected by the truth of the gospel, brought by Epaphras (*as you also learned from Epaphras, v7*).

- Epaphras is described as a *faithful minister of Christ on your behalf*. The word minister does not mean “superior”; it means “one who serves.”

v6 – What was bringing fruit all over the world?

Paul was thankful that the gospel was bringing forth fruit over all the world, even while Paul was in a Roman prison.

- The phrase “in all the world” was legitimate hyperbole, for the gospel spreading all over the Roman Empire.

v7-8 – Who was Epaphras?

Epaphras brought the gospel to the Colossians (Colossians 1:6-7). He was a native of the city (Colossians 4:12), and also got the message out to neighboring towns in the Lycus Valley like Hierapolis and Laodicea (Colossians 4:13).

- Perhaps Epaphras heard the gospel when Paul was in Ephesus. As Paul taught there, all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10).

Colossians 1:9-20 – Preeminence of Christ

⁹ *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;* ¹⁰ *that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;* ¹¹ *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;* ¹² *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.* ¹³ *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the*

kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.* ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.* ¹⁷ *And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.* ¹⁸ *And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.* ¹⁹ *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,* ²⁰ *and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

v9 – What was Paul’s prayer for the Colossians?

that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will: First, Paul prayed that they would have a knowledge of His will, informed by a true spiritual understanding. To know God and what He requires of us is our first responsibility.

Paul frequently alludes to knowledge and wisdom in this epistle, why is knowledge and wisdom so important?

Paul judged the church to be deficient in this area so this dominated his prayerful attention. He knew that spiritual ignorance is the constant source of error, instability, and sorrow; and therefore, he desired that they might be soundly taught in the things of God.

v10 – What would spiritual understanding result in?

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him: Second, Paul prayed that they would live according to the same knowledge they received, living out a walk worthy of the Lord.

- This is a familiar pattern, repeated over and over again in the New Testament. Our walk is based on our knowledge of God and our understanding of His will.

What characterizes a walk worthy of the Lord?

Being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. This is how we can be fully pleasing to God and how we can have a worthy walk.

John 15:7-8 – *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

v11 – How may we be strengthened with all might?

As we walk worthy of the Lord, His strength is there to help us meet all of life’s challenges, and to endure and overcome problems with circumstances (patience) and people (longsuffering) with joy.

v12 – What else did Paul thank God for?

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us: The Father is mentioned in connection with the broad sweep of His plan of redemption. He is the Person of the Trinity who initiates the plan of the ages.

To what did the Father qualify us?

To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints: It is the Father who qualifies us, not our own works. We gain this as an inheritance, instead of earning it as a wage.

v13 – From what has the Father delivered us?

He has delivered us from the power of darkness: Christians have been delivered from Satan's domain. The word has the idea of a rescue by a sovereign power.

How does the power of darkness effect people?

- lulls us to sleep.
- is skilled at concealment.
- afflicts and depresses man.
- can fascinate us.
- emboldens some men.

How may we resist the power of darkness?

With the full armor of God: belt of truth, shod feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit, praying always (Ephesians 6).

To what have we been delivered?

conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love: We have been conveyed into God's kingdom. Everything we have and everything we are now belongs to Him.

v14 – What does redemption mean?

In whom we have redemption through His blood: Redemption has the idea of release by a legal ransom. The price for our release was paid by the blood of Jesus.

What is the significance of pleading the blood of Jesus in spiritual warfare?

The blood of Christ shouldn't be invoked in a magical or superstitious sense. But it is useful in spiritual warfare since it shows the "receipt" of our lawful purchase as redeemed people.

One of the great sticky questions of theology is to whom was the price paid?

Some say it was to God that the ransom price was paid, but we were prisoners of Satan's kingdom. Others say it was to Satan that the ransom price was paid, but what does God owe to Satan? This question probably simply extends the metaphor too far.

What does it mean to have forgiveness of sins?

