**Introduction**

This Bible study is based upon the translation and commentary of the Concordia Commentary of Colossians by Paul Deterding and the ESV translation of the Bible.

**Significance**

Colossians expounds upon the relationship of Jesus Christ to the created order. Christ is the Creator and Reconciler of the universe. Paul also has much to say about how the believer should view and relate to creation.

**Text**

Colossians has its share of textual problems. Therefore textual criticism plays an important part in studying Colossians.

**Recipients**

The congregation at Colossae was not founded directly by Paul, but he shows a pastoral responsibility towards it. It would seem like the church at Colossae, as well as Laodicea and Hierapolis, was started during Paul’s three-year (AD 53-55) ministry in Ephesus. It is likely that Paul organized and coordinated the work of missionaries in the outlying areas of the province of Asia. It is a strong possibility that Epaphras was the founding missionary (see Col. 1:7-8 and 4:12-13) of the three churches located about one hundred miles from Ephesus.

The congregation was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The Colossian heresy that Paul addresses in this book has a mixture of Gentile and Jewish religious practices.

**Occasion**

It appears that Paul was in prison and that Epaphras had come to him bringing word of a heresy which was troubling the congregation. The Christians in Colossae were tempted to add tenets of this false teaching to the way of faith in Christ. Those spreading the heresy evidently considered themselves Christians. Therefore because this congregation was founded under his supervision, Paul writes this letter to guide the congregation away from this heresy and into the truth.

**Authenticity and Integrity**

While some people questions the authenticity of Colossians on various grounds, we accept that it is divinely inspired Scripture and that Paul, as attested to in the letter, is the author. There are several other indications that Paul is the author, but I will skip over them here. The early church accepted Paul’s authorship and the genuineness of the letter was not questioned until the nineteenth century.

**The Colossian Heresy**

Our knowledge of the heresy combated by the letter to the Colossians is limited to those passages in the letter in which Paul writes against it. There were some Jewish elements to it (see 2:11, 16, 20). Yet it went beyond Jewish practices. It involved knowledge and wisdom, mysteries, the flesh, perfection, cosmic beings, and asceticism. It had a number of similarities to the Gnosticism which came along later in the second and third centuries AD. It was apparently an early form of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism in all its forms teaches that God is pure spirit and that matter (the flesh) is inherently evil. In this scheme redemption involves the escape of the spiritual from the material so that it can be unified with God. This escape is gained through knowledge and occurs at death when the spirit abandons the material body of flesh. Knowledge of this is hidden from humankind and it is the job of the redeemer to reveal this. For an individual’s spirit to make its way to God, it had to know secret knowledge, almost like a password to get through each stage.

The attitude of Gnostics toward material things led them to one or the other of two completely different and contradictory views of life in this world. Some Gnostics insisted on strict asceticism (sexual activity and certain foods were forbidden) to prevent the contamination of the spirit. Others claimed that since the flesh did not matter in redemption they could live as licentiously as they pleased. Usually Gnostics viewed themselves as superior to those who did not have knowledge and frequently would have nothing to do with them.

Because of their view of the flesh, Gnostics many times denied the incarnation of Christ and interpreted his death and resurrection in some other way. They spiritualized the resurrection of those who were redeemed.

Many of the things that the letter teaches seem to be combating a form of Gnosticism. It stresses the deity and incarnation of Christ and his victory over powers and authorities. It teaches about the flesh, the saving work of Christ on the cross, the resurrection, and Christian love for others. When the Gnostic elements were combined with Jewish elements the heresy might be described as a Jewish-Gnostic heresy.

It appears as if Christian concepts were harmonized with Greek philosophy to form this early form of Gnosticism. To follow Gnosticism was to associate with the intellectual elite. Many believed that it was a more mature version of the Christian faith. It was viewed as modern and trendy. It was attractive because it had a theology of glory over against Christianity’s theology of the cross.

**Relationship to Ephesians and Philemon**

There are extensive parallels between Colossians and Ephesians and Philemon. Colossians and Philemon mention a number of individuals who were with Paul at the time of writing: Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, and Archippus. Because of this it seems likely that the two letters were written about the same time. Tychicus is mentioned as the bearer of both Colossians and Ephesians. It seems likely then that Ephesians was written and sent at the same time as Colossians. Colossians and Ephesians also have extensive parallels in vocabulary and content.

Colossians was written to deal with a specific problem at a particular place under the apostle’s care. Ephesians employs many of the same concepts and terminology but in a more general way in a letter that was intended for wider circulation. So it looks like Paul first wrote the letter to the Colossians, addressing the heresy issue, and then, while still fresh in his mind, wrote about the same general topics to the church at large. This is the book we know as Ephesians. The emphasis in Colossians is on Christ as the head of his body, the church. Ephesians emphasizes the church as the body of Christ, of which Christ is the head.

**Date and Place of Composition**

Paul is in prison when he writes Colossians (4:3, 10, 18). Paul was imprisoned many times so we are not sure where he was imprisoned when he wrote the letter. Knowing the place of the imprisonment would help determine the letter’s date. Most believe Rome (A.D. 60-61) but there are some issues concerning the large distance travelled from Rome to Colossae. Others speculate it was written from Caesarea (A.D. 57-58) or Ephesus (A.D. 53-55).

**Outline**

Many people outline Colossians in many ways. The following outline uses a simple two-part outline that seems to do justice to the letter’s contents.

I. Kerygma (1:1 – 2:23)

. . A. Lesson 1: Salutation (1:1-2)

. . B. Overture (1:3-20)

. . . . B1. Lesson 2: Thanksgiving Report (1:3-8)

. . . . B2. Lesson 3: The Source of Knowledge: Reason for Intercession (1:9-14)

. . . . B3. Lesson 4: The Christ Hymn: Creation and Reconciliation (1:15-20)

. . C. Main Exposition and Resolution (1:21-2:23)

. . . . C1. Lesson 5: The Ministry of Reconciliation (1:21-29)

. . . . C2. Lesson 6: True Knowledge (2:1-5)

. . . . C3. Lessons 7 & 8:The Fullness of Christ (2:6-15)

. . . . C4. Lesson 9: True Freedom (2:16-23)

II. Paraenesis (3:1 – 4:18)

. . A. The Christian Life (3:1-4:6)

. . . . A1. Lesson 10: Death and Life (3:1-4)

. . . . A2. Lessons 11 & 12: Put Off and Put On (3:5-17)

. . . . A3. Lesson 13: The Table of Duties (3:18-4:1)

. . . . A4. Lesson 14: Watch and Pray (4:2-6)

. . B. Lesson 15: Concluding Matters (4:7-18)

**Part 1 – The Exposition of the Gospel of Christ (Col. 1 -2)**

**Lesson 1**

**A. Salutation (1:1-2)**

1. Based on the first two verses, we can see that the book of Colossians begins like a letter. Who is the author of the letter (1:1; 4:18) and who was the letter sent to (1:2)?

> Col. 1:1 says that the letter was written by Paul and Timothy. But based on Col. 4:18, it seems that Paul is the main author. Paul writes this letter “to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.” Describing the recipients this way means that Paul is sending this letter to the church at Colossae.

Paul had never met the people at the church at Colossae. Yet, he shows pastoral concern for them. It seems as if Epaphras was the founding missionary of the church (Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13). So why does Paul show concern for them by writing this letter to them? Piecing things together, it appears that the church at Colossae was probably founded by Epaphras while Paul spent three years at Ephesus (AD 53-55). Ephesus was not far from Colossae. It is speculated that while in Ephesus Paul sent out missionaries in the surrounding areas to start churches. So even though he had not personally met them, he felt responsible for them since the church came into being through a missionary who was under his supervision.
2. How does Paul describe himself (1:1)?

> Paul describes himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”

What does the word “apostle” mean?

> An apostle is one who is sent by another with authority.

So when an apostle speaks and acts, he speaks and acts as if he is the one who sent him. He completely subordinates his own will to the will of the one who sent him. Paul and the other apostles were called by the Lord Jesus and were given full authority to proclaim his Word. Therefore the apostolic documents that make up the NT are the very words of God and are authoritative in all times and places for the Church.

To be called an apostle of Jesus Christ, what was one thing that was required (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1)?

> To be an apostle of Jesus, one had to be an eye-witness to the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead.

How did Paul become an apostle (Gal. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 15:7-10)

> God set him apart before birth, called him by grace, and had his resurrected Son appear to him.

What kind of an apostle was Paul to be (Rom. 11:13)?

> God had chosen him to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul says he became an apostle “through the will of God” (1:1). God was active in making him an apostle of Jesus. The apostolic office is not one that a man takes for himself. Rather, it is bestowed upon him by God in Christ Jesus. Paul says the same thing in Gal. 1:1 where he says: “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—“.

1. Paul describes the Christians at the church of Colossae as “saints and faithful brothers” (1:2). What does the word “saints” mean?

> Saints are people who are holy and set apart for service to God.

By nature we come into this world sinful and unclean, unable to be faithful to God. What gracious gift does God give us in order to enable us to be faithful to him (Ephesians 2:8-9)?

> Faith. To be faithful, one must have faith in Jesus and this is purely a gift from God.

The addressees are said to be “in Christ” (1:2). “In Christ” is a concept used almost exclusively by Paul. By one count, he uses “in Christ” or equivalent phrases in his 13 letters some 170 times. The phrase “in Christ” denotes a harmonious relationship with Jesus Christ and baptismal incorporation into the body of Christ.

This relationship is:
* created by God through Baptism and the Gospel,
* one of faith directed to Jesus Christ, trusting in what he has accomplished,
* one through which God saves
* one of unity with Christ and other believers,
* one in which Christ can work in the proclamation of judgment and salvation,
* one in which Christ enables believers to do good works,
* one in which the believer will suffer for his faith,
* one in which the power of the resurrection helps believers endure suffering
1. What two things does Paul wish for the church at Colossae and who is the ultimate source of them (1:2b)?

> He wishes grace and peace for them. The ultimate source of grace and peace is God the Father.

In your own words, how do these two things go together for the Christian?

> In grace God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to in order to save us. Jesus took our place living a perfect life for us and dying the death we deserved. In doing so, he satisfied God’s righteous requirements for us and reconciled and restored peace between God and man. He replaced enmity with harmony and peace.

**B. The Overture (1:3-20)**

Paul’s thanksgiving report (1:3-8) leads into a single long sentence (1:9-20) which joins the reason for his intercession (1:9-14) with a hymn about Christ (1:15-20).

This whole section is an overture to the letter. An overture of a symphony or opera introduces the musical themes that will be taken up later in the work. In a similar way, this portion of the letter introduces themes that will be developed later in the letter, especially in the main exposition and refutation of the heresy in 1:21-2:23.

The unity of 1:3-20 is seen from the following.

* The phrase “on account of this” in 1:9 connects 1:3-8 with 1:9-20.
* There are many verbal similarities between 1:3-8 and 1:9-14. This shows that 1:9-20 (which is a single Greek sentence) was built upon 1:3-8.

Therefore the entire overture serves to introduce the letter.

**Lesson 2**

**B1. Thanksgiving Report (Col 1:3-8)**

1. Greek letters in Paul’s day typically started out with a salutation, which was then followed by a section where the author told his readers why he has been praying to his gods for them. Paul uses a similar section in many of his letters. In it he provides a distinctively Christian thanksgiving report, as he tells why he prays to “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3) for them.
2. As the initial part of the overture of the letter, this section gives the most basic elements of the reader’s existence as Christians. They have eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. This faith displays itself with deeds of love. God has given them salvation and faith through the Word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which has been proclaimed to them. Therefore the Gospel of Christ is the foundation for their existence as Christians.
3. In 1:4-5 Paul uses three important words: faith, hope, and love. These words have a relationship with one another. Faith is mentioned first because of its importance and because love and hope are born of faith.

Who did the Colossians put their faith in (1:4)?

> They put their faith in Jesus Christ.

What has he done for them that they would put their faith in him?

> He lived a perfect life for them. He suffered and died for them. He rose from the dead in victory for them. He brought about their justification. He won salvation for them.

Hope in the Bible is not wishful thinking; like, I hope it doesn’t rain today. Biblical hope is knowing you have a sure future because of what God has done and promises to do for you. Therefore because of what Christ has done for us, we have a sure hope of eternal life.

Like faith, hope has to do with trust in God. Hope is faith directed toward the future. When one has hope, one has a good future to look forward to. Hope rests upon what Christ has accomplished for us and the benefits which God promised, which are stored up for us in heaven (1:5).

The Christian’s believing and hoping shows itself by acts of love toward others. Who especially do Christians love (1:4b)?

> Christians especially show love for all the saints, for all believers in Jesus.
4. What was it that produced the faith, hope, and love in the Colossian Christians (and in all Christians) (1:5-7)?

> They have these things because God’s Word was proclaimed to them by Epaphras. He proclaimed to them the Gospel, the word of truth. He proclaimed the grace of God to them.

The Holy Spirit working through the Word of Truth, the Gospel, creates faith, gives a sure hope, and bears the fruit of love.
5. So to sum up this section (1:3-8), Paul gives thanks for what the Gospel of God has accomplished: their faith, their love, their hope. The truth and power of the Gospel proclaimed to them under Paul’s watch created and sustains these things. Through the Word they have a hope that is certain of the future blessings stored up for them in heaven. The Colossian’s faith in God’s promises has moved them to a life of love. Through the Word the same is accomplished all over the world.

**Lesson 3**

**B2. The Source of Knowledge: Reason for Intercession (Col. 1:9-14)**

Having spoken of their status as Christians in the previous section, the apostle continues by noting the need (for which he prays) for his readers to grow in faith and godly living. Such growth, here expressed especially by the concepts of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (matters with which the heretics may have been enticing the Colossians), comes from the same source as their initial coming to the Christian faith: through the proclamation of what God has done in the person and work of Christ for their salvation (1:12-14).

1. When Paul prays for the Colossians, what does he ask that God the Father give them (1:9)?

> He asks that God the Father fill them “with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

The terms “knowledge”, “wisdom,” and, to a lesser extent, “understanding” are used in the Scriptures with rich Gospel content. The apostle apparently uses them here in direct antithesis to the claims of the false teachers troubling the congregation.

In secular Greek “knowledge” means the retention of information. In the OT “to know” connotes an intimate relationship. In the OT knowledge of God is equivalent to “faith.”

“understanding” or “insight” (1:9) is a synonym for wisdom. Such spiritual understanding is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1:8-9).
2. Let’s concentrate on “wisdom” for a moment. In the beginning, in his wisdom (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19-20) God created the heavens and the earth. It was orderly and perfectly harmonious. The first people, Adam and Eve, had a close, intimate relationship with God. But Adam and Eve sinned and the perfect order and harmony of creation was shattered. Adam and Eve were now afraid of God. And worse yet, they had no way of fixing their brokenness. They were doomed to eternal pain and suffering. But God devised a way to save humanity. His plan was to send his Son to take the place of humanity. His Son would live the perfect life God required and suffer the punishment man deserved for his sin. All those who trust in his Son will be saved. To a fallen world this seems like nonsense, but in reality Jesus (God’s Son) is God’s Wisdom. All those who believe in Jesus are reconciled to God. Through Jesus mankind can once again know God, that is, have an intimate relationship with him.

For us sinners, what is Christ and what does he provide for us (1 Cor. 1:24b, 30)?

> Christ is “wisdom from God.” In his wisdom through Christ God provides righteousness and sanctification and redemption for sinners.

Christ accomplished these things through the cross. Therefore what did Paul and the pastors who worked with him preach (1 Cor. 1:23) and for what purpose (1 Cor. 1:21b)?

> They preached Christ crucified to save those who believe.

This is the spiritual wisdom of God and it all centers in Christ and what he has done for us. Through Christ God reveals himself, his grace, and his wisdom to us and for us.

1. What does having knowledge of God’s will with spiritual wisdom and understanding result in (1:10a)?

> It results in “walk[ing] in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.”

How does one do this in a way that pleases God? Or asked another way, what does having knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of God and his ways result in (1:10b-12)?

> 1:10b – “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

> 1:11 – “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.”

