



Colossians - Lesson 1A

Introduction; Chapter 1:1-10

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- Background on the letter
 - Written by Paul while in house arrest in Rome
 - To a small community located between Ephesus and Hierapolis
 - It is widely considered to be written to the least important city to which any of Paul's epistles were addressed
 - But the topics of the letter are some of the most important
 - Paul never visited the city himself
 - He did visit nearby Ephesus where he met a man named Epaphras who came to faith under Paul's teaching
 - Epaphrus was from Colossae
 - So when Epaphrus returned to Colossae, he brought the gospel and founded the Colossian church
- Now as Paul sits in Rome awaiting trial, he has time to receive visitors and write letters
 - Apparently, Paul is visited by Epaphrus (or perhaps he receives a letter from him)
 - Epaphrus shares with Paul that the church he was leading was battling against a long list of threats
 - There were false teachers undermining the person and pre-eminence of Christ
 - They were introducing man-made philosophies in place of sound Christian doctrines
 - They were battling increasing legalism from Judaism and other forms of ritualism
 - They were being told to venerate angels
 - The church was being taught by false teachers that they must not eat certain foods or observe certain festivals
 - Do these kind of threats to the integrity of the church sound familiar?
 - Some of us may have been in churches that were very legalistic, handing out rules and judgment left and right
 - If so, then this letter was written to you
 - We've all heard about the movement in some churches toward a kind of new age self-help appeal where "self" is key to rising above it all
 - This letter was written to us
- So in response to what he hears from Epaphrus, Paul writes this letter to this small church he's never visited
 - As a side note, Paul sent this letter to Colossae with two travelers: Onesimus and Tychicus
 - You may remember Onesimus (the runaway slave who belonged to Philemon)
 - When Onesimus became a believer while in prison with Paul in Rome, Paul convinced him he should return to his master Philemon
 - To help Onesimus' return go a little easier, Paul sent a letter with Onesimus we call the Letter to Philemon

- Since Onesimus and Tychicus would need to travel through Ephesus to reach Colossae, Paul took advantage of the opportunity to send them with a letter for Ephesus too
 - So these two men delivered the letters to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians
 - The other letter Paul wrote while in this period of captivity was Philippians
- So Paul has a difficult task here
 - First, he must establish some credibility with this church that has never seen him before
 - Meanwhile, it's under the influence of false teachers who won't like what Paul has to say
 - Secondly, he must contend with serious issues that are weakening the church yet do so without crushing their spirit
 - Finally, Paul wants to redirect them toward the basics, the essentials of their faith so that the false teachers can't regroup and re-gain an audience

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

Col. 1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Col. 1:3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

Col. 1:4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

Col. 1:5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

Col. 1:6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

Col. 1:7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,

Col. 1:8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

- Those opening verses consist of two sentences, which is why I read to verse 8
 - The opening salutation, which we all know is a common feature in Paul's letters, always fulfills a purpose in Paul's writing
 - His purpose here is given by a couple of clues
 - First, Paul commonly referred to himself as an apostle in his letters, though not always
 - When he did, he was careful to mention that he was appointed an Apostle by Christ
 - Here he says by the will of God

Gal. 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),

- So what is an apostle?
 - The word means “messenger sent by God”
 - But can just anyone be appointed an apostle?
- Scripturally, what is the definition of who could be an apostle?
 - Jesus personally selected them
 - But how can Paul be an apostle in light of the fact that Jesus was dead before Paul became a believer?
- Let's point out the difference first between disciple and apostle
 - Disciple means a follower
 - All of us, those who believe in the Gospel, are disciples of Christ
 - An apostle, was a position Christ gave to certain disciples
 - It's a calling out of a larger group to create a smaller sub-group that He gives a special office to
- You can look at it this way: All are disciples, but not all are apostles
 - The apostles were appointed by Christ through a personal moment in His presence
- Yes we know that one among Him was a “devil”
 - But Judas was never a true disciple – he never believed
 - Jesus preserved Judas' as an unbeliever in the group for the purpose of fulfilling a role in His betrayal
- But when looking at the roles of the apostles in the Millennial Kingdom in ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel, 11 apostles and 12 tribes doesn't quite add up
- If you've ever wondered who the 12th apostle was, here's your answer
 - In Acts 1 you hear about Matthias being selected by lot, but he doesn't fit our definition
 - In fact it is Paul (Saul of Tarsus, we learn in Acts 9)
 - The apostle to the Gentiles
 - But people contend his claim because he wasn't there when Christ walked the earth
 - ****Addendum*** In his study of the book of Acts, Pastor Armstrong confirms Matthias to be the replacement for Judas. Whilst Paul still holds the title of Apostle, he was not one of the 12.*
- So time and time again Paul re-iterates that he was an apostle
 - To gain the church's respect for what he's about to say
- Let's look at the next series of verses
 - Paul has a sincere and serious purpose behind these statements
 - (v3) We thank God (father of Jesus Christ)

- Heard of your faith (in Jesus Christ)
- Your love for saints
- Intentional repetition of name and position of Christ
- (v5) You have a hope for eternal reward
 - You learned of this hope when you heard the gospel
 - Which has come to you (as it has the whole world)
 - Examples of what we have to look forward to in the Millennial Kingdom
- Imagine it's like if you had an old junker car, but knew that in 6 months time upon your Graduation your parents were gifting you with a new car
 - How much car and concern would you give that old junker?
 - I bet you wouldn't even wash it
 - Much less spend unnecessary money on it
- What we are waiting for in our mind is that future vehicle – that's the promise you've been given, and that's the thing you truly want
- Likewise, let's not invest in the things of this world that will burn up anyway
 - Paul continues in the text encouraging them they are not alone in this knowledge
 - (v6) And it is bearing fruit (as in the world)
 - From the day you understood the gospel of grace in truth
 - (v7) And Epaphrus told you the same thing I did
 - He told us of your love in the Spirit
- Do you see what Paul is doing here? The false teachers are probably already starting to squirm a little
 - Up front, Paul begins to emphasize that Jesus is key to everything
 - Jesus is pre-eminent, the Son of God, the object of our faith and the word of truth
 - We'll see Paul go after the false teachers on the issue of Jesus in the rest of the first chapter
 - Then Paul says you have love for one another as you should
 - The theme of caring for one another will re-emerge later as well
 - Paul tells them that their hope lies in an eternal reward located in heaven
 - That's also going to come up again later
 - Then finally, Paul brilliantly builds this pattern of reminding them of what they believed and what positive effect it had in their lives together with the fact that their experience was not unique
 - They believed the same gospel the world believed
 - Which contrasts with the style of false teachers

Col. 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will

in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Col. 1:11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Col. 1:13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