The word translated forgiveness is the ancient Greek word *aphesis*, most literally rendered "a sending away." Our sin and guilt is sent away because of what Jesus did on the cross for us.

- It speaks of the removal of our sins from us, so that they are no longer barriers that separate us from God.

v15 – How is Christ described here?

He is the image of the invisible God: The word translated image (the ancient Greek word *eikon*) expressed two ideas:

- Likeness, as in the image on a coin or the reflection in a mirror.
- Manifestation, with the sense that God is fully revealed in Jesus.

If Paul meant that Jesus was merely similar to the Father, he would have used the ancient Greek word *homoioima*, which speaks merely of similar appearance. The stronger word used here shows that Paul knew that Jesus is God just as God the Father is God.

Is God unknowable since He is invisible?

Just because He cannot be seen by our bodily eye does not mean He is unknowable. Oxygen is unseen but we can know it. In Jesus Christ the unknowable God becomes known.

How was Jesus the firstborn over all creation?

Firstborn (the ancient Greek word *prototokos*) can describe either priority in time or supremacy in rank. As Paul used it here, he probably had both ideas in mind, with Jesus being before all created things and Jesus being of a supremely different order than all created things.

- He is also the firstborn of the dead (v18), the first to have a resurrected human body.

Did the fact that Jesus was "born" make Him less than God?

No, the ancient Rabbis called Yahweh Himself "Firstborn of the World" (Rabbi Bechai, cited in Lightfoot). Ancient rabbis used firstborn as a Messianic title: God said, As I made Jacob a first-born (Exodus 4:22), so also will I make king Messiah a first-born (Psalm 89:27).

- *prototokos* (firstborn): expresses temporal priority, and then, on account of the privileges of the firstborn, it gains the further sense of dominion

v16 – What does it mean that, for by Him all things were created?

There is no doubt that Jesus is the author of all creation. He Himself is not a created being. When we behold the wonder and the glory of the world Jesus created, we worship and honor Him all the more.

- Saturn’s rings are 500,000 miles in circumference, but only about a foot thick.
- If the sun were the size of a beachball and put on top of the Empire State Building, the nearest group of stars would be as far away as Australia is to the Empire State Building.
- The earth travels around the sun about eight times the speed of a bullet fired from a gun.
- There are more insects in one square mile of rural land than there are human beings on the entire earth.
- A single human chromosome contains twenty billion bits of information. If written in ordinary books, it would take about four thousand volumes.

What are the thrones or dominions or principalities or powers our Lord created?

As will be demonstrated in the rest of the letter, the Colossian Heresy seemed taken with an elaborate angelology, which effectively placed angels as mediators between God and man. Paul emphasized that whatever ranks of spirit beings there may be, Jesus created them all and they all ultimately answer to Him.

Why did Jesus create all things?

For Him: We were created for Him. To have an eternal relationship with Him. He didn’t need us but He created us and redeemed us for His glory.

Isaiah 43:7 – *Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.*”

v17 – How is Jesus before all things?

As Creator, Jesus existed before all things. Centuries after Paul, a dangerous teacher named Arius claimed that Jesus was not truly God and that there was a time when He did not exist. Paul rightly understood and insisted that Jesus is before all things and is Himself the beginning.

How is in Jesus all things consist?

The idea that Jesus is both the unifying principle and the personal sustainer of all creation.

John 5:17 – *Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”*

The Godhead is actively providing the forces that are holding the universe together.

v18 – How is Jesus the head of the body, the church?

This describes Jesus’ relationship to the church. Here, head probably refers to Jesus’ role as source of the church, even as we refer to the head of a river.

How is it Jesus has preeminence in all things?

This is a fitting summary of Colossians 1:15-18. As Creator, He owns it all and is in control of it all.

v19 – How is it Jesus has all the fullness of the Father?

This translates the ancient Greek word *pleroma*, and was really just another way to say that Jesus is truly God.

- The word fullness was a recognized technical term in theology, denoting the totality of the Divine powers and attributes.