> 1:12 – “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”
2. In this section, Paul prays that the Colossians “may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9b). Summarized into a sentence or two, what is God’s will (Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 2:4; Gal. 1:4; Mt. 18:14; Jn.6:39-40; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11)?

> It was God’s will that he send his only Son into the world, that whoever believes in him might be saved. Christ accomplished this will of God and thereby effected our salvation.
3. In 1:12 what does Paul say God has qualified the Colossians to share in?

> He has qualified them to share in “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

What OT event does the word “inheritance” remind us of (see the book of Joshua; Deut. 19:8; Jos. 11:23)?

> It reminds us of the promised land being given to God’s people by God in the OT as their inheritance.

This foreshadowed a permanent, eternal inheritance. What is this eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4)?

> Believers inherit eternal life with God in heaven. They will live in the kingdom of God where death, suffering, and pain no longer exist.
4. What contrast does Paul use in 1:12-13 to describe salvation?

> He describes salvation as God’s rescue of us from the darkness of the power of Satan to the light of eternally dwelling in God’s holiness and salvation.

This rescue takes place through the Gospel of Christ and Baptism. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation. In Baptism the Gospel is applied to the individual. In Baptism God transfers the new believer from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ.
5. Salvation as a transfer into the “rule” or kingdom of God (1:13) was a major concept in the teaching of Jesus. Under God’s rule we receive grace. And under God’s rule, he is restoring things to the way he intended them to be. In God’s kingdom, whom are believers ruled by (1:13)?

> Believers are ruled by God’s Son, Jesus.

He rules in grace and this rule of grace comes in a personal, individual way through God’s Word (see the parable of the sower in Mt. 13:3-8, 18-23). This rule has come to the Colossians when God’s Word was preached to them.

What has he done for us that we gladly submit to him (1:14)?

> He has redeemed us and won for us forgiveness of sins.
6. To “redeem” means to purchase for a price. What did Christ purchase us with (Rom. 3:24-25; Eph. 1:7)?

> Christ redeemed sinners with his holy, precious blood.

When people sin, they incur a debt with God, a debt so large they could never repay it. Jesus willingly shed his blood, in order to pay the debt we’ve rung up. Since he paid the debt, our sins are forgiven. He gave up his life in order that we might have life.
7. By joining together “redemption” and “the forgiveness of sins,” Paul may be purposely contradicting the Colossian heretics. Later Gnostics distinguished between the two, with forgiveness being the preliminary stage of salvation and redemption being the latter stage, a stage where perfection was achieved through higher knowledge. Paul says that they are one in the same, two sides of one coin. To have forgiveness of sins is to have salvation and to be redeemed is to be saved.
8. Let’s summarize this section (1:9-14) keeping in mind its context.

In the overture, Paul moves from giving thanks for his readers (1:3-8) to interceding for the ongoing salvation benefits and nurture that they need (1:9-14). The apostle prays that his readers may have all the blessings of “wisdom” and “knowledge,” with these terms describing a relationship with Jesus Christ. These benefits come by way of the Word of God and affect one’s entire being. To have the gift of wisdom is to be in a favorable relationship with God. And this transforms one to do good works and lead a God pleasing life.

This transformation shows itself in a number of ways: the Christian bears the fruit of good works, increases in the knowledge of God, is empowered by God to have endurance and patience, and gives thanks to God with joy for the favorable status before God which he received in Christ.

The favorable status is described in a number of ways: inheritance, rescue, rule, redemption, forgiveness. Each of these concepts denotes what one has through knowledge of and faith in Christ. Paul prays that they not only continue in these things, but also increase in them through an increase of their faith in Christ.

**Lesson 4**

**B3. The Christ Hymn: Creation and Reconciliation (1:15-20)**

Col. 1:15-20 is the conclusion and climatic portion of the overture. In it Paul focuses our full attention on our Lord Jesus, presenting him as Creator, Lord, and Reconciler of the entire universe. By doing this, he shows his readers how to rightly view creation, both material and immaterial. Moreover, he begins to demonstrate that in the incarnate Christ and in his redemptive work those who stand in a saving relationship with Christ have everything they need, including “wisdom” and the fellowship with God that the heresy plaguing the Colossians claimed to provide.

1. It is widely assumed that this section is a hymn or is based on one. And it is very possible that Paul was the author of the hymn. As you read through the hymn (1:15-20), who is this hymn all about? (Going back to 1:13-14 may help.)

> This hymn is all about the Son; it’s all about Jesus. The hymn proclaims Christ.
2. The hymn can be divided into two parts. The structure of each part is similar. They use identical and similar vocabulary that occurs in the same order. The two parts are: 1:15-18a and 1:18b-20. Both parts follow the following pattern:

Who is ...

the firstborn ...

because in him ... all things/all ...

through him ... for/unto him ...

Read through the verses and see if you can see this pattern in both halves.

1. The whole hymn is about Christ, but each half of the hymn stresses something different about him. What is he “the firstborn” of?

> in 1:15b: he is “the firstborn of all creation.”

> in 1:18b: he is “the firstborn from the dead.”

What happened “in him” (see ESV footnote f in v. 16)?

> 1:16: “For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

> 1:19: “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

What happened “through him”?

> 1:16: “all things were created through him.”

> 1:20a: through him God reconciled all things in heaven and earth to himself.

So what is the first part of the hymn (1:15-18a) primarily about?

> The first part of the hymn deals primarily with creation/cosmology.

What is the second part of the hymn (1:18b020) primarily about?

> The second part of the hymn deals primarily with reconciliation/salvation.

1. Knowing the structure and knowing the themes of each part of the structure helps us understand the hymn. Col. 1:18a is the end of the first half of the hymn whose theme is creation/cosmology. Yet this sentence also deals with the church, which is clearly related to salvation (the theme of the second half). The word “head,” which is used in 1:18a, is also used in Col. 2:10 and there it obviously relates to cosmology, the theme of the first part of the hymn. In 1:18a, Christ is the head of the Church. So what Paul is doing is using 1:18a is transitioning from the theme of cosmology to the theme of salvation and reconciliation.

So the whole hymn is about Christ and the two halves present Christ as the Creator and the Reconciler.

In the beginning when God created the world, how did God describe creation?

> Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25: “And God saw that it was good”.

> Gen. 1:31: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”.

In the beginning what did God use to create his good world?

> Prov. 8:24-30: God used wisdom to create the world.

> Jn. 1:1-18: God created the world with his Word.

Who is the Wisdom of God?

> 1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3: Jesus is the Wisdom of God.

Who is the Word of God?

> Jn. 1:1-18: Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

So in the beginning God created the world through his Son, who is the Word and Wisdom of God. And the world he created was good.

1. God had made a perfect world, but then sin entered the picture. Who is affected by sin and what does it cause?

> Rom. 5:12: Sin affects all people and causes death.

What else was affected by sin and how was it affected?

> Rom. 8:19-22: All of creation was affected by sin. Because of sin, it is in bondage to corruption.
2. Through Christ, what did God reconcile to himself (1:20)?

> Through Christ, God reconciled “to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven”.

If two things or two people need to be reconciled, what was their state or status before they were reconciled?

> They were separated from each other.

People, and indeed all of creation, were corrupted by sin and therefore separated from God. But through Christ God reconciles both people and creation back to himself.
3. So let’s summarize the last three points. The “beginning times” (protology) reveals to us how the world came into being and the way things ought to be. God created a perfect world through Christ, his Word and his Wisdom. But after the beginning, sin came and corrupted all of God’s good creation. But God promised to send a Savior to set things right. The Savior would come in the “end times” (eschatology) and restore God’s good creation. Salvation then is the remedy of the corruption that invaded creation. When the end comes, God’s salvation will set things right, the way they first were and the way they ought to be, as the Bible’s protology shows us. So God through Christ created all things (protology) and God through Christ will restore all things (salvation and end times).
4. The rich Christology of Colossians becomes front and center in the hymn. Two of the main concepts informing the view of Christ given here are those of image (1:15) and fullness (1:19).

What does Paul identify Christ as in 1:15a?

> “He is the image of the invisible God.”

An image ties back to its original. The image is like the original in its essential features.

Image can also be used to express identity of essence, such as Christ is one in essence with the Father or as the Nicene Creed puts it: “being of one substance with the Father.”

Image also denotes visibility. What word is used to describe God in 1:15a?

> Invisible.

Since we cannot see God, it is hard for us to know what God is like. So God reveals himself and makes himself known in the incarnate Christ. Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He is God in visible human flesh. Therefore when we see Christ and what he is like, we see God and know what he is like.
5. The “image of God” also reminds us of something else. What does Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 5:1 say about the image of God?

> It says that God created Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, in the image of God.

After Adam and Eve sinned, whose image or likeness were their children born in (Gen. 5:3)?

> After the Fall, the children of Adam were born in the sinful image and likeness of Adam.

Adam was created in the image of God but lost that image because he sinned. Who is the image of God in 2 Cor. 4:4?

> Jesus Christ is the image of God.

Jesus then is the second and last Adam. He came to fix all that the first Adam had messed up with his sin. Rom. 5:18-21 contrasts the first Adam who lost God’s image for himself and all of mankind and the second Adam who came to restore God’s image to mankind. It compares the results of the first Adam’s act of disobedience and the results of the second Adam’s act of obedience. What were the results?

> Rom. 5:18a (first Adam): “one trespass led to condemnation for all men.”

> Rom. 5:18b (second Adam): “one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”

> Rom. 5:19a (first Adam): by “one man's disobedience the many were made sinners.”

>Rom. 5:19b (second Adam): “by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”

> Rom. 5:21a (first Adam): “sin reigned in death.”

> Rom. 5:21b (second Adam): grace reigns through the righteousness of Christ which leads to eternal life.

Adam’s act of disobedience had universal implications. Because of Adam, all people are sinful and are under God’s condemnation. Jesus’ act of obedience also had universal implications. As a result of Jesus’ obedience unto death, righteousness and justification are available to all people.

1. In Phil. 2:6-8, the word “form” is a synonym for “image.” This passage in Philippians clarifies how Christ functions as the image of God and the last Adam. It clearly states that Jesus “was in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6). Yet when the Father sent him to this world as a human being he “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [or held on to]” (Phil. 2:6). So while Adam, in his desire to be like God, lost the image of God through disobedience, Jesus, who was God, emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, the form of a human being and obeying even to the point of death on a cross, thereby restoring the divine image to mankind. The following comparison can be made of Adam and Christ:

*Adam Christ*

Created in the image of God Is the image of God

Desired to be like God Did not grasp for equality with God

Sought to exalt himself Humbled himself

Disobeyed Obeyed

Lost divine image for mankind Restores the divine image to mankind

The image of God is lost by identification with the corporate personality of the first Adam. All those who are begotten from Adam participated in his act of disobedience (1 Cor. 15:49). The image of God is restored by identification with the corporate personality of the last Adam. This takes place through Baptism (Col. 2:11-13).

The restoration of image of God is both now and not yet. It ours now in terms of God’s forgiveness and acceptance. But in terms of our being and conduct, it will not be fully realized until the resurrection. So the loss of the image of God results in death and its restoration results in life.

1. In Col. 1:19, the ESV has “all the fullness of God.” But the Concordia Commentary has simply “all the fullness.” For Col. 2:9, they both have “all the fullness of deity.” The interpretation of Col. 1:19 should be based on Col. 2:9 which states it more fully. What do both of these passages clearly state?

> They clearly state that God fully dwells in the person of Jesus Christ. He is God in human flesh.

“Fullness” was apparently a technical term among the Colossian heretics for the whole pantheon of divine emanations. And these teachers apparently taught reverence and submission to these gods. In antithesis to a redeemer being one of many deities or anything less than God Most High, Paul here asserts that with the incarnation, all the fullness of Deity came to dwell in Jesus of Nazareth, who is the beloved Son of God the Father.
2. Concerning the meaning of “firstborn of every creature” (1:15), there was no controversy but consensus in the first three centuries. But in the fourth century and beyond questions arose about the personal union of the divine and human natures of Christ, such as the Arian heresy.

In our interpretation of this phrase, we will consider three important issues: (1) the meaning of “firstborn,” (2) the relationship of “firstborn” to the modifier “of every creature,” and (3) the crucial matter of context.

(1) First we look at the meaning of “firstborn.” Many times when “firstborn” is used, it is referring to the first one who among others is born. But this is not always the case. Sometimes it refers to one of privilege. For instance, in Ex. 4:22 Moses said of Israel to Pharaoh that the Israelites were God’s “firstborn son.” They were not the first of many, but the ones who were privileged to receive special love from the Father. Similarly, when Ps. 89:27-28 is interpreted Christologically, it stresses Christ’s high position of ruling over all the kings of the earth. We maintain that this verse extols Christ’s high position over creation.

(2) Second we consider the relationship of “firstborn” to the modifier “of every creature.” By calling Christ the “firstborn of every creature,” it is distinguishing Christ from every created thing” and not designating him as a part of what was created.

(3) Third we consider the context. The context supports the idea that Christ was in a high, privileged place over creation. The word “firstborn” is used again in the second part of the hymn in 1:18, where it says that he was “the firstborn from the dead.” This phrase designates Christ as the cause of the resurrection of all others. Without Jesus’ resurrection, no one else could be resurrected unto eternal life. In the same way, to say that Christ was “the first born of all creation” is to say that Christ is the source and cause of the existence of every created thing. And verse 16 explicitly states this. And so when it says he “is before all things” (1:17), it is speaking of his eternal existence. Christ preexisted before anything was created. He has existed from all eternity.
3. In the first article of the Apostle’s Creed we ascribe the work of creating to whom?

> “God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.”

While he is the primary Creator, Col. 1:16 clearly shows that someone else was involved in creating the universe too. Who (see also 1:13-14)?

> The beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Let us now consider further the relationship between Christ and his creation. In 1:16 it says, “For by him all things were created” (ESV) or “because in him were created all things” (CC) or it could be rendered as “through him all things were created.” To say that creation was created “by him,” “in him,” and “through him” is to say that Christ is the agent of creation. He is the Mediator through whom all things were created.

To say that creation was “in Christ” is to say there is a relationship between Christ and creation. What did the beloved Son create (1:16a)?

> “By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

What else does Christ do for creation (1:17b)?

> “In him all things hold together,” that is, he preserves his creation.

Therefore the relationship of the beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to creation is that he is the Creator and Preserver of all creation.
4. After stating that Christ created all things “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible”(1:16a), he immediately focuses on one part of creation. What does he focus on (1:16b)?

> “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.”

These were terms they used for angels. Evidently in the Colossian heresy they held angels in high regard. After all, they were all spirit and not physical. So they worshipped angels. How does Paul’s statement in 1:16 counter the worship of angels?

> If angels were created just like all other things, then they are no higher than all the other created things. And since Jesus Christ created all things, all things are subservient to him.

Paul will have more to say about these powers in Col. 2:6-23.

1. Paul continues by saying that not only were all things created “through Christ,” but they were created “for him” (1:16c). Creation was created very good through Christ; it was corrupted by man’s sin; and Christ saved his creation through his redemptive work. From beginning to end this is Christ’s creation.

Paul says that Christ “is before all things” (1:17). This is to be understood in terms of time and preeminence. What does this say about Christ’s relationship with creation?

> This says that Christ existed before “all things,” that is, it speaks of his eternal existence. It also speaks of Jesus’ authority over creation. Through Christ, the Word, the Father spoke it into existence.

What else does Christ do for creation (1:17b)?

> He holds all things together.

What does this mean?

> This means that without Christ creation would cease to exist.

So Christ is both the Creator and Preserver of creation. The heretics taught that the material world was inherently evil. But God created the world good and through Christ he preserves it and is reconciling the world and restoring it back to its original good state.

1. At the end of the first half of the hymn (1:18a), Paul transitions away from the theme of creation and to the theme of redemption. As the “firstborn of all creation” (1:15), Christ is the head over all of creation. What else is Christ the head of (1:18a)?

> Christ is the head of the Church.

What relationship does the Church as a whole and each individual person have with Christ (1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27; Eph. 5:30)?

> The Church is the body of Christ. And each believer is a member of Christ’s body.

When was this head/body relationship created (1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11-13)?

