

Colossians 1

Salutation, Thanksgiving and Prayers The Person and Work of Christ

Introduction:	1
Salutation (vv. 1-2):.....	2
Thanksgiving (vv. 3-8):.....	3
Prayer (vv. 9-18):.....	4
The Reconciling Work of Christ (vv. 19-25).....	18
The Mystery of Christ in Us (vv. 26-29).....	25

Introduction:

The customary salutations, Thanksgiving, and prayers, which occupy roughly the first half of chapter 1, the rest of the chapter is focused on the person and work of Christ and His supremacy in all things. Dr Thomas Constable listed 13 things that are affirmed about Christ in verses 15-20 of Colossians chapter 1¹:

Thirteen Assertions about Christ in Colossians 1:15-20		
1	He is the image of the invisible God	(v. 15)
2	He is the first-born of creation	(v. 15)
3	He is the originator of creation	(v. 16)
4	He is the agent of creation	(v. 16)
5	He is the goal of creation	(v. 16)
6	He is the antecedent of creation	(v. 17)
7	He is the sustainer of creation	(v. 17)
8	He is the head of the church	(v. 18)
9	He is the first-born from the dead	(v. 18)
10	He is the preeminent One	(v. 18)
11	He is the fullness of God	(v. 19)
12	He is the reconciler of all things to Himself	(v. 20)
13	He is the maker of peace	(v. 20)

I personally would include verse 14 in the list as well, and add “He is the Redeemer.”

¹ Dr. Thomas Constable; *Notes on Colossians – 2021 Edition* ([online](#)); Exposition II:A:3, notes at Colossians 1:20.

Salutation (vv. 1-2):

(1) Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother, (2) To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Paul states in verse 1, both himself and Timothy were present during the writing of this epistle, and both of them send greetings to the church at Colossae.

In verse 2, Paul and Timothy address this epistle to “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae.” It is perhaps a significant that, unlike most of Paul’s other church epistles, he doesn’t address it to the *church* at Colossae. (See notes in the Introduction to Colossians, under the heading “The Church at Colossae.”) However, Paul addresses the church in Ephesus in a similar way, and no one disputes the fact that Paul spent time in Ephesus.

Polk includes the salutation with his standard boilerplate greeting: “Grace unto you and peace, from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thanksgiving (vv. 3-8):

(3) We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, (4) Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have to all the saints*, (5) For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; (6) Which is come unto you, as *it is in all the world*; and bringeth forth fruit, as *it doth* also in you, since the day ye heard *of it*, and knew the grace of God in truth:

Following the salutation, Paul and Timothy (note the pronoun “We”) begin by giving thanks to God for the believers at Colossae, and letting them know that they are always praying for them.

Verse 4 is one of the verses used to support the hypothesis that neither Paul nor Timothy personally established the church at Colossae. Instead, they refer to their having *heard* of the faith of the Colossian believers, and of the love which they had toward other believers. While it’s possible that Paul and Timothy had never visited the city of Colossae, it’s also possible that, having previously established the church there, they were now hearing from others about the faith and love of these new believers.

The phrase “for the hope” at the beginning of verse 5 is a continuation of the giving of thanks begun in verse 3. The apostles are giving thanks for *the hope* which is laid up in heaven for the Colossian believers. Thus, in verses 4-5, we have each of the three greatest graces mentioned — faith, love, and hope. These three graces are often mentioned together by Paul (e.g., *1 Corinthians 13:13*; *1 Thessalonians 1:3*), as they are interrelated. Our infant faith, which initially saved us, produces love and hope, which in turn strengthen our faith; that increased faith then strengthens our love and hope as well. As one commentator remarked:

“Faith rests on the past; love works in the present; hope looks to the future. They may be regarded as the efficient, material, and final causes respectively of the spiritual life.” [J. B. Lightfoot; *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*; Reprint ed. London: Macmillan and Co., 1892; p. 132.]

In the second half of verse 5, and continuing into verse 6, the apostles point out that the believers in Colossae had previously heard about the “hope” which is laid up for them in heaven — in “the word of the truth of the gospel,” which had come to them, as it had in all the world. In other words, whenever the gospel was initially shared with them, they also heard about the hope that was laid up for them in heaven. The gospel is, in essence, a message of hope! We were dead in trespasses and sin, and now we are alive forevermore! We were all facing an eternity in the Lake of Fire, but are now sons and daughters of the Most High God, and can look forward to an inheritance fit for the sons and daughters of the King.

At the end of verse 6, the apostles state that, not only does the gospel give hope, it also “bringeth forth fruit,” as it had done in the Colossian believers as well. This is something we mustn’t gloss over. When the seeds of the gospel find fertile soil, and take root, it not only saves that individual, it should also produce fruit. As James explains in his epistle, “faith without works is dead” (*James 2:20, 26*). If we have been given hope through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we shouldn’t sit on our blessed assurance — we need to get in the game!

**(7) As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;
(8) Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.**

In these two verses, Paul and Timothy specify that it was Epaphras who had told them about the Colossians' love in the Spirit. Epaphras is mentioned again at the close of this epistle:

(12) Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. **(13)** For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them *that are* in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. [*Colossians 4:12-13*]

From this passage, we learn that Epaphras “labored fervently” for the believers in Colossae, and had “a great zeal” for them in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

As mentioned in the introductory notes to this epistle, Epaphras was also one of those present with Paul in Rome who sent greetings to Philemon:

(23) There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; [*Philemon 1:23*]

Tradition holds that Epaphras was the one who initially founded the church at Colossae and was its first bishop, and that Philemon, who was also from Colossae, was its second bishop. The veracity of this tradition, however, is somewhat uncertain. For example, we are not 100 % certain that Philemon was even from Colossae, although that appears to be the consensus among scholars, based on the mention of Epaphras at the close of the letter to Philemon.

Prayer (vv. 9-18):

(9) For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Verse 9 begins one of the longer sentences in the King James Bible, with a total of 197 words, continuing through verse 17. I believe the longest Single sentence is found in the genealogy of Luke, in Luke 3:23-38, which has a total of 469 words. The next longest is Ephesians 1:3-14, which has a total of 269 words. (We were told in English class not to use run-on sentences.) We will obviously have to break this sentence down into sections.

The phrase “For this cause” seems to refer to the fact that the apostles had heard of their “faith in Christ,” and of their “love” toward their fellow believers (v. 4), and their “love in the Spirit” (v. 8), and that the gospel had produced “fruit” in them (v. 6). For these reasons, the apostles were praying for them without ceasing, desiring that they would be “filled with the knowledge of [Christ’s (*or God’s*)] will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” — or, as we might say today, “wisdom and (spiritual) discernment.”

