

The Reason for the Season

Colossians 1:3-18

Colossians 1:3–18 (NKJV)

³ We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵ because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷ as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹ For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father

who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 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.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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.

Introduction:

Every year, when December comes and families begin to prepare for the celebration of Christmas, I know that it is my responsibility as a pastor to preach a sermon on the topic of the Birth of Christ. It is probably one of the more difficult and challenging times of the year for me to prepare and preach. Not because I do anything different in how I handle the text in my study or how I interpret the Scripture. No the challenge comes because of it's familiarity. Of all

the stories in the Bible, this event of the birth of Christ as a babe in the manger through the virgin Mary, with the star over Bethlehem and the Shepherds in the fields and the eventual arrival of the Wise men bearing gifts, is by far the most familiar to Christians and non-Christians alike. It is most likely more familiar to the world of the non-religious than the events of the death and resurrection of Christ which often gets obscured by Rabbits that lay colored eggs in strange places.

But the birth of Christ in our pagan world sees silhouettes of Mary and Joseph with a baby in the manger on the front lawns of believers, and even in some cases on the property of businesses and government buildings. Christmas cards circulate with the same theme. Familiar Christmas songs played on secular radio remind us of the advent of Christ. One of the most popular phrases a few years ago was, "Jesus is the reason for the Season". And although that is true, it is by far not the whole story.

The world around us often misses the point of the birth of Christ..... The "Reason for the Season"

It is not just about a miraculous birth, or an unusually celestial event, or Shepherds in the fields, or the gifts of the wise men.

And it is more than just the fulfillment of Ancient Biblical prophecy, the mystery of the incarnation, or the miraculous life of Christ.

The Reason for the Season is Redemption, Salvation and deliverance from Darkness. This is the coming of the Savior, to save us from our sin and the certain consequences of it.

What the world recognizes as a baby in a manger, with Mary and Joseph attending, most often misses the fact of what that baby means....

Things like,

Man is hopelessly fallen in sin and has no hope of correcting his path.

Man is a violator of the laws of God and is in rebellion against the Sovereign.

Man cannot be good. He is inherently evil, and repeatedly runs from God.

Man is in darkness and is blind to this reality, Yet loves his darkness.

Man will not seek God and does not desire to.

Man will be punished for every sin and every evil act done in the body or the mind.

Man is running toward hell while believing all along that he is on his way to heaven.

The Baby in the Manger means that

Man can't save himself and wont even try.

The Someone else has to save man and without it man will perish.

The Baby in the Manger means that
God desires and is willing to save men.

God loves sinners

God desires to deliver men from darkness

That God can will will save.

The He alone can save.

The He is willing too sacrifice His own Son to
save.

This baby in the Manger means

That Man is so far away from God and in such
deep-seated rebellion to Him, that only God can
reach down and save him from his sure and certain
death.

It means that God came to seek and save that
which was lost.

Our text is a reminder or the Reason for the
Season.

The Lesson:

The Prayer

The Praise

The Power

The Person
The Preeminence
The Prayer

⁹ For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you,

What reason?

⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;⁶ and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

Wow, what a prayer,
That these believers would be filled with

Knowledge of God's Will

Wisdom to apply it

Understanding of it

and that

they would walk worth of the will of God and practice it and be abundantly fruitful in every good deed.

Continually increasing in the knowledge of God.

And strengthened for Patience and long-suffering.

Paul, however, knew that the knowledge that others are progressing in the faith should never lead us to stop praying for them. Rather, it should encourage prayer for their greater progress. The enemy may reserve his strongest opposition for those who have the most potential for expanding God's cause in the world.

Such unceasing or recurring prayer (1 Thess. 5:17) demands first of all an attitude of God-consciousness. That does not mean to be constantly in the act of verbal prayer, but to view everything in life in relation to God

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 27). Moody Press.

[Look at the particulars](#)

filled with the knowledge of His will. *Plēroō* (**filled**) means to be completely filled, or totally controlled. The disciples' hearts were filled with sorrow when Jesus told them of His departure (John 16:6). Luke 5:26 tells us the crowd was filled with fear after Jesus healed the paralytic. The scribes and Pharisees were filled with rage after Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Luke 6:11). The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31), while Stephen was full of faith (Acts 6:5). In each case they were totally under the control of what filled them.