> In Baptism God makes an individual a part of the body of Christ.

How does God strengthen the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17)?

> Christ’s body, the Church, is strengthened through the Lord’s Supper.

Besides being the head of the Church, what else is Christ to the Church (Eph. 5:23)?

> Christ is the Savior of the Church.

This is only possible and is a result of Christ’s work of redemption (Eph. 2:15-16). Through the proclamation of Christ as Savior and Redeemer, the Holy Spirit creates faith and adds members to the body of Christ.
2. Paul uses the word “church” to describe the followers of Jesus. In secular Greek, “church” refers to a public assembly. Therefore the Church is a public rather than a secret or exclusive organization.

The same Greek word translated in 1:18 as “church” is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) to translate the assembly of Israel in the OT. Therefore the term indicates that the followers of Jesus are the successors and a continuation of OT Israel as the people of God.
3. At the beginning of the second half of the hymn (1:18b), what two things is Jesus said to be?

> Jesus is the Beginning and he is “the firstborn from the dead.”

He existed before all things and he was the first to permanently rise from the dead and the cause and source of others who will permanently rise from the dead.

What did God accomplish through Christ (1:20a)?

> He reconciled “to himself all things.”

How would he accomplish this (1:20b)?

> He would send Christ as a man to shed his “blood” and die on a “cross”.

Why was it necessary for Christ to do this (1:21)?

> Because by nature people are sinful, “alienated [from God] and hostile in mind [toward God], doing evil deeds.”
4. The word “blood” recalls OT sacrifices where a victim shed its blood in the place of a sinner to secure forgiveness by making the payment for his sin. What did Jesus shed his blood for (Mt. 26:28)?

> Jesus shed his blood to secure forgiveness of sins.

Throughout his letters, Paul uses the term “cross” to connote humiliation and the power of salvation. It was through the cross that Christ rescued mankind by bearing punishment and shame in the place of others. His death on the cross was the cause of reconciliation and peace.
5. Through Christ’s shed blood on the cross what did God reconcile to himself (1:20a)?

> Through Christ he “reconcile[d] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”

Man’s sin affected not only man but the entire universe. So when Christ died on the cross, he did it not only to restore man to God, he also restored the physical universe to be the way the Creator first intended it to be. He restored harmony between God and his creatures and his creation.

Because of what Christ did, all people are reconciled with God. Some are restored to their Creator and Redeemer willingly through faith and their restoration will be complete at the resurrection.

The holy angels who did not revolt are in complete harmony with God already. They needed no restoration or redemption.

But what about the fallen angels and those people who do not believe in Jesus, are they reconciled too? Yes. The fallen angels and impenitent people who do not believe in Jesus will submit to God’s will in the final judgment by compulsion. Those who continue to oppose God will be “reconciled” by being conquered. Christ is the goal of creation, for everything has meaning only in relationship to the crucified and risen Christ. The purpose of Christ’s resurrection was so that he would be “preeminent in all things” (1:18). His resurrection gives meaning to all creation and to all its history and to all the time of its existence.
6. Let’s take a step back and look at the big picture of cosmology that God reveals in Colossians. In Colossians Paul gives his readers a way of viewing the universe. The universe is dependent upon Christ. It was created through Christ (1:15-16) and he upholds and sustains it (1:16-17). As a creation of God, the universe is not God (1:17). There is also nothing inherently evil about the created order (1:15-18).

In sustaining and upholding his creation, the Lord Jesus uses various powers, both personal and impersonal, which he also created (1:16-17; 3:18-4:1). Some of the personal powers rebelled against the Creator (demons). And the impersonal powers (wind, water, etc.) have been corrupted by these fallen angels in an effort to make life unbearable in creation.

Even though they are at work in creation, the fallen angels have been conquered by Christ and are under his lordship (2:10, 15, 20; 3:1). Their judgment is set and their time to do evil is limited. Knowing this helps the believer to see that life on earth is temporary and gives the believer hope. Since Christ is Lord of all, he is able to overcome and when he returns he will restore all things to the way God intends them to be.

1. This section which we have been studying (Col. 1:15-20) ends the overture. The overture has laid out all of the major themes covered in the letter. In this section Paul has spoken of Jesus in exalted terms. He spoke of Christ’s role in creation (1:15-17) and his work of reconciliation (1:18b-20), with 1:18a being a transition.

Christ is the Creator of all things (1:16), including the angels. He is the Preserver of all things, that is, he holds all things together (1:17). He is the Reconciler of all things (1:20). He reconciled the world to God through his work of redemption, in which he, being fully God (1:19), took on human flesh and shed his blood on the cross (1:20). The Church stands in a special relationship with Christ, for he is the head of the Church and the Church is his body (1:18).

The reconciliation which Christ effects is the restoration of the original goodness of creation. Jesus can do this because he is God in human flesh (1:19). He is the second Adam who, when faced with temptation, did not sin, thereby reversing the damage done to God’s creation as a result of mankind’s fall into sin through the first Adam.

**C. Main Exposition and Resolution (1:21 – 2:23)**

Paul will now begin the main body of his letter. “Even as the overture (1:3-20) had ended on a note of cosmic reconciliation as a corollary of the reconciliation of mankind, so the main argument begins with a description of the reconciliation of the readers. The main themes of ministry, soteriology (salvation), and Christology,” which were introduced in the overture, are brought together here. In this section the apostle sets forth “the work of Christ, the significance of the ministry of the Word, and the resulting life of faith(fulness), before turning to a refutation of the heresy in terms of three broad categories: knowledge (2:1-5), fullness (2:6-15), and freedom (2:16-23).”

**Lesson 5**

**C1. The Ministry of Reconciliation (Col. 1:21-29)**

1. Paul starts out this section contrasting the reader’s former state to their current state which Christ has worked in them (1:21-22). How does Paul describe their former state (1:21)?

> They “were alienated [from God] and hostile in mind [towards God], doing evil deeds.”

Paul’s description of them applies to all people, for this describes all people in their natural, sinful state. All people are born in sin, are hostile towards God, and do evil deeds. But by his death on the cross Jesus overcame this alienation and hostility. And those who believe and trust in Jesus are reconciled to God. Why did Christ die on the cross and reconcile us (1:22b)?

> Through his death on the cross Jesus reconciled us “in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

This is the Great Exchange. Jesus exchanged his holiness and righteousness for our sins. He took our sins upon himself and he gave us his holiness. And so when God looks at us, he sees only the holiness and righteousness of Christ. In his sight we are now blameless and above reproach.

Rom. 5:1-11 has some parallels with Col. 1:20-22 (hostility, peace, reconciliation). By shedding his blood Jesus not only reconciled us to God. What else does his shed blood do for us (Rom. 5:9)?

> By his blood we are justified (pronounced not guilty) before God and saved from God’s wrath.
2. Paul specifically mentions Jesus’ “body of flesh” and “his death” as the cause of reconciliation. How did the Colossian heretics feel about the body and the material world? (See Colossian heresy at the beginning of this study.)

> They believed that only the spirit mattered and that the material world was evil.

So by saying that reconciliation to God occurs only through the physical body of Christ, Paul seems to be pointing out that we are reconciled through a human Redeemer, who has a physical body, who dies a physical death, and who is physically resurrected from the dead. In doing so he is pointing out that the incarnation and the atonement are intimately related: God becoming man in order to effect mankind’s salvation (as in Heb. 2:14-18). This goes against the heretics who would have nothing to do with the physical.
3. “If indeed you continue” expresses a condition for reconciliation. What did they need to continue in to remain reconciled to God and to be presented acceptable to him (1:23a)?

> They must continue in faith.

What must it be based on (1:23)?

> Their faith must be based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Where did they first hear this about Jesus (1:7)?

> They first heard the Gospel from Epaphras who is a faithful minister of Christ.

What three words and phrases does Paul use to describe the firmness of their faith that is needed (1:23)?

> Their faith needs to be “(1) stable and (2) steadfast, (3) not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.”

Through the proclamation of the Gospel they initially came to have faith in Jesus and thereby were reconciled to God. They must continue to hear the Good News that they may remain founded and firm in the faith and not shift away from it and continue to be reconciled with God.
4. According to 1:23b and 1:25, what has Paul become and who does he serve?

> God has made Paul a minister (or slave) of the Word and he serves the Church.

Paul serves according to what (1:25a)?

> Paul serves “according to the stewardship from God” (ESV) or “according the plan of God” (CC).

The Greek word that Paul uses, which is translated as “stewardship” or “plan,” is a word Paul uses in other places to designate God’s management of salvation history and his entrusting to ministers the task of proclaiming the Gospel. These two things go together. It was part of God’s “plan” in redeeming the world to entrust to his chosen ministers (or stewards) the proclamation of his Word. Paul was given this task for the Colossians.

For what purpose did God choose Paul to be a minister of the Word (1:25b)?

> Paul was made a minister of the Word in order “to make the word of God fully known”.

Jesus promised that the Gospel would be proclaimed to the whole world (Mt. 24:13; Mk. 13:10). Paul understands his ministry as one in which Christ is fulfilling his promise “to make the word of God fully known.” Paul may be using the universality of the Gospel to counter the false teachers at Colossae who said that saving knowledge was only for a select few. Instead, Paul says that anyone can be a Christian. They need only trust in Jesus.

According to 1:23b and Eph. 3:10, who has the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ, been proclaimed to?

> It has been proclaimed “in all creation under heaven” or “to every creature under heaven” and “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

When the Church proclaims God’s Word, it bears witness to everyone, including to the heavenly powers. By its proclamation the Church declares Christ’s victory, which includes victory over those powers that rebelled against him (Col. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:18-20). The proclamation shows “every creature” (1:23) where it stands in the universe reconciled by Christ.
5. In the ministry of the Word of God Christ is proclaimed (1:28a). Who is he proclaimed to (1:28a)?

> Christ is proclaimed to “everyone.”

For what purpose does Paul proclaim Christ? For what reason does he struggle “with all his energy”? (see 1:28b)

> He proclaims Christ in order to “present everyone mature in Christ” (ESV) or to “present every man perfect in Christ” (CC).

The goal of reconciliation was to reconcile all of creation to Christ. Likewise, the goal of the ministry of proclaiming Christ is to present every person perfect in Christ. Christ’s work of reconciliation and Christ’s work of ministry, carried out through his chosen ministers, has the same goal. Christianity reaches out to all people. It is universal in scope. It is not elitist like the Colossian heresy.

The ministry of the Word of God is hard. How does Paul describe it (1:29a)?

> He says he toils at it, “struggling with all his energy.”

Yet it is not Paul alone who works. Who is actually working through Paul (1:29)?

> When the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed, it is Christ working through Paul and each minister of the Word. Christ works through them in power.

1. Several elements in 1:28 seem to be directed against the false teachers.
(1) “All wisdom” is found in the Gospel. No other wisdom need be added to it as the Gnostics claimed.
(2) “Everyone” is used three times, stressing the universality of the Gospel against the few Gnostics who were supposedly sufficiently enlightened.
(3) The term “perfect” or “complete” (“mature” in the ESV) was probably a term favored by the heretics to describe themselves. Paul says the only way to perfection is in Christ.
2. What word does Paul use twice in 1:26-27 that refers to and is another name for “the word of God?”

> The word is “mystery.”

Both of these terms refer to God’s plan of salvation which he carried out through Christ. A mystery is something unfathomable and hidden. But what can be done with a mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3)?

> A mystery may be made known through revelation.

God’s plan of salvation existed in OT times, but it was a mystery to them because it was hidden in shadows and types (Paul talks about this later in Col. 2:16-23). In the NT era this mystery has been revealed and made known. The plan itself predates the “ages” and “generations” (Col. 1:26) of the OT because it had its origins in eternity.

Based on 1 Cor. 4:1 what do we call those who are entrusted with the mysteries of God?

> They are stewards of the mysteries of God and servants of Christ.

What do these people do with the mysteries of God (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:8-9; 1 Tim. 3:16)?

> They make it known; they reveal the mystery to the nations.

Who else besides the people being directly spoken to learn what the mysteries of God are when the Gospel of Christ is preached (Eph. 3:9-10)?

> The mystery is revealed to “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

Therefore God uses his chosen stewards first of all to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people. But in doing so all of creation learns of its Savior and Reconciler.
3. According to Col. 1:27b, what is the mystery?

> The mystery is “Christ in you.”

Through Paul God had chosen to make known to the Gentiles the riches of this mystery (1:27). God makes the mystery known through his Word. The ministers of the Word are also the stewards of the Word. God has given them the Word to reveal that he sent Christ “for you.” The ministers preach the Good News to all that will listen. And God attaches his Word to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And so the stewards of the mysteries are entrusted by God to use the Sacraments in the way that God intends for them to be used. Through these means the mystery is made known and faith is given and strengthened. Those who have been baptized are said to be “in Christ,” while here the mystery is the reciprocal of this, which is “Christ in you.” Christ, the believer, and the Father are unified and made one through the Holy Spirit’s use of God’s Word.
4. Who does God reveal the mystery to (1:26b)?

> God reveals the mystery “to his saints.”

This word means “holy ones.” So the Word of God is proclaimed by God’s chosen ministers and the Holy Spirit works through that Word to bring people to faith. The mystery of faith is “Christ in you.” Christ is holy and since he is in you, you too are holy; you are his saints, his holy ones. By faith the saints know “the richness of the glory of this mystery” (CC 1:27). It was and is God’s desire (1:27a) to make known his plan of salvation (the mystery) and that believers receive and experience this Good News through faith.
5. Jesus used the word “mystery” one time. He used this word while explaining which parable (Mk. 4:1-20, see especially 4:11)?

> Jesus used the word “mystery” when explaining the parable of the sower.

He used it to explain why he spoke in parables. In terms of the mystery, what effect did Jesus’ parables have on believers and unbelievers (Mk. 4:11-12)?

> Believers – Because the mystery of God’s salvation of sinners in Christ was made known to believers, they perceived and understood the parables, repented of their sins, and received forgiveness.

> Unbelievers – Because unbelievers do not believe and trust in Christ, the mystery of what Christ did for them is hidden from them and they do not perceive or understand the parables.

So for those who believe, parables about God’s kingdom help them better understand the mystery, and for those who do not believe, when Jesus talks in parables about the kingdom, the mystery remains hidden.
6. Paul’s description of his ministry begins with some puzzling comments in 1:24 when he says: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” In the next couple of points, let’s explore this.

What happens to Christians when they are baptized (Col. 2:11-12)?

> In baptism a Christian dies and rises with Christ.

Incorporation into Christ’s death and resurrection brings us personally into a relationship with Christ. Therefore Paul can greet the Colossians as saints and fellow brothers and sisters “in Christ” (1:2).

What happens to those who are “in Christ” (2 Tim. 3:12)?

> Those who are in Christ will suffer and be persecuted just because they are Christians.

In 2 Tim. 2:11-12 there are two parallel statements. What are they?

> 2:11b: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

> 2:12a: if we endure, we will also reign with him;

These two statements sum up the Christian life. Through Baptism we die and rise with Christ. This begins a baptismal life in which we endure suffering until we are called to glory or Christ comes again, at which time Christ will share his reign with us.
7. So, by way of Baptism, Christ closely identifies himself with his followers so that they share in his death and in the sufferings he endured. What Paul taught about this corresponds to what he heard the risen Lord say to him on the road to Damascus. What did Jesus ask Paul (Acts 9:4-5; 22:7-8; 26:14-15)?

> “Why are you persecuting *me*?”

Who had Paul been persecuting (Acts 26:9-15)?

> Paul had been persecuting the saints. He persecuted the Church.

So in Jesus’ mind, when you persecute the Church you persecute him because Christ and the saints are one. When Christians suffer, Christ suffers.

