

# Colossians

Preached by Phil Kayser 2020-09-20 at DCC

## Introduction

Ligonier Ministries just published a major survey on the state of theology in America. And as you can guess, America doesn't have very good theology. But you can filter subgroups such as ethnic groups and religious groups that were surveyed, and evangelicals didn't fair very well either.

Only 58% of Evangelicals disagreed with this statement: "God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam." That shows major postmodern relativism at work. They personally believe the truth, but they are not willing to say the antithesis is false.

Only 37% strongly disagreed with the following statement: "Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God." Now, maybe they got confused by what that meant, but listen to this next one:

20% did not give a clear answer to the following: "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God," and 11% strongly agreed that Jesus is not God. It's not just the members of the church of Colossae who are confused on this question; modern Evangelicals are too.

To the statement, "The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being" only 51% of Evangelicals strongly disagreed, 6% somewhat disagreed, 7% were not sure, 8% somewhat agreed, and 28% strongly agreed with that heretical statement. That's astounding.

32% said that they agreed with the statement, "Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature."

Only 30% agreed that "Even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation."

5% disagreed that abortion is a sin, and only 85% strongly agreed that it is a sin.

11% strongly agree with this statement: "Gender identity is a matter of choice."

13% agreed that "Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth."

To me that shows that the book of Colossians is a book that is as relevant as ever. But even beyond that survey, it is super relevant to postmodern skepticism, cultural relativism, immorality, mysticism, the occult, rejection of authority, and other issues that we see all around us today.

It's relevant to Christianity on several other levels. Do we have Messianic congregations today who subject believers to unbiblical Talmudic traditions? Sadly we do. They are really

no different than some of the people Paul opposes in this letter. Do women dieters feel guilt about eating yummy food because they somehow think that the “touch not, taste not, handle not” regulations of the legalists in chapter 2:21 apply to them? Yes. Diet legalism is everywhere. Are there believers who get their theology of angels and heaven (the afterlife) from sources other than the Bible? Yes they do. Books and movies about people who have been to heaven and back have introduced a huge number of unbiblical doctrines into the church. Christians today get a lot of their theology from mystics, the apocryphal writings, the Jewish Talmud, pagan philosophy, and even their own supposed private revelations. Are there Christians today who compartmentalize life into the secular and sacred like some Colossians did? Yes. That heresy has been around for centuries. Are there people today who deny Christ’s Lordship over all of life in a two-kingdom kind of way? Yes. Have Christians had their minds muddled on role relationships in marriage, and other authority relationships? Yes. Colossians is an ultra relevant book for today. Don’t brush it off because some of the errors addressed in it seem so weird. We live in a weird culture that needs this book desperately.

Thankfully the structure of this book is very simple - two chapters of doctrine followed by two chapters of application. It follows the pattern of Romans and Ephesians.

## Overview of the book

The theme of the book is also pretty simple. It can be summarized in one sentence: “No part of human existence should remain untouched by the Gospel reign of Jesus.” In chapters 1-2 Paul shows what a Christ-centered theology looks like because the Colossians were mixing Christ with other things and it wasn’t working out too well. In chapters 3-4 Paul shows what a Christ-centered ethics looks like. Again, it was because they were mixing Christ with other things in their day-to-day lives, and Paul wanted Christ to be preeminent in all that they did.

## Christ-centered theology (Colossians 1-2)

### Christ-centered introduction (1:1-14)

Even the introduction is Christ-centered in the way that it is written.

### Their status in Christ (1:1-2)

They have a status as saints who are set apart from the world to God by Christ, and Paul is giving them the revelation of Christ as an apostle of Christ. So they have a status that commits them to being separated from the world and listening to Jesus.

### Thanks for what Christ has done in them (1:3-8)

In verses 3-8 Paul gives thanks for what Christ has already done in them. Paul is not a perfectionist. He is not blinded to the good God has accomplished in them simply because they have a lot that is messed up. He is genuinely thankful for much that has been accomplished. And we need to have that thankful attitude when we are dealing with fellow-

members who have sin or bad theology. Be thankful for the good work that God has begun in them, and have faith that God will complete that work.

