

# **A Verse-by-Verse Study of John 1:1-18 and Colossians 1:15-3:17**

**The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Doctrine of the Trinity  
Are Discussed in this Paper and Holiness and Victory over Sin Are Discussed  
Throughout this Study of Colossians 1:15-3:17**

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The original paper was modified to some extent (a rather small extent) to create this internet version of the paper. The paper was modified a little in January 2013, including updating the cross-references to my other writings, when I worked on this paper to split it up into several parts in the proper format to put on several Christian article sites.

**by Karl Kemp  
November, 2004**

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On the Deity of Christ and the Trinity see under John 1:1-5, 9-18 and under Colossians 1:15-18 (including the footnotes).

Holiness and Victory over Sin are discussed throughout this verse-by-verse study of Colossians 1:15-3:17.

## JOHN 1:1-18

There is widespread agreement that this passage (John 1:1-18) is the prologue for the Gospel of John. These verses set forth the theme of this glorious Gospel. What a prologue! What a gospel! I'll quote a few sentences from what R. C. H. Lenski says here.<sup>1</sup> "This prolog sums up the contents of the entire gospel. It does this by brief, succinct historical statements. Each of these is wonderfully simple and clear and yet so weighty and profound that the human mind is unable to fathom them. Amid all that has been written by the instruments of Inspiration this prolog stands out as the one paragraph that is most profound, most lofty, and incomparable in every way" (page 25). "John's is the paragon among the Gospels, 'the one, tender, real crown-gospel of them all' (Luther), and the prolog is the central jewel set in pure gold. ..." (page 26).

I'll also quote a few sentences from what David J. Ellis says regarding this prologue.<sup>2</sup> "There is probably no other place in the NT where so much is said, as here, with such economy of words. Here is set forth the uniqueness of Christ and the great consequences, which follow from His self-sacrifice embodied in the Incarnation. In this Prologue John announces his main theme, which is the glory of Jesus Christ shown by all which He both said and did."

**In the beginning** [Compare Gen. 1:1.<sup>3</sup> These first words of the prologue take us back before God (the triune God; the Trinity) had created any being or any thing (including physical matter). God (the triune God) didn't have a beginning. We don't know enough to understand eternity and time or the details regarding how God functions in eternity and time, but it is clear that He is above (He is not limited to) the time system of our world, which He created. The time system of our world began when it was created. There is widespread agreement that God knows what will happen in our future; He doesn't have to wait to see what will happen.] **was the Word**<sup>4</sup> [The Greek behind "the Word" is *ho logos*, where *ho* is the definite article (similar to our English definite article, *the*). *Ho Logos* is a name, or title, for the eternal (He has always existed) Son of God; this name/title is also used of Him in John 1:14; 1 John 1:1; and Rev. 19:13.], **and the Word was with God** [Compare John 1:18; 17:5; 1 John 1:2; and Phil. 2:5-11. *The Word* was with God the Father (and God the Spirit) before any creating took place. *God* here refers to God the Father.<sup>5</sup> The Word's being *with* the Father included His having a Person-to-Person relationship with Him. The Word always existed with the Father (and the Spirit). John 1:3 shows that the Word (God the Son) was directly involved in the creation of every being and thing that was ever created; they were all created "through Him" (John 1:3; Col. 1:16), and "for Him" (Col. 1:16).], **and the Word was God.** [These last words are some of the most important words in the Bible that reveal the all-important fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is God/deity with God the Father (and God the Spirit), but there are many other passages that reveal this same truth (cf., e.g., John

<sup>1</sup> *Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1943).

<sup>2</sup> *New Layman's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1979), page 1300.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:1 begins with the words "In the beginning," and these words are the title for the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible; it's all one word in the Hebrew, *bereshith*.

<sup>4</sup> Note the use of the *word/Word* of *Yahweh* in Psalm 107:20.

<sup>5</sup> The fact that the word for *God* (*theos*) here has the definite article in the Greek helps confirm that it refers to God the Father. He is the One typically referred to as *God* throughout the New Testament, but the New Testament makes it quite clear that the Son and the Spirit are God/deity too, and in a full sense.

20:28; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:2, 3, 8; see under Col. 1:15-17 in this paper).<sup>6</sup> The word for *God* (*theos*) is used here without the definite article. An indefinite sense fits perfectly with the idea that *the Word* is under the umbrella of what it means to be God/deity.<sup>7</sup> He is an uncreated Person/Being, and He is not to be confused with the Person of God the Father, who was spoken of earlier in the verse, where the definite article was used. The apostle John had already made it clear that God the Father and God the Son are distinct Persons within the Godhead by saying “the Word was with God.” I discuss the three Persons of the Godhead to some extent under Col. 1:15-17 in this paper and in references cited there. I have written four subsequent papers on this super-important topic: *Who Do We Worship?*; *Who Do We Pray To?*; *More on the Trinity*; and *The Name Yahweh and God the Father and God the Son*. They are all available on my internet site (Google to Karl Kemp Teaching).

I am surprised by how widely spread the oneness view of God is in our day. This is a serious error, but not as serious as denying the deity of Christ/the Son of God. We may not be able to fully understand the Trinity (at least not at the present time), but the biblical evidence for this viewpoint is overwhelming. See my paper *More on the Trinity* for a start.