This is a prayer we should all pray for — for ourselves, as well as for our church.

(10) That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; (11) Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; (12) Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord ... (vv. 10-12a):

This is not the first time that the apostle Paul exhorts his readers to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of their calling as Christians. As Colossians is considered by many to be the sister letter to Ephesians, it's not surprising that Paul says the same thing there:

(1) I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, **(2)** With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; **(3)** Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [*Ephesians 4:1-3*]

(15) See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, **(16)** Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. [*Ephesians 5:15-16*]

Paul repeats the same exhortation in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians as well:

(10) Ye *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: **(11)** As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children, **(12)** That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. [*1 Thessalonians 2:10-12*]

(27) Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; [*Philippians 1:27*]

(The phrase “as it becometh” in Philippians 1:27 is from a single Greek word [*ἄξιός (axiōs)*], which means “worthy of,” and is the same word as that used in Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10, and 1 Thessalonians 2:12 above, all of which are translated as “worthy.” In fact, virtually all modern Bible versions render the word as “worthy” or “worthily.”)

As born-again believers, who have been bought and paid for with the blood of Christ, we should walk worthy of Him who has saved us and given us new life.

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Paul takes this exhortation a step further in these verses, explaining that walking “worthy of the Lord” should produce certain results. A “worthy” walk should lead to:

- Unto “all pleasing” — Pleasing to God in every respect.
- Fruitfulness in every good work — Doing good works and producing fruit for Christ [*Ephesians 2:10*].
- An increase in one’s knowledge of God — Growing in the knowledge of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit [*2 Peter 3:18*].
- Strengthened “with all might,” according to His glorious power — A strengthening of the believer by God’s infinite power.
- Unto all patience and long-suffering — Not quick to anger, or frustration. Dr. Wiersby described these two attributes this way²:
 - Patience is related primarily to one’s circumstances, while longsuffering has to do with people.
 - Patients would be the opposite of despondency, while long-suffering is the opposite of quick-tempered or short-fused.
 - Patience is never listed as an attribute of God, because with God, nothing is difficult. God does not phase difficult circumstances.
- With joyfulness — Not only growing in patience and long-suffering, but learning to be joyful through it all.
- Giving hanks unto the Father — Learning to be thankful to God in *every* situation.

This is the kind of “walk” that is “all pleasing” to the Lord. Walking “worthy of the Lord” should produce these fruits in the life of the believer. If your life is lacking these fruits, perhaps you are not walking *worthy* of Him after all. Warren Wiersby, in his commentary on Colossians, wrote this about a Christian’s “walk”:

“Knowledge, conduct, service, and character must always go together. We know God’s will that we might obey it, and, in obeying it, we serve Him and grow in Christian character. While none of us is perfectly balanced in these four factors, we ought to strive for that balance.” [Warren W. Wiersby; *The Bible Expedition Commentary — New Testament*, Volume II: Ephesians – Revelation; David C. Cook, publisher; 1989; p. 112]

... which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (v. 12b):

The word “meet,” as used here, is an old English word that meant “suitable,” “fitting,” or “proper.” The phrase “hath made us meet” is a translation of a single Greek word [*ἱκανώσαντι (hikanōsanti)*] that means “made qualified,” or “rendered fit.” God the Father has “made us qualified” to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints, in the presence of His glorious light.

² Warren W. Wiersbe; *The Bible Expedition Commentary — New Testament*, Volume II: Ephesians – Revelation; David C. Cook, publisher; 1989; p. 113.

(13) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son {Greek: the Son of His love}:

The pronoun “Who” ties back to “the Father” at the beginning of verse 12. God the Father has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son, Jesus Christ. Each of these two things is an incredible blessing, and we could spend half an hour discussing each one. Let’s look briefly at each one:

[God the Father] hath delivered us from the power of darkness, ... (v. 13a):

As a board-again believer, the power of darkness has no more control of you. When Christ gave His life on the cross as the satisfactory atonement for the sin of the world, He defeated both Satan and sin; we are no longer bound to obey its urges. XXX

[Paul, recounting his Road to Damascus encounter with Christ to Herod Agrippa]

(15) And I said, “Who art thou, Lord?” And he said, “**I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. (16) But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; (17) Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, (18) To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.**” *[Acts 26:15-18]*

(14) Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; **(15) And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.** **(16)** For verily he took not on *him* the nature of angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham. **(17)** Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. *[Hebrews 2:14-17]*

(9) But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: **(10)** Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. *[1 Peter 2:9-10]*

Paul explained it best in Romans chapter 6:

(5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: **(6)** Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. **(7)** For he that is dead is freed from sin. ... **(11)** Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. **(12)** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. **(13)** Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. **(14)** For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. **(15)** What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. **(16)** Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? **(17)** But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. **(18)** Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. **(19)** I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. **(20)** For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. **(21)** What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. **(22)** But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. *[Romans 6:5-7, 11-22]*

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As born-again Christian's, our "old man" should've been crucified the day we came to Christ. We should thereafter consider that person dead to us. Our *new man*, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (*Ephesians 4:24*) does not, and cannot sin (*1 John 3:9, 5:18*). Thus, because we have a *new man* created within us as born-again believers, we are no longer bound to obey sin and its lusts. Because of the new man within us, we have been set free from the power of sin and darkness. Paul explains this concept in depth in the last half of Romans chapter 7:

[*We've covered this passage often, but it's important enough to repeat here.*]

(14) For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For that which I do I allow⁴ not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is good*. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. (22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death {*margin: or, this body of death*}? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. [*Romans 7:14-25*]

... and [God the Father] hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son. (v. 13b):

The word "translated" [*Greek: μετέστησεν (metéstēsen)*], according to Thayer's lexicon, means "transposed, transferred, moved from one place to another." After having delivered us from the power of darkness, God has "transferred us" from this corrupt world into the Kingdom of Christ Jesus. Now obviously we are not enjoying the Millennial Kingdom just yet; but we are already a part of Christ's kingdom. Having been born again, our position in Christ's Kingdom is as sure as the sun rising in the east. XXX

(24) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 'He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.'" [*John 5:24*]

The apostle John, echoing Christ's words, explains that the way we can know whether or not we have "passed from death unto life" is whether or not we love the brethren:

(14) We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. [*1 John 3:14*]

The apostle Paul discusses this subject at length in both Romans and Ephesians:

(16) Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (17) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (18) Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (19) I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. (20) For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. (21) What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. (22) But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. [*Romans 6:16-22*]