According to Vincent, *pleroma* was used by the Gnostic teachers to express the sum-total of divine powers and attributes... “Christ may have been ranked with these inferior images of the divine by the Colossian teachers.”

How is it the divine characteristics of the Father dwelt with Jesus?

The ancient Greek word for dwell is here used in the sense of a permanent dwelling. There is an entirely different word used for the sense of a temporary dwelling place. Paul wanted to emphasize the idea that Jesus was not temporarily God, but is permanently God.

v20 – Does the fact that Jesus will reconcile all things to Himself endorse universalism?

Jesus’ atoning work is full and broad. Yet we should not take Colossians 1:20 as an endorsement of universalism because that would contradict so many other passages.

- Separation from Him to realize the will of the separatee is a reconciliation.

How did the blood of His cross make peace?

We don’t make our own peace with God, but Jesus made peace for us through His work on the cross.

- The blood of the cross is not a magical potion, nor is it the literal blood of Jesus, literally applied that saves or cleanses us. If that were so, then His Roman executioners, splattered with His blood, would have been automatically saved.
- The blood of the cross speaks to us of the real, physical death of Jesus Christ in our place, on our behalf. That literal death in our place, and the literal judgment He bore on our behalf, is what saves us.

Colossians 1:21-29 – Sacrificial Service for Christ

²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled* ²² *in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—* ²³ *if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

²⁴ *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,* ²⁵ *of which I became a*

minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. ²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

v21 – How were we once alienated to God?

We were alienated to God because we were enemies to Him. The ancient Greek word translated alienated (apellotriomenous) is literally “transferred to another owner.” This transfer of ownership, from God to Satan and self, affected us in both mind and behavior.

- Belonging to the race of Adam, we are born alienated from God. Then as individuals, we each choose to accept and embrace that alienation with wicked works.

Once were alienated: This means that in Jesus we are no longer alienated. The difference between a believer and a non-believer isn’t merely forgiveness; there is a complete change of status.

What is God’s answer to the problem of alienation?

Yet now He has reconciled: God’s answer to the problem of alienation is reconciliation, initiated by His work on the cross (*reconciled in the body of His flesh through death*, v22). God’s work of reconciliation didn’t just meet us halfway, He meets us all the way and invites us to accept it.

How does the analogy of a criminal before the judge help us understand our need and God’s salvation?

We can see God as the judge, and we are guilty before Him. Therefore, we need forgiveness and justification.

How does the analogy of a damaged relationship help us understand our need and God’s salvation?

We can see God as our friend, and we have damaged our relationship with Him. Therefore, we need reconciliation.

Isn’t the phrase *body of His flesh* redundant?

What is significant about being redundant here?

Paul wanted to emphasize that our reconciliation happened because of something that happened to a real man on a real cross.

v22 – What was the result of our reconciliation to God?

To present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight: Taken together, these words show that in Jesus we are pure and can’t even be justly accused of impurity.

- The idea of presenting us holy and blameless before God may recall the terminology used when priests inspected potential sacrifices. We are presented to God as a living sacrifice.
- A desire to be saved means a desire to be made holy, and blameless, and above reproach; not merely a desire to escape the fires of hell on our own terms.

v23 – What is the evidence of those reconciled to Christ?

If indeed you continue in the faith: Those truly reconciled must truly persevere. Paul’s main focus is continuing in the truth of the gospel (*continue in the faith... not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard*).

- It is important for Christians to continue in godly conduct, but we are not saved by our godly conduct.
- So, it is even more important for Christians to continue in the truth of the gospel because we are saved by grace through faith.

What does it tell us if a person abandons faith in Jesus?

Continuance is the test of reality... they really weren’t saved to begin with.

v24 – How was Paul suffering for the Colossians?

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you: Paul wrote this from a Roman jail. He was able to see that his sufferings worked something good for others, so he could say that his sufferings were for the Colossians and other Christians.

What was lacking in the afflictions of Christ?