The orthodox Christian view from the beginning has always been that there is *one* God, *three* Persons—there are not three Gods. The fact that God the Son (and God the Spirit) is subordinate to the Father in His role<sup>8</sup> helps explain why the Bible doesn’t

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<sup>6</sup> The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is a foundational doctrine of Christianity. This doctrine has often been attacked and challenged since the early days of Christianity, but orthodox Christians have always defended this essential doctrine. The idea that God the Son was a created being (and therefore not deity) was condemned by the councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). That heresy is still with us today in the Jehovah’s Witnesses; The Way, International; and others. The Jehovah’s Witnesses try, quite unsuccessfully, to get around what John 1:1 says with their own translation that proclaims the Word was a god. What an insult to God the Son to call Him a god. (The Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Word refers to God’s first and greatest created being, Michael the archangel.) The Greek, unlike English, does not have an indefinite article (like our *a*, *an*). Sometimes an *a* or *an* must be supplied in the translation from Greek to make good English, but we clearly do not want to supply an *a* at the end of John 1:1, not unless we want to promote a heretical idea.

<sup>7</sup> If John had used the definite article with the word for God at the end of this verse (at the end of this verse the Greek has the word for God, then the verb, and finally *ho logos*) it would have confused the issue in at least two ways: Without that article it is clear that *ho logos* is the subject; that is, the last words say “the Word was God,” not “God was the Word.” Also, the definite article with God here would have tended to communicate the wrong idea that “the Word” and God the Father are to be equated. We have already been informed that the Word (God the Son) was *with* God (the Father).

<sup>8</sup> On the subordination of the Son in His role to the Father, cf., e.g., Acts 7:55; 1 Cor. 11:3; 12:4-6 (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:4-6. The “Lord” in verse 5 is God the Son. Verse 6 shows that the work of God the Son and God the Spirit is under God the Father.); 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 4:4-6 (God the Father, God the Son [the Lord]; and God the Spirit are mentioned in Eph. 4:4-6); and the Son *was sent* by the Father (cf., e.g., John 3:17; 5:24, 30). The deity of God the Spirit, His being a distinct Person within the Godhead, and His subordination to the Father in His role are also clearly taught in the New Testament (cf., e.g., Matt. 28:19; John 14:16; Acts 5:3, 4; Rom. 8:26, 27; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 11; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; and 1 Pet. 1:2; and He too *was sent* by the Father (and by the Son; John 14:26; cf. Acts 2:33). The subordination of the Son of God to the Father in His role (along with His full deity) is discussed in some detail in my four subsequent papers that I mentioned above.

I’ll quote part of what Wayne Grudem says under the subheading “The Persons of the Trinity Eternally Existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (*Systematic Theology* [Zondervan, 1994], pages 251, 252). “...there are no differences in deity, attributes, or essential nature between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God and has all the attributes of God. *The only distinctions between the*

speaking of *three* Gods, even though God the Son is fully God (and God the Spirit is too). Each of the three Persons perfectly relate to one another, and they fulfill their functions in a perfectly harmonious way.] **(2) He** [“Lit. *This one*”] **was in the beginning with God.** [The apostle John has already given us this important information in the first verse. The fact that he repeats it here helps demonstrate the importance of this revelation. For one thing, this revelation concerning God the Son was something new for the Jews. Although there were quite a few verses in the Old Testament that indicated the deity of the Angel of Yahweh/the Messiah,<sup>9</sup> God the Father didn’t clearly reveal

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*members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to creation.* In those relationships they carry out the roles that are appropriate to each person.

This truth about the Trinity has sometimes been summarized in the phrase ‘ontological equality but economic subordination,’ where the word *ontological* means ‘being’ [Grudem has a footnote, “See section D. I. above, where *economy* was explained to refer to different activities or roles.”] Another way of expressing this more simply would be to say ‘equal in being but subordinate in role [speaking of God the Son and God the Spirit].’ Both parts of the phrase are necessary to a true doctrine of the Trinity: If we do not have ontological equality, not all the persons are fully God. But if we do not have economic subordination [Grudem has a footnote, “Economic subordination should be carefully distinguished from the error of ‘subordinationism,’ which holds that the Son or Holy Spirit are inferior in being to the Father (see section C. 2, above, p. 245).”], then there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another, and consequently we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. ...

This is why the idea of eternal equality in being but subordination in role has been essential to the church’s doctrine of the Trinity since it was first affirmed in the Nicene Creed.... Surprisingly, some recent evangelical writings have denied an eternal subordination in role among the members of the Trinity [Grudem has a footnote here, giving examples. I’ll quote one of the three paragraphs he has here, “...Millard Erickson, in his *Christian Theology* (...Baker, 1983-85), pp. 338 and 698, is willing only to affirm that Christ had a temporary subordination in function for the period of ministry on earth, but nowhere affirms an eternal subordination in role of the Son to the Father....”] The viewpoint that Erickson expresses is in line with what I (K. Kemp) was taught, but I have always thought that that viewpoint didn’t go far enough in acknowledging the eternal subordinate roles (I didn’t say *inferiority*) of the Son and the Spirit., but it has clearly been part of the church’s doctrine of the Trinity (in Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox expressions), at least since Nicea (A.D. 325). ....”

In my brief remarks I didn’t comment on an eternal subordinate role of the Spirit to the Son, which is widely held. You can argue for that subordinate role on the basis of verses like John 15:26; 16:7, 13-15; and Rev. 22:1, but that subordination isn’t clear to me. The issue of whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or the Father *and the Son* has become a divisive issue in Christianity. I’ll quote part of what Grudem says on this issue under the heading “The Filioque Clause,” on pages 246, 247. In the original paper I had quoted some two paragraphs from Grudem. Here I’ll briefly summarize what he said. *Filioque* is a Latin word meaning “and from the Son.” This word was not included in the original version of the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325). The original version said only that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” but in A.D. 589 “and the Son” was added with the result that the creed now said that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*).” The statement was understood to speak of an *eternal* relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit. Grudem says that the creed with the added word(s) “received an official endorsement in A.D. 1017.” He went on to say that “this apparently very insignificant doctrinal point was the main doctrinal issue in the split between eastern and western Christianity in A.D. 1054,” but he pointed out that church politics and struggles for power, which very much included the issue of “the relation of the Eastern church to the authority of the Pope” were key factors in the split that has “not been resolved to this day.”

