

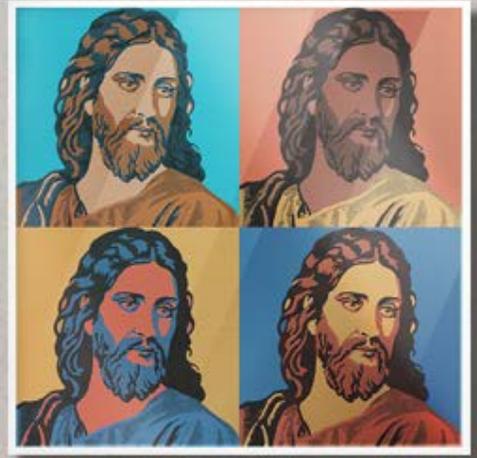
BAND OF BROTHERS

# No Other Jesus

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Rediscovering the Sufficiency and Superiority of Christ

SUMMER 2025



## Summer Series Teaching Schedule

May 6, 7, 8 – WEEK 1: **Colossians 1:1-23**

The supremacy of Christ

Devotionary™ Reading: Pages 5-24

May 13, 14, 15 – WEEK 2: **Colossians 1:24-2:7**

The mysterious ministry of spiritual maturity

Devotionary™ Reading: Pages 25-32

May 20, 21, 22 – WEEK 3: **Colossians 2:8-23**

The sufficiency of the gospel and the allure of self-made religion

Devotionary™ Reading: Pages 33-40

May 27, 28, 29 – WEEK 4: **Colossians 3:1-17**

Live like who you are

Devotionary™ Reading: Pages 41-52

June 3, 4, 5 – WEEK 5: **Colossians 3:18-4:6**

Let's get practical

Devotionary™ Reading: Pages 53-62

June 10, 11, 12 – WEEK 6: **Colossians 4:7-18**

A prisoner of Christ

Devotionary™ Reading: Pages 63-66







## A Letter of Love

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,*

<sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father. – Colossians 1:1-2 ESV*

The ancient city of Colossae achieved its early prominence and prosperity due to its location along a major trade route that ran through the Lycus River Valley in the Roman province of Asia Minor (in what is today modern-day Turkey). But in time, the nearby and newer city of Laodicea replaced Colossae as the economic engine of the region. While the Colossians had made a name for themselves through the manufacture of the much-coveted, crimson-colored wool cloth known as *colossinum*, the once-thriving metropolis became little more than a small village. It was in this environment that a small congregation of believers sprung up.

The founding of the Colossian church is unclear. At the time Paul wrote his letter, he had not been to the city of Colossae, but his missionary journeys had taken him to nearby Ephesus where he had spent an extended period of time spreading the gospel message and making converts. According to Acts 19:10, “This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” It could be that one of the new converts from Ephesus took the good news of Jesus Christ to Colossae or a visitor from Colossae had been in Ephesus to hear the preaching of Paul. But whatever the case, the gospel made its way to the Colossians, and, in time, a small congregation had been formed.

Because of its location along a major trade route, the city of Colossae had a population comprised of Greek colonists and native Phrygians. There would have also been a fairly large number of Jews living in the area because Antiochus the Great (223-187 B.C.) had relocated hundreds of Jewish families from Mesopotamia to this region. So, this local congregation was likely a diverse mixture of ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This hybrid blend of diverse backgrounds, along with the influence of false teachers, was causing a great deal of confusion among the church’s young congregation.

It appears that Paul had received word of the situation in Colossae from Epaphras, a resident of the city. Whether Epaphras visited Paul while he was under house arrest in Rome is unclear, but the fellow minister of the gospel had somehow gotten word to the apostle about the state of affairs in his home city. According to verses 7-8 of chapter one, Epaphras had been instrumental in the spread of the gospel to his fellow Colossians.