Paul wants the Colossians to be totally controlled by **knowledge**. *Epignōsis* (**knowledge**) consists of the normal Greek word for *knowledge* (*gnōsis*) with an added preposition (*epi*), which intensifies the meaning. The knowledge Paul wants the Colossians to have is a deep and thorough knowledge.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 28). Moody Press.

The Bible warns of the danger of a lack of knowledge. Proverbs 19:2 says that “it is not good for a person to be without knowledge.” It was for lack of knowledge that Israel went into exile (Isa. 5:13), and God says in Hosea 4:6, “My people are

destroyed for lack of knowledge.” First Corinthians 14:20 warns us, “Do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.” Ephesians 4:13–14 tells us that lack of knowledge produces “children tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” Verse 18 describes unbelievers as “being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them.”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 29). Moody Press.

Paul prays that the knowledge we have would be of His will. God’s will is not a secret; He has revealed it in His Word

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 29). Moody Press.

Knowledge of God’s Word will lead to **all spiritual wisdom and understanding**. Though the terms **wisdom** and **understanding** may be synonymous, *sophia* (**wisdom**) may be the broader of the two terms. It refers to the ability to collect and concisely

organize principles from Scripture. *Sunesis* (**understanding**) could be a more specialized term, referring to the application of those principles to everyday life. Both *sophia* and *sunesis* are spiritual; they deal in the nonphysical realm and have the Holy Spirit as their source.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 29–30). Moody Press.

Believing, submissive Bible study leads to the knowledge of God's will. A mind saturated with such knowledge will also be able to comprehend general principles of godly behavior. With that wisdom will come understanding of how to apply those principles to the situations of life. That progression will inevitably result in godly character and practice.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 30). Moody Press.

¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Walk is used in the Bible to refer to one's pattern of daily conduct. A mind controlled by knowledge, wisdom, and understanding produces a life **worthy of the Lord**. Although it seems impossible that

anyone could walk worthy of the Lord, that is the teaching of Scripture. Paul desired the Thessalonians to “walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). He exhorted the Ephesians to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). He told the Philippians to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27).

God has not left us to our own resources for walking the worthy walk

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 30). Moody Press.

being fruitful in every good work (1:10*b*)

Fruitfulness also results from knowledge. Fruit is the by-product of righteousness. It is the mark of every redeemed individual. Jesus said in John 15:8, “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (cf. vv. 2, 5–6). Paul told the Romans, “You also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God” (Rom. 7:4).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 31). Moody Press.

increasing in the knowledge of God; (1:10c)

A third result of knowledge is spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is progressing **in the knowledge of God**. *Tē epignōsei* (**in the knowledge**) is an instrumental dative case. It indicates the means by which our **increasing**, or growth, takes place. The knowledge of God revealed in His Word is crucial to spiritual growth. Peter wrote, “Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2). As always, the Holy Spirit infuses our own efforts with God’s enabling grace (2 Pet. 3:18), without which we could not grow.

The marks of spiritual growth include: first, a deeper love for God’s Word

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). *Colossians* (p. 32). Moody Press.

11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all **patience** and **longsuffering** with joy;

Paul gives one last result of true spiritual knowledge: joyous endurance of trials. Knowledge of God’s promises and purposes revealed in Scripture gives the strength to endure trials and suffering.

Hupomonē (**steadfastness**) and *makrothumia*

(patience) are closely related. If there is a distinction, it is that *hupomonē* refers to being patient in circumstances, whereas *makrothumia* refers to patience with people (Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], p. 198). Both refer to the patient enduring of trials.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 34). Moody Press.

The Prayer

The Praise

¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Father emphasizes the personal, relational aspect of our union with God. Before our salvation, God was our Judge. We stood condemned before Him for violating His holy, just laws. But when, through the grace of God, we placed our faith in Christ, God ceased being our sentencing Judge and became our gracious Father.