Col. 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- Paul continues on, but now he begins to focus in on his first issue for this church
 - Paul says we, meaning Paul & Timothy, leading some to speculate Timothy might have acted like a ghost writer for Paul
 - So, “we” are praying that God would fill them with a knowledge of God’s will and all spiritual wisdom
 - This is apparently what the church sought
 - They wanted spiritual knowledge
 - Influenced by early stages of Gnosticism
 - Gnostics taught you were believed by what you knew
 - Selective, only for certain people
 - We see examples of this in Mormonism and Scientology
 - But they sought knowledge from the wrong places
 - They had false teachers leading them astray
 - Because they sought something new, different, special
 - Today, we see people doing the same thing
 - We see people seeking spiritual wisdom in a million places
 - Oprah and Dr. Phil
 - Chicken Soup for the Soul
 - Even Christian authors’ best sellers
 - Or a friend
 - These things in themselves are not evil, but as Christians, where should we go first for the wisdom we seek?
 - God’s word!
- The bigger picture isn’t to block out any other source of knowledge in the world, but to filter it through the lens of Scripture
 - And to do that requires us to know what is in this book
 - To not know leave us prey to whatever might capture our attention
 - In the movies we see the guy with the black hat and the white hat, and we can

- easily identify bad guy/good guy
- But if the devil came at us with a tail, horns and pitchfork, essentially revealing himself for who he really was, he'd stand no chance in capturing our attention
 - Instead, he puts the white hat on to deceive us
- So what does Paul to move this church towards?

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- The phrase “spoken to us in His Son” means several things
 - He has spoken through what Christ said
 - In what He did as He lived
 - And in the revelation that Christ has given through the apostles’ writings in the New Testament
- He has given us all we need to know in these last days – there is no other source
- Revelation warns that if anyone changes or adds to scripture, they are to be judged harshly
 - Paul is saying that where you want to go for your knowledge is where you got it from – from Christ himself

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- Paul addresses probably the most commonly discussed principle of the NT for believers
 - He wants to draw a clear connection between knowledge of spiritual matters and the fruit that knowledge produced in terms of their behavior
 - What you know has everything to do with what you do
 - Jesus spoke of this idea of fruit

Matt. 7:15 “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matt. 7:16 “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

Matt. 7:17 “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Matt. 7:18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Matt. 7:19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matt. 7:20 “So then, you will know them by their fruits.

- Here we see a basic principle at work in our lives in two ways...
 - First for discerning false teachers:
 - Get to know them first
 - If what you see in their life doesn't align – listen to their speech, look at their priorities, how they raise their kids, what they do with their time, how they treat their spouse
 - If you don't see fruit reflected in their life, why would you care what they say?
 - The second, which we will cover more next week, is the key if we want to have more fruit in our lives
 - True knowledge of God – Who He is and His will for our lives, as revealed in His Scriptures
 - Like a marriage, if we want it to grow stronger we need to spend time together
 - Similarly, we don't become more Christ-life unless our time in the word is a preeminent part of our week

Col. 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

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- As we introduced last week, Paul is setting up a connection in their minds
 - Firstly, he has to establish credibility with his audience
 - Secondly, he needs them to understand they have been subjected to false teaching
 - Thirdly, he wants to combat the false teachers with the truth – the fundamentals of the faith
 - Paul moves from cause to effect in the list we just read
 - Cause #1 is to be filled by a knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding
 - As revealed by the Holy Spirit
 - Filled means *pleroo* – to be complete, to be accomplished
 - The effect of that filling is in verse 10: so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord
 - How can a child walk (live/behave) in a manner pleasing to their parents?
 - Only by knowing their parents' expectations
 - Besides the factor of obedience, the fundamental question is can I do it if I don't know it?
 - So we said last week, this relationship between what you believe to be true and how you live is a Biblical principle
 - Imagine someone was to claim they don't believe in gravity, we can test this belief by walking them to the top of a tall building and asking them to jump
 - If they are firm in their belief, they should have no worry to jump
 - If they decline, it shows they are not believing what they say they believe (as crazy as it is)

1John 2:4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His

commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;
1John 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:
1John 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

- John is not saying that perfection is the standard, but that there ought to be a desire to live like Christ
 - If there is no fruit, we have reason to question what they truly believe
- Then Paul moves to the next series of cause and effect relationships
 - Effect #1 becomes Cause #2
 - Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord
 - Pleases Him in all respects

2Cor. 5:6 Therefore, though we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—

2Cor. 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight—

2Cor. 5:8 yet we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord.

2Cor. 5:9 Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him.

2Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad.

- Paul is saying that no matter where we are, our aim is the same – to please the Lord
 - We can't wait until we get to Heaven to serve Him in obedience
- He adds another phrase, and bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God
 - So Paul completes a circle of sorts that says our pursuit of a knowledge of His will and of spiritual wisdom
 - Causes us to walk in worthy manner
 - To please the Lord
 - And to bear the fruit of good works
 - Thus to increase in our knowledge of God all the more
 - If you walk obediently according to God's will, you can't help but bear fruit
 - Paul's prayer finishes in verse 11 & 12 asking that they be strengthened in these efforts by God's power
 - So that they might attain steadfastness and patience

- All the while giving the Father thanks for including us in His inheritance
- Paul now moves to a jumping off point into his most powerful presentation of Christology, the doctrine of Christ
 - The key for every church who wants to be sound and healthy, is to understand who the man Jesus is

Col. 1:15 **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**

Col. 1:16 **For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.**

Col. 1:17 **He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.**

Col. 1:18 **He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

Col. 1:19 **For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, Col. 1:20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.**

- Paul wants to magnify the person and work of Jesus Christ within the minds of this church
 - Paul describes Jesus' image or person in relationship to three things:
 - To Deity
 - To Creation
 - To the Church
- These are the three areas of knowledge we must get right if we are to mature properly as a Christian
 - First, we must understand Jesus' relationship to Deity
 - Jesus is the image of the invisible God
 - Provided the physical connection to God for us
 - We can't see the Father nor the spirit, they can only be manifested through His creation
 - Moses and the burning bush
 - Pillars of cloud
 - Thunder/lightning
 - But men did see Jesus
 - He is the member of the trinity who can be seen
 - And today we see Him living out in the lives of His church

- That's why we reflect Jesus in our actions and words
- Secondly, we've already touched on His relationship to the Creation
- Finally, we must understand Jesus in relationship to the Church
 - He is the head of the church – and this headship can have no true meaning if it doesn't mean that Jesus is actively making decisions and directing the work of the church through men
 - It must be that what is happening in His church at all times is happening according to His plans and purposes
- So the preeminence of Christ is Paul's point here
 - There is nothing else of value or meaning in our religious experience as Christians except Christ, and Him crucified
- But that's the basic problem with the Colossian church
 - They've taken their eye of the ball
 - They've left their first love
 - Like the church at nearby Ephesus

Rev. 2:4 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Rev. 2:5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

- Here are these two sister churches, experiencing the same effects
 - Moving the teaching of Jesus aside
 - And they stand to lose their lampstand; their position as a church in this world
- Just as when a church arrives, God has planted it. And when a church leaves, their lampstand has been removed
- In verse 20 Paul has begun to make a transition, narrowing down to the individual