### Prayer that they would walk worthy of their calling (1:9-14)

But in the last part of the introduction (verses 9-14) he offers up a prayer that God would help them to keep pressing into their upward calling; that they would walk worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus. He is concerned that they are living inconsistently by taking some of Jesus and some of the world. So Paul asks for a pouring out of God's wisdom, grace, power, patience, and everything else that flows from Christ's redemption. He knows that apart from Christ all the preaching in the world won't change them, so he prays. In that he is a model to us. Prayer shows dependence on Christ.

And in his prayer he ties kingdom and redemption together in a way that demolishes the gap theory of Dispensationalism. Verse 13:

13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness *and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul weaves kingdom and Gospel together. Christ's kingdom was not postponed for 2000 years as a lot of Dispensationalists have claimed. Those Colossians had already been ushered into his kingdom right then and there. The age of the Gospel *is* the age of the kingdom.

I won't spend more time on the introduction, but it gives an immediate focus on Christ being their sufficiency. It's a great introduction.

### The total supremacy of Christ over all (1:15-23)

But in verses 15-23 Paul gives a magnificent theology of Christ's supremacy over all. And it is not a theoretical supremacy because Paul says that Jesus will redeem the very things that He is supreme over and He will reconcile those things. There is no square inch of the universe that Jesus does not declare is Lordship over, and therefore there is not a square inch of the universe that His kingdom grace will not eventually be applied to.

These Colossians had apparently treated Jesus as not being sufficient and had gone to pagan philosophy for wisdom (hmm - sounds familiar), and had gone to Jewish legalism for practical advice, and to mystical experiences for comfort, and to other things for sanctification. Little did they realize that in doing so they were diminishing Christ. I'm going to read most of this section because it sets the tone for the rest of the book. This section demolishes all the problems we looked at earlier in the introduction.

### Supremacy over the universe (1:15-17)

Verse 15 says first, "He is the image of the invisible God..." The image of the invisible God can be rendered as "the visible expression" of God. Or as Hebrews 1:3 words it, "the exact representation" of God. In other words, Christ is God made visible. Thus Jesus told the disciples, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus needs no further

power or abilities to accomplish His desire of subduing all things beneath His feet. He is willing and He is able. He is God made visible in the Incarnation.

The second thing that verse 15 calls Jesus is “the firstborn over all creation.” There are hints that Paul is not using the term “firstborn” as a literal reference to being born first. For example, He is firstborn *over* something, not firstborn *from* something. That would seem to point to the figurative use of that term - which is the way the New Testament mostly uses it.

So what was the figurative use of the term? It represented a person who was preeminent over the things or over the people that he is firstborn over. For example, in Psalm 89:27 God says of David that God would make him the firstborn by making him the highest over the kings of the earth. He wasn't literally born first, but David had the function of being exalted over all other kings, so he bore the title of firstborn. If you are firstborn of kings, you are exalted over all kings. But here Jesus is more than simply a firstborn over kings; He is the firstborn over all creation - meaning that there is nothing created that He is not exalted over. But it also means that He will inherit the creation. And the rest of the chapter makes that clear. Look for example at verses 16-18:

16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

There is absolutely no way that I can do justice to that magnificent paragraph this morning. But it is obvious as you read that that there is no possibility of any square inch of heaven and earth being neutral. Everything was given to Jesus. Let me emphasize four points from those three verses. There are many other things in there, but let me only emphasize four:

1. First, Jesus is the creator of all things. There is nothing created that He did not create, which logically means He was not created. Jesus is the Creator God.
2. Second, all things were created *for* Him. He owns them and they must serve Him. In that phrase Paul is giving a Christ-centered orientation to the entire universe.
3. Third, He is *before* all things. This speaks to His preexistence as God from all eternity past. Before any “thing” came into existence, He was already there. In any beginning to have been begun, He was already there. This means that He is not dependent upon anything.
4. But fourth, everything is dependent upon Jesus because all things are held together by Him - or as the New King James translates it, “in Him all things consist.” Here's how Douglas Moo exegetes that phrase. He says,

Without him, electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to work, the planets would not stay in their orbits... Paul wants them to understand that things make sense only when Christ is kept at the center.<sup>1</sup>

### Supremacy in Redemption (1:18-20)

But in verses 18-20 Paul indicates that everything in this universe that He has just outlined that was made by Christ and for Christ and that He upholds by the Word of His power is also going to be redeemed. This is such a correction to the Pietism and Gnosticism of modern Christianity that only thinks the invisible is important and denigrates the importance of work, ecology, politics, and other things. No, He is going to redeem those kinds of things and even thrones and dominions.