*You learned the gospel from Epaphras, our dear fellow slave—a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf—who also told us of your love in the Spirit. – Colossians 1:7-8 NLT*

But Epaphras had shared with Paul his concern for the spiritual well-being of the church. Without proper leadership and instruction, the fledgling congregation had found itself struggling to resist the temptation to syncretize their old religious ideologies with their new faith in Christ. And some of the Jewish converts were attempting to add their own blend of Judaistic ritualism and traditionalism. To top it all off, there were those who had infiltrated the church, posing as doctrinal experts and propagating a dangerous brand of false teaching that stood in direct opposition to the teachings of Paul and the other apostles. This is what led Paul to open his letter with a statement that established his apostolic credentials.

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God... – Colossians 1:1 ESV*

While Paul had not been one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus Christ, he had received his apostolic commission directly from the Lord Himself. Early on in his life, Paul had been a member of the Pharisees, a powerful and highly influential sect of Judaism. At one point, he described himself as the poster boy for religious extremism and dedication.

*“I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.” – Philippians 3:5-6 NLT*

He was an up-and-coming member of the Pharisees who had been given a commission by the high priest to persecute and arrest members of “the way,” the name given to the cult of followers who worshiped the dead Rabbi, Jesus. As a devout Pharisee, Paul had been a zealous adherent to and defender of the Jewish faith, and he was determined to eradicate the memory of Jesus and eliminate every one of His followers. He would later describe to the Jews how he had been given a commission to hunt down and destroy Christians.

*“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.” – Acts 22:3-5 NLT*

But something remarkable had taken place as Paul made his way to Damascus. He had come face to face with the resurrected Jesus. A blinding light had stopped Paul in his tracks and a voice had spoken to him, saying, “I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting” (Acts 22:8 NLT). Unable to see but fully capable of hearing, Paul heard Jesus give him instructions to visit a man named Ananias, who would give him further instructions. And Ananias opened Paul’s eyes and revealed to him his new mission:

*“The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.” – Acts 22:14-16 NLT*

This “Damascus Road experience” transformed Paul’s life. He went from persecutor to proclaimer of the gospel. And he was appointed an official apostle or messenger of Jesus Christ, with specific instructions to take the good news of salvation to the Gentiles. And Paul wanted the believers in Colossae to understand that he had divine authority to address the situation taking place within their local congregation. Paul spent a great deal of time defending his rights to speak on behalf of Christ because there were those who attacked his apostolic credentials. But Paul pushed back on these critics, declaring his God-given authority to proclaim the gospel.

*“I was not appointed by any group of people or any human authority, but by Jesus Christ himself and by God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.” – Galatians 1:1 NLT*

So many of the churches that Paul helped establish were being targeted by men who claimed to be speaking for God but who were teaching false doctrines and leading the people away from the simplicity and integrity of the gospel. Many of these men were eloquent and influential speakers who derided Paul’s ministry and portrayed him as a charlatan. But Paul refused to let them destroy what God had built.

*“But I will continue doing what I have always done. This will undercut those who are looking for an opportunity to boast that their work is just like ours. These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ.” – 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 NLT*

So, as Paul wrote the believers in Colossae, he opened his letter with a declaration of his apostleship. He wanted them to know that what he was about to tell them was divinely inspired and not just the thoughts of a man they had never met. He was about to divulge to them the will of God concerning their situation, and it would pay for them to listen. And Paul let them know that he was not alone in his concern for them. His protégé and fellow minister of the gospel, Timothy, stood with him in his message of encouragement and admonition.

Paul refers to his audience as “saints,” using a Greek term (*hagios*), which means “those set apart to God.” He wanted to remind them that they had been consecrated by God for His use. They belonged to Him and had an obligation to live their lives in keeping with His will and according to His Word. They were not free to establish their own model for righteous living or to create their own system of religious rituals or creeds. They had been set apart *by* God and were to dedicate their lives *to* God. And the rest of his letter will address the specifics of their situation and the measures they must take to ensure that they continue to live faithful lives marked by God’s grace and peace.