Col. 1:20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Col. 1:21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

Col. 1:22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

Col. 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

- Jesus has reconciled all things to Himself by His blood
 - Christ's work on the cross was the saving work of creation
 - Paul transitions away from a discussion of the person of Jesus Christ to a discussion of the work of Jesus Christ
 - This tells us Paul was concerned about the thinking that a believer still required something to enter into Heaven
 - The false teaching in their church had gained a foothold in the church preaching that there was more you needed to do to be secure in your place with God
 - The only way you become susceptible to that kind of thinking is if you are not confident about what the scriptures say about your relationship
 - Paul says in v.23 that the fact they are able to gain a foothold gives clear evidence to indict their confession
 - This is the same point made by the writer in the letter to the Hebrews

Heb. 3:12 **Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.**

Heb. 3:13 **But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**

Heb. 3:14 **For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,**

- The writer is not saying what you have to do to be a Christian, he's saying this is the definition of a Christian
 - A Christian hold firms their assurance to the end
 - False teachers don't get a crack at you because you know Christ's work on the cross is sufficient
 - But when you run after the teaching that says you haven't done enough, you show the falseness of your confession
- Again in v.23, we are to be firmly established in the hope of the Gospel
- Paul is pointing out to this group that Christ has reconciled us into the body, and we gain the benefit from it – only as long as we trust in that message
 - But if we depart from it to chase false messages, we're showing ourselves to never having believed the truth to begin with

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- Paul transitions away from a discussion of the person of Jesus Christ to a discussion of the work of Jesus Christ
 - False teachers were teaching a new Gospel for being saved – Christ plus something
 - But Paul talks of Christ's work on the cross as the saving work of creation
 - Whether things on earth or things in heaven = broad scope

Rom. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope

Rom. 8:21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Rom. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

- It is not just that you and I were born into sin, but when Adam sinned he put the whole world into bondage
 - By the curses God pronounced in response to his sin
 - God did not curse man (or woman)
 - He cursed the ground, and the enemy
 - To be cursed is to be forever condemned to Hell
- So what happens to the creation?
- Paul alludes here (and elsewhere) that eventually this world will be burned up by fire
 - But will be replaced, as a function of God's need to provide a dwelling place for His children
 - He has to provide a corrupt free environment for His corrupt free children He is producing by the work of Christ on the cross
- Given that Jesus is pre-eminent in all these things, Paul concludes in verse 21 that the Colossians can offer nothing in support of their own salvation

- There is nothing they can do to prompt, ensure, hold on to, enhance or make better their salvation
- It was done once for all on the cross
- Paul is about to make an interesting point, that you are to continue in your salvation they way you received your salvation
 - But entering into salvation, we start as enemies of God
 - In another parallel with the Ephesian church, Paul made a similar statement on this point:

Eph. 2:1 **And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,**

Eph. 2:2 **in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.**

Eph. 2:3 **Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.**

Eph. 2:4 **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,**

Eph. 2:5 **even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

- Grace means that before you deserved it and before you knew it, He was already making us a child of God
 - In using the analogy of baptism, we were dead and now we're alive
 - No more could a physical corpse bring itself back to life, than we could do spiritually
- I received a letter from a listener in New Zealand who wrote to tell me about a conversation between her 13-year old daughter and a schoolmate who was an unbeliever

My 13 yr old daughter, Georgia, (who was just baptized) came home from school the other day. She told me she had a conversation with her friend which went something like this....

Georgia: Ashley, do you know that you hate God?

Ashley: I don't hate God!

Georgia: Well actually, the Bible says that if you are not with Him, then you hate Him, even if you don't personally feel like you do.

- What a bold conversation for a newly baptized 13 year old to have with a friend, but her words were truth
 - Do we sometimes forget the truth of that statement?
 - It sounds like Paul was concerned that the false teaching in Colossae must have included some kind of teaching that personal achievement – obtaining some kind of special knowledge – was a part of obtaining or maintaining our salvation
- But then Paul in verse 23 says this assurance is only true for someone who holds to the true gospel
 - Close doesn't count
 - There is nothing more dangerous than something close to the truth that is not in fact the gospel
 - But if you have not held to the true gospel, you have no right to share in the promises he is giving out to the church
 - He's trying to differentiate the two groups up front as he begins to teach
 - Not to say anything about someone who has already believed the truth and is in someway in jeopardy
 - Paul is making this dramatic turn to emphasize the seriousness of this church tolerating false teachers who present a false gospel
 - It leads people astray
 - It becomes a stumbling block
 - For a true believer, it stunts their maturity
 - To the unbeliever who falls prey, it becomes a diversion to finding the path for truth
- Paul's concern is that this church has abandoned its responsibility to protect the flock
- At the end of verse 23, Paul made a reference again to his authority
 - He calls himself a minister of the gospel – *diakonos*, servant
 - This leads Paul to spend another moment establishing his credibility with this church
 - And he's doing this because of where is preparing to go next
 - Paul is acting on the principle: What you think of me, has a lot to do with how you will receive my criticism
- As an aside, the reason we teach verse-by-verse is to avoid accusations of false motives in our teaching
 - We're just teaching what God wrote
 - Paul is trying to establish his own motives to be pure, honest, and good intentioned
 - Let's look at what he says about himself

Col. 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Col. 1:25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

Col. 1:26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

Col. 1:27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Col. 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Col. 1:29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

- Verses 24-29 are again one sentence, so let's take it apart in pieces
 - To begin, the whole point of this sentence is to communicate Paul's credibility
 - But even more than credibility, it explains his motives
 - First, he says he is not taking a privileged place in the Body of Christ, but rather he is doing his part
 - Specifically, he's doing his part to suffer for Christ
 - This verse is one of the most controversial in all of Paul's writing
 - Filling up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings
 - Some use it to suggest we have more work to do in accomplishing our salvation
 - A sense of works on top of grace
 - Paul is actually saying that the Body of Christ is appointed to suffer at times
 - That suffering began when our Lord suffered Himself while on the cross
 - And we are the body of Christ now, and we continue his suffering

Acts 9:4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

- This is not to suggest this additional suffering is the atonement – that was done through Christ's physical death on the cross
 - But it is God's purpose that there continue to be suffering so that we identify with Christ
 - We share in His inheritance and His suffering
- Paul says that he is doing his part to fill up the afflictions that are lacking in the body of

Christ until the appointed suffering has reached its end

- Paul was writing from jail, whereas I doubt the false teachers were taking the same persecution
- Second point – Paul was to preach the mysteries of God’s word
 - Paul was granted the privilege of revealing certain mysteries to the church
 - The word mystery, in Biblical terms, is any truth that was revealed in the Old Testament, but its meaning was hidden until a later date
 - And chief among these mysteries was that God would bestow His grace upon the gentiles
 - The fact that God planned to save Gentiles through Christ was revealed in Genesis (to Abraham), but not understood until after the resurrection
 - So the mystery Paul has to tell the Colossians is about God’s plan to redeem them, Gentiles
 - So Paul’s motive is for their good, to bring them good news that God has prepared beforehand
- Then Paul shifts in v.28, to say with that responsibility comes the necessity of preparing men to stand before Christ
 - Admonishing and teaching
 - The work of ministry is first and foremost about shaping lives
 - Correcting wrong behavior and thinking
 - Teaching truth from scripture
 - Paul is going to so much effort, laboring on their behalf, so they are brought up in the right way
- Now he is going to go a little further...