But in verse 18 Paul says that Jesus started this process of making all things new by redeeming the church. You've got to start somewhere, so He starts by redeeming a people. But verse 19 says that this process of redemption and reconciliation will not stop until all things are reconciled to Jesus. Everything that is out of order will be put back into order. Verse 18:

18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Again, there is a boatload that I cannot touch upon, but in terms of the supremacy of Christ, let me give five bullet points.

5. First, verse 18 says that Jesus is the head of the church. So He has supremacy over everything in the church. Historically presbyterians have said that this means that Christ's officers have no authority that Christ has not delegated to them in the Bible and they must speak nothing that Christ has not authorized. He is the head and the *only* head of the church.
6. Second, that verse says that Jesus's body is also the beginning of the new creation by being the firstborn from the dead. As the first to be raised from the dead, He gains the preeminence over even death itself and is the owner and head of everything that represents the new creation. Another way of saying it is that His resurrection of an old creation body into a new creation body is the beginning of every aspect of the old creation being turned into a new creation.
7. Third, verse 18 ends by saying that in light of what has already been said, Jesus has to have the first place in everything in this universe. Nothing can be more important than Him and nothing in this universe can be excluded from the claims of Jesus. As Abraham Kuyper worded it, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 126.

existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'"<sup>2</sup>

8. Fourth, verse 19 says that the fullness of the Father dwells in Jesus, so there is no reason that Jesus is not sufficient. He overflows with God's aseity. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.
9. And fifth, verse 20 declares that the Father has willed to reconcile all things to Himself by Jesus. So it is going to be slam-dunk. It will happen.

Now let's just think about how extensive redemption will eventually be on planet earth because this is something that most Evangelicals are clueless on. The things that will be redeemed in verse 20 are exactly the same things that are created by Jesus in verse 16. Verse 16 again:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Through the Fall of Adam into sin, Satan sought to capture all things for himself. We find in Job 1 and 2 that Satan was even able to enter into heaven and defile that place with his evil presence. That's astonishing. Even heaven needed to be purged and cleansed by Christ's atonement. It had to be redeemed. Passages like 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18 indicate that other demons were also in heaven. This was why Revelation 12 said that Michael the Archangel had to cast all of Satan's armies (billions of them) out of heaven and onto the earth. It was a part of redeeming even the heavens.

But planet earth itself must be progressively redeemed. And many prophecies indicate that as the Gospel pervasively covers the earth, long life, health, taming of animals, and other reversals of the curse will be noticed. Notice again the language of verse 20. Redemption will be very extensive:

and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

You cannot get more comprehensive than that. The universe that Adam lost is the universe that Jesus will redeem. And once all sin and sinners are cast out of it, it will be a universe in which only righteousness dwells. Jesus will be successful.

### **Supremacy in conquering enemies (1:21-23)**

Verses 21-23 make it clear that all of this redemption begins by restoring what was alienated and turning enemies into allies. Even the Colossians had once been at enmity with God, but they too had been brought into the new creation that Christ is making. Verse 21:

Col. 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above

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<sup>2</sup> Sphere Sovereignty (p. 488) cited in James D. Bratt, ed., Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

reproach in His sight— 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

### Paul's Christ-centered ministry (1:24-2:3)

And that last clause becomes the sedge-way into the next section - the Supremacy of Christ in Paul's ministry. And that point logically follows. If every kind of thing in this universe was made by Christ, has been redeemed by Christ, and will be reconciled to Christ, then it must of necessity impact the message of an ambassador of Christ. Ambassadors of the universal king cannot preach neutrality or imply that Christ is OK with any aspect of this universe remaining in rebellion to Him. This excludes Christian pluralism in politics. Modern evangelical preaching must come into conformity to the preaching of Paul. The last clause of verse 23 already said that the Gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven (or as some versions render it, Paul preached a Gospel that pertains to the whole creation under heaven). Either way you translate it, Paul's Gospel was not a truncated Gospel. When your Gospel is Christ-centered it evaporates anything that pietistic, individualistic, or truncated. It makes it a Gospel that is as broad as Christ's interests - which are universal.