Not only has God adopted us as His sons, but He has also **qualified us to share in the inheritance**

of the saints in light. Qualified is from *hikanoō*, a word used only here and in 2 Corinthians 3:6 in the New Testament. It means “to make sufficient, to empower, to authorize, to make fit.” We are not qualified through our own efforts. God has qualified us through the finished work of Christ.

Before God saved us by His grace we were truly unqualified for our inheritance. Several passages in Ephesians describe our helpless condition:

You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (2:1–3)

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (2:12)

This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being

darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (4:17–19)

Before our salvation, we were dominated by the evil world system; its wicked ruler, Satan; and our own fallen, sinful, human natures. We were Christless, stateless, covenantless, hopeless, godless. Our minds were given to futility; our understanding was darkened. We were cut off from the life of God, ignorant, hardhearted, callous, immoral, impure, and greedy. The only thing we were qualified to receive from God was His wrath. And that is what we would have received, if not for God's mercy toward us.

God has by grace **qualified** the unqualified to share in the inheritance. The Greek text literally reads, “for the portion of the lot” (*eis tēn merida tou klērou*). The partitive genitive (*tou klērou*) means that we each receive our own individual allotment or portion of the total inheritance. Paul here alludes to the partitioning of Israel's inheritance in Canaan (cf. Num. 26:52–56; 33:51–54; Josh. 14:1–2). Just as the Israelites received their inheritance in the

Promised Land, so also do we receive our portion of the divine inheritance.

The Bible has much to say about our **inheritance**. It consists first of eternal life. Jesus said in Matthew 19:29, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life.” Eternal life is far more than endless existence. It is a quality of life; Christ’s life lived in the believer (Gal. 2:20; cf. 1 John 5:20). Second, our inheritance includes the earth. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said that believers would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). That focuses on the future aspect of our inheritance, when we will rule with Christ in the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:6). The knowledge that we will inherit the restored earth should free us from the present pursuit of material possessions. Someday we will receive far more than we could ever gain in this life. Third, we inherit all the promises of God. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12).

When do we receive our inheritance? The present tense participle *hikanōsanti* (**qualified**) indicates we have it now (cf. Eph. 1:11). We have already been transferred from the domain of darkness into Christ’s kingdom (Col. 1:13). We are already fellow heirs with

Christ (Rom. 8:16–17). The full possession of that inheritance, however, is yet future. Peter refers to it as “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). It will be ours forever. Hebrews 9:15 depicts it as an eternal inheritance.

Paul further defines our inheritance as that of **the saints in light**. *Hagiōn* (**saints**) refers to those who have been separated from the world and set apart to God. The inheritance belongs to that group alone. First Corinthians 6:9–10 asks the rhetorical question, “Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

Ephesians 5:5 echoes that thought: “For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” And Galatians 5:21 adds that “those who practice such things [the deeds of the flesh in vv. 19–21] shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The saints’ inheritance is **in the light**. Light represents two things biblically. Intellectually, it represents truth (Ps. 119:130). Morally, it represents

purity (Eph. 5:8–14). In contrast to Israel’s earthly inheritance, the saints’ inheritance is in the light—the spiritual realm of truth and purity where God Himself dwells (1 Tim. 6:16). In his defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26, Paul spoke of the Lord’s commissioning him to preach to the Gentiles. The Lord told Paul that He was sending him “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (v. 18). Paul no doubt had that event in mind when he wrote Colossians 1:12–14. The saints are those who have turned from sinful darkness to righteous light (cf. Eph. 5:8; 1 John 1:7).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 37–39). Moody Press.

The Prayer
The Praise

The Power

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.

A second cause for thanksgiving is our spiritual liberation. **Delivered** is from *ruomai*, which means “to draw to oneself,” or “to rescue.” God drew us out of Satan’s kingdom to Himself. That event was the new birth. We are not gradually, progressively delivered from Satan’s power. When we placed our faith in Christ, we were instantly delivered. “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Believers do not need deliverance from the dominion of sin and Satan; they need to act as those who have been delivered (cf. Rom. 6:2, 7, 11).