(1) And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. [*Ephesians 2:1-7*]

(14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

The pronoun “whom” connects back to the words “His dear son” at the end of verse 13, and is speaking of Jesus Christ. Critics of Christianity sometimes accuse Christians of following a bloody religion. I would have to agree with them! Christianity stands or falls on the blood of Christ. Was it Christ’s death that paid the price for our sins? Or was it His shed blood? What if the Pharisees had poisoned Jesus? Would this type of non-violent death have been enough to pay for our sins? The answer, of course, is that Jesus Christ had to shed His blood for the remission of the sins of the world. As the writer of Hebrews explains:

(11) But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; **(12)** Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. **(13)** For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: **(14)** How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ... **(19)** For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, **(20)** Saying, “This *is* the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.” **(21)** Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. **(22)** And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. [*Hebrews 9:11-14, 19-22*]

Remember, Christ did not come to destroy the Law of Moses, but to fulfill it:

(17) “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. **(18)** For verily I say unto you, ‘Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.’” [*Matthew 5:17-18*]

Christ fulfilled the law of Moses, including its requirements for the atonement of sin, by shedding His blood on the cross. If Christ had not shed His blood, there could never be any remission of sins.

Note in the Matthew passage cited above that Jesus did not say that nothing would *ever* pass from the Law, but that nothing would pass from the Law “till all be fulfilled.” At what point will “*all* be fulfilled”? Was it *all* fulfilled at Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection? The short answer is, “No.” The Protevangelium, found in Genesis chapter 3, refers to a future time when “the seed of the woman” [Christ] would “bruise the head” of the Serpent [Satan] — i.e., deal him a fatal blow:

(15) And I will put enmity between thee [the Serpent; i.e., Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [the seed of the woman] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. [*Genesis 3:15*]

Nothing can pass from the Law of Moses until *that* prophecy has been fulfilled, which will occur at the end of the Millennial reign of Christ, just before the Great White Throne Judgment (*Revelation 20:10*).

(15) Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

Who is the image of the invisible God, ... (v. 15a):

The pronoun “Who” links back to the phrase “his dear son” at the end of verse 13. Jesus Christ is the “image” of the *invisible* God. This particular word “image” [Greek: εἰκόν (eikōn)] means “a likeness, representation, or resemblance,” whether in a picture, or in a statue. This particular Greek word is used a total of 23 times in the New Testament, and is always translated as “image” in the King James version. It’s used 10 times in the book of Revelation to refer to the “image” of the Beast (the Antichrist), which he constructs for his own worship. The word is used in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke to refer to the image of Caesar which appeared on coins of the day (*Matthew 22:20; Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24*). Paul explains in his epistle to the Romans that, as believers, we are being conformed into the “image” of God’s Son (*Romans 8:29*). This same word is used of Christ being the image of God in 2 Corinthians chapter 4:

(3) But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: **(4)** In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. [*2 Corinthians 4:3-4*]

In Hebrews, the writer draws a distinction between the Old Testament law, which he describes as “a shadow of good things to come,” versus the “very image” of those things:

(1) For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. **(2)** For then would1 they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. [*Hebrews 10:1-2*]

Thus, the writer of Hebrews is noting that the Law is merely a *shadow* of things to come, but not an *exact representation* of those things. So we see that the word “image” used here in Colossians 1 denotes an *exact representation* of something, in this case God himself. Jesus Christ is an *exact representation* of the character and nature of God, who is *invisible* by nature.

The word used here in Colossians is a different word from that used in Hebrews 1:3, which is translated into English as “express image”:

(3) Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; [*Hebrews 1:3*]

The word used in the above passage from Hebrews 1 [Greek: *χαρακτήρ* (*charaktēr*)], according to Thayer’s Greek Definitions, means “the exact expression of a person or thing, a precise reproduction in every respect,” or, “the peculiarity or characteristic by which people or things are recognized and distinguished from each other.” According to Strong’s Greek and Hebrew Lexicon, the word means “an exact copy, or a representation.” This same Greek word is where we get our English word “*character*.” Both here in Colossians, as well as in Hebrews chapter 1, the point the writers are making is not that Jesus is a “mirror image” of God in a *physical* sense, but that He is an *exact representation* of God’s nature and His character — His essential being. Jesus is the *physical, visible* representation of the God who is *pure Spirit*, and *invisible*. Jesus is God *manifested* in human form. As John records in his gospel account:

(18) No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. [*John 1:18*]

(24) God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. [*John 4:24*]

(6) Jesus saith unto him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. **(7)** If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.” **(8)** Philip saith unto him, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” **(9)** Jesus saith unto him, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, ‘Shew us the Father?’” [*John 14:6-9*]

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... the firstborn of every creature: (v. 15b):

We must be careful when we approach this phrase. The term “firstborn” is not being used here in a strictly chronological sense, or in a physical sense, but in the sense of preeminence. Jesus was obviously not the first human being ever born into the world. Also, Christ was not “created,” but has existed for all eternity, and was the Creator of all things. And although He existed in eternity past, He was not “born” until His 1st Advent. In the ancient world, the firstborn son inherited all of the status and privileges of the father, and was due a larger portion of the inheritance than any other siblings.

In Psalm 89, the LORD, speaking of David, says:

(27) Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. [*Psalm 89:27*]

David was not the oldest son of Jessie, but was likely one of the youngest. In this passage, like here in Colossians, “firstborn” is a title of rank or importance, not of chronological birth order.

But what is really meant by this phrase, in my opinion, is that Jesus is the firstborn *from the dead* — He is the first one to be resurrected into a glorious eternal body. Paul clarifies this 3 verses later, when he refers to Christ as “... the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* He might have the preeminence” (v. 18).

The point is that Christ, in being the first to be gloriously resurrected, will forever have the preeminence among those who will one day be similarly resurrected. This resurrection of the *faithful* is referred to in Scripture as “the first resurrection” (*Revelation 20:5-6*), the second one being the resurrection of the *unfaithful* to face the Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium (*Revelation 20:11-15*).

Note: Not surprisingly, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, in their *New World Translation*, insert the word “other” six times in verses 15-17 (the firstborn of every *other* creature, by him were all *other* things created, all *other* things were created by him and for him, etc.) in order to make Christ merely the first *among other* created beings. Thus, they suggest that Christ created all *other* things after He Himself was created!