And of course, this is why Paul will later say that the Gospel should make radical differences in every part of our lives. Paul is astonished that these people can go to the wisdom of the world for anything. He is astonished that these people would trust the world for anything. He is astonished that their family life looked like the world rather than taking on new creation characteristics. Even how we do our jobs should flow out of this comprehensive good news.

Another implication is that Paul can't preach whatever He wants to preach. He's an ambassador. Verse 25 says that he must preach as a stewardship trust the whole Word of God and the Word of God alone. And this Word is not a meager provision. Verse 27 says that it makes known the *riches* of God's plan, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. There again is the Christ-centeredness of His preaching. And Paul strives as a preacher to present everyone mature in Christ Jesus by the mighty power of God working through him. His preaching is accompanied by the almighty power of God. Chapter 2:3 says that this Christ-centered message is adequate since in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You don't need to go anywhere else. All of these references to the Supremacy of Christ in Paul's preaching should impact our preaching today. Modern preaching scandalously truncates the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### What can happen when theology is not Christ-centered (2:4-23)

But in the next section (2:4-23), Paul outlines what disastrous things can happen when theology is *not* Christ-centered and when Christ does *not* have supremacy in our theology. Again, I don't have time to delve into every issue that Paul argues against here, but let me point out a few key issues.

1. First, verses 4-7 show that if we are not rooted and grounded and abounding in the resources Christ has given, we can easily be deceived by nice sounding arguments of

persuasive men. Only those who have experienced the *real* thing can recognize and reject the counterfeit.

2. Second, verses 8-10 say that if you don't see yourself as complete in Jesus who is the head over everything and if you don't take all your presuppositions from Christ, you can unwittingly adopt "the basic principles of the world." That phrase, "the basic principles," which occurs in verses 8 and 20, translates the Greek word στοιχεῖα. The στοιχεῖα of the world are the axioms of the world or the presuppositions of the world. If you have already adopted the world's presuppositions in your education (which is what most Christians have done by sending their kids to government schools), it will be extremely difficult for you to not be deceived by the world's worldview; extremely difficult. Let's read verses 8-10:

Col. 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

This has huge implications for apologetics, hermeneutics, science, education, philosophy, and other areas of thinking. God wants us to derive our presuppositions or axioms from Christ; from the Bible. If we do not, we will easily be cheated by philosophy, empty deceits, traditions of men, and the wisdom of the world. Every presupposition that we hold must come from Christ. This chapter is presuppositionalism on steroids.

3. Third, verses 11-15 show us that if you don't see your baptism in the Spirit as being a definitive break with Adam and with the old creation, you won't have any logical basis for believing that you have power over demons. Why would you? Unless you truly have tasted of the miraculous powers of the age to come, you don't have power over the demonic. But when you see step by step that Christ's resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God ushers us into resurrection power, ascension victory, and kingly authority over the demonic, then its not about us - demons have no option but to flee from Christ in us. In ourselves we are no match for demons, but resourced with the Christ-centered resources of the new creation, demons are no match for us. We need not fear them. But again, it all flows from being Christ-centered.
4. Fourth, verses 16-23 deal with legalism of some unknown Jewish group. There are four or five theories: Some have said that there were two groups (Pharisees and converted pagan gnostics). Others have said that these doctrines very much resemble the teachings of the Essenes. Others think that this might be the teachings of the Ebionites. And others think that it was a Jewish pre-gnostic group that would later produce the gnostic apocalyptic writings that were discovered in Nag Hammadi in 1945. I favor the latter theory. This past week I was reading of some of the gnostic-like views that those Jewish mystical sects had, and they are very similar to what we see in this section - including worship of angels as intermediaries between Christ and us. It's rather bizarre. And of course, the Judaizers had successfully gotten the Colossian Gentiles to get circumcised, observe Jewish festivals, study Jewish secret knowledge about heavenly places, and to think of their ascetic practices as somehow gaining God's favor and status. We don't have those exact groups around today, but it is



fascinating that similar errors seem to have arisen in our own generation. I'll give you four quite different examples so that you can see that even this section of Colossians is very relevant:

First (and you might be surprised by this one), all forms of *Messianic Judaism* violate at least some tenets of Colossians chapter 2. Some of the Messianic congregations are fairly Orthodox, so I don't want to paint them all with a broad brush. But they all violate this chapter - even the best of them. For example, the only errors that the better Messianic congregations have are 1) that they refuse to treat Sunday as the Sabbath, 2) second, they eat only Kosher food (believing it is sinful to do otherwise), 3) third, they celebrate the feast days, 4) and fourth, some of them optionally encourage Gentiles to become Jews by getting circumcised and going through an unbiblical ceremony when they do so. The better ones don't mandate it, but they encourage it. Colossians still speaks against even this milder sort of Jewish Messianic Christianity.

But there are some forms of Messianic Judaism known as the Hebrew Roots Movement that embrace the very Pharisaism that Jesus opposed with all His heart. Their rhetoric may sound fine. For example, they start with the presupposition that Jesus was a Jew and He was Jewish in every way, and if we want imitate Jesus, then we must imitate Jesus' Jewish customs too. OK, that sounds logical. But here's the problem - rather than looking *to the Bible* for what constitutes true Jewishness, they look to the demonic doctrines of Talmudism - the very doctrines that Jesus spoke against so severely. I'm sorry, but Jesus did not wear a Jewish Yarmulke in worship, or a Kippah, Kashket, Tzitzit or any other kind of modern Jewish garb. Those were inventions of the Middle Ages and have nothing to do with Biblical garb.

At least some Messianic congregations *require* Gentiles to get circumcised. And you might wonder, "How on earth do they reconcile that requirement with Paul's teaching?" Two ways. A few more radical groups have rejected Paul's epistles. But most have simply said that Paul was opposing getting circumcised to get saved, but once saved, Gentiles are obligated to get circumcised in order to be considered part of their Christian synagogues.

And they have many arguments for circumcision. For example, many of these Messianic Jewish congregations insist that it is sin to not keep all the Jewish festivals, and since you can't keep Passover without getting circumcised according to Exodus 12, Gentiles are excluded from their Passover meals until they are willing to get circumcised. They ignore the fact that their Passovers are grossly unbiblical. Where in the Bible do you get the roasted egg, the hidden piece of Matzah bread called afikomen, or the bowl of salt water representing the tears of the Jews in Egypt, or the extra seat for Elijah? These and other ceremonies were added in the Middle Ages and have nothing whatsoever to do with Bible. But these Christians call it God's law and insist that it must be celebrated exactly as the Jews celebrate it today. They are adding to the law of God.

How do they interpret verse 16 - "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." They say that Paul meant that no one should judge *them* for *keeping* the Jewish ceremonies. They completely turn it upside down. They say that a Paul is defending the keeping of these festivals. Now I bring all these things up

because you are likely to run across Christians who hold to these Jewish Roots practices. I have.

Many of these Messianic congregations have bought into Kabbalistic mysticism (which has Bible mixed with the occult - so there are doctrines of demons in these churches). Many of them are immersed in Kabbalistic Jewish numerology.<sup>3</sup> Some like Sid Roth have introduced Jewish occult practices such as reverencing the star of Remphan. At least some have introduced a whole host of Talmudic requirements and traditions. A huge number of these congregations have been raising money to build a temple in Jerusalem where the sacrificial system (it is hoped) will be restored so that once again 100% of the Old Testament ceremonial law will be able to be kept. They are hoping to resurrect the sacrifices of animals in a temple in Jerusalem. That's heresy.