Please note that Baptism not only brings with it suffering and death, but it also gives us the power to endure them. It does this by imparting the power of our Lord’s resurrection by the Spirit (Rom. 1:4; Phil. 3:10; see also Col. 2:12). To reach the consummation of one’s Baptism [resurrection unto eternal life], the believer must live a baptismal life [a life of daily dying to sin and rising to new life], which will also involve suffering.
8. Our sufferings, which are the “afflictions of Christ” (1:24), are not the sufferings which all people experience because of the fall. They are sufferings inflicted on believers precisely because they are believers in Christ.
9. When one thinks of suffering in the OT, one set of passages that come to mind are the Suffering Servant psalms of Isaiah. The Servant is primarily an individual who suffers on behalf of the people of God for their sins [Jesus of course]. But there is also a corporate dimension to this motif. In Is. 49:3, who is the servant identified as?

> The servant is identified as Israel.

So The Servant, Christ, identifies with God’s servant, Israel.

In Acts 13:47 a verse from the second Servant Song (Is. 49:1-13) is quoted (Is. 49:6). Who is it applied to in Acts 13:46-47?

> It is applied to Paul and Barnabas.

As they proclaimed the Gospel, they suffered for it. They and all who proclaim the Word of God are suffering servants, a part of God’s servant Israel. They are servants of the Lord who identify with The Servant. Thus when any Christian suffers for proclaiming God’s Word, Christ, The Servant, suffers with them. Their sufferings become his afflictions in fulfillment of his role as the Servant of the Lord.
10. In 1:24 instead of “for your sake” (ESV), the CC translates it as “in your place.” Who is Paul suffering for the sake of and in the place of?

> He is suffering for and in the place of the Colossians.

He is suffering “on behalf of his [Christ’s] body, which is the church” (1:24). The idea is that the Colossians have wavered in the faith by listening to the heretics. Had they remained firm in their faith, who would have suffered for it?

> The Colossians would have suffered since they would have been attacked by the heretics.

But since they did not remain strong in the faith, Paul has had to preach the Gospel to them once again and instead he is the one suffering.

Baptism incorporates us into the body of Christ, the Church. And what affects one part of “the body” (the Colossians) affects the whole “body” (the Church). What is affecting the Colossians affects Paul and the rest of the Church. So Paul is suffering physically in his body (“in my flesh,” 1:24) for the afflictions the Colossians lack. Paul’s suffering for the sake of the Colossians completes what they lack and is another way in which he serves the body of Christ.
11. Let’s summarize Col. 1:21-29, in which Paul gives a description of ministry of reconciliation. The previous section, the great hymn about Christ (1:15-20), ended with the universal reconciliation accomplished by Christ through his shed blood on the cross. This section begins with the personal reconciliation accomplished by Christ and proclaimed by the Church (1:21-23). Through the death of his physical body, the incarnate Christ reconciled to himself those who had alienated themselves from him by their evil works (1:21). As a result of what he did, Christ is able to present his reconciled ones holy and without moral defect (1:22). The public presentation will be on Judgment Day.

This reconciliation and perfection is received now by faith (1:23). But in order to remain reconciled and presented perfect on Judgment Day, one must remain in the faith (1:23). So the apostle offers a gentile warning to his readers that they must resist the enticements presented by the false teachers and remain steadfast in faith (1:23).

Their faith was created when they heard the Word of the Gospel (1:23). And their faith will be preserved by the Word of the Gospel (1:23). Therefore Paul stresses the ministry of the Gospel (1:23, 25) in order that they will remain firm in their faith and not shift away from the hope of the Gospel (1:23).

This Gospel is not a recent invention, for it has existed for ages (1:26). The Gospel has to do with God’s plan of reconciliation, a plan which Christ carried out and which is now proclaimed to all men (1:25-28). The Gospel is centered on a specific historical setting, person, and ministry (1:27-28). This Gospel is universal in scope. It applies to all people and the entire universe (1:23, 28). With Christ’s work and the proclamation of the Church, an initial fulfillment of God’s plan is already occurred. The reconciliation and salvation that the Gospel brings is eternal, rich, glorious, and perfect (1:27). This Gospel is all that is needed, for it proclaims and bestows all wisdom (1:28).

Because the Gospel is so important, Paul labors with great exertion to make it known (1:29). And this Gospel has within it divine power (1:29). It has the power to take what Christ has done and give it to us, in order that we might be presented as holy and perfect before God (1:28).

Having faith in Christ and proclaiming the Gospel brings with it affliction (1:24). When one undergoes suffering because of one’s faith, one is tempted to withdraw from the faith. Since the strength to continue firm in faith comes from the Word, the Word of the Gospel must continue to be proclaimed and heard (1:25-28). And those who proclaim it know and accept that further affliction will come their way. In bearing this affliction, the proclaimer completes the deficiency of the weak and wavering in their bearing of the afflictions of Christ (1:24).

**Lesson 6**

**C2. True Knowledge (Col. 2:1-5)**

Beginning with this section, the apostle refutes the Colossian heresy, which he characterizes as deception by persuasive speech (2:4). He shows that real knowledge (knowledge was prized by the heretics) is saving faith in Jesus Christ. This pericope ties together the previous and next sections by uniting the themes of the two sections: the significance of the ministry of proclaiming Christ (“mystery,” 1:26-27; 2:2) and Christology (2:3), which is developed further in 2:6-15.

1. In chapter 2 Paul begins to critique the heresy, but he does not do so by pointing out the heresy’s errors. Instead he points out the full sufficiency of Christ. What three phrases does Paul use in Col. 2:2-3 to tell the Colossians that they have everything they need in Christ?

> He uses “all riches,” “full assurance,” and “all the treasures.”

This Christ who is fully sufficient for their salvation is the same Christ that Paul and his coworkers have offered and continues to offer to them in his ministry. What Paul speaks is the truth and it is the Gospel and it contains everything they need for salvation.

The best way of dealing with heresy is through the proclamation of the Word of Christ. God’s Word has divine power to persuade the hearer to believe the truth of the Gospel and to reject the error. So that is what Paul is doing here.
2. For what reason does Paul struggle and labor (2:1) for the people in Colossae and Laodicea (2:2)?

> He does this to encourage them “to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery.”

When Col. 2:2 is looked at in a slightly different way, one could ask: If one has knowledge and understanding of God’s mystery (Christ), what can one have?

> Then one can have “full assurance” that Christ has done everything necessary for your salvation.

Reading between the lines, it appears that the heretics were saying that Paul and Epaphras gave the Colossians only part of what they needed to be saved. And the heretics were offering the rest of what was needed in addition to the Gospel. But Paul refutes the heretics here by saying that the mystery which God has revealed and made known through Paul, the mystery that is bound up in Christ alone, offers all of the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom that is necessary for salvation. In fact, where does Paul say that true wisdom and knowledge can only be found (2:3)?

> True wisdom and knowledge can only be found in Christ.

They are hidden in Christ (2:3). Therefore outside of him they cannot be found. But when one comes to know Christ by faith (2:5), then the mystery that was hidden is revealed. And then one can see that in Christ, one has everything necessary for salvation.
3. How were the heretics misleading the Colossians (2:4)?

> They were “deluding” them with “plausible arguments.”

Dr. Deterding translates 2:4 this way: “that no one deceive you by persuasive speech.” The fact that the heretics were deluding and deceiving the Colossians does not mean that they were not sincere. They believed in Christ, but they also believed a person needed more than Christ. They believed they had a special knowledge and wisdom that was needed in addition to Christ. But Paul warns them directly that they are being deceived by these heretics. They are very persuasive but what they are teaching is false.
4. What does Paul rejoice at seeing (2:5b)?

> Paul rejoices at seeing “your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.”

This was the result of the Gospel being preached to them. What would happen to this “good order” and “firmness” if they listened to the heretics?

> The good order would turn into chaos and the firmness would turn into them being unstable and unsteady.

If they listen to the heretics their strong faith would be turned to mush.

By rejoicing in the firmness of their faith in Christ, Paul treats them as Christians. They have not caved in to the heretics but because of the persuasiveness of the heretics, they are in danger of doing so. So Paul warns them not to fall for their lies.
5. These verses (2:1-5) may be summarized as follows. At this point in the letter the apostle shows his genuine pastoral concern for his readers, even though he has not personally met them. He tells of the great effort he puts forth for them. It was through the Word of God that they came to saving faith and it is through the Word of God that Paul ministers to them and supports them now.

Paul begins his critique of the heresy by contrasting the benefits of the true Gospel, which was brought to them by Epaphras on Paul’s behalf, to the deception of the false teachers. He points out how the Christ-centered Gospel brings great and abundant blessings to his readers, while the false teaching of the errorists takes those blessings away. The errorists may be sincere and they may believe they are Christians, but a firm Christian faith is based on Christ alone and “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are found in Christ alone.

**Lesson 7**

**C3. The Fullness of Christ (Col. 2:6-15) – Part 1 (Col. 2:6-10)**

This section is the heart and center of the letter. It speaks of Christ and salvation.

* In 2:8-10 Paul refutes the heresy setting forth Christ in his fullness, that is, his total sufficiency as God and Savior.
* In 2:11-13 Paul speaks of our baptismal relationship to Christ. It is what ties the entire letter together.

The rest of Paul’s instructions in the letter (Paul’s assertions about Christian freedom in 2:16-23 and his ethical teaching in 3:1-4:6) are based on this section.

1. In 2:6 Paul begins by saying, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord ... ” Is Paul describing a past, present, or future event?

> “Received” is past tense. Paul is describing some past, completed action. In the past they received Jesus.

Given the context of this passage (see Col. 2:11-12), when would this have taken place?

> This would have occurred at their baptism.

[Or it could be said to have happened when they heard and believed the Gospel. Of course anyone who has heard and believed the Good News about Jesus will want to be baptized, for Jesus said, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk. 16:16).]

In baptism one received Christ and the benefits of his saving work, that is, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In the short phrase “Christ Jesus the Lord,” the Christian confesses two things about Jesus. Jesus is two things for the Christian. Using two words from this phrase (and one of them is not “Jesus”), what does it say that Jesus is for the Christian?

> Jesus is “the Christ.” Jesus is the promised Messiah. Jesus is the One God promised to send to save people from sin.

> Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is God.

A partial expression of this was made in an early confession made by Christians. What was that short confession (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3)?

> The confession of early Christians was “Jesus is Lord.”

By saying this, they were publically saying that they believed that Jesus was God, that Jesus was Yahweh. In Baptism, Jesus becomes the Lord and Savior of the one who is baptized.
2. Having received Jesus as both Christ and Lord, what does Paul exhort Christians to do (2:6b)?

> He exhorts them “to walk in him.”

What does this mean?

> To walk in Christ means that the believer is exhorted to live continually in a manner pleasing to Christ.

The imperative (command) of ongoing ethical living (“walk in him”) is grounded on the completed indicative (what God has done) of what Christ has done for our salvation. This is the Christian life. It is a life based upon what Christ has done for us. And because of his great love for us, as displayed in his perfect life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, we respond in faith, “walk[ing] in him.”

So what is the only way that they/we will be able to “walk in him” (see 2:7a)?

> They/we must remain “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.”

So Paul is encouraging them/us to take the firm foundation of Christ given to them in baptism and build upon it. Only by staying in a close relationship with Christ will they be able to lead a Christ pleasing life.
3. In describing the faith in which they were firmly established in, Paul borrows terms from horticulture (growing plants) and construction. What word does he borrow from in

> horticulture? rooted.

> construction? built up.

What are they to be rooted and built up in (2:7)?

> They are to be rooted and built up “in him,” that is, in Christ.

So the roots of their faith must always go deep into the ground of Christ and their faith must always be built up on the solid foundation of Christ. If their faith remains firmly in Christ then it will stand firm no matter what storm beat against it.
4. Being “in him” or “in Christ” simply means having saving faith in Christ, putting your complete trust in him and what he has done for you. Saving faith is not something we do or work to achieve. It is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). How does God create and strengthen faith in us? (fill in the blanks)

> Rom. 6:3, 11; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:11-13: Faith is created and sustained by God through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Baptism.

> 1 Cor. 4:15, 17; Eph. 1:13; 3:6: Faith is created and sustained by God through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the proclaimed Gospel.

> 1 Cor. 10:15-17; 11:17-32: Faith is created and sustained by God through \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the Lord’s Supper.

So when we use these things, God provides and works through them to make our faith stronger and more durable. Among Lutherans, what are these things commonly called?

> They are called the Word and Sacraments and the means of grace.

1. How did the Colossians come to have a firmly established faith (2:7b; 1:3-4, 7)?

> They were taught the faith.

This was done by Epaphras as he most likely worked under the direction of Paul. The apostle Paul learned it from the OT and from Jesus himself. Apostolic teaching is both the standard that Christian faith is to follow and the source of such transmitted faith. The Colossians are to stick with this teaching and not to the teaching offered by the heretics.
2. In 2:8 Paul talks about “tradition.” In tradition, something is passed on from one person to another. Someone gives something and someone else received it. So a tradition has a source or origin. What tradition are the heretics trying to pass on to the Colossian church (2:8a)?

> They are trying to pass on “philosophy and empty deceit.”

Where did this come from (2:8)?

> This tradition is “human tradition” which comes from “the elemental spirits of the world.”

In contrast to this, Paul and Epaphras taught them the tradition of the Gospel. How did Paul learn the Gospel (Gal. 1:11-12)?

> Paul learned the Gospel by a revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the tradition of the Gospel originated with Christ, who passed it down to the apostles, who in turn wrote it down to create the NT and passed it down and taught it to that generation, which in turn passed it down to the next generation and the next, etc. In contrast, the heretics are passing down a tradition of philosophy and deceit which originated with men and a sinful world.
3. Traditions can be good or they can be bad. What tradition did the scribes and Pharisees follow (Mt. 15:2)?

> The scribes and Pharisees followed “the tradition of the elders”.

How did Jesus feel about their tradition (Mt. 15: 3-6)?

> Jesus denounced this rabbinic tradition.

What did Jesus say they were doing with their tradition (Mt. 15:6b)?

> He said they were using their tradition to void the Word of God.

Whenever the traditions of men conflict with the tradition of the Gospel passed down from Christ to his apostles, it has the same effect. It voids the Word of God. This is what the Colossian heretics were doing.
4. As we said above, in a tradition something is being passed from someone to someone. In Paul’s Gospel tradition what was being passed (2:6)?

> Paul passed Christ to the Colossians and the Colossians received him.

In the following instances, what was being given and/or received as apostolic tradition?

> Gal. 1:9: the Gospel.

> 1 Thess. 2:13: the Word of God.

> Jude 3: the faith.

> 2 Pet. 2:21: the holy commandment.

In our current passage (Col. 2:6-7), the receiving of Christ is connected to remaining firm in the faith that was taught. Through the Gospel Christ was given to them and by faith they received him who is the center and goal of all Christian doctrine. In a very real sense, Christ is the true, Christian, apostolic tradition. He is the one who is given and received in Word and Sacrament. And apostolic tradition was received directly from Christ. Therefore since the Scriptures were received from Christ, they are authoritative and a source of true tradition.

So in terms of the sources of tradition, what is Paul telling the Colossians?

> He is saying to make a distinction between the traditions set forth by men and the traditions which are apostolic, biblical, and the Word of God. Reject those traditions that originate with men and hold on to those traditions that originate with Christ.

The Gospel tradition is one that Christ gave to his apostles and they in turn recorded them as Scripture. The Holy Spirit then uses the Scriptures to pass down Christ throughout the ages to generation after generation.
5. Paul tells his readers in 2:8 not to be enticed by this philosophy which is in accordance with what?

> “the elementary spirits of the world” or “elementary principles of the world.”

The elementary things of this world are all created things. And they were created by Christ. And what dwells within Christ (2:9)?

> “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

Paul is comparing two things. One is inferior and one is superior. What are they and from where did each originate (2:8-9)?

> The philosophy of the heretics is an inferior philosophy that originates with men and the Good News of Jesus Christ is superior because it originates with Christ who is fully God.

The fact is that Christ is so much greater than the things created by him that no real comparison can be made between the two. Why would anyone follow a tradition that originated in and was handed down by sinful men instead of the pure Gospel which originated in Christ, who is fully God, and was handed down by Christ to his apostles?
6. The inferiority of this manmade philosophy is also shown in another way. As all the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, so the false philosophy had its own “fullness.” For them, “fullness” was a technical term which referred to all the emanations of their gods. (Emanations are things that flow or proceed out of something.). These emanations (angels, rulers, authorities, thrones, dominions) had as their source deities. They radiated out from them. So the source of this heretical philosophy was not just men, but it came from the emanations of false deities. In contrast to this, Jesus is not just some emanation from God. He is fully and completely God.