Those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ have been rescued from **the domain of darkness**. *Exousias* (**domain**) could be translated “power,” “jurisdiction,” or “authority.” Our Lord used the phrase **domain of darkness** (*exousias tou skotous*) to refer to the supernatural forces of Satan marshalled against Him at His arrest (Luke 22:53). The triumph of the domain of darkness was short-lived, however. A few hours later, Jesus forever

shattered Satan's power by His death on the cross. You need not fear that power, for "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Through His death, Jesus crushed Satan and delivered us from his dark kingdom.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 40). Moody Press.

13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Paul continues the litany of blessings that draw out his gratitude by describing our new domain.

Methistēmi (**transferred**) means to remove or change. It is used in Acts 13:22 to speak of God's removing Saul from being king. It was used in the ancient world to speak of the displacement of a conquered people to another land. The verb speaks here of our total removal from the domain of satanic darkness to the glorious light of the kingdom of Christ.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 41). Moody Press.

Kingdom refers to more than the future millennial kingdom, when Jesus will reign on earth for a

thousand years. Nor does it speak merely of the general rule of God over His creation. The kingdom is a spiritual reality right now. Paul gives us a definition of it in Romans 14:17: “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The kingdom is the special relationship men in this age have with God through Jesus Christ. A kingdom in its most basic sense is a group of people ruled by a king. Christians have acknowledged Christ as their King and are subjects in His kingdom. They have been **transferred ... to the kingdom of His beloved Son**. The Greek text literally reads, “the Son of His love” (*tou huiou tēs agapēs autou*).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (p. 41). Moody Press.

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.

Before we could be fit subjects for Christ’s kingdom we needed **redemption, the forgiveness**

of sins. *Apolutrōsis* (**redemption**) is one of the magnificent New Testament words expressing a blessed aspect of the work of Christ on our behalf. Alongside such terms as *sacrifice, offering, propitiation, ransom, justification, adoption, and reconciliation*, it attempts to describe the riches of our salvation. It means “to deliver by payment of a ransom,” and was used to speak of freeing slaves from bondage. The meaning of *apolutrōsis* is expressed in our English word *emancipation*. The Septuagint uses a related word to speak of Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. *Apolutrōsis* is used in several places in the New Testament to speak of Christ’s freeing us from slavery to sin. In Ephesians 1:7, Paul writes, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” To the Corinthians he wrote, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). In the midst of perhaps the most thorough soteriological passage in the New Testament, Paul writes that we are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

Redemption results in **the forgiveness of sins.** *Aphesin* (**forgiveness**) refers to pardon, or

remission of penalty. It is a composite of two Greek words, *apo*, “from,” and *hiēmi*, “to send.” Because Christ redeemed us, God has sent away our sins; they will never be found again. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). “He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 41–42). Moody Press.

The Prayer

The Praise

The Power

The Person

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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

The Bible is supremely the book about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament records the preparation for His coming. The gospels present Him as God in human flesh, come into the world to save sinners. In Acts, the message of salvation in Christ begins to be spread throughout the world. The epistles detail the theology of Christ's work and personification of Christ in His Body, the church. Finally, Revelation presents Christ on the throne, reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Every part of Scripture testifies about Jesus Christ. Luke 24:27 says, "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." In John 5:39, Jesus said of the Scriptures, "It is these that bear witness of Me." Philip preached Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch by using the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:35).

But of all the Bible's teaching about Jesus Christ, none is more significant than Colossians 1:15–19. This dramatic and powerful passage removes any needless doubt or confusion over Jesus' true

identity. It is vital to a proper understanding of the Christian faith.

As mentioned in the introduction, much of the heresy threatening the Colossian church centered on the Person of Christ. The heretics, denying His humanity, viewed Christ as one of many lesser descending spirit beings that emanated from God. They taught a form of philosophic dualism, postulating that spirit was good and matter was evil. Hence, a good emanation like Christ could never take on a body composed of evil matter. The idea that God Himself could become man was absurd to them. Thus, they also denied His deity.