Col. 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,

Col. 2:2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself,

Col. 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Col. 2:4 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.

Col. 2:5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

- Paul says I struggle over you and Laodicea, the other church in the region he never visited (and all others that had not seen his face)

- As the mention of Laodicea in the Book of Revelation attests, they were suffering from the same problems of false teachers
 - In fact, Laodicea becomes a symbol of the apostasy threatening the church in the end times
- In v.2, Paul explains his purpose in writing
 - The NIV captures the verse better:

Col. 2:2 **My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,**

- He says
 - My Purpose is to encourage them
 - So that they may have complete understanding
 - In order that they may know Christ
- Then Paul gets to the point in v. 4
 - I say this so that no one will delude you with a persuasive argument
 - False arguments can sound persuasive
 - There is a misconception at times that "we will know false teachers when we see it"
 - Forgetting that the enemy can come in disguise
 - Judaizers, Mormons, Gnostics, Jehovah's Witnesses all take the truth, cloud it with additions or subtractions, and end up with a false Gospel
 - Instead we test what we are told against Scripture
 - And though Paul wasn't there, he says I'm on your side hoping that you have good discipline in the stability of your faith in Christ
 - Spiritual discipline of the believer includes:
 - Prayer
 - Fasting
 - Study of the word
 - Not forsaking gathering together
 - It doesn't happen because we will it, but because we make it a priority

Col. 2:6 **So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, Col. 2:7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.**

Col. 2:8 **See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive**

philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

- Paul is about to juxtapose what it means to depend on Christ, with what are hollow, empty, deceptive human philosophies
 - Let's finish today by looking at how he describes depending on Christ
 - First, v.6 says as you received Christ, continue to live in Him
 - What worked at first is always enough
 - Live in Him refers specifically to new life, being born again
 - On the same basis you were saved in the first place, continue to be saved in an ongoing way
 - Paul said the same to the Galatians:

Gal. 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

Gal. 3:2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Gal. 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

- Paul is asking, if faith was good enough to save you on Day 1, why was it not good enough on Day 2? On Day 10?
 - If you were susceptible to teaching that you need more now, you would've needed it then
- Verses 9-15 are a concise doctrinal thesis of what it is to depend on Christ
 - And this is where we will start next week

- Often an epistle doesn't have the same study appeal as some of the other books of the Bible, but this is where our faith gets into the trenches
 - It's about studying the real life of the body of Christ – and the constant issues of faith
 - The problem of the Colossae church was they were being incorrectly taught what it means to be a Christian
- Paul is now in the midst of defending this faith, from afar, to a group he'd never met
 - Let's back up in the chapter to begin with our context
 - Before this, Paul was teaching on one principle point: Add nothing to what they had received in the beginning
 - As you were saved, so continue

Col. 2:6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, Col. 2:7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

- Remember that a simple childlike faith was enough in the beginning to give us the joy and assurance of a new life in Christ
 - Having nothing to show in the moment except the freedom of having been freed from a life of sin
 - Why would we believe someone who tells us that now more is necessary?
 - That if works didn't make you right with Christ, how can they keep you right with Christ?
 - But the behavior and attitude of the Colossae church in what they were being taught and were willing to accept, brought this into question
- He says in verse 7 we are to be rooted in Him, built up by Him, established in our faith
 - Rooted means that we were planted by His power in our faith
 - Build up means anything we achieve in our walk is accomplished by Christ's work in us
 - Established is *bebbaioo*, meaning secure – in our faith
- And then in verse 8 Paul makes the comparison that sets up the rest of the chapter

Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

- The word captive can make us think of a cult, something that wants to take us away from the mainstream – held captive by false teaching
- But first let's think about the context of Colossae

- It is evident that there were false teachers in that church, that wanted people to believe there were additions to Christ
 - They brought deceptive human philosophy dependent on traditions and worldly principles
- Paul warns that either we follow that kind of teaching or we depend on Christ alone
 - In the verses that follow, Paul explains what each side represents
 - But he reverses the order and talks first about what it means to depend on Christ
 - Followed by a description of what are additions, the human philosophies that were corrupting the Church
 - Verses 9-15 are a concise description of what it means to depend on Christ

Col. 2:9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Col. 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Col. 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; Col. 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Col. 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Col. 2:14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Col. 2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

- Paul begins by describing the salvation process as it is accomplished by Christ's work
 - All of the work required for us to be saved is done by Christ
 - Paul begins with a play on words
 - Christ is God in bodily form – and He is all God (the fullness)
 - The word for fullness (*pleroma*) comes from the root Greek word *pleroo*
 - Used in verse 10 meaning complete
 - So Christ was completely God in physical form
 - Just as Christ was completely God, we are made complete in Christ
 - There is nothing more to be added to Christ to make us complete before God
 - An unbeliever has no prospect of spending eternity in God's presence, only eternal

judgment

- To make sure an individual does not end up in Hell, there are several things that need to be "fixed" – of which Christ fixes all of them
- The first way we are complete in Christ is that He has dominion over all rule and authority
 - The authority Paul is talking about here is the rule of the enemy and his forces over fallen man
 - When Adam fell, he placed fallen man under the authority of the enemy
 - Consequently, we shared in the judgment reserved for Satan
 - In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes that we are all born as "sons of disobedience"
 - Born in the nature of Adam, we inherit his condition and the judgment on the world
 - Only by faith in Christ do we move to under His authority
 - We no longer share in the enemy's future, we are now "sons of God"
 - Consequently, we no longer fear death

Heb. 2:14 **Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, Heb. 2:15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.**