Note that the verb Paul uses in verse 9 (dwells) is present tense. When did God first indwell the body of Christ (See Mt. 1:23 and the meaning of “Immanuel”.)?

> The indwelling of God in Christ’s human flesh began at his conception. From that moment on God dwelled in the human flesh of Jesus.

What did Thomas confess Jesus to be after Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:28)?

> Thomas called Jesus, “My Lord and my God.”

What is Christ called in Rom. 9:5?

> Christ is “God over all.”

Christians wait for Jesus to return. Christ will return as what (Titus 2:13)?

> He will return as “our great God and Savior.”

So the indwelling of God in human flesh began at Christ’s conception and continues through all eternity. Col. 2:9 teaches what is confessed in the Nicene Creed: Christ is “very God of very God ... being of one substance with the Father.” He is far more superior than their emanations. In fact he “is the head of all rule and authority” (2:10b).
7. Paul says that the fullness of God dwells in Christ “bodily” (2:9). Paul uses this word specifically in order to counter another tenet of the false philosophy. These heretics had a Gnostic-like view of the world. So what did they believe about the physical world and human flesh (In the Introduction, see the Colossian Heresy)?

> They believed that everything physical was evil.

If their view was correct, then God who is holy could not dwell in anything physical because it is inherently evil. Yet, God dwells in the flesh of Christ. Physical matter in its self is not evil. When God created the world he created it good. Man’s physical body is not evil. It is just that sometimes man uses his body for evil purposes.
8. One more point about the word “dwells.” Paul is writing to the Colossians after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. Yet he uses “dwells” in the present tense. He is saying the fullness of Deity dwells bodily in Jesus Christ right now. And if the fullness of God dwells in the body of Jesus Christ right now then this statement attests to the bodily resurrection of Jesus and to the eternal indwelling of God in the body of Christ.
9. In 2:10 Paul uses the phrase “in him.” He uses this phrase in his customary way to denote a relationship with Christ. This relationship is created by God’s Word of the Gospel, whether it be proclaimed or applied individually in Holy Baptism. Whenever God speaks his Word, his Spirit is present and active, creating, strengthening, and sustaining saving faith in Christ. This saving relationship with Christ is described as being “filled in him” (2:10). By nature we are spiritually empty. But when we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit fills us up with all spiritual gifts. Through faith he fill us with what (1:9)?

> He fills us with “the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Those who have faith have a relationship with Christ and Christ is what (2:10b)?

> Christ is “the head of all rule and authority.”

He is over all creation. And since Christ is the head of all things, a relationship with him is vastly superior to the worship of the powers that are subservient to Christ (2:18) and to a philosophy that is in accord with lesser authorities (2:8).

**Lesson 8**

**C3. The Fullness of Christ (Col. 2:6-15) – Part 2 (Col. 2:11-15)**

1. The heretics believed the physical body to be evil and they required circumcision. What does Paul tell the Colossians has already happened to them (2:11a, c)?

> He told them: “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,” ”the circumcision of Christ.” They have been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.

In circumcision, the foreskin is cut off. What was put off in the circumcision of Christ (2:11b)?

> “the body of the flesh” was put off. The whole body of sinful flesh was put off.

Paul is in effect saying to the Colossians, “The heretics, who believe the body is evil, tell you that you must be circumcised. But their circumcision only cuts off a small portion of the flesh. Yet, you’ve already had the circumcision of Christ. This circumcision is much better than theirs. In Christ the whole body of sinful flesh has been put off, not just a little piece. So why in the world would you consider their circumcision?”
2. When Paul talks about the circumcision of the Colossians, he talks about it in the past tense: “you were circumcised.” This is a past action that they have already experienced. What past event was the occasion of their circumcision (2:11-12)?

> The circumcision of the whole body of flesh occurred at their baptism.

How was their baptism a circumcision (2:11b)?

> Their baptism was their circumcision because baptism is the “putting off the body of the flesh.”

Later in the letter Paul speaks again about something that is put off and he also talks about something that is put on. What are they (Col. 3:9, 10, 12)?

> Paul talks about putting off the old self and its sinful practices and putting on the new self and its God pleasing practices.

The putting off of the body of flesh then is the putting off of the old sinful self. And the old self is replaced with a new self, one that by the power of the Holy Spirit knows God’s will and does it. The custom of a candidate disrobing (putting off) for Baptism and then afterwards re-robing (putting on) in a new clean garment may have been practiced because of this terminology.

1. As we just said, Paul links Baptism and circumcision when he describes Baptism as “the circumcision of Christ” (2:11). Many centuries before Jesus and Paul, what did God direct the Israelites to do (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3; Lk. 2:21)?

> He directed them to circumcise 8 day old male babies.

What would happen if this was not done (Gen. 17:14)?

> If a male was not circumcised he would be “cut off from his people.” He would not be a part of the people of God.

What control over this did the 8 day old child have over this? Did he make a decision to do this?

> The boy was only 8 days old. He had no control. He made no decision to have this done.

This was something done to him that blessed him by making him part of the people of God. Since Paul equates baptism to circumcision and since infant children were circumcised, would it make sense to baptize infant children? What benefit or blessing would they receive from being baptized? What blessing did OT circumcision bring with it?

> Of course it would it would make sense to baptize infants. Just as infant children were made a part of God’s people through circumcision at 8 days old, so it makes sense that infant children should be baptized to become a part of God’s people.

God is a God of grace; he gives his gifts to unworthy people. The gifts God gives are not earned. What better way to illustrate this undeserved grace than infant baptism? At that age they cannot bring themselves to be baptized. They cannot make a decision to accept Christ. Baptism is God’s action for them. In it God uses the mouth of the pastor to place his holy name on the child. When he does this, he claims the child as his own. And God uses the hands and mouth of the pastor to pour water over the child and to speak God’s holy Word. And the result of this is, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, the child becomes a child of God, a part of God’s family, a child of faith.
2. What does Paul say happens to us when we are baptized (Col. 2:12)?

> When we are baptized we are buried with Christ and raised with him.

Rom. 6:3-7 also speaks of baptism. What happens to the old self in baptism (Rom. 6:6a)?

> The old self is crucified in baptism.

What benefit do we receive because of this (Rom. 6:6b)?

> The benefit of the old self being crucified is that the body of sin that controls us and condemns us is brought to nothing and this frees us from enslavement to sin.

So in Baptism we become full participants in the death and resurrection of Christ. When we were baptized we were “buried with him” and “raised with him” (2:12). In baptism, we die with Christ; we rise with Christ; we are set free from sin; and we are given a new life, a life in which we are free to love and serve God and neighbor.
3. Baptism is all about Christ’s death and resurrection. It is about the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection being received by the person being baptized. Christ and his benefits are received “through faith” (2:12). What is it that we have faith in (2:12b)?

> We have faith in “the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

So faith is not a general confidence in God. Faith is specifically based on what God has done in the historical ministry of Jesus Christ for our salvation.
4. In 2:13 Paul describes his readers’ former status from which God rescued them by way of their Baptism. What was their [and our] former condition before they [we] were baptized (2:13a)?

> Their former status was that they were spiritually dead.

And because they were that way, that meant they were completely helpless to do anything to remedy their situation. Their rescue had to be completely God’s work.

What caused this condition (2:13a)?

> They were spiritually dead because of their trespasses and their uncircumcision of their sinful flesh.

“Trespasses” refers to the individual sins they’ve committed. “Uncircumcision” is a word not used very often. Paul refers to circumcision as the putting off of the body of sinful flesh (2:11). Knowing this, what would uncircumcision be?

> Uncircumcision is the opposite of circumcision. It would mean that the body of sinful flesh is not put off.

Uncircumcision describes the sinful condition of all people from the moment of their conception. We are “by nature sinful and unclean” (Divine Service confession). By nature we are totally corrupted and estranged from God. Spiritually we come into this world dead. And if the old sinful self is not put off and a new righteous self put on, we remain dead in our sinful state.

But how can this be remedied? We are dead. Dead people can’t do anything. In our dead state, we are doomed to eternal death in hell. This is the condition that all mankind has inherited from Adam after the fall. What needs to happen is the old sinful self, which is uncircumcised, needs to be cut off or put off (circumcised) and a new, circumcised self needs to be created in its place. This is exactly what has happened to the Colossians. Who caused this to happen and how did he do it (2:11-13, especially 2:13b)?

> God made them “alive together with Christ,” forgiving them their trespasses.

Baptism is the “circumcision of Christ” (2:11b). In baptism we are joined with Christ (2:12) and the old, sinful self dies with Christ. It’s as if in baptism Christ circumcises or “puts off” the sinful flesh (2:11) which we have been saddled with since conception. But that is not all that happens in baptism. Because we are joined with Christ (2:12), when he rises from the dead, through the power of God, he also raises us from the dead (2:12) fully forgiven by God (2:13) for Jesus’ sake.
5. Every person, no matter how many actual sins he commits (trespasses), is in a state of uncircumcision (spiritually dead) when he comes into this world. Because every person has a corrupt sinful nature, every person is in need of God’s saving action. Sinful acts, words, thoughts, and feelings (“trespasses”) are a result of the corrupt human nature (man’s condition of being “uncircumcised”).

But even those who have saving faith must battle against the committing of sins which spring forth from the corruption of their being. On their own they are unable to do what is right. Instead they need to rely on God and the power he provides in the Gospel of Christ. To combat their “uncircumcision” God provides Baptism, the “circumcision of Christ.”

Baptism is not just a onetime event, but a daily dying and rising with Christ. Every day we are to purge all that pertains to the old Adam and in faith bear the fruit of the Spirit. The way I like to think about this is comparing it to marriage. When a person gets married, he does not have the ceremony and then the next day go back to life as it was when he or she was single. The act of getting married leads to a whole different kind of life, a married life. So too the act of baptism leads to a whole different kind of life, a baptismal life. This is a life of daily dying to sin and living to do good works for others.

An example may help us better understand why the old sinful self (uncircumcised) cannot be fixed, why it must daily be put to death. If a saw becomes warped it will never produce a straight cut. The only way to correct this is to re-forge the saw. We are like a warped saw and its defective cuts in the corruption of our “uncircumcision” (warped) and in the individual sins we commit as a result (crooked cut). The only way to correct our condition is to remake us. This remaking takes place in Baptism, the circumcision of Christ. In Baptism we receive the power of the Holy Spirit and as a result are able to produce deeds, words, thoughts, and feelings that are not trespasses.

1. Take note that as he has done here, Paul uses the expressions “with Christ” and “in Christ” often. When he does so, he is saying that the believer is incorporated into Christ and is a recipient of Christ’s saving work. He is saying that anyone who is with Christ or in Christ has a saving relationship with Christ.
2. What document does Paul picture our trespasses as (2:14a)?

> Paul pictures our trespasses as “a record of debt” or a bill or bond of debt.

Because of our trespasses, we owe God. Big time! In fact, because our debt is so enormous, we could never pay it. So, Christ came for the express purpose of paying off our debt for us. Christ paid for our debt by suffering and dying on the cross. Because Christ paid our debt, what did God do with our debt (2:14a)?

> Because Christ paid our debt for us, God cancelled the debt.

Since God is a just God, he requires that all debts be paid in full. Even if we wanted, we couldn’t pay off the debt we’ve rung up in a million years. But since Jesus paid our debt for us, God’s justice was satisfied and God wiped the slate clean. This is part of what Luther called the Great Exchange. Jesus took all of our trespasses and uncircumcision upon himself and paid the price for us and in exchange he gave us his perfect righteousness. So now when God looks at us, he no longer sees us as great sinners but the righteousness of Christ.
3. Through his death and resurrection, Christ did more than pay our debt. What else did Christ accomplish (2:15a)?

> “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame.” He triumphed over and defeated all hostile, cosmic powers and then made a public spectacle of them.

Because we are in Christ, we share in his victory. The picture here is the Roman custom of a triumphant military procession. The Romans would take the defeated armies, disarm them, strip them, and humiliate them by parading them in public. Through his death and resurrection Christ won the victory and then made a public spectacle of the powers he defeated.

When did this probably occur (1 Pet. 3:18-22; Acts 1:6-11)?

> This most likely occurred when he descended into hell, showing himself to be alive and preaching to those who were held in prison because of their open defiance and disobedience to God and in his ascension into heaven publically seen by his disciples.

What Paul is saying to the Colossians is that these powers that they are being tempted to give their allegiance to are the same powers that Christ has triumphed over. They have been defeated and publically shamed. In effect he is asking them, Why would you give your allegiance to these defeated enemies instead of Christ?
4. Because of Christ’s victory, the ultimate triumphant is assured for our Lord and his followers (Rev. 12:7-11). [Yet while the powers are defeated, they are currently like a chained up dog. They are limited in what they can do, but if one comes too close, the powers can do serious harm, even kill.] Yet God’s people need to be watchful. They will continue to struggle against the powers (Rev. 12:17; Eph. 6:10-17) until the consummation of Christ’s victory at the End (1 Cor. 15:24-28).
5. The triumphing, disarming, and shaming of the powers are done “in him [Christ]” (Col. 2:15b). Whenever Paul uses the phrase “in Christ,” he is referring to those who have a close, saving relationship with Jesus. Therefore using this phrase means not only that God won the victory through Christ. It means that Christ shares the victory he won with who?

> Christ shares his victory with all of those who are “in Christ.” He shares it with all believers. In Christ all believers are victorious over the powers of evil.
6. These verses (2:6-15) may be summarized as follows. This is a pivotal section of the letter. Paul begins this section with a call to faith and faithfulness (2:6-7). He encourages them to remain faithful to what they have been taught. What they have been taught is authoritative because it came from Christ through his apostle. And what they have been taught, both OT and NT, is authoritative because it is God’s revelation to man, concerning the salvation he provides for mankind through his Son, the Christ.

Paul then warns them against the “philosophy” (2:8) that is enticing them. This philosophy is deceptive because it is in error and is spiritually deadly. This philosophy appeals to the human way of thinking. It is “in accord with the tradition of men” but is “not in accord with Christ” (2:8). But in fact its origins are not simply the imaginations of men, but ultimately derive from “the elements of the world” (2:8) or “the elemental spirits” (ESV), that is, the spiritual powers that have fallen away from and are hostile to God.

In contrast to this deceitful philosophy which accords with powers hostile to God, Paul directs them to the all-sufficient Christ. Everything that makes God to be God is found in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is God in human flesh (2:9). And even after he died and rose again, Jesus continues to be both God and man. As God, Jesus is supreme over all of creation, including all spiritual powers (2:10). And those who are “in him” (2:11) through faith by way of the means of grace have an intimate relationship with him who is over all things. They are the Church, the body of Christ.

This relationship with Christ was created in Baptism. In Baptism we are buried and raised with Christ (and therefore also crucified with him) (2:12). In Baptism the corruption of the sinful flesh (2:11, 13) has been removed as a kind of circumcision through the forgiveness of sin (2:13). Baptism gives forgiveness of sins because it incorporates us into the mighty deeds of Christ by which he won forgiveness. Therefore Baptism is a Sacrament which has divine power to save (1 Pet. 3:21). In Baptism God creates faith which lays a hold of the forgiveness Christ won. The forgiveness we have in Baptism raises us up from a state of spiritual death to a new life in Christ (2:13). And the same power in Baptism that saves us also gives us the ability to live a God pleasing life.

Since Christ won for us forgiveness of sins through his death and resurrection and since we have received that forgiveness in Baptism, our debt has been paid and the slate wiped clean (2:14). The Law can no longer condemn us. And in Baptism Christ’s victory over the rulers and powers becomes our victory because we are in him (2:15)

**Lesson 9**

**C4. True Freedom (Col. 2:16-23) (pp. 112-131)**

1. Paul starts out this section by instructing his readers not to allow the heretics to condemn them with regard to what (2:16b)?

> Don’t let them condemn you because of “questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.”