Nor was Christ adequate for salvation, according to the errorists. Salvation required a superior, mystical, secret knowledge, beyond that of the gospel of Christ. It also involved worshiping the good emanations (angels) and keeping the Jewish ceremonial laws.

In the first three chapters of Colossians, Paul confronts the Colossian heresy head on. He rejects their denial of Christ's humanity, pointing out that it is in Him that "all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (2:9). Paul also rejects their worship of angels (2:18), and their ceremonialism (2:16–17). He emphatically denies that any secret knowledge is required for salvation, pointing out that in Christ "are

hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3; cf. 1:27; 3:1–4).

By far the most serious aspect of the Colossian heresy was its rejection of Christ’s deity. Before getting to the other issues, Paul makes an emphatic defense of that crucial doctrine. Christians would do well to follow his example in their confrontations with cultists. The primary focus of discussions with them should be the deity of Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 1:15–19, Paul reveals our Lord’s true identity by viewing Him in relation to four things: God, the universe, the unseen world, and the church.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 43–44). Moody Press.

15 He is the image of the invisible God,

First, Paul describes Him as **the image of the invisible God**. *Eikōn* (**image**) means “image” or “likeness.” From it we get our English word *icon*, referring to a statue. It is used in Matthew 22:20 of Caesar’s portrait on a coin, and in Revelation 13:14 of the statue of Antichrist.

Although man is also the *eikōn* of God (1 Cor. 11:7; cf. Gen. 1:26–27), man is not a perfect image of God. Humans are made in God’s image in that they have rational personality. Like God,

they possess intellect, emotion, and will, by which they are able to think, feel, and choose. We humans are not, however, in God's image morally, because He is holy, and we are sinful. Nor are we created in His image essentially. We do not possess His incommunicable attributes, such as omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, or omnipresence. We are human, not divine.

The Fall marred the original image of God in man. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were innocent, free of sin, and incapable of dying. They forfeited those qualities when they sinned. When someone puts faith in Christ, however, that person is promised that the image of God will be restored in him or her. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). God will make believers sinless like Christ when they enter the final phase of their eternal life.

Unlike man, Jesus Christ is the perfect, absolutely accurate image of God. He did not become the image of God at the incarnation, but has been that from all eternity. Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as "the radiance of [God's] glory." Christ reflects God's attributes, as the sun's light

reflects the sun. Further, He is said to be “the exact representation of [God’s] nature.” *Charaktēr* (“exact representation”) refers to an engraving tool, or stamp. Jesus is the exact likeness of God. He is in the very form of God (Phil. 2:6). That is why He could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Christ, the invisible God became visible, “and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” (John 1:14).

By using the term *eikōn*, Paul emphasizes that Jesus is both the representation and manifestation of God. He is the full, final, and complete revelation of God. He is God in human flesh. That was His claim (John 8:58; 10:30–33), and the unanimous testimony of Scripture (cf. John 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1). To think anything less of Him is blasphemy and gives evidence of a mind blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4).

Paul further describes Jesus as **the first-born of all creation**. From the Arians of the early church to the Jehovah’s Witnesses of our own day, those who would deny our Lord’s deity have sought support from this phrase. They argue that

it speaks of Christ as a created being, and hence He could not be the eternal God. Such an interpretation completely misunderstands the sense of *prōtotokos* (**first-born**) and ignores the context.

Although *prōtotokos* can mean firstborn chronologically (Luke 2:7), it refers primarily to position, or rank. In both Greek and Jewish culture, the firstborn was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was not necessarily the first one born. Although Esau was born first chronologically, it was Jacob who was the “firstborn” and received the inheritance. Jesus is the One with the right to the inheritance of all creation (cf. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 5:1–7, 13).

Israel was called God’s firstborn in Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 31:9. Though not the first people born, they held first place in God’s sight among all the nations. In Psalm 89:27, God says of the Messiah, “I also shall make him My first-born,” then defines what He means—“the highest of the kings of the earth.” In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is called “the first-born of the dead,” even though He was not the first person to be resurrected chronologically. Of all ever raised, He is the

preeminent One. Romans 8:29 refers to Him as the firstborn in relation to the church. In all the above cases, firstborn clearly means highest in rank, not first created.