This word “afflictions” is never used for the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Most commentators see this as a reference to the affliction Jesus endured in ministry. These afflictions are not yet complete, and in this sense Jesus still “suffers” as He ministers through His people.

- Paul attaches no atoning value whatever to his own sufferings for the church. It speaks, rather, of those ministerial sufferings which Paul bears because he represents Jesus Christ.

How is it Paul suffered for the sake of His body, which is the church?

Paul did not suffer for himself in the way that an ascetic might. Instead, he suffered for the sake of the body of Christ.

- Ascetic – characterized by the practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence for religious reasons. (salvation-by-works)
- Ascetics focus on their holiness, on their spiritual growth, and on their perfection. Paul followed in the footsteps of Jesus and was an others-centered person. Paul found holiness, spiritual growth, and maturity when he pursued these things for others.

v25 – How did Paul describe Himself?

As a minister of Christ's church; that is, a servant of the body of Christ, the church. He did not take this position on his own initiative, but according to the stewardship from God. God put Paul into this position, he did not put himself there.

v25-26 – Why is the Word of God, *the mystery which has been hidden*?

In the biblical sense, a mystery is a truth that can only be known by revelation and not by intuition. Now it can be known, because it now has been revealed to His saints.

Hidden from ages and generations: There were aspects to God's plan that were not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. The specific mystery Paul refers to here deals with many aspects of the work of Jesus in His people, but especially the plan of the church, to make one body out of Jew and Gentile, taken from the "trunk" of Israel.

v27 – What other ministry has been revealed to the Gentiles?

This mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you: The wonder and glory of the abiding, indwelling Jesus was not clearly revealed in the Old Testament, especially that He would abide in the Gentiles.

How is Christ in us the hope of glory?

It isn't our own hard work or devotion to God, or the power of our own spirituality. Instead, it is the abiding presence of Jesus: Christ in you.

Romans 8:16 – *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

v28 – What did Paul preach?

Him we preach: This was the focus of Paul's preaching. He didn't preach himself, or his opinions, or even lots and lots of entertaining stories. He preached Jesus.

Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom: Paul wanted the whole gospel for the whole world. He wouldn't hold back in either area — it was for every man, and he presented it in all wisdom.

- Some translate the word warning as "counseling." The ancient Greek verb *nouthetountes* means, "To impart understanding," "to lay on the mind or the heart."
- The stress is on influencing not only the intellect, but also the will and disposition.

The work of warning (or helping to impart understanding) was a passion for Paul in ministry (Acts 20:31). It is also the job of church leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12) and of the church body in general (Colossians 3:16).

What was the goal of Paul's preaching?

That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: The goal of Paul's ministry was to bring people to maturity in Christ, and not to dependence upon himself.

When will we be perfect?

When we are resurrected and glorified. Until then, we are a work in progress being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

How is it every person may be perfect in Christ Jesus?

In contrast, the false teachers at Colosse believed the way of salvation to be so involved that it could be understood only by a select few who made up sort of a spiritual aristocracy.

v28 – What empowered Paul?

Striving according to His working which works in me mightily: Paul's work was empowered by God's mighty strength. But God's strength in Paul's life didn't mean that he did nothing. He worked alongside God's working...

Matthew 11:28-30 – *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

Why is the word 'striving' a good description of Paul's working with the Lord in ministry?

The root of original Greek word used here can mean 'to compete in the games' carrying the idea of athletic contest: Paul did not go about his work half-heartedly, hoping that grace would fill in the gaps he was too lazy to work at himself.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- We must resist cultural influences on our beliefs... Scripture should be our sole authority.
- Christians should be characterized by faith, hope and love... follow Jesus, not flawed human examples.
- Jesus Christ is the Creator-God... anything less is heresy taking away from who He is.
- Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins by His death on the cross... this belief is prerequisite for salvation.
- All people are born alienated to God... all must accept Christ's provision for eternal life.
- Christ's death on the cross reconciled us to God... we should thus live like we are His.