## Faith, Hope, and Love

<sup>3</sup> We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup> which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, <sup>7</sup> just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf <sup>8</sup> and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. – Colossians 1:3-8 ESV

Paul describes the believers in Colossae using three of his favorite terms: Faith, hope, and love. He mentions their faith in Christ and their love for all the saints. And he indicates that these two qualities are based on the hope that is laid up for them in heaven. Because they have a secure hope in the future salvation promised to them because of their faith in Jesus Christ, they are able to love others as they have been loved. This triad of Christian character traits was near and dear to Paul's heart. In fact, in his great "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13, Paul summarizes his statements on love by writing, "Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13 NLT).

For Paul, faith, hope, and love were the non-negotiable essentials of the Christian experience. In writing to the church in Corinth, he expressed his admiration for them and his belief that they had been blessed by God with every spiritual gift.

*God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Corinthians 1:5-7 NLT*

And yet, despite their giftedness, the Corinthians were a divided church, bickering over who had the most impressive of the spiritual gifts. They had missed the whole point and were allowing the gifts that God had given them to create a hierarchy of spiritual elitism marked by pride and arrogance.

So, as Paul wrote to the fledgling church in Colossae, he emphasized the three characteristics that were essential to living the Christian life and honoring the name of Christ: Faith, hope, and love. Paul had used the same trifecta of godly qualities when addressing the believers in Thessalonica.

*We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 ESV*

In Paul's theology, faith was an ongoing experience, not a one-time, once-for-all action that ushered in one's salvation. While faith was essential for experiencing God's saving grace as

expressed through Christ's sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross, it did not stop at the point of salvation. Faith was to be a dynamic and ever-increasing quality in the life of the believer. Paul told the Corinthians believers that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7 ESV). He commended the believers in Thessalonica for their ever-expanding faith.

*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because **your faith is growing abundantly**, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. – 2 Thessalonians 1:3 ESV*

When speaking of his own life, Paul stated, "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 ESV). He no longer relied upon his own strength and his capacity to produce good works in the flesh but, instead, he relied upon the sanctifying work of Christ – by faith. He truly believed what he wrote to the church in Philippi: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

And for Paul, love was the greatest proof of a truly transformed life. According to the author of Hebrews, without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). But Paul would qualify that statement by adding, "if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1 ESV). Love for others provides demonstrable proof that we have been loved by God and had our hearts transformed by the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. As James so eloquently put it, faith that produces no tangible evidence is not really faith at all.

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. – James 2:14-17 ESV*

James was not inferring that we are saved by works, but he was emphasizing that saving faith produces godly fruit, such as love for those in need. The apostle John would echo that sentiment.

*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. – 1 John 4:20 ESV*

And according to Paul, both faith and love are founded upon the hope of our future glorification, promised to us by God and provided for us by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus was intended to provide us with proof that there is life after death. This world is not all there is. That is why Paul told the Corinthians, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ESV).

And Paul went on to stress the essential nature of Christ's resurrection. If He is not risen from the dead, then our faith has no meaning whatsoever. It's little more than a pipe dream.

*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. – 1 Corinthians 15:13-14 ESV*

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. – 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 ESV*

Ultimately, our faith is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because it is His resurrection that assures us of our future hope of glorification. And Paul went on to assure the Corinthians of the unwavering reliability of God's plan for our future glorification.

*...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

*“Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

*“O death, where is your victory?*

*O death, where is your sting?” – 1 Corinthians 15:52-55 ESV*

We live by faith in the present because we have hope for the future. The God who will fulfill all that He has promised regarding the hereafter is fully capable of meeting all our needs in the here-and-now. And because we rest in His unfailing love for us, we are able to express that same love to all those around us, including our enemies.

And Paul commends the Colossian believers because the gospel continues to bear fruit in their lives.

*...it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth... – Colossians 1:6 ESV*

Their faith, hope, and love were anything but static. Each was increasing daily and being manifested in their lives for the world to see. The missionary work of Epaphras had been productive, resulting in their salvation and ongoing sanctification. Paul wanted the Colossians to know how proud he was of their perseverance and determination to continue to pursue faith, hope, and love – even in the midst of the difficulties and distractions of life in a fallen world.