<sup>9</sup> See my paper titled, *The Name Yahweh and God the Father and God the Son: The Name Yahweh and a Listing of Some of the Large Number of Passages in the Hebrew Old Testament Where We Can See God the Son Long with God the Father*; see on Isaiah 9:1-7 on pages 8-15 of my paper, *Verse-by-Verse Studies of Selected Passages from the Book of Isaiah* (which is available on my internet site); and see under

God the Son (who became the Messiah/Christ) until the days of the new covenant.] **(3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.** [Compare John 1:10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; and Heb. 1:2. In other words, every being or thing that has been created (including physical matter) has been created through God the Son. He was active in creation along with God the Father and God the Spirit. Each Person perfectly fulfilled His role.] **(4) In Him was life** [Compare John 5:26; 11:25; 14:6; and 1 John 1:1, 2. The emphasis is on spiritual *life*, but physical life is included.], **and the life was the Light of men** [cf. John 8:12; 9:5; and 12:46]. [The NASB undoubtedly capitalized the word “Light” in verses 4 and 5 because they assumed that “the Light” speaks of the God the Son. It’s clear that God the Son is called “the Light” in verses 7-9, but it isn’t clear that “the light” speaks of Him in verses 4, 5. The KJV; NKJV do not capitalize this word in verses 4, 5.

The way the words *life* and *light/Light* are used in this verse further demonstrates the deity of the Word; it would be blasphemous to say what verse 4 says about Him if He were not deity. God (the triune God) is the only source of life and light, and everything else that is good. The *light* includes the *truth*; the *truth* includes the existence of the God who is there (the God of the Bible, the God who is the Creator, the Judge, and the only Savior) and it includes the righteousness and holiness of God (cf., e.g., Eph. 4:24).

Those who submit to the light of God learn the truth and are enabled to live in the light, which includes living in right relationship with God in His righteousness and holiness.]

**(5) The Light shines in the darkness, and [or “but”<sup>10</sup>] the darkness did not comprehend it.** [What John says in verses 9-12 helps explain what he means here. The *darkness* originated with the fall of Satan. The *darkness* here (cf., e.g., John 3:19; 8:12; 12:35; and 12:46) refers to the darkness that has permeated the world of mankind since man joined the devil in his rebellion against God and died spiritually.

Instead of “did not comprehend it,” the margin of the NASB has “or *overpower* [it]”; the NKJV has, “and did not comprehend it”; the KJV has, “comprehended it not”; the NIV has, “has not understood it”; the *Amplified Bible* has, “has never overpowered it—put it out, or has not absorbed it, has not appropriated it, and is unreceptive to it.” It is clear that the darkness (speaking of mankind living in the darkness) did not understand/comprehend the light, and it is clear that the darkness (including Satan and his hosts) was not about to overpower or extinguish the light of God. But I believe the point that the apostle John was making here is that mankind (living in the darkness, which included following the devil in his rebellion and living in sin) did not receive the light that was made available to them/that shined on them—they rejected God and His light. Like the last words in the *Amplified Bible* say, “has not absorbed it, has not appropriated it, and is unreceptive to it.” Hendricksen translates, “did not appropriate it.” He points out the parallelism with the last words of verse 10, which he translates “the world did not acknowledge him,” and with the last words of verse 11, which he translates “his own did not welcome him.”<sup>11</sup>

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Isaiah 9:6 of my paper, *More on the Trinity*. All three papers are available on my internet site (karlkempteachingministries.com).

<sup>10</sup> William Hendricksen translates “but.” I’ll quote part of the footnote he has here (*Gospel of John* [Baker, 1953], page 73). “The fact that *kai* especially in the Fourth Gospel frequently means *but* or *and yet* is clear from such passages as [John] 7:19; 16:32; 20:29. Cf. also Matt. 7:23; Mark 4:16, 17; Luke 10:24; 13:17. ....”

<sup>11</sup> *Gospel of John*, pages 73, 74.

The light of God has been shining (to some extent) throughout the history of man, but mankind, for the most part, has rejected the light.<sup>12</sup> The most amazing thing is that even after the Word (God the Son) became a man (the God-man) and dwelled among us, most people still rejected Him and chose to remain with the darkness (cf., e.g., John 3:19, 20), which helps demonstrate how deep and serious the sin problem of man is, far more serious than most people realize.] **(6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John** [John the Baptist]. **(7) He came as a witness, to testify about the Light** [Since “the Light” clearly refers to the *Logos* (God the Son) in verses 8, 9, the Light undoubtedly refers to Him here in verse 7 too.], **so that all might believe through him.** [John the Baptist called for men to repent and submit to God and His unique Son (the Lamb of God and the Savior from sin), and all the more so in light of the fact that the day of judgment was (and very much is) at hand (cf., e.g., Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; 3:1-20; John 1:19-37; and 3:25-36).] **(8) He** [John the Baptist] **was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.** **(9) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.** [I can’t live with the translation of the NASB for this verse, or for the alternative translation given in the margin, “which enlightens every man coming into the world,” or for the translations of the KJV (“*That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that comes into the world.”); NKJV (“*That was* the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world.”). I’ll give a literal translation of the Greek that yields, I believe, the intended meaning (my translation is similar to the NIV, which I’ll quote here, “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”):