We don’t know the exact details of what the heretics were requiring, but from these verses we can see that Paul is rebutting some of the things that they were requiring their followers to do. Those things included certain dietary restrictions and the observance of certain religious days. These types of things were ok (they were required in the OT) but in the big picture these things were only what (2:17a)?

> These things were only “a shadow of the things to come.”

In other words, the thing that caused the shadow is more important than the shadow it causes. What is the substance or body that causes the shadow (2:17b)?

> “The substance [or body] belongs to Christ.” Jesus is what is important, much more so than the OT regulations about food and religious days that pointed forward to him.

In the OT you couldn’t see what was coming in the NT, but you could get some idea about it from the shadows that it cast. People, places, and things in the OT were types of Jesus. They each taught us a little bit about the One that was coming. But now he has come! So don’t concentrate on the shadows he casts, but look only to him. These shadows don’t save people, but Christ who has now come does!

1. In one simple sentence (2:17) Paul sheds light on how the OT should be understood. One must interpret the OT in terms of Christ. The primary purpose of the OT is to point us to Christ. It is to be understood typologically. This means that the OT institutions, events, and messages (prophecies), while having historical value for their own time and setting, achieve their full meaning only in relationship to Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a couple of examples of OT typology.
* The OT sacrifices anticipated Christ’s once-for-all-time sacrifice for forgiveness and salvation.
* The Sabbath Day looked forward to the eternal life that Jesus would win.
* The Passover foreshadowed both Christ’s offering of himself as the Lamb of God and the Lord’s Supper as the new covenant meal.
* The thanksgiving offerings foreshadowed the Christian’s spiritual life of service to his Savior.

These things derive their significance from Christ. The Colossians have Christ himself, the body that casts the shadow. Christ is the way of forgiveness and salvation. We have him too, as he comes to us and offers these gifts in the means of grace (Word and Sacrament).

1. What had been “hidden for ages and generations but [was] now revealed to his saints” (1:26)?

> “The mystery” had been hidden but was now revealed.

What was this mystery (1:27b; 2:2b)?

> The mystery is “Christ in you” or “Christ”.

What does the word “Christ” mean?

> Christ means “Anointed One.”

This is the Greek word for the Hebrew word “Messiah.” The mystery of the promised Messiah had been hidden for ages and generations in the typology of the OT. But now Paul had the privilege to “make known” (1:27) the mystery, to give the saints the “full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ” (2:2). With the mystery being revealed, it is easier for us to look back at the OT and understand its true meaning and grasp the significance of its message in ways that we never could without the revelation.
2. The heretics were using the OT festivals and dietary regulations as a way to worship God and seek God’s salvation. But since these things pointed forward to Jesus, they were misusing them. They were taking something God had given as Gospel (pointing ahead to Christ) and using them as Law (performance of works to earn salvation). Christ has fulfilled all of the OT rituals for us and therefore they are no longer binding on NT believers.
3. What kinds of things did the heretics insist on (2:18a)?

> They insisted on asceticism and the worship of angels.

And what did they fail to do (2:19a)?

> They failed to hold on to the Head (Christ Jesus).

Christ is the head of all creation, which includes all good and evil powers, and he is the head of all those who have a saving relationship with him. What happens to those who have a faith relationship with Christ (2:19b)?

> Those who have a faith relationship with Christ grow stronger and more secure in that relationship.

How is this growth obtained (Eph. 4:14-16, esp. 15a)?

> Growth is obtained by “speaking the truth in love.”

Jesus said, “I am the Truth.” Therefore growth in Christ occurs through the proclamation of Christ. And when Christ is proclaimed, what does this counter (Eph. 4:14)?

> Proclaiming the Truth counters false doctrine which comes from human cunning, craftiness, and deceitfulness.
4. The regulations referred to in Col. 2:16, 17, and 21 show that the Colossian heresy was influenced by Judaism. In 2:17 Paul established that the OT rituals were transitory in that they pointed to Christ who has now come. Because of this, they should not let anyone deem them as ineligible for salvation because they don’t perform the rituals advocated by the heretics.
5. Besides the Jewish ritual influences, what two things did the heretics insist upon (2:18a)?

> They insisted upon asceticism and the worship of angels.

What is asceticism?

> It is the idea that one can reach a high spiritual state through the practice of extreme self-denial or self-mortification.

The heretics believed that one must escape the physical in order to obtain spiritual oneness with God. The angels were not physical beings, therefore they held them in very high regard.

In addition to these things, what did they claim to have seen that they became puffed up over and went on about in detail (2:18b)?

> They claimed to have seen visions.

From these visions they may have claimed to have superior and secret knowledge or they may have claimed to have seen the way to spiritual union with God.
6. The ESV translation of 2:18 has “puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.” The CC translation has “is vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh.” The flesh is what the heretics wanted to escape. But notice that their whole religion was in the realm of the flesh. Where did their religion originate from (2:8)?

> Their religion was a human philosophy that originated from human tradition.

Where did the regulations for their religion come from (2:22b)?

> They came from “human precepts and teachings.”

They wanted to escape the flesh but their entire religion was based on human traditions and teachings.

Just as Paul rebuked the heretics for their man-made regulations, so Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for the man-made requirements that they placed on the people. What did Jesus say they were teaching as the doctrines of God (Mt. 15:9b)?

> Jesus said they were taking “the commandments of men” and teaching them as if they were doctrines from God.

This is the same thing the heretics in Colossae were doing.
7. What kind of religion are they promoting (2:23a)?

> They are promoting a religion that is self-made that is based on humiliation of and harshness to the body.

What value does this religion have in stopping the sinful inclinations of the fallen flesh (2:23b)?

> It has no value in stopping the flesh from indulging in sin.

No matter how severe one treats the body, it does nothing to help one overcome the “flesh,” one’s hostile relationship toward the holy God. These practices not only do not subdue the “flesh,” but actually indulge it. When one hopes to overcome the sinful condition and alienation from God by self-willed practices and severe treatment of the body, one inflates the human nature into thinking that it can overcome sin and save itself. This self-willed worship rejects God’s design for salvation and gratifies the “flesh.”
8. In 2:11-15 Paul tells how God triumphed over the powers hostile to him through Christ and how Christ shares his victory with all those who have been buried and raised with him in Baptism. Therefore all those who have been baptized have been released from the influence of the demonic (“the elemental spirits of the world,” 2:20). Because Christians have been released from the influence of the powers of this world, they are no longer obligated to serve those powers or to submit to their regulations. Paul’s question then in 2:20-22 points out the absurdity of them submitting to regulations of the powers since they are no longer under their control and influence.
9. In these verses Paul deals directly with the heresy plaguing the Colossians. He exposes the danger and error of this false teaching. Paul addresses these issues in such a way that his words can be applied to a wide variety of circumstances in the life of the Church. His words here can also provide some important keys for understanding the meaning of the Scriptures of his day, the OT.

The heretics offered a different way of salvation. Their teachings seemed wise, but they could not save and they did not have divine authority or any value. Their teachings actually had a negative effect because they promoted a fallen person’s desire to do something for his own salvation. Their teachings also robbed people of the freedom that was theirs in Christ. Any man-made way of salvation leads to stifling bondage.

God’s Word always points to Christ, the Savior of the world. Both the OT and NT must be understood in the light of Christ. He is the key for understanding Scripture.

**Part 2 – Paranesis [Ethical Instruction Regarding Christian Life] (Col. 3-4)**

Colossians, like other letters written by Paul (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Thessalonians), consists of two parts: a section where Paul expounds on the Gospel of Christ (Kerygma – Col. 1-2) and a section where Paul gives ethical instructions for living the Christian life (Paraenesis – Col. 3-4). When he does this, Paul builds the Christian living section on the Gospel of Christ section. True godly living can only proceed from and is based upon true faith in Christ. The Gospel of Christ provides both the ability and the willingness to live in a manner pleasing to him.

The Christian living section of the letter is laid out as follows:

* Paul will use the broad concepts of life and death in this section (3:1-4) as a basis for more specific guidelines in the sections that follow.
* The following two sections (3:5-11 and 3:12-17) of general exhortations are united by the recurring themes of “put off” and “put on.”
* In this section Paul gives specific admonitions addressed to believers regarding their respective stations in life in the table of duties (3:18-4:1).
* Here Paul presents his readers with general exhortations to watchfulness in prayer (4:2-6).
* The last section of the letter Paul turns to concluding matters (4:7-18)

**Lesson 10**

**A1. The Christian Life - Death and Life (Col. 3:1-4)**

1. As we said above, the last half of the letter (Col. 3-4), which covers instruction on the Christian life, is based on the proclamation of the Gospel of the first half of the letter (Col. 1-2). Four words and phrases tie this opening section back to the preceding exposition of the Gospel.

(1) The CC translation starts this section with “Therefore, if you were raised with Christ ... ”. The word “therefore” ties this section back to the previous section. What follows “therefore” is a conclusion based on information previously given. Here is an example.”Last night we had torrential rains. Therefore the baseball games today have been cancelled.” The reason the games have been cancelled is because of the torrential rains.

The Gospel of the previous section (Col. 1-2) centered on Baptism. Given this and that much of the rest of Colossians is Paul’s instruction on Christian living, what is Paul saying here when he ties the two together with “therefore”?

> Paul is saying that as a consequence of receiving Christ in Baptism, the believer should live in the way that Paul instructs.

(2) In Baptism we die with Christ and are raised with Christ. What word or phrase in Col. 3:1a ties back to Col. 2:12, indicating Baptism?

> Paul’s use of “raised with Christ” in 3:1a ties back to “you were also raised with him” in 2:12.

The question of whether they have been raised with Christ has already been answered. What did Paul say about this in 2:12?

> Paul said in Baptism they had been buried with Christ and raised with Christ.

Since they have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, they are to live in the way that Paul instructs.

(3) What phrase in 2:12 does “with Christ” tie back to? (Hint: it’s used twice)

> “With Christ” corresponds to “with him.” They have been buried “with him” and they have been raised “with him.”

So this short phrase also helps make the connection to baptism.

(4) Another phrase in 3:3 ties this section back to baptism. In 3:3 Paul says, “For you have died ... with Christ.” What phrase in 2:12 implies dying with Christ in baptism?

> The phrase “having been buried with him in baptism” implies dying with Christ.

Only dead people are buried. So saying someone was buried with him implies he has died with him.

All of these phrases tie back to Baptism. Baptism is a means to salvation and eternal life in heaven. This eternal salvation then is the basis of the kind of conduct we display in this life.

1. In Baptism believers have been delivered from evil and given eternal life (2:11-13). The effects of baptism reach forward into eternity. Christians will live in the holiness of heaven forever. But what about right now? How are Christians to live now (3:1-2)?

Paul says to:

> 3:1 – “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

> 3:2 – “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Rather than now living by the evil of the fallen world, they are to live as they will live in heaven. All of their spiritual and intellectual faculties are to be oriented on God’s salvation in Christ. And this in turn will shape the moral conduct of their lives now. The following sections (especially 3:5-11) will specify what “things above” are to be sought and implemented and what earthly vices are to be excluded from one’s conduct.
2. The word “for” at the beginning of 3:3 indicates that the ethical exhortation in 3:2 rests upon the theological foundation of dying to the things of this world in 3:3. Because they have received the righteousness of Christ in Baptism, they are holy and blameless in God’s sight. That is their current status before God. Because God sees them as holy, righteous, and blameless people, therefore they should live holy, righteous, and blameless lives. What Paul is doing then is exhorting baptized Christians to “be what you already are.” You are holy, therefore be holy.
3. There is an indication in this section (3:1-4) that Christians already have eternal life. When Paul uses the phrase “in Christ,” he is talking about the saving relationship we have with Christ. In 3:3 he uses a similar phrase, “in God.” What do believers have “in God” (3:3b)?

> The believer’s life is in God.

The believer has life now, but why can’t it be seen (3:3b)?

> It can’t be seen because it “is hidden with Christ in God.”

When will the believer’s life be clearly seen by all (3:4)?

> It will be revealed for all to see when Christ returns.

When Christ is “revealed” (“revealed” is used twice in 3:4), then it will be revealed to all that believers have eternal life because they have a saving relationship with Christ.

What is the only way that eternal life can be seen now (2 Cor. 5:7)?

> It can only be seen by faith.

Currently it’s hard to tell the good wheat (Christians) from the weeds (unbelievers) that grow with it (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43), but when the End comes the eternal life that believers possess will be revealed so all can see it (Col. 3:4).
4. In this life on earth, eternal life is hidden (3:3) under the shadow of suffering and cross-bearing, which we must endure (Mt. 16:24-27; Mk. 8:34-38; Lk. 9:23-26; Rom. 8:17). But when Christ appears at the End, Paul says, “then you also will appear with him in” what (Col. 3:4b)?

> Believers will appear with Jesus “in glory.”

By using this word, Paul uses a word with rich OT meaning. In the OT the word “glory” describes God himself, especially as he is revealed to mankind (Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 2:8). What else does the word “glory” refer to (Jn. 1:14)?

> The word “glory” refers to the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus, the eternal Word, became flesh and lived among us. He is the glory of God.

Therefore “glory” is a virtual synonym for the image of God (Rom. 3:23; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21). Hence eternal life is a life lived “in glory” (3:4), that is, a life lived in the presence of God. In eternal life, what do we become partakers of (2 Pet. 1:4)?

> We become partakers and sharers in the divine nature.

In the beginning God made man in God’s image. But man lost that image when he fell into sin. In eternal glory that righteous and holy image, which was lost, will be restored in us. God is also worthy of “glory” for his redemption of humanity (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14) and throughout eternity the redeemed will praise God’s glory.

**Lesson 11**

**A2. Put Off and Put On (Col. 3:5-17) – Part 1**

The imperatives of this section are built upon the indicatives of salvation and Baptism from the earlier portion of the letter. But while 3:1-4 dealt with broad principles of sanctification, 3:5-17 deals with more specific directions on how God’s people are to live their lives.

1. All human beings have been corrupted by sin and we by ourselves cannot reverse its effects. Therefore Paul’s instruction to “put to death” the vices of sin he lists (3:5) is not something we can do on our own to fix our corruption of sin. Rather this can only take place when Christ works in us to conform us to his likeness.
2. What is “earthly in you” that needs to be put to death (3:5b)?

> Sins such as “Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry,” are in you and need to be put to death.

What else must Christians put away (3:8)?

> Christians must also put away “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.”

The five vices in 3:5 and the five vices in 3:8 are illustrative rather than a complete list. All of these evil things are to be removed from the baptized believer’s way of life.

What is coming on account of our sin and vice (3:6)?

> On account of our sin and vice God’s wrath is coming.

God is justly angry with the sinner for his sin and unbelief. Yet God in his grace and mercy sent Christ to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus satisfied God’s righteous demands for us and paid the punishment we deserved. We need only to appropriate for ourselves the righteousness of Christ. This is done passively through faith in Christ. Sin and its consequences can only be removed by God’s intervention in Christ. And God did this when he took his wrath out upon his Son instead of us.
3. Sin affects us outwardly through our actions or inwardly in our hearts. There seems to be a movement in the vices in 3:5. Is the movement from the outward to the inward or from the inward to the outward?

> There seems to be a movement from outward actions to inward attitudes of the heart.

What is the root cause of all of these vices (end of 3:6)?

> The root cause is idolatry, trusting in someone or something more than we trust in Jesus.

All the vices listed in 3:5 are selfish vices. What then is our idol that we replace Jesus with?

> Our idol is ourselves. Instead of trusting in and pleasing Jesus, we trust in and please ourselves.

Our idolatry causes us to commit all kinds of sins and stirs up God’s wrath (3:6). All who commit such sins (all people) deserve eternal damnation.

The vices listed in 3:8 also have a movement. Do they move from wrongful talk to wrongful actions or from wrongful actions to wrongful talk?

> They move from wrongful actions to wrongful talk.

All of these things must be put away (3:8a). Who do all of these things, as well as lying, belong to (3:9a)?

> They belong to the old self or the old man.
4. This section, like previous sections, contains considerable baptismal terminology. Paul’s exhortation to godly living is based upon what Christ has already done for us and given to us in Baptism. What word in 3:5 ties back to Baptism (see 2:12; 2:20; 3:3)?