- For an unbeliever, this is as good as it gets – after death it gets worse
- For a believer, this is as bad as it gets – at death it gets better
- So the first way Christ has made us complete, is that He has taken away the fear of death and our dominion under the enemy
- Secondly, the believer is complete in Christ by having undergone a spiritual circumcision in Christ – not of human hands
 - A circumcision of the heart by the Holy Spirit
 - Paul makes an interesting comment at this point in verse 11
 - Christ has removed the body of flesh
 - Paul seems to be referring to the eventual replacing of our sinful body with our new body
 - In other words, just as physical circumcision removed a part of the flesh, the circumcision of the heart means that God will remove all our flesh
 - So that it may be replaced with a new body upon our resurrection
 - So we are complete in the sense that nothing else is needed to ensure we

escape the corruption of the sinful body

- Third, our sinful nature itself has likewise been dispensed with, having been buried with Christ
 - Our spiritual burial is pictured by our water baptism
 - And our new spiritual awakening was brought about by God's hand (verse 12) in the same way that God's power raised Christ from the dead
- So, in those three ways we are complete in Christ
 - We have nothing more we need to do to escape the enemy, to remove the sinful flesh or to receive a new spirit
 - You can see where Paul is leading here, right? You can't add anything to something that's complete, can you?
- Now Paul really turns up the pressure
 - He reminds the Colossians that all of this was done on their behalf even before they knew it was happening
 - While they were still dead in their trespasses
 - The word for dead, *nekros*, literally means a dead body – a corpse
 - They were literally a walking corpse
 - They had no life without God
 - Just as it is impossible for a human being on their own to decide they want to believe in God, a dead body cannot choose to raise itself
 - God made the Colossian church alive in Christ
 - Paul then says, while they were yet still uncircumcised in the flesh
 - Refers to their sinful nature, the sin nature of the flesh
 - They were not only sinning (transgressions), but they had a sin nature that left them dead to God
- At that point, God forgave us for our transgressions
 - All our sins for all our lives were instantly and permanently forgiven in the moment we were saved
 - We are complete in that forgiveness
 - There is nothing we need nor anything we can do to add to that forgiveness
 - Next, He cancelled our debt
 - The word for cancelled in Greek literally means smearing away the impression made in wax
 - Creates the picture of making the decree against you no longer valid
 - In Paul's time, when a prisoner was crucified, they would take the charges against the accused and nail them to the cross
 - Jesus' accusation was King of the Jews

- But our debts were nailed to the cross at the same time
- So Christ's execution paid our debt under the Law
 - There is nothing more to pay, no more debt to erase
- Finally, Paul says this is why those rulers and authorities have been disarmed against Christians
 - The demonic realm has nothing left to accuse of before God
 - Whatever accusation the enemy might use, God turns around and answers him that debt has already been paid
- Now, what does it mean to be taken captive by empty, human philosophies? We read examples of that in the next verses:

Col. 2:16 **Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—**

Col. 2:17 **things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.**

Col. 2:18 **Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,**

Col. 2:19 **and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.**

- Now Paul moves to the issue of human philosophies and human traditions
 - The first word to note is the opening – Therefore
 - If the audience had accepted what Paul's taught up to verse 15, they need to be prepared to accept the necessary logical consequences of it
 - Because we are complete in Christ (v 8)
 - Because we know there is nothing more we need to do to accomplish salvation
 - Then we should know these things
 - Paul starts with saying, let no one act as your judge
 - Men can only be our judge in these ways if we allow them
 - The first example is food & drink
 - In the day of this letter, the issue was mainly one of Jewish dietary restrictions
 - Men who wanted to bring the church back under the rules of the law
 - Particularly odd when Collosae was a Greek church who did not originally hold to these laws
 - Judaizers followed Paul from city to city trying to convince new Christians

to live under the Jewish dietary laws

- But there was also considerable debate over eating meat sacrificed to idols
 - Today we see it as a restriction to avoid meat
 - In Paul's day, meat was a luxury, so it could be avoided fairly easily
 - Most meat was given to gods even before it was sold in shops, so eating meat often meant risking eating meat sacrificed to idols

1Cor. 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.

1Cor. 10:24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

1Cor. 10:25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake;

- The concern is for our witness to our neighbor
- There is nothing the Bible prohibits us from eating (spiritually speaking)
- Let's be clear, that it is not unlawful to set up restrictions of our own making
- But it is wrong to try and transfer those convictions to somebody else
 - That is legalism
- So when are corporate rules something we should follow?
 - So long as they are not being applied as a means of establishing or maintaining salvation
 - The rule itself is irrelevant, the meaning and purpose behind it is what's important
- The second issue was with festivals
 - In the time of the church it would have been the annual 7 Jewish festivals observed on the calendar
 - Today, Halloween can be a festival which individuals may be convicted on differently
- If we are living according to the Holy Spirit, there will be things we feel comfortable doing/not doing but it will be because of what God has taught you – not because of what someone is trying to impose upon you
 - And in all of this decision making we have the Word as our guide
- The final issue was the Sabbath, and particularly which day to observe (Sat or Sun)
 - The Sabbath was given to the Jews as a picture of Christ – work, but then rest
 - But where the shadow was incomplete is that you had to go back to work, our rest was not permanent
 - A shadow is useless once the real thing has arrived
 - Now if we rest in Christ, we are at rest perpetually

- So are we to keep the Sabbath? Only if God leads us that way, but not as a requirement of Scripture
- In v.17 Paul is making the comparison that once the real thing (Christ) appears, we ignore the shadow
- If we continue to pay attention to the shadow – restricting foods, festivals, keeping the Sabbath – then we disrespect the truth, the thing it pointed us to
 - This is the real freedom we have in Christ
 - We no longer have a list of rules to keep in order to be holy
 - We are made holy by Christ's work (in terms of salvation)
 - Now we have an obligation to be obedient to the Holy Spirit and grow more in our behavior so it catches up with our position before God
 - This is the work of sanctification

- Last time we met, we had covered up to 2:19, where Paul begins his assault on those teachings that he called empty philosophies and traditions
 - Things that the Judaizers were trying to re-insert into the lives of the believers
 - Those things that stood in opposition to a trust in Christ
- We looked at verse 17 where Paul had said that these things were merely shadows
 - As they were given in the OT, they pointed to Christ in one way or another
 - But a shadow is useless once the real thing has arrived
 - Don't keep the shadow as sacred once the real (Christ) has come
- Finally, we ended with a brief mention of how submitting to such teaching, to legalism, allows someone to defraud us of our prize – which is our liberty in Christ
 - Today we pick up here, moving quickly through the end of the chapter and into Chapter 3

Col. 2:16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

Col. 2:17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Col. 2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

Col. 2:19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

- We'll start by focusing on verse 18:
 - What were the tendencies of these false teachers in Paul's day?
 - Self-abasement (*ta pe ino phro sunē* in the Greek)
 - Could mean two things:
 - Self-denial
 - This is the practice of denying yourself in the expectation that this gains merit with God
 - It's a work, and as a work intended to make one righteous, it has no benefit
 - False Humility
 - These were men who acted humble for effect
 - In reality they were proud of their accomplishments
 - Either way, they were men who trusted in self
 - Secondly, they worshipped angels