“The true Light, which shines on [The Greek verb (*phōtizō*) that I would translate “shines on” here is different than the verb (*phainō*) that was translated “shines” in verse 5, but I believe the meaning is the same.<sup>13</sup>] every man, was coming into the world.” The words “coming into the world” refer to the *true Light’s* coming to dwell among men through His incarnation. He was born of the virgin Mary and became the God-man. The first words of the next verse (verse 10) say, “He was in the world”; *He was in the world*, living as the God-man (one Person, two natures), from the time of His incarnation. Verse 14 shows how the true Light came into the world, “And the Word [God the Son, who always existed with God the Father] became flesh, and dwelt among us...”] **(10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him** [See John 1:3.], **and the**

<sup>12</sup> Some did receive and submit to the light of God in the days from Adam to Christ (like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and quite a few of the people of Israel, but typically not the majority of the people of Israel). The apostle Paul spoke of the sinfulness of the non-Christian Gentiles in these terms: “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” (Eph. 5:18, 19). Also see Rom. 1:18-32.

<sup>13</sup> The *Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* by Barclay M. Newman (United Bible Societies, 1971) has “give light to, light, shine on...” for *phōtizō*. I prefer “shines on” instead of *enlightens* or *gives light to* because, as we discussed under verse 5, those in the darkness rejected the light. The light shined on them (it was given to them, it was shed upon them), but they were not enlightened because they rejected the light and chose the darkness. It is rather common for writers, including the writers of the New Testament, to use different (Greek) words with the same meaning for variety. The apostle John does this quite often.

**world did not know** [Hendricksen translates, “did not acknowledge him.”<sup>14</sup>] **Him.** [The world (speaking of the majority of mankind) did not come to know Him after He came because, as verse 11 says, they “did not receive Him.” They rejected the Light and chose to remain with the darkness (the darkness of sin, Satan, and his kingdom—Satan is “the god of this world” [2 Cor. 4:4; cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11]). This doesn’t mean that every individual has rejected Him. Some individuals received and submitted to the light of God before the Word came into the world (see footnote 12), and, significantly, verse 12 speaks of those who have “received Him” as Savior and Lord in new-covenant salvation.] **(11) He came to His own** [The Greek more literally reads, “Unto His own things (or, “possessions”) He came.” “His own things/possessions” is a translation of the Greek *ta idia*, where *ta* is a *neuter* plural definite article and *idia* is a *neuter* plural adjective. Apparently John used the neuter here (even though the masculine form of the adjective was readily available, as we will see when we discuss the following words of this verse) to make the important point that the people to whom the Word came were part of that which had been created through Him. Having been created by God (the triune God), they owed Him their allegiance, and all the more so after the Word condescended to become a man (the God-man) and all the more so yet after He died for them. The NIV has, “He came to that which was His own, but his own did not receive him.”] **and those who were His own** [“His own” here is a translation of *hoi idioi*, where *hoi* is a *masculine* plural definite article and *idioi* is a *masculine* plural form of the same adjective that was used earlier in this verse. After making the point that the Word came to “His own things/possessions” with the first words of this verse by using a *neuter* plural form of this adjective, John switched over to a *masculine* plural form of this same adjective; the masculine was the typical gender used for people (unless the persons happened to be female).

Many believe “His own” and “those who were His own” is limited to the people of Israel.<sup>15</sup> It is true, of course, that God had a special relationship with the people of Israel and that they had a special obligation to submit to the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> I believe, however, that John was speaking of mankind worldwide here in verse 11, as he was in verses 4, 5, 9, 10, and 12. ] **did not receive Him.** [Mankind owed God (the triune God) everything, but they did not receive God the Son as Savior and Lord, even after He condescended to become a man and died for them as the Lamb of God. We can be very thankful that the story didn’t end with the sinful rejection spoken of in this verse. As John continues he shows that some (both Jews and Gentiles) did receive Him.] **(12) But as many as received Him** [They received Him by submitting to Him in repentance and faith.], **to them He gave the right to become children of God** [John is speaking here, as verse 13 shows, of becoming *born-again* children of God. The new birth wasn’t available under the old covenant because the sin, spiritual death, Satan, darkness problem that had existed since the fall of Adam and Eve wasn’t solved until God dethroned these enemies through the atoning death and resurrection of the Lamb of God. Being born again (or, born from above) by the Spirit of God is a major

<sup>14</sup> *Gospel of John*, pages 74, 79, 80.

<sup>15</sup> Some understand *ta idia* in the first part of this verse in the sense, “His own *home*,” with the Word coming to *His own home*, Israel. John 16:32 confirms that *ta idia* can be used of one’s *home/possessions*.

<sup>16</sup> The problem was that most of the people of Israel were far from God in the days that Jesus came. God’s message to Israel (including His message through John the Baptist) started with the need for them to repent (cf., e.g., Luke 13:1-5).