> “Death.” In Baptism we die and are buried with Christ.

Because we have died to the power of sin in Baptism, we are to put to death those vices that show we are under the control of Satan and our sinful nature.

What phrase in 3:9 ties back to Baptism in 2:11?

> The words “put off” tie back to Baptism.

What is put off in Baptism (2:11)?

> In Baptism “the body of flesh” is put off.

What is the opposite of “putting off” (3:10)?

> “Putting on” is the opposite.

The OT talks about “putting on.” What is “put on” in the following verses: Is. 52:1; 61:10; Zech. 3:1-5?

> New, clean garments are put on. These are the garments of salvation and righteousness.

What was put off and put on in 3:9-10?

> The old self (or old man) was put off and the new self (or new man) was put on.

When did or will this putting off and putting on occur? In the past, present, or future?

> This occurred in the past.

So what Paul is saying is this: Put off these vices because you have already put off the old sinful man and have already put on the new righteous man. These vices are not in keeping with your new status.

The Colossian Christians (and all Christians) have put off the old man in Baptism (2:11-12; 3:9). So now they are urged to put off the vices of the old man (3:8-9a). And since they have been raised with Christ and put on the new man in Baptism (2:12-13; 3:10), they are to put on the virtues of the new man (3:12-15). This is supported by Eph. 4:22, 24. Therefore the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man are both an accomplished reality in Baptism and an ongoing goal for the Christian’s conduct.
5. The concepts of “old man” and “new man” play an important role in this section. They are part of Paul’s baptismal terminology. The old sinful man was crucified with Christ in Baptism in order to destroy sin (Rom. 6:6). The new man is created in the image of God, holy and righteous (Eph. 4:24).

What two people does Paul speak of in 1 Cor. 15:45?

> Paul speaks of the first Adam and last Adam.

You can pair up and associate each one of these two people with the old man or the new man. Which “man” is associated with which “Adam” and why?

> The old man is associated with the first Adam because the first Adam brought sin into the world. And that sinful state was passed down from Adam to each succeeding generation. That sinful state along with its vices is what Paul is calling the “old man.”

> The new man is associated with the Last Adam (Jesus) because Jesus came and reversed the effects of sin that the first Adam caused. He lived the perfect life that the first Adam failed to do. The reception of Christ’s righteous by faith in Baptism makes the Christian a new man and gives to him eternal life.

Thus putting off the old man and putting on the new man (Col. 3:9-10) is nothing more than trusting in Christ for salvation. Such faith, given to us in Baptism, trusts him because he is the image of God and God come in human flesh in order to save us.
6. In Baptism, what do Christians put on?

> Gal. 3:27: In Baptism Christians put on Christ.

> Col. 3:10: In Baptism Christians put on the new man.

These are two different ways of referring to the same thing. Both are saying that in Baptism we enter into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And in this relationship, what is happening to the new man (3:10b)?

> The new man “is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

The first Adam was created in the image of God. So Paul is saying to live the kind of life that the first Adam lived, before he rebelled, forfeiting the image of God. Having had the image of God restored to us in Baptism equips us to live such a life now (although on this side of eternity we can never live a perfect life). And doing good works displays the fact that we have a relationship with Christ.
7. Paul uses the phrases “outer man” and “inner man” in the same way as “old man” and “new man.” The new man and inner man are:
* created and maintained only by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16)
* renewed daily (2 Cor. 4:16)
* delighted to follow the will of God (Rom. 7:22)
* anticipating the resurrection (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

The old man and the outer man have been corrupted and are wasting away (2 Cor. 4:16).

1. One important aspect of putting on the new man is given in the following verses: Col. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:15; Gal. 3:28. What is it?

> Christian unity. Though Christians come from many different backgrounds, they are unified in their relationship to God through faith in Christ.

This is expressed in the phrase “Christ is all and is in all” (Col. 3:11). Christ is the basis for the Church’s unity. Those united with Christ are to reject prejudice and animosity. Yet in this life the old man rears his ugly head causing divisions. Only in the life to come will these divisions be fully resolved.

In the early church there were two main groups, the Jews and the Gentiles. They had their differences and the Colossian heresy, with its mixture of Jewish and Gentile elements, may have been a way to try and overcome these differences. In our own day we have movements such as the Ecumenical Movement that try and overcome differences by encouraging dialogue between Christianity and other religions. In reality, all unity is found in Christ alone. All who are unified with Christ are unified with each other.
2. All who put on the new man are unified in Christ and called to be what (3:15)?

> All who put on the new man are called to be “in one body.”

How is it possible for so many kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds to be united and live in one body (3:15a)?

> They are able to so by allowing “the peace of Christ rule in [their] hearts.”

Having peace with God through faith in Christ, Christians are called to a peaceful and loving relationship with other believers.
3. We have mentioned several times that the commands for Christian living in this section are based upon Baptism. The Christian realizes that the old man clings to him, causing him to do all kinds of evil. Therefore the Christian must daily return to his Baptism and put off the old man and its vices and put on the new man and its virtues. Daily the Christian returns to the promise of the remission of sins in Baptism, the Word, and the Supper. The Christian cannot put off the old man and put on the new man without God’s grace in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Growth in Christian living is a consequence of Christ’s action for our salvation (Col. 1:13-23). So, in Baptism God not only gives us the forgiveness Christ won, but he also gives us the strength and ability to live a God pleasing life.

Over time Christians grow in their knowledge of and faith in Christ. And that growth yields abundant good works. This growth takes place as believers continually return to their baptismal incorporation into Christ’s death and resurrection with daily repentance and trust in what God has done for us in Christ. The Christian’s growth in faith and love in Christ can be shown as follows:
 /\
 /\ / \
 /\ / \ / \
 /\ / \ / \ /\ / \ /
 /\ / \ / \ /\ / \ / \ / \ /
 / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ /
Baptism /\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\/\_\_\_\_

This view of sanctification is Christocentric because it stresses a daily returning to one’s Baptism. In Baptism one dies and rises with Christ and puts one’s trust in him alone.

Others view Baptism as their act of public testimony showing they’ve made a “decision for Christ.” In their view, Baptism is their public commitment to God rather than God’s commitment to them. For them it’s a one –time event instead of an on-going way of life. This view of Baptism is anthropocentric. In this view people depend upon themselves and self-improvement. This view tends to be pietistic, synergistic, legalistic, or works-oriented. This view is not Christ centered.

**Lesson 12**

**A2. Put Off and Put On (Col. 3:5-17) – Part 2**

1. After focusing primarily on the individual Christian’s life (Col 3:5-10) and the unity Christians have in Christ (Col. 3:11), Paul then turns to Christian virtues that are relational (Col. 3:12-15). Sometimes, in an attempt to shield oneself from evil, Christians will isolate themselves from others, especially unbelievers. But the virtues that Paul lists in these verses can only be carried out when we interact with other people, Christian and non-Christian. The exhortations in Col. 3:5-17 are primarily concerned with interaction with other Christians, but they also have application to interaction with all people.
2. What 5 virtues does Paul list in 3:12?

> Paul says to put on “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”

Briefly explain how each of these is used in relation to others.

> A person with a compassionate heart identifies with someone who is in a tough situation and is willing to stoop down and take time to help that person in their time of need.

> A person who is kind treats others with a consideration of their feelings.

> A person who is humble puts oneself beneath others; he puts others first.

> A person who is meek or gentle recognizes the difficult state or situation another person is in and treats them gently.

> Patience can only be practiced when we come into contact with those whose conduct tries our patience. A person who is patient practices tolerance and self-restraint.
3. What 2 things does Paul encourage Christians to do in 3:13a?

> He says Christians should bear with each other and forgive each other.

No one can do these things if they are isolated from others and their disagreeable and hurtful conduct. We are not called to withdraw from the world. We are to engage with others, and then as Luther says, “put the best construction on everything” (explanation to the 8th commandment).
4. What does Paul say we should put on above everything else (3:14)?

> Above all we should put on love.

Love is a matter of the will, a determined decision to love another even when they are unlovable. It reaches out to those who have no claim on us. It overflows with concern for those who need our help. It risks and looks for no reward.
5. What is to rule in the Christian’s heart (3:15a)?

> The peace of Christ is to rule in the Christian’s heart.

This is not a situation where there is no conflict, but where peace overcomes conflict. Peace is like a mediator who settles disputes.
6. Lastly, how does Paul say Christians should be (3:15b)?

> Christians are to be thankful.

When dealing with others, the Christian offers thanksgiving to God for the blessings received by others. This happens regularly in the Divine Service. In the Divine Service Christians give thanks for blessings, eternal and temporal, that others have received.
7. What is to richly dwell in Christians (3:16a)?

> The Word of Christ is to dwell in Christians richly.

Why is this? Because it is through his Word that Christ is at work offering and giving his gifts to us. For this reason, the Word of Christ (Scripture) is read and proclaimed in the Divine Service. When this is done, we are “teaching and admonishing one another” as Paul directs. In what other ways do the Word of Christ dwell in us richly and we teach and admonish each other (3:16)?

> The Word of Christ dwells in us and we teach and admonish each other when we sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” to each other.

Christians teach and instruct each other on what God has done for them by these means. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are God’s Word set to music. In whatever form it takes (spoken, read, sung), the Holy Spirit used the Word to create and strengthen faith in us. He also uses it to provide Christians with the strength, ability, motivation, and guidance to live a God pleasing life.
8. When God is at work for us and giving us his gifts in the Divine Service, it is said to be sacramental. The direction of the sacramental is God to us. Our response to the sacramental is call sacrificial. The direction of the sacrificial is from us to God. What is our sacrificial response to God giving us his gifts to include (3:16b)?

> Our response is to include thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is expressed in the music, prayer, and praise of the worship service. Is thanksgiving confined to worship only? Where else is it to be expressed (3:17)?

> Thanksgiving is not confined to worship, but is to be expressed in whatever we are doing in everyday life. No matter what we do or where we do it we should give thanks to God.

No matter what we are doing, how should we do it (3:17b)?

> We should do it “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Everything we do is affected by our relationship with Jesus.
9. The sacramental component of worship takes priority over the sacrificial. And as we said, the music is sacramental in that we teach and instruct each other in the love of God carried out in Christ by song. Since this is the primary purpose of music in the Church, the chief criterion for the evaluation of the Church’s music is this: Does it proclaim Christ-centered teachings? Man-centered music has no place in the Church. Unfortunately it seems as if that is what much of the music of American Christianity is today.

Because the Church’s music is primarily about what God has done and continues to do for us, that means it looks forward to and is associated with heaven and the joy of eternal life. That means that the music and song of Col. 3:16-17 and Eph. 5:19-20 look forward to and anticipate the worship, joy, and glory of eternal life.
10. Can anyone fully and perfectly perform the virtues God commands in these verses (3:12-17)?

> No, we are all sinful. No one is perfect.

Only the redemptive work of Christ makes it possible for people to live godly lives and motivates them to do so. While we cannot perfectly keep God’s commands, Jesus did. The virtues described in 3:12-17 describe the life of Christ. Which virtue of Christ is listed in each of the following verses?

> Phil. 1:8: Affection or compassion

> Eph. 2:7; Titus 3:4: Kindness

> Mt. 11:29; Phil. 2:6-8: Humility

> Mt. 11:29; 21:5; 2 Cor. 10:1: Gentleness

> 1 Tim. 1:16: Patience

> Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2: Love

> Eph. 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:16: Peace

Forgiveness and all the rest of the virtues listed in Col. 3:12-15 characterize the life of Christ.
11. As we have said several times, the ability to do what God commands in Col. 3:1-17 is completely dependent upon what God has done through Christ’s work of redemption. Therefore the following is true:
* Only those who have died and been raised in Baptism (2:12, 20; 3:1) can set their minds on the things above (3:2) and put to death the wrongful deeds of earthly life (3:5).
* Only those who have put off the old man through Baptism into Christ (3:9) are able to put off the vices of the old, sinful life (3:8).
* Only those who have put on the new man through Baptism into Christ (3:10) are able to put on the virtues of the sanctified life.
* Only those who have put on the image of God through Baptism into Christ (3:10) can perform the virtues that Adam once did when he was created in God’s image and which will characterize life in heaven when the image of God is fully restored (1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:21).
* Only those who were called to the peace of Christ by God (Col. 3:15b) will be able to let the peace of Christ rule and mediate their relations with others (3:15a).
* Only those in Christ (1:2) have Christ in them (1:27) and are able to let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly (3:16).
* Only those who are holy through God’s loving choice (3:12a) will be able to do the things that are holy (3:12b-17; cf. Rom. 14:23).
1. Col. 3:5-17 can be summarized as follows. All of the ethical imperatives of this section are grounded in the indicatives of redemption and Baptism. They are to live their lives in a way that reflects their Baptism. Since they have been baptized and received the righteousness of Christ, they are to remove all manner of evil actions, words, and desires. This was once the way they lived, but now since they have been baptized they are to conduct themselves differently.

As a result of the work of Christ, the image of God has been restored to believers. This means that they stand righteous and holy in God’s sight. While this restoration has begun now, the full restoration will be completed in eternity. Having been restored to the image of God like Adam and Eve were before they sinned, believers are to live now in the same way that Adam once did in Eden and as the redeemed will live throughout eternity. This then means that all believers are united in Christ and barriers such as race and economic status should not divide believers.

The Christians who read this letter from Paul are already God’s chosen, holy, and beloved people. Paul exhorts them to choose virtues that are in keeping with their status as God’s people. The way they treat other people can be summarized by one word: “love.” These virtues are exemplified by Christ, motivated by Christ, and empowered by Christ.

Christian worship supplies power for doing these virtues. God’s Word, which is proclaimed and sung in worship, enables Christians for faith and life. Music and song are also used to praise and thank God. Worship carries over to daily life, where Christians serve God and others.

**Lesson 13**

**A3. The Table of Duties (Col. 3:18-4:1)**

The Christian life not only involves living a virtuous life (Col. 3:5-17) but also carrying out the duties of one’s vocations (or callings, Col. 3:18-4:1). Therefore carrying out the responsibilities of one’s stations in life is just as important as avoiding vice, doing good, forgiving, worshipping, and the like.

In 3:1-17 Paul gave general instructions that applied to all Christians. The context makes it clear that in 3:18-21 Paul is giving directions for life to each Christian family and not to society as a whole. For example, he addresses the relationship between husband and wife rather than women and men in general.

1. Understanding 3:18 revolves around understanding the command to “submit to.” The Greek word being translated as “submit to” can be understood in a couple of ways. It can be used in a demeaning way, casting one person as inferior to another. But that is not the case here. It is used similarly here as it is in Lk. 2:51 and 1 Cor. 15:28b. Who was and will be submissive in these two verses? And who was he submissive to?

> Lk. 2:51: Jesus, as a boy, was submissive to his parents.

> 1 Cor. 15:28b: At the End, the Son will submit to the Father.

Was Jesus inferior to Mary and Joseph?

> No. Obviously he is God and they are not. Instead they are inferior to him.

Is the Son inferior to the Father?

> The Father and Son and Holy Spirit are equal with one another.

So in these two cases the One who is superior or equal to the other party willingly submits himself to them. “Submit” is used in the same way here for wives. The wife is equal to her husband. Yet Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands, just as Christ will willingly submit himself to the Father at the End.
2. In this case the concept of subjection or submission does not have to do with differing human worth. Rather, it has to do with divine order. God created the world with order. Because God designed the world in this way, people are united and work together best when they follow the order that he set up.

For instance, even though the quarterback is equal to all the other players on a football team, the team follows his lead. This is because the team works best and is successful when they follow his lead. The same is true for marriage. It works best when the wife willingly submits to the husband and the husband does what to the wife (3:19)?

> And the husband loves the wife and is not harsh to her.

When a husband does this, he humbly and willingly puts the wife ahead of himself and serves her. This love is a selfless love, a love given without expecting anything in return. This love is patterned after Christ who loved his bride (the Church) and gave himself up for her.
3. Let’s compare willing submission to some other attributes of Christians. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 is known as the love chapter. What does love not insist on (1 Cor. 13:5)?