- Ingrained into the Jewish mindset - hence the book of Hebrews begins with why Christ should be worshipped rather than angels
 - When we look back through Scripture, we see that every time God had something significant to tell the nation of Israel, He did it through a mediator which was an angel
 - What they missed was that a greater mediator was now available in Christ
- Third, they take their stand on visions they've seen
 - Their truth is experiential, not based in scripture
 - Traditions of men take precedence in their beliefs rather than the unchanging truth of God's word
 - And these visions have been inflated by their minds
 - The word for inflated is *phusioo* which means to make arrogant
 - So "inflated" refers to puffing up their visions in importance and significance
 - We see this today in the Mormon church, where one man's vision dominates their theology
 - This concept is subtly sneaking into the church today
 - If study of the Word is not as appealing as the experiences in the church, generally that is a Christian that is not maturing
 - Finally, they don't hold fast to the head of the Body
 - The head being Christ
 - And in holding fast to the Head, the church will realize growth by God's direction
 - So, what do we learn about these men?
 - They falsely claim faith in Christ
 - But instead they pridefully trust in their own works
 - They claim to worship Christ
 - But they promote worship of angels
 - They claim to follow scripture
 - But they trust in vision and experiences, inflating those experiences in an arrogant way
 - Making their visions more important than scripture
 - Finally, they claim to be a part of Christ's church
 - But they are not holding to the Head of the church
 - They have abandoned Christ
 - Then in verse 20, Paul begins to touch on the specific traditions and rules these false teachers had begun to impress upon the church at Colossae

Col. 2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

Col. 2:21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”

Col. 2:22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Col. 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- What a powerful set of verses for living a life of liberty
 - First, Paul sets up a test of sorts
 - Speaking to the church, he says if you have died with Christ
 - If you are a believer
 - And furthermore, you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of this world
 - Referring to the picture of baptism - being put under the ground (water) and being resurrected back to new life (out of the water)
 - Spiritually, at this moment our sin nature has been put to death
 - And God gives us a new spirit
 - We are halfway to regeneration (old body but new spirit aligned with God)
 - But Paul is asking why if we have a new spirit, do we live a pattern of life that is true for the old spirit
 - If we have died with Christ, then we have died to the rules that teach us to gain righteousness by our own works
 - Then why do you submit to degrees that tell you what you can't eat or handle?
 - Submitting to decrees could be translated “coming under this dogma”
 - Willingly embracing a system of thought that contradicts Christianity
 - In other words, why are you doing this?
 - The test is this: if you are submitting to them because you believe these actions are a part of your salvation, then you are terribly wrong
 - And if you are submitting to them because you were unaware of how they contradict the teaching of scripture, then you are dangerously naïve
- Paul says in verse 22 that all these rules concern things destined to perish in time anyway
 - The false teachers in this church were advising that in order to be acceptable to God, they encouraged self-denial; limiting eating or drinking certain items
 - They were told to observe the festivals

- But Paul highlights these things are meaningless things of the physical creation, rather than eternal spiritual things that matter
 - And in verse 23 Paul acknowledges that these things have the appearance of wisdom
 - But they originate in self-made religion
 - Self-abasement, self-denial and false humility
 - And severe treatment of the body, as if by sacrificing pleasure we are earning merit with God
- Paul ends the chapter with a great irony
 - These teachings were all directed supposedly at restraining the evil of the flesh
 - But the irony is that they have no value against indulging in the flesh
 - Fasting is not unbiblical, but the reasons why we do it matter
 - But when we try to advance the cause of salvation by these works (like fasting or otherwise), then that is unbiblical
 - Remember we are saved despite our works
 - But when we make the flesh the focus, we only make our problem worse
 - When we yield to the Holy Spirit, we naturally give less attention to our flesh
 - When we try to do it in our own power, we instead put focus on the very thing we're trying to avoid
 - Such as the person who is concerned about eating too much so weighs their food and tracks their food - they are thinking about food all day long!
 - The only thing that can restrain our flesh from anything is the Spirit within us

"When we make Jesus Christ and the Christian revelation only part of a total religious system or philosophy, we cease to give Him the preeminence. When we strive for 'spiritual perfection' or 'spiritual fullness' by means of formulas, disciplines, or rituals, we go backward instead of forward. Christian believers must beware of mixing their Christian faith with such alluring things as yoga, transcendental meditation, Oriental mysticism, and the like. We must also beware of 'deeper life' teachers who offer a system for victory and fullness that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. In all things, He must have the preeminence!" - Wiersbe

- Wiersbe is not saying that any given activity by itself is the problem, but rather where that activity fits into our system of theology
 - They should have no bearing on what we feel about our salvation
- Now Paul turns back to encouraging and teaching the Church

- Looking at how the things we do should be an act of service to God

Col. 3:1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Col. 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Col. 3:3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Col. 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Col. 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Col. 3:6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

Col. 3:7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

Col. 3:8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

Col. 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

Col. 3:10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

- First we see the principle that we need to focus on eternal things, not on the here and now
- Next, we see the repetition of the old vs new
 - We have been changed spiritually by God's power in us
 - He has freed us from slavery to sin
 - When we were a slave to sin, we could not help but sin
 - Now with the Holy Spirit in us, He enables us to avoid to sin - to make the choice not to sin
 - But like when our mind makes the decision to fast, our bodies struggle
 - Same as with lusts of a sexual context
 - These practices demonstrate we have a physical attraction to the wrong thing - separate from our mind and Spirit
- So Paul is drawing the attention of the church back to sin in the body
 - Number 1: keep seeking what is from above, not what comes from the minds of men
 - Today, we have a ton of teaching material and programs flooding into the church that are little more than man-made philosophy
 - And it's dressed up to appear Christian or at least spiritual
 - It rarely touches on eternal matters

- Our 40 years on earth doesn't compare to eternity with Him
- Second: (verses 3&4)
 - Your life was buried with Christ as pictured in your baptism
 - Your earthly life, with all its petty cares, and concerns was ended
 - The only life you should know now is the life you have in Christ
 - To work toward the arrival of His kingdom
 - Like the parable of the master returning to see which of his servants has been faithful in his absence

"Sometimes we say of a man, 'Music is his life—Sport is his life—He lives for his work.' Such a man finds life and all that life means in music, in sport, in work, as the case may be. For the Christian, Christ is his life. Jesus Christ dominates his thought and fills his life." - Barclay

- Even though this may not be true of ourselves, it should be true
 - Point Three is that the Christian life does have an aspiration to be a disciplined body, sin-free life, to the extent we can
- But there is a Christian method:
 - Firstly Paul says consider the earthly members of your body dead...
 - It's the aorist tense in the Greek, showing a decisive initial act that introduces a finished continuing state
 - We can see examples in Paul's life: stoned, shipwrecked, starved, imprisoned
 - The council the world would offer would be to preserve your body for future service to the Lord - all about the here and now
 - But Paul sacrificed his body because it didn't matter
 - He wanted Christ to use any way He wants
 - Whether living in luxury or poverty
 - This was a stark contrast to the false teachers
 - Paul lists those things that we should put to death so that they remain dead
 - He begins with the passions of the flesh
 - Immorality – which literally means illicit sexual intercourse
 - Impurity – any form of moral corruptness
 - Passion – uncontrolled illegitimate desires
 - Greed – materialistic desires, which amount to idolatry
 - Paul reminds the church that these are the very same traits that are common to unbelievers and will lead to their destruction

- These are the traits we shared before we had faith
- Therefore why share in these traits? Why share in the traits that define someone we used to be?
- Then Paul follows up with yet another list, this time sins of speech
 - Anger – attitude of hostility
 - Wrath – verbal outbursts of hateful thought
 - Malice – a vicious disposition that harbors ill-intent for others
 - Slander – insulting and injurious speech (gossip)
 - Abusive speech – means filthy, profane speech
 - Lying – deceptive and dishonest speech
 - The imperative against lying was especially strong in the Greek
- So, if you want to address the sin nature of the body, don't play around the edges of the problem with false teaching in false humility following practices of men that can't save you
 - Rather, put to death the old nature and instincts and set them aside forever
 - Then Paul says what they should practice instead

Col. 3:11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Col. 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

Col. 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

- All the groups Paul mentioned were groups that were often used to differentiate men in that day
 - But those distinctions disappear for those in Christ
 - Paul reminds them of who they are
 - They are the ones chosen by God
 - Holy and beloved
- But often the reason we struggle to live this out, is because we still think we can achieve it in our own power
 - When we yield to Him, He provides us a way out of our problems - if only we would take it!