(16) For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: (17) And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

This is my personal favorite memory verse from the book of Colossians. The apostle Paul uses three different prepositions (in the Greek) in verse 16: *In* Him [ἐν (*en*); *by* him in the KJV), *Through* Him [διὰ (*diá*)]; *by* him in the KJV), and *For* Him [εἰς (*eis*)]. Warren Wiersby, in his commentary on Colossians, had this to say about Paul's use of these prepositions:

“Everything exists *in* Him, *for* Him, and *through* Him. Jesus Christ is the Sphere in which they exist, the Agent through which they came into being, and the One for him they were made. Paul's use of three different prepositions is one way of refuting the philosophy of the false teachers. For centuries, the Greek philosophers had taught that everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause, and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause the power, and the final cause the purpose. When it comes to creation, Jesus Christ is the primary cause (He planned it), the instrumental cause (He produced it), and the final cause (He did it for His own pleasure).” [Warren W. Wiersby; *The Bible Expedition Commentary — New Testament*, Volume II: Ephesians – Revelation; David C. Cook, publisher; 1989; p. 116]

It's important not to overlook the fact that everything in this universe, whether material or spiritual, was created *by* Jesus Christ, and *for* His own pleasure, and continues to exist *through* His upholding power.

There is a lot to cover in these two verses, beginning with who they are referring to. In the phrase “For by him” at the beginning of verse 16, the pronoun “him” is linked with the “Who” of verse 15 and the “In whom” of verse 14, all of which tie back to the phrase “his dear son” at the end of verse 13. In other words, all three verses, as well as verses 17 and 18 that follow, are speaking of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. There are five key points I would like to focus on in these two verses:

- (1) **The first point** to focus on is the fact that Jesus Christ is said to have created “all things” (v. 16a, c). This fact is stated several other places in the New Testament as well:

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **(2)** The same was in the beginning with God. **(3)** All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. [*John 1:1-3*]

(5) For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) **(6)** But to us *there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things {I}, and we by him.* [*1 Corinthians 8:5-6*]

(8) Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; **(9)** And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: [*Ephesians 3:8-9*]

(1) God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, **(2)** Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; [*Hebrews 1:1-2*]

When you go through the first two chapters of Genesis, all you read is “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ ... “And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament. ...’” etc.; there's no mention of the Son of God being involved in the Creation. But, if you dig a little deeper, you'll find that Christ is there after all.

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First of all, the Hebrew word translated “God” 35 times in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is אֱלֹהִים (‘*ělohîym*), which is the plural form of the word אֱלֹהֵי (‘*ělôwah*), but used in Genesis 1–3 as a singular noun. This is our first hint that more than one entity was involved in the Creation. Also, on three occasions in the first eleven chapters of Genesis (once in the Creation account) we find the LORD using plural pronouns for Himself (“Let us ...,” “one of us,” etc.) indicative that more than one person is present:

(26) And God [אֱלֹהִים (‘*ělohîym*)] said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. [Genesis 1:26-27]

(22) And the LORD God [יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים (‘*Yehôvâh ’ělohîym*)] said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever”: (23) Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. [Genesis 3:22-23]

(5) And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

(6) And the LORD [יְהוָה (‘*Yehôvâh*)] said, “Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. (7) Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” [Genesis 11:5-7]

We, of course, understand this as the first indications in Scripture of the Holy Trinity — three persons, one God. There is only one God, existing in three separate persons: the Father, The Word (who became the Son), and the Holy Spirit. And, as the verses size it on the previous page prove, Jesus Christ was the active force behind the creation of all things.

- (2) **The second important point** is the fact that not only was the physical universe created by the Son of God, even the things in heaven — angelic beings, cherubim, seraphim, and even Satan and his demons — were originally created perfect by Jesus Christ (v. 16b). The four words Paul uses to describe some of these created things are:

1. Thrones Seats of power
2. Dominions Lordship or ruling authorities
3. Principalities (literally: first, or chief *things*); used of angels and demons
4. Powers Those having power or authority

That these four terms are referring, at least in part, to the “invisible” angelic powers that work behind the scenes seems obvious. The parallel passage in Ephesians omits “thrones,” but lists “dominions,” “principalities,” and “powers,” along with “might”:

(20) Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly places, (21) Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: (*Ephesians 1:20-21*).

Jesus Christ, as the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity, created *all things* — stars, galaxies, nebulae, the earth, and everything in it, and even angels. Even Satan himself was originally created by Christ as a perfect being, without flaw!

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- (3) **The third important point** is that everything that was created was created “for him” — for Jesus Christ (v. 16c). Everything in this universe, both physical and spiritual (with the exception of God Himself) was created by Christ, and for His own personal pleasure. And everything means *everything* — things in heaven, things in earth, visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers — *everything* was created by Jesus (the Word) and for Jesus! And eventually He will claim all things that are His.

Even the angelic beings were not only created *by* Christ, the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity, they were created *for* His own pleasure. In John’s apocalyptic vision, when the 24 elders in heaven praise God, they echo this same truth:

(10) The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, **(11)** Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. [*Revelation 4:10-11*]

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- (4) **The fourth important point** is the fact that Jesus Christ is “before all things” (v. 17a). The word “before” [Greek: *πρὸ* (*pró*)] means “fore,” “ahead of” or “in front of.” What Paul is saying here is that Christ existed *before* any created thing. He is the pre-existing Creator; He predates anything in this created universe. He is “before” of things because He existed *before* anything that was created.

This phrase also conveys the additional meaning that Christ is “before” all things in rank and importance. All created things are to one day be put under His feet:

(22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (23) But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. (24) Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (25) For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. (27) For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under *him*, *it is* manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. (28) And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. [*1 Corinthians 15:22-28*]

[*Parallel passage to Colossians 1:9-18*]

(15) Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, (16) Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; (17) That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: (18) The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (19) And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, (20) Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly places, (21) Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: (22) And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, (23) Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. [*Ephesians 1:15-23*]

(8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (9) Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: (10) That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; (11) And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [*Philippians 2:8-11*]

(5) For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. (6) But one in a certain place testified, saying, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? (7) Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: (8) Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.” [*quoting Psalm 8:4-6*] For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. (9) But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (10) For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. [*Hebrews 2:5-10*]

(12) But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; (13) From henceforth expecting [or anticipating] till his enemies be made his footstool. [*Hebrews 10:12-13*]

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- (5) **Finally**, it's important to note that "all things consist" by Jesus Christ (v. 17b). The word "consist" [Greek: *συνέστηκεν* (*synéstēken*)] is formed by combining the prefix *σύν* (*syn*), which means "with, or together," with the perfect active form of the verb *ἵστημι* (*histēmi*), which means "to stand." Put together, it means "stand together," or "put together." What the Holy Spirit is saying, through the apostle Paul, is that Jesus Christ is the one who puts everything together, and continues to hold everything together. As Paul says in the book of Acts, recorded by the physician and historian Luke:

(28) "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.'" [Acts 17:28; citing certain Greek poets]

The writer of Hebrews also alludes to this upholding power of Christ:

(1) God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, **(2)** Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; **(3)** Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; [Hebrews 1:1-3]

When you consider the incredible energy required to hold a single atom or molecule together, it's mind-boggling! When that energy is released, it unleashes the devastation experienced at Hiroshima and Nagasaki! Christ, in His infinite power, is currently holding the entire universe together. All He has to do is let go, and the entire universe instantly goes up in a massive ball of fire. So it's not hard to imagine a fiery ending as described in 2 Peter chapter 3:

(10) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. **(11)** Seeing then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, **(12)** Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? [2 Peter 3:10-12]

When Christ removes His powerful, upholding hand, the entire universe goes up in a massive explosion! Physicists today speak of four fundamental forces at work in the universe: The Strong Force, the Weak Force, Gravity, and the Electromagnetism. The first two of these — the Strong Force and the Weak Force — deal with subatomic particles, and are an attempt by modern scientists to define the forces that hold atoms together. As the name suggests, the Strong Force is by far the strongest of the four fundamental forces, and is the force that holds atomic nuclei together. The Weak Force is involved in the radioactive decay of atomic nuclei. What these scientists are really attempting to define, without knowing it, is the upholding power of Christ!

Dr. Thomas Constable summarized these two verses as follows³:

1. Christ is the *originator* of creation ("in him," verse 16a [NIV]; KJV "by him")
2. Christ is the *agent* of creation ("through him," verse 16b [NIV]; KJV "by him")
3. Christ is the *goal* of creation ("for him," verse 16b)
4. Christ is the *antecedent* of creation ("before all things," verse 17a)
5. Christ is the *sustainer* of creation ("hold together," verse 17b [NIV]; KJV "consist")

³ Dr. Thomas Constable; *Notes on Colossians*, 2021 Edition (online); notes at Colossians 1:16-17.

(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 might have the preeminence.

And he is the head of the body, the church: ... (v. 18a):

The apostle Paul is fond of comparing the church to a human body (*cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16, 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:16*). The head is rightly considered the most important part of the human body; without it, we wouldn't be able to think, or reason, or love, or even know that we existed. Without the head, we would literally be a mere lump of flesh. In similar fashion, Jesus Christ is the head of the spiritual "body" known as the *church* — He is the most important, and most vital part of this body of believers. Without Him, there would be no "body"!

... who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the preeminence. (v. 18b):

As briefly discussed in the notes for verse 15 (*see page 10*), Paul, when referring to Christ as the "first born," is emphasizing His preeminence over all creation, as well as His "first" status among those resurrected from the dead — not the chronological order of His birth to Joseph and Mary. Jesus Christ is first and foremost in rank, He is first and foremost in importance, and He is first and foremost in preeminence!

The Reconciling Work of Christ (vv. 19-25)

(19) For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell;

The word “fulness” in this verse [*Greek: πλήρωμα (plērōma)*] means “fulness” or “repletion” — the state of being completely filled up. What Paul is saying here is that God the Father desired that “complete fulness,” should reside in His Son Jesus Christ — that He would be completely full, and lack nothing. This Greek word is translated as “fill up,” “filled up,” or “full,” three times in Scripture (*Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21, Mark 8:20*), and as “fulness” 13 times. Let’s look at some of the other places where it’s translated as “fulness” to get a better idea of its meaning:

(14) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) **full** [*a different form of the same word*] of grace and truth. ... **(16)** And of his **fulness** have all we received, and grace for grace. [*John 1:14, 16*]

(12) Now if the fall of them [*the Jews*] be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their **fulness**? [*Romans 11:12*]

(25) For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the **fulness** of the Gentiles be come in. [*Romans 11:25*]

(26) For the earth *is* the Lord’s, and the **fulness** thereof. [*1 Corinthians 10:26*]

(4) But when the **fulness** of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
(5) To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. [*Galatians 4:4-5*]

(19) And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the **fulness** of God. [*Ephesians 3:19*]

(9) For in him [*Christ*] dwelleth all the **fulness** of the Godhead bodily. [*Colossians 2:9*]

The 19th century Presbyterian scholar Albert Barnes summed it up this way:

“We have a Saviour who is in no respect deficient in wisdom, power, and grace to redeem and save us. There is nothing necessary to be done in our salvation which he is not qualified to do; there is nothing which we need to enable us to perform our duties, to meet temptation, and to bear trial, which he is not able to impart. In no situation of trouble and danger will the church find that there is a deficiency in him; in no enterprise to which she can put her hands will there be a lack of power in her great Head to enable her to accomplish what he calls her to. We may go to him in all our troubles, weaknesses temptations, and needs, and may be supplied from his fullness — just as, if we were thirsty, we might go to an ocean of pure water and drink.” [Albert Barnes; *Notes on the Bible* (online); notes at Colossians 1:19]

There is nothing we will ever need that Christ doesn’t have in abundance. As the apostle Paul put it:

(19) But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. [*Philippians 4:19*]

(32) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? [*Romans 8:32*]

(20) And, having made {margin: or, making} peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

Keep in mind, verse 20 is a continuation of the sentence begun in verse 19. After having made peace through the blood of Christ which He shed up on the cross, it also “pleased the Father” that through Christ’s shed blood “all things” could be reconciled unto Himself. Paul then clarifies the phrase “all things” by adding the phrase “whether things on earth, or things in heaven.”

One rather interesting aspect of this verse is at the very end, when Paul states that all things would be reconciled to God, “whether things in earth, or things in heaven.” As you read this, you’re probably asking yourself, “What things *in heaven* would be reconciled to God through Christ?” I believe Scripture makes it abundantly clear that those angelic beings who rebelled against God with Satan (i.e., the demons) have their fate forever sealed in the Lake of Fire. So, what other “things in heaven” might God reconcile to Himself through Jesus Christ? I believe this is referring to the stars and galaxies which dwell in the heavens. The entire creation has suffered under the curse of sin ever since the fall of mankind (*Romans 8:19-23*). We know from Scripture that there will a restoration of the physical universe, to some degree, during the Millennial reign of Christ (*Isaiah 65:20, 22, 25*). So I think this “restoration” of the physical universe is what this particular verse is referring to. The physical universe will be reconciled to God.