feature of new-covenant salvation (cf. John 3:1-8). The *Spirit of life* (the Holy Spirit) dwells in every true Christian from the time they become born-again Christians; He sets them free from the law of sin and death and enables them to live in the righteousness and holiness of God (see Rom. 8:1-17<sup>17</sup>; cf., e.g., Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 6:63; 7:37-39; Acts 2:33; Rom. 7:6; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 3:26; and 5:16-25).], **even to those who believe in His name** [“He who believes in Him is not judged [condemned]; he who does not believe has been judged [condemned] already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten [*unique, only one of His kind*] Son of God” (John 3:18). “This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ...” (1 John 3:23). “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). To believe in the name of “the unique Son of God,” “His Son Jesus Christ,” “the Son of God,” “the Word,” “the Light,” “the Lord Jesus Christ” means a whole lot more than giving mental assent to the existence of that Person. It includes being committed from the heart, in faith, to that Person, and to all that has been revealed about Him (His name includes all that has been revealed about Him). Furthermore, it is impossible to be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith without being committed to the One who sent Him and to the Spirit of God and the word of God, with some emphasis on the gospel of new covenant salvation.], **(13) who were born, not of blood** [“Lit. *bloods*.” The BAGD Greek Lexicon<sup>18</sup> (under *haima, haimatos*) lists this verse under the heading “blood as basic component of an organism,” and regarding John 1:13 says to be born of bloods means “owe one’s descent to the physical nature.” The NIV has, “children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will.”] **nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man,**<sup>19</sup> **but of God.** [Compare John 3:3-8; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23; and 1 John 2:29; 3:9. The primary point of this verse (verse 13) is that we become “children of God” (John 1:12) through a birth that comes from God (from heaven) and is wrought by Him (by the Spirit). It does not come from man in the flesh (from fallen man, from man separate from God in spiritual death), whether of/from “bloods,” of/from the “will of the flesh,” of/from the “will of man,” or from man any other way. I’ll quote a few sentences from what D. A. Carson says here.<sup>20</sup> “...they are born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God [using the NIV]. The prologue thus introduces us to the ‘new birth’ theme of ch. 3. ... ‘Natural descent’ (lit. ‘of bloods,’ i.e. a blood relationship, on the assumption that natural procreation involves the mixing of bloods) avails nothing – which means that heritage and race, even the Jewish race, are irrelevant to spiritual birth. ... Spiritual birth is not the product of sexual desire, ‘the will of the flesh,’ here rendered ‘of human decision’.... ....”] **(14) And the Word [Ho Logos; cf. John 1:1] became flesh, and dwelt among us** [Compare Matt. 1:1-25; Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-38; Rom. 1:3; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:7, 8; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 1:1, 2; 4:2; and 2 John 1:7. God hasn’t revealed all the details, but it is clear that God the Son became a man, but not just a man—He became the God-man. From the time of His incarnation, He was *one* Person with *two* natures,

<sup>17</sup> These verses are discussed on pages 116-123 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

<sup>18</sup> Third edition, 2000, page 26.

<sup>19</sup> The Greek noun behind “man” here (*anēr, andros*) is used for the “adult human male, man, husband” (BAGD Greek Lexicon, page 79). The word *flesh* in the preceding prepositional phrase (“the will of the flesh”) speaks of man in the flesh, including male and female.

<sup>20</sup> *Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), page 126.

divine and human. He temporarily set aside some of the prerogatives of deity and glory when He became a man (cf., e.g., John 17:1-5; Phil. 2:7, 8), but He never ceased being deity, and He will be worshipped forever with God the Father (cf., e.g., Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:11-14; 21:21, 22; 22:1-21). Jesus Christ was not spiritually dead, as all men have been since the fall, and, even though He was tempted, He never sinned (cf. Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16). Hebrews 4:16b speaks of His “[having been] tempted in all things as *we are, yet without sin.*”], **and we saw His glory** [Throughout His life on earth His glory was manifested to some extent, and especially after He was anointed by the Spirit to become the Anointed One/the Messiah/the Christ (cf. John 2:11, “This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory....”), through who He was and the things that He said and did. The apostles Peter, James, and John were privileged to see His glory in a special sense at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36; John 2:11; 2 Pet. 1:16-18; and 1 John 1:1, 2). Many, especially the apostles, saw His glory after He was resurrected.], **glory as of the only begotten from [unique Son/One of] the Father** [The KJV; NKJV also translate “the only begotten.” I don’t believe this translation communicates God’s intended meaning. Furthermore, this translation lends itself to serious misunderstanding. Some have understood these words in an unorthodox (heretical) way. They have understood these words to mean that there was a time when God the Son did not exist and that He was begotten by the Father before the world was created. But that is not what orthodox Christians have meant by the words *only begotten*. Orthodox Christians who have used these words have understood them to mean that God the Son has always existed with the Father, being *eternally* generated/begotten by the Father.

Although *eternal generation* can be understood in an orthodox way, I don’t believe it is a helpful idea or that God intended to reveal that doctrine to us. I believe that the note in the margin of the NASB points us in the right direction, “Or *unique, only one of His kind*” instead of “only begotten.” The NIV translates “the One and Only” and in the margin has, “Or *the Only Begotten*.” The translation “only Son,” which is acceptable, is common, including in the *New American Bible; Jerusalem Bible; NEB; and RSV*. One problem with the translation “only begotten Son” is that the New Testament teaches that we (all true Christians) have been *begotten* (born) of God (and that we are sons of God); John 1:13, for example, speaks of our being “born [Greek verb *gennaō*]...of God.” (Also see 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; and 5:1; these verses all use *gennaō*.) The angels are sons of God too (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; and 38:7).