## A Powerful Prayer for God's People

*<sup>9</sup> And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. – Colossians 1:9-14 ESV*

Paul's response upon hearing of the Colossians' ongoing display of faith, hope, and love was to let them know that this was an answer to his prayers for them. He states that he and Timothy had regularly and zealously prayed that God would fill them with "the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9 ESV).

The prayers of Paul, many of which are recorded in his letters, reveal a shepherd's heart for his dispersed and ever-increasing flock. These prayers provide a rare glimpse into the approach to ministry and discipleship of this great 1st-Century apostle, missionary, and church planter. Paul had a passion for the gospel and a love for people that revealed itself in how he prayed for them. While it's likely that he received many personal requests from Christians he met along the way during his many journeys, his recorded prayers are more universal in nature and deal with the spiritual needs of the congregations to which he wrote. There is little doubt that he faithfully lifted up to the Lord the personal requests of individual believers, his real passion for people went way beyond the surface needs, wants, and desires they may have had. While he took their physical needs seriously and cared deeply about their health and well-being, his real concern was for their spiritual lives and their relationship with God.

In the opening lines of his letter to the believers in Colossae, Paul encourages them by informing them that they have been in his prayers – constantly. He tells them that he and Timothy have not ceased to pray for them. What a blessing it is to hear that someone has been praying for you. What an encouragement to know that someone cares enough about you to lift you up before the throne of God. And Paul reveals to them the content of his prayers. This is where it gets interesting and revealing.

Paul says that his request to God for them was that they would have a knowledge of His will. Paul has been asking God to give them knowledge or awareness of His will. But he is doing much more than just asking. Paul is begging. The Greek word, *proseuchomai*, carries much more force behind it than our English word for prayer. It means "to pray earnestly for" and reflects Paul's strong desire for God to provide the believers in Colossae knowledge of His will for them. Not only that, he wants God to *fill them* with that knowledge.

Once again, the original Greek language is much more rich and forceful in its meaning. When Paul asks God to fill them, he means “to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim.” In other words, he is asking God to fill them so fully that there isn’t room for anything else – including their own wills. For the believer, knowing the will of God is essential. It is what directs our actions and influences our attitudes. It is what gives us direction in our lives. As we live life in this world, we will be constantly influenced by our own sin nature and the world around us. We will constantly be tempted to control our lives according to our own will.

Paul warned the believers in Rome, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2 NLT). So, there is a sense in which we have to turn our attention from the things of this world and concentrate on God’s will as revealed in His Word. God is out to transform us by influencing our thinking and altering our behavior – from the inside out.

But Paul goes on to qualify his request. He says that he is asking that they be filled with a knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. In other words, God’s will must be spiritually discerned. It is not of this world. In fact, the wisdom of God will often, if not always, stand in conflict with the ways of this world. It will make no sense from a human perspective. It will appear illogical. To know God’s will requires spiritual wisdom and understanding, which can only be provided by the Spirit of God. Paul told the believers in Corinth, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV). Then he reminded them, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16 ESV). We have the mind of Christ because we have the Spirit of Christ living within us. We are spiritual creatures with a God-given capacity to understand and know His will. And Paul’s prayer was that his brothers and sisters in Christ be filled to overflowing with that knowledge.

But for Paul, to be aware of and filled with the knowledge of God was not enough. Knowing the will of God is useless if it is not put into action. That is why Paul states that his prayers for them had an objective. He wanted them “to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10 ESV). The knowledge of God should produce obedience to God. Knowing His will should produce a desire to live it out in daily life.

While the Greek word, *peripateō*, can be translated as “walk,” it can also convey the idea of conducting one’s life. Paul is expressing his prayerful desire that the Colossians live their daily lives in submission to and in keeping with God’s will. Doing so will please the Father, produce a life of spiritual fruitfulness, and result in an even greater awareness of His will. Paul wanted them to know that, as they expended energy in doing God’s will, they would tap into an inexhaustible supply of power based on His “glorious might” (Colossians 1:11 ESV). Rather than growing weak or weary, they would find themselves with an overabundance of endurance and

patience even amid the trials of life. God would supply them with strength for the task and they would respond with joyful thanksgiving.