> Love does not insist on its own way.

How is a humble person described in Phil. 2:3-4?

> A humble person does not do things out of selfish ambition or conceit.

> A humble person considers others more significant than himself.

> A humble person looks to the interests of others.

What then do willing submission, love, and humility all have in common?

> All three put others and their concerns first.

So Paul’s command to wives and his command to husbands are actually quite similar. Whether you submit or love, one puts others first.

Unsurprisingly, who is the supreme example of:

> Submission (1 Cor. 15:28): Jesus, the Son of God, will submit himself to the Father on the Last Day.

> Humility (Phil. 2:5-11): Jesus Christ humbly became man and suffered death on behalf of mankind.

> Love (Eph. 5:25): Christ loved the Church so much that he up his life for her.

Therefore Christ is the ultimate example to guide both husbands and wives. Note that Eph. 5:21-33 is parallel to this section. It develops the subjects of this section to a much greater extent and explicitly centers it on Christ. It sets Paul’s instruction in a context of mutual subjection of Christians to one another (Eph. 5:21).

1. In 3:20-21, what relationship is addressed?

> It addresses the relationship between children and parents.

In God’s design of this relationship, who is over who?

> Parents are over children.

Children are directed to obey their parents as part of God’s good order of creation. Fathers are singled out in verse 21. What are they not to do?

> They are not to provoke their children.

They are not to rear their children legalistically or abusively. Instead they should strive to raise their children in a positive way to live a vigorous Christian life.

Special note should be taken of the following. This letter was written with the intent that it be read publically in the church’s worship. In the Roman world, underage children were treated like property. By addressing children, Paul implies that they are full members of the body of Christ just like the adults and that they have a responsibility to live according to the obligations of their vocation as Christian children. Christianity elevated children and treated them with respect because it viewed children as a gift from God.
2. What relationship is addressed in 3:22 – 4:1?

> It addresses the relationship between slaves and their masters.

One word used in these verses will help us understand it better. In verse 24 Paul uses the word “inheritance.” When Paul uses “inheritance” in the following verses, what is he referring to?

> Gal. 3:18; Eph. 1:14, 18; 5:5: Paul is referring to eternal salvation or eternal life in heaven.

Another word Paul uses in other letters that is related to “inheritance” is “heirs.” In Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; and Titus 3:7 Paul uses the term “heirs” to refer to those who will inherit salvation. An inheritance is a gift given to an heir, not something that is earned. Here, Paul talks to slaves about their inheritance (3:24). This would be welcome and highly unusual news to a slave because slaves could not be heirs and receive an inheritance in the Roman world. Since the slaves that Paul addresses are Christians, they are heirs who have and will receive God’s free gift of salvation just like free people. God does not play favorites. He treats everyone the same no matter what their economic status.

Knowing they have an inheritance will give them motivation to keep these directives. Sometimes slaves were treated cruelly. What other comfort would they have in 3:25?

> If they are mistreated by their masters, in the long run justice will prevail. God will not let them get away with it.
3. Passages such as Col. 3:22-4:1; Eph. 6:5-9; and the letter to Philemon speak of slavery. To understand it better, we must be familiar with slavery as practiced in the Roman Empire. The experiences of slaves at that time varied greatly. At times some slaves were treated very cruelly. Others were treated fairly and decently. Many slaves lived with the prospect of being set free.

Since the empire depended upon slave labor, it was in the best interest of masters to treat their slaves fairly. In some ways the master/slave relationship that Paul encountered was closer to our employer/employee relationship than to the institution of slavery that was practiced in the United States with all its abuses prior to the civil war.

The NT teaching about the relationship between slaves and masters is applicable to the modern relationship between employees and employers. The Christian employee is to serve his employer in the same way that the first-century Christian slave was instructed by Paul to act toward his master. And the Christian employer is to display the same consideration towards his employees as the apostle directed the Christian masters to show their slaves.
4. What instructions does Paul give slaves in 3:22-23?

> Slaves are to obey their masters and work hard for them. They are not to only work hard while the master is watching and then slough off when they are not looking.

Who are they actually serving (3:22b, 24b)?

> They are actually working for and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. He is their real master.

What instructions does Paul give to masters in 4:1a?

> They are to treat their slaves justly and fairly.

What should masters remember (4:1b)?

> They should remember that they too have a master and their master is God.

The implication of this is that the way they treat their servants will be the way that their Master treats them.
5. The way that Paul and the other Biblical writers dealt with slavery transformed the way that others viewed it. The following five points are ways in which the NT view of slavery transcended that of the secular Hellenistic cultures.
	1. Christianity treated slaves as equals in the Church (1 Cor. 7:20-24; Gal. 3:28).
	2. Paul reminds masters that they too had a Master, in heaven (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1). Masters and slaves were on equal spiritual footing with each other as they stand before God.
	3. The NT addressed slaves and treated them as persons with both rights and responsibilities (Col. 3:22-25; 1 Pet. 2:18).
	4. Christianity asserted the dignity of manual labor (Eph. 4:28). People at that time viewed manual labor as humiliating and degrading.
	5. The NT pointed out that Jesus suffered unjustly (1 Pet. 2:21). This gave a new dignity to those who were slaves and were treated unjustly.

All Christians, no matter what their station in life, have freedom, freedom from sin, death, and the Law which was won by Christ (Gal. 4:21-5:1). All of us are equal in God’s eyes. And all of us are called by God to various vocations or stations in life. In all of our vocations, whether it be parents, children, or siblings; employer or employee; trash collector, CEO, waitress, or engineer, we have been put in that vocation by God to serve others. In every vocation we are treat each other fairly, justly, and respectfully, for in reality we all work for God. And the funny thing is that he is working through us to care of others.

**Lesson 14**

**A4. Watch and Pray (Col. 4:2-6)**

In this section Paul concludes his instructions on Christian living with an eye on the ongoing mission of the Church as carried out by both himself and his readers. The present exhortations deal with actions by which every member of the Colossian congregation can contribute to the Church’s witness. And that witness to Christ occurs by both the words we speak and the work we do.

1. What does Paul ask that the Colossians do for him and his co-workers (4:2a, 3a)?

> Paul asks that the Colossians pray for him and his co-workers.

What are they to ask God to do (4:3)?

> They are to ask “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ”.

Eph. 6:19-20 is parallel to these verses and is based on these verses. Since that is the case, what else does Paul want the Colossians and Ephesians to pray for (Eph. 6:19-20)?

> Paul also wants them to pray “that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.”

So Paul is asking them to pray that God not only provide the situation where the Gospel can be proclaimed, but that once the situation presents itself he might boldly proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.
2. How does the world perceive Christ (4:3)? What does that mean concerning their understanding of him and what he came for?

> To the world Christ is a mystery. That means they do not understand who he is or what he came for.

Through natural knowledge, that is, through the beauty, complexity, and orderliness of the universe, we know that God exists. God reveals himself through these natural means. But we cannot know about Jesus Christ and his work of redemption from natural knowledge. God reveals Jesus Christ through a different means. He reveals Christ through special revelation. Outside of special revelation, Jesus is a mystery to the world. In the special revelation of the Scriptures God reveals that Jesus is the Christ who came to save us sinners.

God chose to make known to Paul “the mystery of Christ” (4:3). And this is what Paul proclaimed through his preaching and through his letters to the churches. When Paul proclaimed the mystery of Christ, the Holy Spirit was at work creating faith in Christ. Only those who have faith will understand this mystery. For those without faith, the Scriptures are a closed book. But to those who have faith, every page of the Bible reveals Christ.

So ironically, the proclamation of the mystery of Christ leads to the understanding of the mystery of Christ. Paul’s task was to proclaim Christ clearly. For this purpose Paul asked for prayers on his behalf (4:3-4).
3. One way the Christian mission is supported, as just discussed, is through the prayers of the saints. How else is it supported (4:5a)?

> Paul instructs them to live (walk) in wisdom in relation to those outside the faith.

It is wise for the Christian to live by faith in Jesus Christ for this leads to eternal life. And those who have faith live according to God’s moral law and according to how God intends things to be. They do this in sight of those outside the Christian faith. Living a good, moral, and faithful life puts their proclamation of the Word in a favorable light.
4. Besides prayer and the way they live, what else has an effect on a Christian’s witness (4:6)?

> The way a Christian speaks in the world also affects his proclamation.

How should a Christian’s speech be characterized (4:6a)?

> A Christian’s speech should be gracious.

What colorful metaphor does Paul use to describe this kind of speech (4:6)?

> Speaking graciously is like seasoning our speech with salt.

What is the main reason we season food with salt?

> Seasoning food with salt makes the food appealing to the palate.

If one’s speech is filled with profanity, gossip, animosity, moral defects or arrogance, what will it do to one’s witness about Jesus Christ?

> It will obviously damage one’s witness.

How does Peter say we should defend our faith (1 Pet. 3:15-16)?

> He says to do it with “gentleness and respect.”

The goal is to win someone over to Christ. This is hard to do when others perceive us as hypocrites or as attacking them. So we seek to speak the truth in love. We seek to speak the truth about Christ with graciousness and gentleness and respect.
5. In Col. 4:4 Paul describes his own ministry of speaking the Word. In Col. 4:6 Paul describes how the Colossians are to speak the Word. The two verses are constructed in a similar way.

Col. 4:4

... in order that

I may make it known

as it is necessary

for me to speak.

Col. 4:6

... in order to

Know how

it is necessary

for you to answer each one.

While not the same, both the pastor and congregation have obligation and privilege to speak of Christ whenever the occasion presents itself.

1. In chapters 3 and 4 of Colossians Paul gives instructions on Christian living. This is quite typical of Paul’s letters. If you look closely at the ethical sections of Paul’s letters in the NT, you will find a pattern of instruction on the ethical responsibilities of Christians. These teachings are based on the teaching of Jesus himself and the teachings of the OT. Therefore these teachings express the divine will for how God’s people are to live. The table of duties also find common ground with Jewish codes of behavior for Gentile proselytes and with Hellenistic culture.

While there are some similarities between NT ethical teaching and Jewish and pagan teachings, the Christian ethic is different because it is centered on Jesus Christ. Jesus is not only the example we follow, but he also enables and motivates us to live in a God pleasing way. A Christian does not live a good life in order to earn God’s favor or as a sense of duty to others or for self-satisfaction. The salvation Christ supplies gives the Christian motivation to do good works. While the deeds of the believer and unbeliever may be the same, only those people who have faith please the Lord (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6).

The following table shows that not only did Paul use this pattern of teaching the Gospel and then the Christian life that proceeds as a result of the Gospel, but so also did other NT writers.

Patterns of Topics in New Testament Paraenesis (p. 181)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Colossians | Ephesians | Romans | 1 Thess. | 1 Peter | James |
| Renunciations | 3:5-9 | 4:22; 4:25–5:17 | 13:12-14 | 5:22 | 2:1 | 1:21 |
| New creation | 3:10-15 | 4:23-24 | 6:4-7 |  | 1:3, 22-23 | 1:18 |
| Worship | 3:16-17 | 5:18-20 | 12:1-2 | 5:16-20 | 1:17; 2:4-9 | 1:26-27 |
| Social order | 3:18-4:1 | 5:21-6:9 | 12:3-13:7 | 5:12-15 | 2:13-3:7; 5:5-6 | 4:7 |
| Watch & pray | 4:2-6 | 6:18 | 13:11-13 | 5:6-8 | 4:7; 5:8 |  |
| Stand fast | 4:12? | 6:10-17 | 5:2-4 | 3:8 | 5:8-12 | 4:7 |

**Lesson 15**

**B. Concluding Matters (4:7-18)**

Paul’s letters usually end by discussing such things as his travelogue, greetings, commendations, and blessings. The conclusion of Colossians mentions these things and the ministry of the Gospel, which has been mentioned throughout the letter.

The greetings in Colossians, as well as Romans, are far longer than the other letters Paul wrote. These two letters addressed congregations that Paul never personally visited. Paul sends greetings to and from as many people as he can think of who are known both to himself and his readers, thus establishing common ties.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was imprisoned (4:18); he was under “house arrest.”

1. The people mentioned in these concluding verses were ministers of the Gospel and laborers for the Gospel. That then emphasizes the importance of the proclamation of the Word in the life of the Church.

What is the description for each the following people that tells you they were ministers of the Gospel and laborers for the Gospel?

> Tychicus (4:7): “He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.”

> Onesimus (4:9): “our faithful and beloved brother”

> Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus (4:10-11): “my fellow workers for the kingdom of God”

> Epaphras (4:12): “a servant of Christ Jesus”

Like Paul, they all serve the cause of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. They are his fellow servants in the Lord and his fellow workers for the kingdom of God. Here and in most other places where the term “fellow worker” is used, it seems to be used for those who preach, teach, witness to, or otherwise speak Christ’s Gospel. In doing so, they bring people the salvation Christ won. Thus those mentioned in Col. 4:10-14 did more than provide for Paul’s physical needs or run errands or serve as his messengers. The term then exalts the speaking of the Word. It is the foremost activity of the Church.

1. The greetings in Paul’s letters are more than just some acquaintances saying, Hi. These are greetings from fellow believers who are proclaiming the Gospel. They are all one in faith. Those sending the greetings and those receiving the letter all have saving faith in Jesus Christ. There is a special relationship between the two. Those sending greetings are the ones who created the unity of faith by ministering to them in Word and Sacrament.

When Tychicus and Onesimus deliver the letter, what is supposed to happen first (4:16a)?

> The letter is to read out loud to the congregation.

In Christian churches at Paul’s time the OT Word of God was read out loud publically. Here Paul instructs the Colossians to read this letter out loud to the congregation. In doing so, Paul places this letter on par with the OT Scriptures. Paul does the same thing in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:27).

By doing this Paul shows the authority God had given him. In other letters Paul also shows his authority. In each of the following cases, describe how Paul shows that he has authority.

> 2 Thess. 2:15: He tells the Thessalonians to “hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”

> 1 Cor. 14:37: Paul says that “the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.”

> Phil. 4:9: Paul told the Philippians that whatever “you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things.”

> 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2; 3:14: Paul instructs Timothy to hold on to, follow, and teach the things that he has learned from him.

How does Peter describe Paul’s letters (2 Pet. 3:16b)?

> By equating Paul’s letters with “the other scriptures,” Peter is saying that Paul’s letters are the Word of God.

These passages indicate that Paul was conscious of the divine inspiration and authority of his letters. He knew he was being entrusted with the tradition and teaching revealed to him by Christ himself. The Lord would use Paul to teach his people during the whole time from his ascension to the time when he returned at the end of the world. Thus the letters of Paul were not determined to be authoritative later. It was God’s original intent as indicated by the letters themselves.

1. After the letter to the Colossians has been read to the congregation, what is to happen to it (4:16a)?

> It is then to be read to the church at Laodicea.

What will the church at Laodicea be receiving from Paul (4:16b)?

> Like the Colossians, they will be receiving a letter from Paul.

Once the letter to the Laodiceans has been read out loud to the congregation at Laodicea, what is to happen to it (4:16b)?

> They are to send it to Colossae where it will also be read out loud to the Colossian congregation.

What is the identity of the letter to the Laodiceans? It is probable that this letter was an identical copy of the letter to the Ephesians. The letter to the Ephesians is quite general and was meant to be circulated and read to all the churches in the Ephesus area. Since this general letter was going to be sent to several churches, Paul probably would have had a copy made for each church. The letter to the Laodiceans would have been one of these copies.
2. Paul writes the closing few sentences himself. Why might he do this?

> He would do this in order to authenticate that this letter was indeed from him and not from someone who pretended to be him.

What does Paul want them to remember (4:18)?

> Paul says, “Remember my chains.”

By drawing the reader’s attention to his suffering for the Gospel, Paul highlights the cross in the Christian’s faith and life. The Christian follows her Lord in suffering. It is a mark that identifies him/her as one who has faith in Jesus.

How does Paul end the letter (4:18b)?

> He ends with, “Grace be with you.”

God’s grace is essential to the Christian faith. Grace is the undeserved favor God shows for the sake of Christ. Grace is that which Christians take constant refuge in. Grace is always central to Paul’s message.