The Greek adjective (*monogenēs*) should, I believe, be translated “unique One,” “unique Son” here, or the equivalent, not “only begotten.” The word for Son (*huios*) isn’t included with *monogenēs* in the Greek here, but both words are included in John 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9; and probably in John 1:18 (see under that verse). I’ll quote several paragraphs from what James Oliver Buswell says under the heading “The Meaning of ‘Only Begotten.’”<sup>21</sup> What he says here also applies to John 1:18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. “It seems that the church fathers of the fourth century, in the heat of the Arian

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<sup>21</sup> *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1 (Zondervan, 1963), pages 110, 111. Dr. Buswell was a founding theologian of Covenant Theological Seminary. I graduated from there.

controversy,<sup>22</sup> took this word as somehow connected with the root of the verb *gennaō*, which means generate or beget. Thus our English words, 'only begotten,' are derived from fourth century usage. When the orthodox church fathers were challenged by the Arians, who said that Christ was a created being and who pointed to the word *monogenēs* for their evidence, the orthodox fathers did not have the facilities to prove that the word has nothing to do with begetting, but they knew that in the light of other Scriptures, Christ was not created; 'There never was a time in which He was not.' They therefore accepted the word 'begotten' but added the words 'not created.'<sup>23</sup>

The notion that the Son was begotten by the Father in eternity past, not as an event, but as an inexplicable relationship [a relationship between the Father and the Son that has always existed], has been accepted and carried along in Christian theology since the fourth century. Charles Hodge, the greatest of systematic theologians, in discussing the historical doctrine of 'the eternal generations of the Son' takes this for granted. He says,<sup>24</sup> '...the Son is begotten of the Father; he is declared to be the only begotten Son of God. The relationship, therefore, of the Second Person to the First is that of filiation or Sonship. But what is meant of the term [only begotten], neither the Bible nor the ancient creeds explain.'

Careful lexicographical studies prove beyond a question that the word *monogenēs* is not derived from the root *gennaō*, to beget or generate, but is derived from *genos*, kind or class. The word therefore means 'in a class by himself,' 'the only one of his kind,' or in other words 'unique.' ... ..we can say with confidence that the Bible has nothing to say about 'begetting' as an eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. ...."

I'll also quote a footnote from Leon Morris that deals with this topic.<sup>25</sup> "It should not be overlooked that *monogenēs* is derived from *ginomai* not *gennaō* (one *n* not two). [I should point out that the Greek noun *genos*, which was mentioned in the preceding paragraph and is mentioned in the following quotation, was derived from the verb *ginomai*.] Etymologically it is not connected with begetting. See further the note by D. Moody, *BT*, 10, 1959, pp. 145-7." And I'll quote a sentence from Merrill C. Tenney.<sup>26</sup> "The 'one and only Son' represents the Greek *monogenēs*, which is derived from *genos*, which means 'literally "one of a kind," "only," "unique" (*unicus*), not "only-begotten." ...' (MM, pp. 416, 417)."

After writing the preceding paragraphs dealing with the meaning of *monogenēs*, I came across the newly published commentary titled *The Gospel of John* by Craig S. Keener (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2003). He has some four pages, with many footnotes, dealing with the meaning of this word. He is in essential agreement with what has been said above. I'll quote several sentences from what he says here (pages 412-416). "Commentators dispute the significance of *monogenēs*; some follow the traditional translation 'only begotten,'<sup>27</sup> whereas others object that this is not even a sound etymological

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<sup>22</sup> Buswell has a footnote, "Arianism, the doctrine that the Second Person of the Trinity was not eternal, but was the first and greatest of all created beings, was condemned by the councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381). Arius, for whom the movement was named, died 356 A.D."

<sup>23</sup> Apparently Buswell is referring (at least in part) to the wording of the Nicene Creed. I'll quote the key words of this creed from an appendix in the back of Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, page 1169. "I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made...."

<sup>24</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 468.

<sup>25</sup> *Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1971), page 105.

<sup>26</sup> *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9 (Zondervan, 1981), page 33.

<sup>27</sup> Keener has a footnote, "Dahms, 'Monogenēs.'"

reading of the term.<sup>28</sup> ‘Only Begotten’ fails the etymology test, as it would require a different word, *monogennētos*; *monogenēs* derives instead from a different root, *genos*, leading to the meaning ‘one of a kind.’<sup>29</sup> This observation hardly settles the Johannine sense of the term, since usage rather than etymology determines word meanings in practice; but further analysis confirms the conclusion based on the term’s derivation.

Many patristic writers read the term as ‘only begotten,’<sup>30</sup> but this may say more about second-century Christology than about the semantic presuppositions shared between John and his original audience. ‘Only’ is also a very old translation, appearing in some ancient versions<sup>31</sup> and some from the Reformation era.<sup>32</sup> ‘Only begotten’ came into vogue through church councils and the rendering of the Latin Vulgate.<sup>33</sup> Other writers contemporary with John clearly used *monogenēs* to indicate uniqueness rather than procreation; Plutarch, for instance.... Although the LXX [Septuagint; the Hebrew Old Testament translated to Greek] attests that the term applies well to an only child (Judg 11:34; Tob 3:15; 6:11; 8:17), it applies also to other unique things (Ps 21:21; 24:16; 34:17 LXX)....

[After continuing for four paragraphs, Keener concludes this discussion with the following paragraph:] Christians, like Israel, are called God’s children ([John] 1:10-12), but Jesus is the special Son, the ‘only one of his kind.’<sup>34</sup>”, **full of grace and truth** [See John 1:17; cf., e.g., Rom. 5:21; 6:14.]. **(15) John** [John the Baptist] **testified about Him** [cf. John 1:7] **and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me** [Jesus Christ came after John the Baptist in that He was born some six months after him (cf. Luke 1:36) and in that John’s ministry began earlier and prepared the way for His ministry.] **has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me** [cf. Matt. 3:11; John 1:27, 30].’ ” [These words show that John the Baptist understood quite a bit about the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 1:5-80, especially verses 27, 31-35, 41-43; John 1:19-36).] **(16) For of His fullness we have all received** [cf. Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:19; and 2:9], **and grace upon grace.** [Every aspect of new-covenant salvation that we receive in/through the Lord Jesus (which includes everything we could ever need now and forever, including truth, knowledge, wisdom, redemption, forgiveness, righteousness, holiness, provision for our daily needs in this world, glorification, having a place in God’s eternal kingdom, and reigning with Him and the Lord Jesus Christ forever) comes to us by the all-sufficient, super-abundant grace upon grace of God in Christ Jesus. We did not and could not earn/merit these things.] **(17) For the Law was given through Moses** [Jesus said, “Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?” (John 7:19)]; **grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.** [The Law, which was the foundation for the old covenant, was given through Moses. The Mosaic Law was from God, it was good, it

<sup>28</sup> “Cf., e.g., Manson, *Paul and John*, 133; Du Plessis, ‘Only Begotten’; Morris, *John*, 105; Roberts, ‘Only Begotten’; Pendrick, ‘Monogenēs’; cf. Westcott, *Epistles*, 169-172.”