Col. 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; **Col. 3:13** bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

- Paul is moving away from a discussion of what we shouldn't be doing, to one on what we should be doing
 - This list came as a result of the false teachers levying their own set of (incorrect) do's and don't's
 - Things based in works
 - But first, Paul reminds them of who they are
 - Who you think you are affects how you behave
 - You are a child of the King, chosen of God, set apart for great things
 - We then learn gratitude through receiving something we didn't deserve
 - So act accordingly:
 - Compassion (Gk. *splanchna oiktirmou*) shows sensitivity to those suffering and in need
 - Kindness (*chrestotes*) manifests itself in a sweet disposition and thoughtful interpersonal dealings
 - Humility (*tapeinophrosyne*) means having a realistic view of oneself, thinking lowly of ourselves because we are so
 - Gentleness (*prautes*) means not behaving harshly, arrogantly, or self-assertively but with consideration for others
 - Patience (*makrothymia*) is the quality of being long-suffering, self-restraining
 - Then he expands on what patience looks like in the Christian walk:
 - Forbearing (*anechomeno*) means putting up with others and enduring discomfort
 - Forgiving (*charizomeno*) involves not holding a grudge or grievance
 - We could ask ourselves, does our life mirror this list?

Col. 3:14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

- Paul is speaking of agape love, a unique form in contrast to the world's love
 - Absent the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to show agape love
 - The expectation is that we would love in the manner that God loves
 - The world forgives conditionally
 - We forgive those who forgive us

- Those who earn our forgiveness
- Those who deserve forgiveness
- And forgiveness is special, valuable commodity
 - If you hurt me, or offend me too many times, then I have the right to limit or withdraw my forgiveness
 - But we are to forgive like the Lord did
- First, we forgive them before they stop offending us

Rom. 5:8 **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

Rom. 5:9 **Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.**

Rom. 5:10 **For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

- When God was taking action to forgive us, in that moment we were still enemies of Him
 - So even while the offense is ongoing, our forgiveness needs to begin
- Secondly, He forgave those who were undeserving

1Pet. 3:18 **For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;**

- God's forgiveness was extended in the form of His perfect just Son dying for the unjust
 - God forgave those who deserved punishment
 - Do we extend forgiveness to those who truly deserve our anger, or do we only forgive those who are innocent?
- Finally, do we demand performance for forgiveness?
 - Conditional forgiveness

2Tim. 1:9 **who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,**

- God extended His grace to us, not based on our works
- But will we forgive one who is not grateful for it, doesn't change their behavior?
 - The neighbor who keeps parking over your drive

- The kid who keeps throwing things at your house
- Then Paul culminates his description of the Christian formula for living with the ultimate measure whether we are living up to God's expectations

Col. 3:14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Col. 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Col. 3:17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

- Paul continues in his instruction defining the Christian lifestyle with 5 commands or imperatives
 - Previously he has been talking about the traits of a Christian walk
 - Now we move to the actions that put those traits into practice
- First, put on love
 - In the Greek it literally means love brings the group to perfection
 - The thought is that the love of God is most clearly understood and experienced in a group setting
 - One individual cannot demonstrate God's love in its fullness
 - We need someone to forgive, have compassion on, show grace, mercy and kindness towards
 - Argues for the need to work in the body of Christ
- After love, Paul says let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts
 - Paul frequently expresses peace in his letters
 - It echoes the Jewish greeting shalom
 - It means well-being and contentment
 - And this was a command to the church, not simply the individual
 - The church should not be ruled by personal ambition, material desires, or any other selfish desire
 - Instead we should have contentment in what God has provided
- Then at the end of verse 15 (repeated at the end of 16 and 17) is to be thankful
 - You cannot be at peace unless you are constantly reminding yourself of all that God has given you already
 - And the need to be thankful
 - Here is where peace and contentment fit

- If you are wanting something you don't have, it's hard to be thankful for what you do have
- But as sinners who deserve none of what God gives us, saved from judgment and condemnation, thankfulness is the natural result
- People who carry a thankful attitude in everything are the most pleasant and approachable people
 - They give rise to questions about why they are so thankful and hopeful
 - Which leads to an opportunity for a witness
- Then in 16 and 17, probably the most concise statement of how the corporate Christian life should be carried out
 - The word of Christ is to dwell in every Christian
 - This is the only use of the Greek term *logos christos* – the word of Christ, the teachings of Christ
 - We're not talking about the word of God as Paul describes in Romans 10:17 – the word about Christ, meaning salvation
 - The focus is more on Christ's literal instruction to us dwelling within us
 - The word dwell reminds us of the difference between the owner of a house and a visitor
 - If someone passes through your house, they are only a visitor
 - They will never be mistaken for the master of the house
 - But the one who sets up residence in your home and never leaves, then they are clearly the master of the home
 - Likewise, if the Word of God is given its proper place in your heart, a constant presence in your daily life, then it will truly be the master of your body
 - Better than treating the Bible simply as a reference book
 - The Bible needs to be center place - reading it even when we don't have a question or problem to solve!
 - Studying the word should be like breathing or eating
- And that word is to be used to teach and to admonish
 - To build up the good and tear down the wrong in our lives
- Paul sums it up this way:
 - Whatever you do, do in the name of Jesus
 - In the Eastern thinking, The name always embodied the character of the individual
 - The name was the perfect representation of the person
 - So by speaking something in the name of Christ we invoke His person, nature and authority
 - As His ambassador, we carry His reputation with us