Paul desperately desired for the Colossian believers to understand the magnitude of the gift they had received upon placing their faith in Jesus. Something truly remarkable had taken place when they accepted the free gift of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. They had been immediately “delivered...from the domain of darkness and transferred...to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13 ESV). As a result, they shared in the inheritance of the saints in light. They had a permanent place reserved for them in God’s eternal kingdom. The apostle Peter expressed it this way:

*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. – 1 Peter 1:3-5 NLT*

The author of Hebrews also wrote of this inheritance of the saints. In his great “Hall of Faith,” he mentions such Old Testament luminaries as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, and describes how they were distinguished by their faith in God.

*All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. – Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT*

And when Paul tells the Colossians that God has “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13 ESV), he is letting them know that they are as good as there. The promises of God are so sure and certain that the Colossians can live in perfect peace in the here-and-now because their hereafter has been guaranteed by God. They were already citizens of that eternal kingdom, even while living their lives here on earth.

And Paul lets them know that this kingdom to come belongs to Jesus Christ, the one who made possible their redemption and forgiveness from sin. Jesus was not only their Savior but their coming King. Their redemption and justification would one day result in their glorification. And Paul’s ongoing prayer for them was that they might continue to grow in their knowledge of the full scope of God’s grand redemptive plan for them.

This prayer of Paul is a great example of how we should be praying for one another. There is nothing wrong with praying for someone's physical healing, for their marriage, their financial needs, or any other concern they may have. But how much more important it is to desire that they grow in their knowledge of God's will. One of the problems believers face is trying to understand what it is we're supposed to do in life. We need to know how we are to use our time, talents, and resources. We need to know what it is that God is trying to teach us through the trials and troubles we face in life. How would God have us respond to the situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves? It is not difficult to discern *our* will. That comes easy. But knowing the will of God takes intention. It requires listening to the Spirit of God and patiently waiting to hear God speak. But what greater prayer could anyone pray for a friend or family member than that God would fill them with a knowledge of His will – his good, pleasing, and perfect will?

## He Has No Equal

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. – Colossians 1:15-20 ESV*

As far as Paul was concerned, one of the most non-negotiable aspects of God's will that the Colossians needed to understand concerned the preeminence of Christ. Evidently, Epaphras had informed Paul that the doctrine of Christ was under direct assault by men claiming to have apostolic authority. These unnamed individuals were teaching false doctrines concerning Christ that had left the Colossian congregation confused and dangerously close to diminishing the fruitfulness for which Paul had so graciously complimented them.

To redirect the focus of his letter to Christ, Paul adeptly and somewhat abruptly shifts the emphasis from God the Father to Jesus Christ the son.

*For he [God] has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. – Colossians 1:13-14 NLT*

Following this reminder of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross and its eternal implications for their redemption and justification, Paul states, "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15 NLT). In coming to earth and taking on human flesh, Jesus, the Son of God and second person of the Trinity made God both visible and knowable. He became the visible image of the invisible God on earth.

In his gospel account, the apostle John elaborates on this unique aspect of Christ's earthly ministry.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14 ESV*

And John boldly proclaims that Jesus was more than just another messenger from God. He was God Himself.

*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side, has made Him known. – John 1:18 BSB*

The author of Hebrews expands on the God-reflecting nature of Jesus and further solidifies the doctrine of His divinity.

*The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names. – Hebrews 1:3-4 NLT*

For Paul and these other authors of the New Testament, the divinity of Jesus was an essential doctrine that must be defended at all costs because it was the hinge upon which the door of salvation swung. If Jesus was not divine, then His death on the cross would prove to be ineffective. His sinlessness was the key to His death's effectiveness.