<sup>29</sup> “Roberts, ‘Only Begotten,’ 4; also Harrison, ‘John 1:14,’ 32.”

<sup>30</sup> “Cf. Dahms....”

<sup>31</sup> “The Syriac, ca. 170 C.E.; Coptic, ca. 200 C.E.; Old Latin, late second century C.E. (Roberts, ‘Only Begotten,’ 3).”

<sup>32</sup> “Coverdale (1535) and Tyndale (1525), as against ‘only begotten’ in Wycliffe, Rheims, Genevan, Bishops, KJV, etc. (Roberts...2).”

<sup>33</sup> “[Roberts], 10-12.”

<sup>34</sup> “See Harris, *Jesus as God*, 84-87, also noting that the issue is not Jesus being ‘begotten’ but being the only one of his kind.”

was *true*, and some *grace* accompanied that covenant, but God didn't give the old covenant to solve the sin, spiritual death, darkness, Satan problem. God's plan, from before the foundation of the world (cf. 1 Peter 1:17-21), was to send His Son to die for our sins and to fully solve the sin, spiritual death, Satan, darkness problem. The all-sufficient grace of God in Christ—the “grace upon grace” spoken of in verse 17—avails to fully save us and to totally remove sin, spiritual death, darkness, Satan and all who continue to follow him in his rebellion against God from His kingdom forever. The Mosaic Law was *true*, but the full, complete *truth* was not manifested until Jesus Christ, who is *the truth*, was manifested. As verse 14 says, He was “full of grace and truth.” Compare John 8:32; 14:6; and 18:37.] **(18) No one has seen God at any time** [Compare Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16; and 1 John 4:12. No man has seen God the Father at any time, not in any full, direct sense. After we are glorified we will see Him as He is (cf. 1 John 3:2) and face to face (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4).]; **the only begotten** [The Greek behind “only begotten” is *monogenēs*, the adjective that we discussed in some detail under verse 14. Here, as in verse 14, I believe a meaning like “unique” was intended. The interpretation of this verse is complicated by the fact that many ancient Greek manuscripts have the word for “Son” (*huios*) following *monogenēs* instead of the word for “God” (*theos*). Quite a few translations have followed the Greek text that has the word for “Son,” including the KJV (“the only begotten Son”); the NKJV (“the only begotten Son”); the RSV (“the only Son”); the NEB (“God’s only Son”); and the *Jerusalem Bible* (“the only Son”). If the original reading was *monogenēs* followed by *huios* (and I favor this reading), I would translate “the unique Son” or the equivalent. The NIV has, “but God the One and only,” but in the margin has, “Some manuscripts *but the only* (or *only begotten*) Son.”

The United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*<sup>35</sup> gives a B rating to the word for “God” (instead of the word for “Son”) as the word that follows *monogenēs*. That rating means that they believe “there is some degree of doubt” regarding the reading “God,” but that it is the preferred reading. Bruce M. Metzger in *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, which is a companion volume for the *Greek New Testament* just mentioned, points out that “A majority of the Committee regarded the reading *monogenēs huios*, which undoubtedly is easier than *monogenēs theos*, to be the result of scribal assimilation to John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9.” All three of the verses just cited use *monogenēs* with *huios*. That fact demonstrates that it would be quite reasonable for these two words to be used together here in John 1:18 too, and, as I mentioned, I favor that viewpoint.

I'll quote part of what David J. Ellis says here.<sup>36</sup> “God is now seen in the incarnate Word, the only Son. There is a variant here, *viz.*, ‘God only-begotten,’ which is supported by a number of important manuscripts, and by some of the earliest patristic commentaries. It would be quite in accordance with what John elsewhere records concerning the deity of Christ (cf. [John 1:1-4;] 20:28; 1 John 5:20). [The words “the unique/only Son” fit the *deity* of Christ too, but His deity is more forcefully stated with the reading *theos*.] Yet acceptance of the usual reading [*huios*, instead of *theos*] seems preferable since this also accords well with John's

<sup>35</sup> Fourth revised edition, 1983.

<sup>36</sup> *New Layman's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1979), page 1302.

writing (cf. 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Christ dwells in the bosom of the Father, an expression denoting a relationship of love and perfect understanding.”