Colossians would say that such Evangelical groups have failed to understand the new creation Christ is making or the finished work of redemption. Verse 17 says that those ceremonies were merely shadows and Christ is the substance. To embrace the shadow once Christ has come is to deny the Messiah - to deny that they have been fulfilled. Verse 14 is even clearer - "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." The ceremonial law was wiped out. Contrary to verse 3, they are going outside of Christ's revelation to find wisdom and knowledge. Contrary to verse 8, they are picking up traditions of men and presuppositions that do not come from the Bible at all. We cannot go back to the ceremonial law without making a mockery of what Christ has done. But we certainly cannot go to the man-made traditions of the Christ-hating Pharisees without incurring the wrath and the woes of Christ in Matthew. So there is a direct application of almost every word of this chapter to modern Messianic Judaism - especially the more radical forms of it in the Hebrew Roots Movement.

The second and third examples flow from a faulty hermeneutics that is not 100% rooted in Christ's Scriptures. A lot of Evangelicals have started interpreting the Bible through the lens of first century culture rather than interpreting first century culture through the lens of Scripture. Paul was not embracing his culture; he was rebuking it. Yet these people say that you can't understand Paul or any other passage in the Bible unless you read it through the lens of Jewish apocalyptic literature (which, I will remind you, is gnostic to the core). A lot of Full Preterists have bought into this heretical hermeneutic, but so have some anti-creationists, and some others.

This comes out in many Evangelical interpretations of Genesis 1. Using the hermeneutical principles of those gnostics as their key to interpretation, modern teachers have been saying that Genesis 1 is apocalyptic literature and cannot be understood unless we immerse ourselves in the Jewish gnostic literature of the first and second centuries. The

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<sup>3</sup> For quotes of some Jewish Christians who feel uncomfortable with the conversion of so many Gentiles into a "Christian" Judaism, see the discussion of the Hebrew Roots Movement here <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/january-2014-bewitching-believers-hebrew-roots>

conclusion they have come to is that Genesis 1 has nothing to do with a literal creation of the world; it has to do with the setting up of the Mosaic covenant and is simply using apocalyptic language. We are talking about even Reformed writers that you know spouting nonsense like this.

In verses 2 and following, Paul insists that the Colossians do not need anything other than the wisdom of Christ provided in the Bible to have a faithful worldview. He explicitly says that Christ has all wisdom and knowledge and we don't need to go elsewhere for it (verse 3). He explicitly says in verse 8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the presuppositions of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him..." Get that - you are complete in Him.

My third example is also related to the second issue of hermeneutics. Paul warns the Colossians in verses 16-19 to not let anyone cheat them with regard to a number of doctrines - including the doctrine of angels. The Colossians were getting their ideas about angels from extra-biblical sources - specifically, the Jewish gnostic apocalyptic writings. Strangely, many theologians today are getting their doctrine of angels from the same gnostic apocalyptic documents. I own Evangelical books on angelology that purport to be biblical, but give the names of hundreds of angels and demons - names that have not once been mentioned in the Bible. Where do they get their theology from? It is a mix of Bible, the writings of Jewish Kabbala writers, the Talmud, apocalyptic writings, and the purported visions and meetings that some Charismatic leaders have had with angels. Some angel purportedly gives his name to a well-respected Charismatic leader, that name lines up with a name in Jewish apocalyptic literature, and that is enough for these people to dogmatically affirm this to be one of the names of an angel. And the books sneak in a lot of other unbiblical teachings into their doctrines.

We have to always be on guard for what cannot be backed up by the Bible. Movies introduce you to bad ideas about Bible stories that are hard to get out of your head. I don't like watching Bible movies for the simple reason that it can be confusing to sort through what ideas in your head are Biblical and what ideas have been added to the story by a movie or book.

The fourth example is asceticism and harsh treatment of the body. Paul addresses that in verses 20-23. Many church fathers felt guilt over enjoying food, sleep, or sex. But asceticism is not just an ancient phenomenon. Undo fasting, forcing our bodies to sleep 3-4 hours max a night, and other ascetic practices are common in some circles. I know some theologians who judge you if you sleep more than 4-5 hours a night. I was sucked into an ascetic lifestyle in my College days - fasting for 3-4 weeks at a time as a proof of holiness. Then I would eat meagerly for a month and go into a long fast again. At the same time, I felt guilty for sleeping any more than four hours a night. I tried unsuccessfully to cut it down to three hours and just couldn't do it. But it was a kind of asceticism, and I ruined my health, and Paul would say it was sinful.