The idea that physical things can be affected by man’s sin is not without precedent in Scripture either. As you study the required sacrifices specified in the Law of Moses for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), you find that the blood of the bullock that was sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat by the high priest was specifically for the sins of the High Priest and his household. The blood of the LORD’s goat, on the other hand, that got sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat, the Tabernacle, and the Altar, was for the purpose of cleansing the Tabernacle itself, which had become corrupt by the mere fact that it resided in the midst of a corrupt people (*Leviticus 16, esp. vv. 16, 19*).

(21) And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works *{margin: or, by your mind in wicked works}*, **yet now hath he reconciled** **(22) In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:**

Verses 21-29 form another fairly long sentence. And Paul goes on to state that “you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” God has now reconciled. The phrase “you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind” could be translated as “you, who used to be alienated and enemies in your mind.” Paul is addressing born-again believers here, who, before their conversion, used to be enemies of God, alienated from Him through wicked works. But now, these same born-again believers, who used to be enemies of God, alienated from Him, Christ has now reconciled in the body of His flesh, through His death on the cross.

(9) Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, **(10)** Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. **(11)** And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. [*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*]

(17) Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. **(18)** And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; **(19)** To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us *{Greek: put in us}* the word of reconciliation. **(20)** Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. **(21)** For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. [*2 Corinthians 5:17-21*]

As born-again believers, Christ reconciled us to God through the blood of His cross, so that He would be able to present us to God “holy, unblameable, and unproveable in His sight. Keep in mind, much of our New Testament descriptions of the Church body are given in terms of a Jewish wedding, in which the betrothal period can be many months before the actual wedding. As Christ’s betrothed bride, He seeks to present us to the Father in a manner befitting the bride of “the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” At the moment of an individual believer’s salvation, they are immediately given the righteousness of Christ in God’s eyes (*2 Corinthians 5:21*). From that moment, and forever thereafter, the born-again believer is pure and chaste in God’s eyes.

(23) If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

This reconciliation Paul discussed in verses 21-22 is said here to be *conditional* upon a believer “continue[ing] in the Faith, grounded and settled,” and not being “moved away from the hope of the gospel.” What exactly does Paul mean by that? Is he implying that once a believer is saved, they can only *remain* reconciled to God if they continue steadfastly in the Faith, without being moved away from the gospel? Several commentators point out that the “If” at the beginning of verse 23 is known as a 1st Class Condition in the Greek; it’s an “if” that is assumed to be true for the sake of argument. Paul is not suggesting a possibility of losing your salvation; he’s arguing from the standpoint of true salvation versus false salvation. Warren Wiersbe expressed it this way:

“Paul’s statement to the Colossians seems to cast a shadow on the assurance of our future glory (see Colossians 1:27). Is it possible for a believer to lose his salvation? No, the *if* clause does not suggest doubt or lay down a condition by which we “keep our salvation.” Paul used an architectural image in this verse — a house, firmly set on the foundation. The town of Colosse was located in a region known for earthquakes, and the word translated “moved away” can mean “earthquake stricken.” Paul was saying, “If you are truly saved, and built on the solid foundation, Jesus Christ, then you will continue in the faith and nothing will move you. You have heard the gospel and trusted Jesus Christ, and He has saved you.” In other words, we are not saved by continuing in the faith. But we continue in the faith and thus prove that we are saved. It behooves each professing Christian to test his own faith and examine his own heart to be sure he is a child of God (2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10ff.)” [Warren W. Wiersbe; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary — New Testament*, Volume II: Ephesians – Revelation; pp. 120-121]

Just as Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5), and as Peter exhorted his readers, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure...” (2 Peter 1:10), it’s necessary that each of us *examine ourselves* to make sure that our salvation is genuine. Genuine salvation shows the fruit of salvation, whereas a mere mental acknowledgment of who and what Christ is does not.

This is the second of three times in this chapter Paul uses the word “hope” in relation to the gospel. In verse 5, Paul had referred to “the hope which is laid up for you [i.e., believers] in heaven”; here in verse 23, he again mentions “the hope of the gospel,” and finally, in verse 27, he mentions “the hope of glory.” This “hope of the gospel” is what Paul described to Titus as “that blessed hope” — the glorious hope believers have in the Lord’s return (*Titus 2:13*). The hope that the gospel message gives to every true, born-again believer is that one day the Lord Jesus Christ will return for His bride, we will be immediately transformed, and forever live with our Lord in glory. This “hope” isn’t a *maybe* type of hope — it is an absolutely *sure thing*; all we’re waiting for is for that hope to be finally revealed.

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... [and] which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; ... (v. 23b):

In the second half of the verse, Paul refers to the gospel as having been preached (“which was preached” — past tense) to every creature under heaven. What does he mean by that? Obviously, in Paul’s day, the gospel had yet to reach every person on earth. Most likely, this is an example of *hyperbole* — exaggeration for emphasis. Paul is contrasting the widespread circulation and broad appeal of the gospel message to the relatively narrow, limited appeal of the false teachers’ message of justification by works. Earlier in this same chapter (verse 6), Paul had referred to the gospel as having come to them, “as in all the world.”

Paul himself had personally taken the gospel message to Cilicia, Galatia, Phrygia, Asia minor, Macedonia and Greece, Cyprus, Crete, and Rome. He also mentions taking the gospel as far as Illyricum, which was located across the Adriatic Sea from Italy in modern-day Croatia, Bosnia, and Albania (*Romans 15:19*). It’s very possible he could also have visited Spain at some point (*Romans 15:24-28*). All the while Paul was doing this, the other apostles were certainly not idle — they too were busy taking the gospel to the far reaches of the world. So it’s easy to imagine that, within 30 years of Christ’s crucifixion, the gospel had spread widely throughout the known world.

In Matthew 24, Jesus made the comment that once the gospel had been preached to all the world, the end would come:

(14) And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. [*Matthew 24:14*]

Many people read this verse and assume that it’s up to the Church to bring about the end of the age, by taking the gospel to every last human being on earth. However, there is a statement in the book of Revelation which suggests that it’s actually an angel that ultimately fulfill this prophecy by Christ in Matthew 24:

(6) And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, (7) Saying with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” [*Revelation 14:6-7*]

In other words, you might think of this angel as the “cleanup crew,” making sure that every last human being on earth had heard the gospel message — including any who might have slipped through the cracks up to that point.

... whereof I Paul am made a minister; (v. 23c):

The word “minister” [*Greek: δίακονος (diákonos)*] means “servant.” It’s where we get our English word “deacon.” This particular Greek word comes from a root verb [*δίακω (diákō)*] that means “to run errands.” Paul had been made a *servant* of the gospel by Jesus Himself on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9:1-31*). From that point forward, throughout the rest of Paul’s life, he was, in effect, *enslaved* to the gospel message. The gospel was his master in a sense — he lived and breathed the gospel message. A couple of verses later (v. 25), he speaks of “the dispensation of God” that was given to him to preach the word of God. This was Paul’s calling, and he did everything humanly possible to see this calling through. Wouldn’t it be great if we all took that same attitude toward our own calling in Christ!