*...we have an advocate before the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins... – 1 John 2:1-2 BSB*

*But you know that Christ appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. – 1 John 3:5 BSB*

And what makes this atoning work of Jesus even more significant is the fact that, as God, He was the Creator laying down His life for those whom He created. Paul further enhances Christ's divine credentials by stressing His eternity and the essential role He played in the creation story.

*...by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. – Colossians 1:16 ESV*

And, once again, the apostle John provides ample support for Paul's claim.

*He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. – John 1:2-3 BSB*

Paul would present this same message concerning Christ's role in the creation account when writing to the believers in Corinth.

*...there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we exist. – 1 Corinthians 8:6 BSB*

As the Creator-God, Jesus was responsible for all that existed, including the believers in Colossae. He was not just a Messiah who came to save them, but He was the God who had created them. He was responsible for their very existence as well as their salvation. He had formed them and forgiven them. He had breathed in them the breath of life and had become

for them the means for experiencing new life. And by His divine power, Jesus would hold them safe and secure to the end.

*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. – Colossians 1:17 ESV*

Paul is going out of his way to stress the unique nature of Christ. He was adamant that the believers in Colossae grasped and appreciated the significance of Jesus' life-giving and life-transforming role as the Son of God. Jesus had been so much more than a teacher, Rabbi, healer, and miracle worker. He was supreme in all things. He had no equal and there was no one who could replicate His accomplishments or diminish His one-of-a-kind status as the sovereign Savior of the world. That is why Paul stresses the headship of Christ over the church, and promotes His well-deserved position as the preeminent one.

*And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. – Colossians 1:18 ESV*

Paul's point seems to be that the church would not exist without Christ. Had He not died and risen again, there would be no church because there would be no Christ-followers. He was not a martyred teacher who had managed to cultivate a faithful host of committed followers who continued to propagate His teachings. He was the "firstborn from the dead" who, through His death and resurrection, made possible the spiritual transformation of countless men and women.

There were those who were teaching that the resurrection of Jesus was a fable or myth and downplaying its importance to the Christian faith. Paul addressed the misguided musings of these dangerous "false teachers" sovereign in his first letter to the church in Corinth.

*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. – 1 Corinthians 15:12-14 ESV*

Christ's resurrection made possible the redemption of condemned humanity and guarantees the future resurrection and glorification of all those who accept His free gift of salvation. Again, Christ was more than a gifted teacher with a message of life transformation based on behavior modification. He had not just modeled a new way of living, but He had died so that sinful men and women might receive new lives and new natures that emulated His.

Paul emphatically states that Jesus is preeminent and one-of-a-kind. He has no equal. Jesus was the sole means by which God chose to redeem fallen humanity. That's why Paul claims, "God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ" (Colossians 1:19 NLT), and no one else. And it was only through Christ that "God reconciled everything to himself" (Colossians 1:20 NLT). No one else could take credit for the role that Jesus had played in God's grand redemptive plan. God

used Jesus to reconcile sinful humanity to Himself. And anyone who diminished Jesus' role as Savior or presented another means of salvation was to be avoided at all costs.

*You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. – Galatians 1:6-8 NLT*

*You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed. – 2 Corinthians 11:4 NLT*

It seems quite obvious that Paul held strong views concerning this topic. He was obsessed with defending the doctrine of Christ at all costs. He would not tolerate anyone who attempted to diminish Christ's divinity or who tried to devalue His role as the God/man who, through His life, death, and resurrection made it possible for sinful men to be made right with a holy God.

## The Reality and Reliability of Reconciliation.

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. – Colossians 1:21-23 ESV*

Paul knew it was essential that the Colossian believers fully understood who Jesus was and what He had done for them. Their concept of Jesus was far too limited and had allowed false ideas about His identity and accomplishments to filter into their beliefs about Him. After Jesus resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven, there was growing speculation as to His true identity and its implications for mankind. In His absence, His disciples continued to spread the news concerning the coming kingdom of God and the sole means of gaining entrance into it: By placing one's faith in Jesus Christ.