There are many other reasons for rejecting the idea that the use of **first-born** makes Jesus a created being. Such an interpretation cannot be harmonized with the description of Jesus as *monogenēs* (“only begotten,” or “unique”) in John 1:18. We might well ask with the early church Father Theodoret how, if Christ was only-begotten, could He be first-begotten? And how, if He were first-begotten, could He be only-begotten? How could He be the first of many in His class, and at the same time the only member of His class? Yet such confusion is inevitable if we assign the meaning “first created” to “firstborn.” Further, when the *prōtotokos* is one of the class referred to, the class is plural (cf. Col. 1:18; Rom. 8:29). Yet, creation is singular. Finally, if Paul meant to convey that Christ was the first created being, why did he not use the Greek word *prōtoktistos*, which means “first created?”

Such an interpretation of *prōtotokos* is also foreign to the context—both the general context of

the epistle and the specific context of the passage. If Paul were here teaching that Christ is a created being, he would be agreeing with the central point of the Colossian errorists. They taught that Christ was a created being, the most prominent of the emanations from God. That would run counter to his purpose in writing Colossians, which was to refute the false teachers at Colossae.

Interpreting *prōtotokos* to mean that Christ is a created being is also out of harmony with the immediate context. Paul has just finished describing Christ as the perfect and complete image of God. In the next verse, he refers to Christ as the creator of everything that exists. How then could Christ Himself be a created being? Further, verse 17 states, “He is before all things.” Christ existed before anything else was created (cf. Micah 5:2). And only God existed before the creation.

Far from being one of a series of emanations descending from God, Jesus is the perfect image of God. He is the preeminent inheritor over all creation (the genitive *ktiseōs* is better translated “over” than “of”). He both existed before the

creation and is exalted in rank above it. Those truths define who Jesus is in relation to God. They also devastate the false teachers' position. But Paul is not finished—his next point undermines another false teaching of the Colossian errorists.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 45–47). Moody Press.

Paul gives three reasons for Jesus' primacy over creation. First, He is the Creator. The false teachers at Colossae viewed Jesus as the first and most important of the emanations from God, but they were convinced it had to be a lesser being much further down the chain who eventually created the material universe. But Paul rejects that blasphemy, insisting that by Him all things were created. That truth is affirmed by the apostle John (John 1:3) and the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 1:2). Because the Colossian errorists viewed matter as evil, they argued that neither the good God nor a good emanation could have created it. But Paul maintains that Jesus made all things, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible. He refutes the false philosophic dualism of the Colossian heresy. Jesus is God, and He created the material universe.

By studying the creation, one can gain a glimpse of the power, knowledge, and wisdom of the Creator.

The sheer size of the universe is staggering. The sun, for example, has a diameter of 864,000 miles (one hundred times that of earth's) and could hold 1.3 million planets the size of earth inside it. The star Betelgeuse, however, has a diameter of 100 million miles, which is larger than the earth's orbit around the sun. It takes sunlight, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, about 8.5 minutes to reach earth. Yet that same light would take more than four years to reach the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, some 24 trillion miles from earth. The galaxy to which our sun belongs, the Milky Way, contains hundreds of billions of stars. And astronomers estimate there are millions, or even billions of galaxies. What they can see leads them to estimate the number of stars in the universe at 10^{25} . That is roughly the number of all the grains of sand on all the world's beaches.

The universe also bears witness to the tremendous wisdom and knowledge of its Creator. Scientists now speak of the Anthropic Principle, "which states that the universe appears to be carefully designed for the well-being of mankind" (Donald B. DeYoung, "Design in Nature: The Anthropic Principle," *Impact*, no. 149 [November 1985]: p. ii). A change in the rate of Earth's rotation around the sun or on its axis would be catastrophic.

The Earth would become either too hot or too cold to support life. If the moon were much nearer to the Earth, huge tides would inundate the continents. A change in the composition of the gases that make up our atmosphere would also be fatal to life. A slight change in the mass of the proton would result in the dissolution of hydrogen atoms. That would result in the destruction of the universe, because hydrogen is its dominant element.