- So are we sulling His name by our words and actions?
- To those who put on agape love, peace and contentment with the life God has given, and exercises thankfulness in all things, and allows God's word to set up residence in their heart...
 - That person is walking in a way that will reflect glory upon the name of Christ
- What a stark contrast to the commands of the false teachers!
 - The false teachers wanted the congregation to focus on the here and now, the temporal
 - They had to perform works of their own to please God
 - They couldn't be content or at peace
 - They had to worry and work to please God
 - That led to a life of discontentment and worry
 - They taught that some rules were preferred, festivals, Sabbaths, food, drink
 - Which led to judgment of others, enforcing those rules
 - That led to disunity and unwillingness to accept others or to defer to others' wishes
 - Ultimately, it was made possible because of a lack of appreciation of God's word and a lack of thankfulness for the grace that God had bestowed upon them
 - Now Paul teaches the opposite of all those things
 - What a liberating message
- And just to make sure that they understand how this liberty in Christ looks in practice, Paul finishes Chapter 3 with a few specific examples

Col. 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Col. 3:19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

Col. 3:20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Col. 3:21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

Col. 3:22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Col. 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

Col. 3:24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Col. 3:25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Col. 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

- Now each of these examples could be a Sunday preaching on its own, but I will cover them somewhat in passing, allowing you to study them on your own later
 - Each group Paul mentions is called to be self-sacrificial, loving, content and loving in light of their circumstances
 - No one is more or less obligated to the Christian walk, but their individual circumstances dictate the way in which they exhibit their Christian walk
 - A wife demonstrates the Christian walk most clearly when she submits to the authority of her husband
 - Likewise, a husband shows Christian walk by showing love to his wife, love that is agape – serving
 - Just as Ephesians tells us how Christ loved the church, and gave everything up for her
 - Ephesians also teaches not that the husband demands submission, but that the woman gives submission
 - If you have to ask for it, is evidence it is not being given
 - Notice submission is not conditional
 - Should women only submit to their husbands when they're doing the right thing?
 - Should men only love their wives when they're being submissive?
 - Children show their Christian walk most clearly by obedience to parents
 - Likewise, a father shows a Christian walk by not making their obedience a weight around their necks, where obedience is met with harshness or unfairness or indifference
 - An important corollary, a parent who will not demand respect and obedience from their children is dishonoring the Lord through their children
 - But parents should not achieve this by compromising their own walk, but rather do it in an encouraging and scripture-driven way
 - To slaves, Paul says serve your master out of a sincere desire to please the Lord, not merely because you have no choice
 - Even a slave can present a witness of his faith by showing love and patience and contentment
 - We don't need to use words to witness and show others what makes us different
- Then Paul sums up his examples
 - What we do we don't do because of someone else
 - The praises of men are not what we seek
 - When we make decisions about what we do based on what men will say, we will

inevitably make wrong choices

- We will make choices depending on how it is received by others
- Or we will intentionally do the wrong thing because we don't feel the other person deserves the right thing
 - Or the other person has done something to offend us, so we feel the right to retaliate
- When we work for the Lord, our decisions will always be based on what He expects
 - And His holiness, and His worth and what He deserves
 - And that standard will always drive us to the right place
 - And don't worry about men's rewards, because God has your back – eternal rewards you can work towards
 - And don't worry about those who deserve punishment, God has that in control too

Col. 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;

Col. 4:3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;

Col. 4:4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Col. 4:5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

Col. 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

- As Paul wraps up the letter, he makes mention of how the church should respond to the world at large
 - Up to now, he's focused on how they live with one another
 - But now, he speaks about how to treat the world
 - First, be devoted to prayer
 - The word devoted means ceaselessly active
 - And be alert in it
 - This means looking for needs, paying attention to where you can engage in prayer for the needs of God's work
 - And carry an attitude of thanksgiving into the prayer, not one of sorrow or anger or disappointment
 - And in those prayers, Paul specifically says remember him and his companions to have success in carrying the Gospel
 - Paul asks the church to use wisdom to make the most of every opportunity God

gives them

- Paul is saying that the church's purpose as Christ's ambassadors is to use every opportunity to tell the foreigners around us about the home we have in heaven
- And to accomplish this, let your speech be seasoned with grace
 - This is two concepts together
 - First, speak graciously, building relationships and drawing people toward us through genuine expressions of love and friendship
 - Second, bring God's grace into your conversations, not hesitating to speak of your faith and God's impact in your life
 - Season your talk with what God is doing in your life, which might prompt discussion with those God has opened their ears to hear

Col. 4:7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.

Col. 4:8 For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;

Col. 4:9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

Col. 4:10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);

Col. 4:11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

Col. 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

Col. 4:13 For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Col. 4:14 Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

Col. 4:15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

Col. 4:16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

Col. 4:17 Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Col. 4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

- Paul uses this list to continue to build credibility, remind them of relationships they share in these men

- Tychicus was a beloved member of the Colossian church
 - Paul sent him to relay additional information not in the letter and to encourage the church
 - Onesimus went with Tychicus delivering the letter to Ephesus, Laodicea and Colossae
- Aristarchus was from Thessalonica (Acts 20) and had ministered with Paul in Ephesus before accompanying Paul to Rome
 - Paul says he was a fellow prisoner, but the word in Greek is unusual and literally meant prisoner of war
 - Some believe Paul was using it as a play on words
 - Paul was a prisoner of Caesar, but Aristarchus was a fellow prisoner in the spiritual battle that they were fighting
- Barnabas and Mark are mentioned
 - They were cousins
 - This is the Mark that wrote the gospel
 - Mark had failed Paul earlier in Pamphylia having deserted Paul there
 - Paul didn't want Mark to accompany them, and it caused a split between Paul and Barnabas
 - Now it appears they are all reunited in Rome
 - Encouragement that disappointments and disagreements in ministry aren't the last word
- Jesus Justus is a unique mention
 - Together with Mark and Barnabas, they are the only Jews (circumcision) to accompany Paul to Rome
 - This would have added emphasis to Paul's teaching that all men – Greek or Jew – are one in Christ
- Paul mentions Epaphras
 - He commends him for prayers and concern for the church
 - He's not meddling, he's concerned
- Luke was there
 - Between Luke, Paul and Mark, these three men have written two gospels, the book of Acts, and 13 letters of the New Testament
 - 60% of the NT
- Demas was there with Paul
 - But we hear later in 2 Timothy 4 that he turned against Paul
- Finally, greetings to
 - Laodicea, to the church in the house of Nympha

- Probably a house church in that city
- There were no church buildings until at least the third century
 - The church met in homes or public places longer than the United States has been in existence
 - Don't ever think that a church begins with a building or even needs one
- Paul refers to a letter written to Laodicea, but obviously not part of the Biblical record, and therefore not inspired for inclusion in God's word
- Archippus seems to be the son of Philemon and perhaps the leader of the Colossian church
 - Paul's statement would then be a statement of correction to a leader who has failed in his responsibilities in this church
 - A leader must take hold of their responsibility to lead God's people
- Finally, Paul says he wrote this letter in his own hand
 - Likely, that sentence was the only one he wrote, to authenticate the letter
- So to sum up the letter:
 - We are all soldiers working together serving the same Lord
 - The church isn't a club or a pastime or a social event
 - But because we are ambassadors of Christ and are called to a life that mirrors Him
 - And there are eternal consequences for how we carry it out
 - We must not allow false teachers to draw us off from the purpose God has set in front of us