(24) Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: (25) Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil {margin: or, fully preach} the word of God;

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, ... (v. 24a):

When Paul was made to suffer for the gospel of Jesus Christ, he took great joy in that suffering. Early on in the book of Acts, after the apostles were arrested, beaten severely, and released, they rejoiced that they had been considered worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ:

(40) And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten [them], they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. **(41)** And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. **(42)** And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. [*Acts 5:40-42*]

Jesus foretold that His followers would suffer for His sake, and told them how they should respond to that suffering:

(10) Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **(11)** Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely {Greek: lying}, for my sake. **(12)** Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. [*Matthew 5:10-12*]

(22) Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. **(23)** Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. [*Luke 6:22-23*]

The apostle Paul teaches this same attitude toward Christian suffering other places as well:

(3) And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; **(4)** And patience, experience; and experience, hope: **(5)** And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. [*Romans 5:3-5*]

(29) For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; **(30)** Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me. [*Philippians 1:29-30*]

The Lord's step-brother James, now the leader of the church in Jerusalem, put it this way:

(2) My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations {1}; **(3)** Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. **(4)** But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. [*James 1:2-4*]

The apostle Peter explains the Christian's attitude towards suffering this way:

(12) Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: **(13)** But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. **(14)** If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. **(15)** But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as a thief*, or *as an evildoer*, or as a busybody in other men's matters. **(16)** Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. [*1 Peter 4:12-16*]

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Suffering for the sake of Christ should be viewed as a tremendous honor and privilege by Christians. If we are Sunday called upon to suffer through persecution for the sake of Christ or his gospel, remember in that moment that you have been deemed worthy by Christ Himself to suffer for His sake.

Not all of the suffering that Christians endure today is suffering “for the name of Christ.” Paul is not talking about suffering because you are buried in debt, or because your car was repossessed, or you’re behind in your child support payments. This type of suffering is often self-inflicted — we bring it upon ourselves through carelessness or bad choices. We’ve all been there. But there may very well come a day soon, here in America, when, in order to be a Christian, we will have to suffer true persecution — losing our job, being arrested, imprisonment, or even death. Will your faith stand up to that type of persecution?

... and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church (v. 24b):

This particular phrase at the end of verse 24 could be misunderstood if we are not careful. Paul is speaking of “filling up,” or *completing*, that which was “behind” (i.e., lacking) in the afflictions of Christ in Paul’s own body for the sake of the body of Christ, which is the Church. Paul is in no way suggesting that Christ did not suffer enough on the cross. What he’s referring to here are the shortcomings in *his own sufferings* for Christ. Paul had begun this verse talking about how he rejoiced in the sufferings he endured for the sake of the Colossian believers. Paul was now working to “fill up,” or complete, any sufferings for the Church of Jesus Christ that he had yet to endure.

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, (v. 25a):

The “Whereof” at the beginning of verse 25 is referring to the church, Christ’s body (*cf. v. 24b*). At the end of verse 23, Paul had spoken of being made a *minister*, or servant [δίακονος (*diákonos*)], of the gospel. Here, he says that he was also made a *minister*, or servant, of the Church. This ministry, or *dispensation*, was given to him by God for the benefit of the Church body at large. Some people today are put off by the word “dispensation.” The word used here [Greek: οἰκονομίαν (*oikonomían*)] means “an administration, or stewardship.” Think of it as Paul’s *assigned responsibility*. As a *steward*, duly ordained by God Himself, Paul’s *assigned responsibilities* were the gospel, and the Church.

Even in theological discussions, when you hear the word *dispensation*, or *dispensionalism*, it is merely referring to the different *administrative* periods in history, unique periods in the history of salvation in which God dealt with mankind and the problem of sin in varying ways.

... to fulfil the word of God; (v. 25b):

This interesting phrase at the end of verse 25 has, in my opinion, two different nuances of meaning. First, Paul is referring to his God-given task of *fully preaching* the Word of God. This he did everywhere he went. Secondly, I also believe it has reference to Paul’s continuing work toward *completing* the Word of God. The 13 epistles of Paul constitute almost half of the total number of books in the New Testament (27). Analyzed by word count, his epistles make up 24% of all the words in the New Testament. In a very real sense, Paul contributed greatly to the completion of the Word of God.

The Mystery of Christ in Us (vv. 26-29)

(26) Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (27) To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in {margin: or, among} you, the hope of glory:

In the previous verse (v. 25), Paul had described how he was a “minister” (servant) of Christ’s Church, and explained his God-given “dispensation” (i.e., stewardship, or task) to “fulfill the Word of God.” He further explains in verse 26 that this “fulfilling” of the Word of God involved, at least in part, revealing the “mystery” which had been hidden from the world for ages upon ages, and for generation after generation, but which had now been “made manifest” (i.e., had been revealed) to His “saints” (His *holy* ones, or His *set apart* ones). The word “mystery,” or “mysteries,” appears a total of 27 times in Scripture, all in the New Testament, and always a translation of the Greek word “μυστήριον” (*mystērion*). Whenever you encounter the word “mystery” in Scripture, it’s almost always referring to something that was previously hidden, or unknown, but which was now being revealed, as it is here.

He continues in verse 27 explaining that this “mystery” is now being revealed to God’s “saints,” and that God would make known to them “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.” First of all, the word “saint” simply means someone who has been *consecrated*, or *set apart*, for God. It is very closely related to the words “holy” and “sanctified,” and in fact, all three words come from the same Greek root word [ἅγιος (*hágios*)], which means “sacred,” or “devoted to God.” Thus, anyone who is a believer in Christ is a “saint”; it’s not some honor that’s bestowed by men upon certain believers for their outstanding life achievements. The moment you except Christ as a new believer, you are a saint.

What does Paul mean he says that God would reveal to us “what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles”? The word “riches” can be thought of as “priceless worth.” God would make known to His saints — i.e., New Testament believers — the *priceless worth* and the *gloriousness* of this mystery among the Gentiles. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and through him, God was going to show the Gentiles the priceless and gloriousness of this mystery.

So what exactly was this “mystery” which had been hidden for ages and ages, but had now been revealed to New Testament believers? We find the answer at the very end of verse 27: “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” There are two aspects of this mystery wrapped up in this short phrase:

- (1) “Christ in you” The indwelling of Christ in every born-again believer, and
- (2) “The hope of glory” The unshakable hope of every believer that they will one day be with Christ in glory.