The creation gives mute testimony to the intelligence of its Creator. Max Planck, winner of the Nobel Prize and one of the founders of modern physics, wrote, “According to everything taught by the exact sciences about the immense realm of nature, a certain order prevails—one independent of the human mind ... this order can be formulated in terms of purposeful activity. There is evidence of an intelligent order of the universe to which both man and nature are subservient” (cited in DeYoung, “Design in Nature,” p. iii). It is no wonder that the psalmist wrote, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world” (Ps. 19:1–4).

The testimony of nature to its Creator is so clear that it is only through willful unbelief that men can reject it. Paul writes in Romans 1:20, “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Like those who deny Christ’s deity, those who reject Him as Creator give evidence of a mind darkened by sin and blinded by Satan.

Jesus also has primacy over the creation because He is before all things. When the universe began, He already existed (John 1:1–2; 1 John 1:1). He told the Jews in John 8:58, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (not “I was”). He is saying that He is Yahweh, the eternally existing God. The prophet Micah said of Him, “His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity” (Mic. 5:2). Revelation 22:13 describes Him as “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” As was previously mentioned, anyone existing before time began at the creation is eternal. And only God is eternal.

A third reason for Jesus’ primacy over creation is that in Him all things hold together. Not only did Jesus create the universe, He also sustains it. He maintains the delicate balance necessary to life’s

existence. He quite literally holds all things together. He is the power behind every consistency in the universe. He is gravity and centrifugal and centripetal force. He is the One who keeps all the entities in space in their motion. He is the energy of the universe. In his book *The Atom Speaks*, D. Lee Chesnut describes the puzzle of why the nucleus of the atom holds together:

Consider the dilemma of the nuclear physicist when he finally looks in utter amazement at the pattern he had now drawn of the oxygen nucleus.... For here are eight positively charged protons closely associated together within the confines of this tiny nucleus. With them are eight neutrons—a total of sixteen particles—eight positively charged, eight with no charge.

Earlier physicists had discovered that like charges of electricity and like magnetic poles repel each other, and unlike charges or magnetic poles attract each other. And the entire history of electrical phenomena and electrical equipment had been built up on these principles known as Coulomb's law of electrostatic force and the law of magnetism. What was wrong? What holds the nucleus together? Why doesn't it fly apart? And therefore, why do not all atoms fly apart? ([San

Diego: Creation-Science Research Center, 1973], pp. 31–33)

Chesnut goes on to describe the experiments performed in the 1920s and 1930s that proved Coulomb's law applied to atomic nuclei. Powerful "atom smashers" were used to fire protons into the nuclei of atoms. Those experiments also gave scientists an understanding of the incredibly powerful force that held protons together within the nucleus. Scientists have dubbed that force the "strong nuclear force," but have no explanation for why it exists. The physicist George Gamow, one of the founders of the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe, wrote,

The fact that we live in a world in which practically every object is a potential nuclear explosive, without being blown to bits, is due to the extreme difficulties that attend the starting of a nuclear reaction. (cited in Chesnut, *The Atom Speaks*, p. 38)

Karl K. Darrow, a physicist at the Bell (AT & T) Laboratories, agrees:

You grasp what this implies. It implies that all the massive nuclei have no right to be alive at all. Indeed, they should never have been created,

and, if created, they should have blown up instantly. Yet here they all are.... Some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together. The nature of the inhibition is also a secret ... one thus far reserved by Nature for herself. (cited in Chesnut, *The Atom Speaks*, p.38)

One day in the future God will dissolve the strong nuclear force. Peter describes that day as the one when “the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). With the strong nuclear force no longer operative, Coulomb’s law will take effect, and the nuclei of atoms will fly apart. The universe will literally explode. Until that time, we can be thankful that Christ “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus Christ must be God. He made the universe, existed outside and before it, and preserves it.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 47–50). Moody Press.