Now, you may not be an ascetic by principle, but your dieting might subtly edge over into that. I want you to notice that all such things are useless. Verse 21 asks why they were

following regulations of “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.” Verse 23 says, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” Did you get that? They are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. They were hurting and putting to death the wrong things. Stapling your stomach is not the solution to gluttony. The real enemy is not material things or even your body. The real enemy is called here the flesh, which is the old sin nature.

## A call to Christ-centered ethics (Colossians 3-4)

And Paul’s solution for ethics is to be 100% Christ-centered. And that brings us to chapters 3-4.

### The foundations for Christ-centered living (3:1-17)

The foundation for Christ-centered living is given in chapter 3:1-17.

Col. 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Jesus is not telling us to be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good. Quite the opposite. If you are Christ-centered in your ethics, it will transform your personal walk (verses 5-17), your home (verses 18-21), your workplace (verse 22 through chapter 4:1), your prayer life (4:2-3), your time management (v. 5), and your communication (v. 6). Christ is our life. Everything we need must come from Him. And He has *in Himself* everything that we need. So Paul is basically asking us to petition God - “Thy kingdom come to earth; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” May heaven’s kingdom and all of Christ’s life invade earth and transform it starting with me. That’s what it means to seek the things which are above.

### Christ as the source of our life (3:1-4)

I won’t take the time to exegete all of these passages, but very briefly, chapter 3:1-4 (that I just read) shows that Christ is the source of our life. And we must pray for all of our resources from Him.

### Putting off our old identity with Adam (3:5-9)

Verses 5-9 show that our union with Christ demands that we put off our old identity with Adam. If we are in the New Covenant and part of the New Creation, then we need to put off all the things that Adam and the Old Creation ruined.

### Putting on our new identity with Christ (3:10-17)

Verses 10-17 deals with how to put on our new identity with Christ. Very literally, if we need tender mercies in handling someone whose head we want to yank off, we need to seek that tender mercy from heaven; from Christ. We don’t work it up in our own strength. If we

need kindness, Christ overflows in kindness to those who seek it in faith from Him. All of these graces flow from Christ in verses 1-4. In the rest of verse 12 Paul says that we are to look to Christ for...

humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Christ is our bank account, and whatever we do in word or deed, we must do it in the name of Jesus. Just as in Ephesians and Philippians, we must sign the spiritual checks on our bank account in heaven in Jesus name, not our own name. If you meditate deeply on those verses you will see that our personal sanctification is not pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. It is seeking our new life in heaven from Christ and by faith putting on Christ's graces moment by moment. We can't be sanctified without Jesus because without Him we can do nothing.

### **This Christ-centered life in the home (3:18-21)**

This Christ-centered life should impact the way we live at home. Verse 18:

Col. 3:18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. 20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

How can we do those things? Only in Christ - as is fitting in the Lord.

### **This Christ-centered life at work (3:22-4:1)**

If we are united with Christ, verses 22 and following say that it should affect how we treat our employees or our employers. A bondsman might be doing only menial tasks, but verses 23-24 says that if we are Christ-centered in our work, Christ receives our work as loving service to Him:

23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

I remember working as a janitor in a hospital and there were certain rooms that I knew for sure had not been used that day. But my contract said that I would mop with my sterilization water every square inch of the floor, moving all the furniture. A lot of my fellow-employees said to just skip those rooms. But I did my job as unto God and I knew He was looking and I wanted *God* to be pleased. And I noticed little scraps of paper underneath trash cans and other places. I later found out from my boss that she put those there to test me. And since I passed the test, she promoted me. But working for Christ can give you satisfaction even when the boss doesn't notice.

## **This Christ-centered life in our prayer, witness, time management, and speech (4:2-6)**

I think you get the point. The rest of the outline shows how the Christ-centered life works out in our prayer, our witness, our time management, and our speech.

## **Conclusion (4:10-17)**

In 4:10-17 Paul closes out the letter with warm greetings and interactions with individual people by name in a way that could be a pattern for how we interact with each other in the church. There are many lessons that can be learned on relationships in Christ even from that conclusion.

But let me end this sermon by repeating my summary statement: “No part of human existence should remain untouched by the Gospel reign of Jesus.” May our lives become more and more Christ-centered. Amen.