These two things, which we often take for granted today, were unknown mysteries in Old Testament times, but have now been revealed to New Testament believers. Also intimated in this mystery is the fact that Gentiles would share equally in it.

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While we're on the subject of mysteries, there are several things described as "mysteries" which are revealed in the New Testament:

- **The Mystery of God / Christ — The Deep Things of God:**

(2) That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; (3) In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [*Colossians 2:2-3*]

(2) Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; (3) Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

(4) That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. [*Colossians 4:2-4*]

(4) And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: (5) That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (6) Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: (7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: (8) Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) But as it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (10) But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. [*1 Corinthians 2:4-10*]

- **The Mystery of Christ and His Relation to His Church:**

(30) For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. (31) For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. (32) This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. [*Ephesians 5:30-32*]

- **The Mystery of The Gospel:**

[*Paul, asking for prayer from the Ephesian church*]

(19) And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. (20) For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. [*Ephesians 6:19-20*]

- **The Mystery of The Faith:**

(8) Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; (9) Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. [*1 Timothy 3:8-9*]

- **The Mystery of Gentiles Being Fellow-Heirs of the Promises:**

(1) For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, (2) If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: (3) How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, (4) Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) (5) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (6) That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel! (7) Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. [*Ephesians 3:1-7*]

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- **The Mystery of Godliness:**

(16) And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. [1 Timothy 3:16]

- **The Mystery of Iniquity:**

(3) Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; (4) Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (5) Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? (6) And now ye know what withholdeth {i.e., suppresses, or restrains} that he might be revealed in his time. (7) For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth {restrains} will let {restrain}, until he be taken out of the way. (8) And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: (9) *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, (10) And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. [2 Thessalonians 2:3-10]

- **The Mystery of The Seven Stars in Jesus’s Right Hand, and the Seven Golden Candlesticks which He Stood Among:**

(20) “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” [Revelation 1:20]

- **One Day, All of God’s Mysteries Will Finally Be Finished:**

(7) But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets. [Revelation 10:7]

Of course there are still things we do not know about God and His plan for mankind. But whenever we encounter the word “mystery” in Scripture, it’s dealing with an issue that was previously hidden and unknown, but which is now being revealed to New Testament believers.

(28) Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: (29) Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

As we close out chapter 1, Paul reminds his readers that it is Christ that the apostles are preaching. In preaching Christ, they are both warning and teaching everyone they come across, “in all wisdom,” in order to one day present every one of them “perfect” (i.e., complete, whole, spiritually mature) in Christ Jesus. That is really the goal of every pastor, teacher, preacher, and evangelist, to nurture those to whom they minister until they reach the point of spiritual maturity. And it’s worth pointing out that, while it’s good to preach and teach the good news of Christ, it’s also often necessary to warn as well. The applies both to the sharing of the gospel to a nonbeliever, as well as to the preaching and teaching that we do with believers. When you share the good news of the gospel with a nonbeliever, it can seem meaningless to them without the accompanying *warning* regarding his or her sin. And preaching and teaching that is done *within* the body of Christ must also necessarily contain warnings — warnings against false teachers and false teachings, warnings against becoming idle or lazy in one’s faith, warnings against the flippant or careless observation of the Lord’s Supper, etc.

As Paul explains in Ephesians, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers were placed in the Church body by Christ Himself for the express purpose of building up and maturing the body of Christ, until every single member reaches a point of spiritual maturity equal to that of Christ Himself. We are all probably familiar with this passage, but I’m going to read through it explaining some less-than-obvious words as we go:

(11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
(12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
(13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: **(14)** That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; **(15)** But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: **(16)** From whom the whole body **fitly joined together and compacted** by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the **edifying** of itself in love. [*Ephesians 4:11-16*]

No, let’s analyze some of these words and their underlying Greek definitions:

(11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
(12) For the perfecting [*Greek: καταρτισμόν (katartismōn); κατά (katá = “down” [often used in the sense of “thoroughly”]) + ἄρτιος (ártios = complete) = “thorough completing”*] ...

... of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying [*Greek: οικοδομήν (oikodomēn); οἶκος (oikos = “a dwelling”) + δέμω (dēmō = “to build”) = “to build a dwelling”*] ...

... of the body of Christ: **(13)** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [*Greek: τέλειον (téleion) = “complete”*] ...

... man, unto the measure of the stature [*Greek: ἡλικίας (hēlikías) = “age” or “maturity level”*] ...

... of the fulness [*Greek: πληρώματος (plērōmatos) = “the state of being completely filled”*] ...

... of Christ: **(14)** That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; **(15)** But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: **(16)** From whom the whole body **fitly joined together** [*Greek: συναρμολογούμενον (synarmologóúmenon); σύν (sýn = together) + αρμολογέω (armologéō = laying of joints) = “fit together at the joints”*] ...

... and **compacted** [*Greek: συμβιβαζόμενον (symbibazómenon); σύν (sýn = together) + βιάζω (bibázō = to force); = “put together,” or “assembled”*] ...

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... by that which every joint supplieth, according to the **effectual working** [*Greek: ἐνέργειαν (ènérgeian) = “energy” or “active operation”*] ...

... in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying [*same as in verse 12; “building”*] of itself in love. [*Ephesians 4:11-16*]

Now, if you’ll allow, let me put that whole passage together using these definitions:

(11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **(12)** For the **thorough completing** of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the **building** of the body of Christ: **(13)** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a **complete** man, unto the measure of the **maturity level** of the **complete fulness** of Christ: **(14)** That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; **(15)** But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: **(16)** From whom the whole body **fit together at the joints** and **put together** by that which every joint supplieth, according to the **active operation** in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the **building** of itself in love. [*Ephesians 4:11-16*]

Did you notice how many times we came across words that meant “whole,” “complete,” or “mature”? How about words like “building,” or “put together”? I think you probably get the idea now; Christ’s purpose for having positions within the Church body, such as pastors and teachers, is for the “building up” of the Church body, until every last one of us becomes as spiritually mature as Christ Himself. And just like Paul, anyone who is a pastor or teacher today strives for the same spiritual maturity in those they minister to as well.

In verse 29, Paul explains how it’s the spreading of the gospel to every human being, and their subsequent spiritual growth, that he constantly labors for, and that it is *Christ’s strength*, not his own, that enables him to do this. That same thing goes for anyone who ministers in the gospel — we couldn’t do it if it weren’t for Christ and His strength!