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (1:16b)

Thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities refer to the various ranks of angels. Far from being an angel, as the Colossian errorists taught, Christ

created the angels. The writer of Hebrews also makes a clear distinction between Christ and the angels: “Of the angels He says, ‘Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.’ But of the Son He says, ‘Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom’ ” (Heb. 1:7–8). Jesus has been exalted “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:21). As a result, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). With that truth the apostle Peter agrees: “[Christ] is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (1 Pet. 3:22).

Scripture is clear that Jesus is not an angel, but the Creator of the angels. He is above the angels, who in fact worship Him and are under His authority. Jesus’ relation to the unseen world, like His relation to the visible universe, proves He is God.

The Prayer
The Praise
The Power
The Person
The Preeminence

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.

Jesus Christ in Relation to the Church

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (1:18)

Paul presents four great truths in this verse about Christ's relation to the church.

christ is the head of the church

There are many metaphors used in Scripture to describe the church. It is called a family, a kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a building, and a bride. But the most profound metaphor, one having no Old Testament equivalent, is that of a Body. The church

is a Body, and Christ is the head of the Body. This concept is not used in the sense of the head of a company, but rather looks at the church as a living organism, inseparably tied together by the living Christ. He controls every part of it and gives it life and direction. His life lived out through all the members provides the unity of the Body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–20). He energizes and coordinates the diversity within the Body, a diversity of spiritual gifts and ministries (1 Cor. 12:4–13). He also directs the Body’s mutuality, as the individual members serve and support each other (1 Cor. 12:15–27).

Christ is not an angel who serves the church (cf. Heb. 1:14). He is the head of His church.

christ is the source of the church

Archē (**beginning**) is used here in the twofold sense of source and primacy. The church has its origins in Jesus. God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). It is He who gives life to His church. His sacrificial death and resurrection on our behalf provided our new life. As head of the Body, Jesus holds the chief position, or highest rank in the church. As the beginning, He is its originator.

christ is the firstborn from the dead

First-born again translates *prōtotokos*. Of all those who have been raised from the dead, or ever will be, Christ is the highest in rank.

christ is the pre-eminent one

As a result of His death and resurrection, Jesus has come to have first place in everything. Paul summarizes for emphasis in verse 18. He wants to drive home the point as forcefully as he can that Jesus is not merely another emanation from God. Because

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross ... God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:8–11)

Jesus reigns supreme over the visible world, the unseen world, and the church. Paul sums up his argument in verse 19: **For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him.** *Plērōma* (**fulness**) was a term used by the later Gnostics to refer to the divine powers and attributes,

which they believed were divided among the various emanations. That is likely the sense in which the Colossian errorists used the term. Paul counters that false teaching by stating that all the fulness of deity is not spread out in small doses to a group of spirits, but fully dwells in Christ alone (cf. 2:9). The commentator J. B. Lightfoot wrote about Paul's use of *plērōma*,

On the one hand, in relation to Deity, He is the visible image of the invisible God. He is not only the chief manifestation of the Divine nature: He exhausts the Godhead manifested. In Him resides the totality of the Divine powers and attributes. For this totality Gnostic teachers had a technical term, the *pleroma* or *plenitude*.... In contrast to their doctrine, [Paul] asserts and repeats the assertion, that the *pleroma* abides absolutely and wholly in Christ as the Word of God. The entire light is concentrated in Him. (*St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [1879; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959], p. 102)

Paul tells the Colossians they do not need angels to help them get saved. Rather in Christ, and Him alone, they are complete (2:10). Christians share in His fulness: “For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16). All the fulness of Christ becomes available to believers.

What should the response be to the glorious truths about Christ in this passage? The Puritan John Owen astutely wrote,

The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness than the whole creation, and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or afford. Without this knowledge, the mind of man, however priding itself in other inventions and discoveries, is wrapped up in darkness and confusion.

This therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them. For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where He is, and beholding of His glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory? (John Owen, *The Glory*

of Christ [reprint, Chicago: Moody, 1949], pp. 25–26)
MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1992). [Colossians](#) (pp. 50–53). Moody Press.

Colossians 1:19–22 (NKJV)

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.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—