But there were others who had begun to formulate their own concepts concerning Jesus and the implications of His life and death. The disciples had clearly spread the news that Jesus had risen from the dead and had returned to His Father's side in heaven. Paul had boldly proclaimed the nature of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to the believers in Corinth.

*I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. – 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NLT*

But there were those who had begun to refute the disciples' teaching concerning resurrection, declaring it improbable and even unnecessary. That's what led Paul to warn the Corinthians about this dangerous heresy.

*...if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. – 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 NLT*

There were others who had begun to spread the idea that Jesus had not been a real, flesh-and-blood human. Because these people deemed the flesh to be inherently evil, they could not accept the idea of deity taking on humanity. So, they rationalized it away by claiming that Jesus had only *appeared* to have a human body. So, His "death" was just a fiction. This heresy was later deemed *Docetism*, which comes from the Greek word *dokein*, which means "to seem." But by voiding the humanity of Jesus, these false teachers were actually eliminating the heart of the

gospel message. Without the humanity of Jesus there is no gospel. That is why the apostles boldly preached the reality of Jesus' humanity.

***He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.** – 1 Peter 2:24 NLT*

The doctrine of the bodily death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus became the litmus test for determining the veracity of those claiming to be teachers.

*Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that **Jesus Christ came in a real body**, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here.* – 1 John 4:1-3 NLT

So, as Paul continues the introduction of his letter to the Colossian believers, he stresses the humanity of Jesus, reminding them that they had been “reconciled in his body of flesh by his death” (Colossians 1:22 ESV). For Paul, that point was essential, because it explained how sinful human beings could be made right with a holy and righteous God. He even stressed the nature of their pre-conversion state, describing them as “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” (Colossians 1:21 ESV). This concept of alienation and hostility was a common theme for Paul. He repeatedly stressed the formerly hopeless and helpless condition of those who now enjoyed a right standing with God. He wanted them to consider the almost incomprehensible scope of Christ's sacrificial death and all that it had accomplished on their behalf.

*...since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.* – Romans 5:9-11 NLT

The physical death of Jesus had made possible their spiritual transformation from enemies of God to friends of God. They had been reconciled to a righteous God by the undeserving death of His righteous and sinless Son. Paul reminded the believers in Rome of the remarkable nature of Jesus' selfless sacrifice of His own life.

*The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And **in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.** – Romans 8:3 NLT*

And Paul told the believers in Colossae that, because Jesus had died in their place, He had been able to present them to God the Father as “holy and blameless and above reproach” (Colossians 1:22 ESV). Jesus had taken upon Himself the penalty for their sins and, in exchange, had placed upon them His own unblemished righteousness. Paul fully understood the significance of this “great exchange,” and boldly proclaimed His appreciation for it and his unwavering dependence upon it.

*I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.* – Philippians 3:9 NLT

For Paul, belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was essential for living the Christian life. He called the Colossians to reject any false teaching that might undermine their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and urged them to remain committed to the good news just as they had heard it from Epaphras.

*...you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.* – Colossians 1:23 NLT

Paul knew that false teachers would be a constant problem in the church. Each generation of believers would face a new wave of plausible but unreliable doctrines concerning the saving work of Jesus. He also knew that immature and poorly informed Christians would be easy targets for false teaching, ending up “tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching” and tricked by “lies so clever they sound like the truth” (Ephesians 4:14 NLT). For Paul, the best defense against false teaching was the truth. And he declared his firm commitment to continue doing what he had always done: Preach the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ to any and all who would listen.

*The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God’s servant to proclaim it.* – Colossians 1:23 NLT

Paul wanted the Colossians to know that they had been reconciled to God through the physical death of Jesus Christ. He had been a real man who lived a real life and died a real death on the cross – in their place. And by placing their faith in the substitutionary death of Jesus, they had been made right with God. Formerly enemies of God, they now enjoyed a new status as His sons and heirs. And no false teacher or faulty doctrine could take that away from them.