I’ll also quote part of what Frederick Louis Godet says here.<sup>37</sup> Godet’s comments are dated. He wrote this commentary more than a hundred years ago, and we have a lot more information available today regarding the ancient New Testament manuscripts and the art of textual criticism. But I believe he was right to opt for the reading “Son” instead of “God.” “As to internal reasons [By “internal reasons” Godet apparently speaks of “reasons” an ancient scribe could have had to change the reading *theos* (God) to the reading *huios* (Son) in an attempt to correct the manuscript he was working on.] stress may be laid upon its [*monogenēs theos*] unique and wholly strange character; for it is said to be more [probable<sup>38</sup>] that it should be replaced by the received reading [*monogenēs huios*], which has a more simple and common character, than that the contrary could have taken place. [In textual criticism the harder reading is to be favored. This does not mean, however, that the harder reading always represents the original reading.] But it may be asked whether a reading [*monogenēs theos*] which does not find its counterpart in any writing of the New Testament, and in any passage of John himself, does not become by reason of this fact very suspicious. To account for its [the reading *theos*] rejection it is enough that an explanation be given as to how it [the reading *theos*] may have originated and been introduced, and *Abbot* does this by reminding us how early readings like the following were originated: *the Logos-God*, which is found in the second century in Melito and Clement of Alexandria, and the epithet *theotokos, mother of God*, given to Mary. [There can be no doubting the fact that the early Christians felt a need to contend for the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. His deity is of crucial importance, and there was no shortage of those who fought against His deity from the beginning, including the non-Christian Jews. Such conflicts often lead to overreactions and overstatements (like some calling Mary the “mother of God”). We desperately need the balanced truth.] ... It would be difficult, on the other hand, to explain the dogmatic reason which could have substituted here the word *Son* for *God*. [That is, orthodox Christians would have been very reluctant to substitute the word *Son* for *God*, and especially in a day when the deity of Christ was being challenged.] ....”

It is possible that *God* (instead of *Son*) was the original reading (but I rather strongly favor the reading *Son*). If so I would understand this verse in the sense given by D. A. Carson and quite a few others.<sup>39</sup> “...the unique and beloved one (the term is *monogenēs*...), [himself] God, has made him known. That is probably the correct text [with the reading *God* instead of the *Son*]... What it means is that the beloved Son, the incarnate Word (1:14), himself God [“God” in the sense of deity, as in verse 1] while being *at the Father’s side* – just as in v. 1 the Word was simultaneously God [God the Son] and with God [with God the Father]...”] **God who is in the bosom** [*In the bosom of* is a Hebrew idiom expressing the

<sup>37</sup> *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Zondervan, 1969 reprint of the 1893 edition), page 281.

<sup>38</sup> The book has “improbable” but Godet undoubtedly meant “probable.”

<sup>39</sup> *Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), page 134. Bruce Metzger (*Textual Commentary*), in a footnote mentions four scholars who take this viewpoint. I’ll quote what Metzger says regarding this viewpoint, “Some modern commentators take *monogenēs* as a noun and punctuate so as to have three distinct designations of him who makes God known... [the three distinct designations are *monogenēs*, the word for *God*, and the words for *the One being in the bosom of the Father*].” George R. Beasley-Murray (*John* [Word, Inc., 1987] page 2) translates, “God no one has ever seen. The only Son, by nature God...”

intimate relationship of child and parent, and of friend and friend (cf. [John] 13:23."<sup>40</sup>) **of the Father, He has explained Him.** ["has made him known" NIV; "has revealed him" *New American Bible*. The Lord Jesus Christ was the perfect Person to reveal/make known God the Father (and the triune God). He was/is deity with the Father; He became a man (the God-man), which permitted Him to dwell with men and communicate with mankind in their dimension; He was anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit; He had the same attitudes, motives, and priorities as the Father, and He spoke the words that the Father wanted Him to speak and did the works the Father wanted Him to do (cf. e.g., John 5:19; 10:37, 38; 12:49; and 14:8-10).]

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<sup>40</sup> R. V. G. Tasker, *Gospel According to St. John* (Eerdmans, 1969), page 49.

## COLOSSIANS 1:15-29

Colossians 1:9-14, which are important verses on holiness and victory over sin and the kingdom of Satan, are discussed on pages 146-151 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

**(15)** [Many believe the apostle Paul was quoting a hymn that was already known in the Christian church in verses 15-20.] **He** [literally, “who” (referring to Christ Jesus)] **is the image of the invisible God** [“...Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4); “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...” (Heb. 1:3); “Phillip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Phillip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves’ ” (John 14:8-11).

Orthodox Christianity (based on what the Bible teaches) has always recognized that God the Son is not the same Person as God the Father (the Father sent His Son into the world; the Son talks to the Father and about the Father, and vice versa; the Son went back to the Father and sits at His right hand; both Persons are on the throne in new Jerusalem; etc.), but the two Persons (three Persons with the Holy Spirit; one God, three Persons, the Trinity) are united in a way that the Bible can speak of *one* God (not *three* Gods).<sup>41</sup> See my four subsequent papers on this topic, *More on the Trinity; Who Do We*

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<sup>41</sup> When the Old Testament spoke of God being *one*, as it did, for example, in Deut. 6:4, “Hear, O Israel! the LORD [*Yahweh*] is our God, the LORD is one!” there was no contradiction with the subsequent revelation regarding the three Persons of the Trinity. As the margin of the NIV shows, the last words of this verse could also be translated, “The LORD alone.” The NRSV has, “Hear O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone”; the NAB is essentially the same, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone”; and the *Amplified Bible* is similar, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord—the only Lord.”

The intent in Deut. 6:4 (as in Deut. 4:39, for example, “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD [*Yahweh*], He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other”) was to claim that the God of Israel (the God of creation, the God who revealed Himself to Abraham, the God of the Holy Scriptures) is the only One who really is God (He alone is God), thereby denying polytheism. All of the peoples that ancient Israel interacted with believed in many gods. The other nations did not especially appreciate being told that the God of Israel is the only real God, but it was the truth, and it was very important for Israel to cling to that truth, and for the nations to learn that truth. All too often though many Israelites joined the Gentiles in worshipping the gods of the nations, but not because they hadn’t been taught and warned.

I’ll quote a sentence from what J. A. Thompson says under Deut. 6:4, “The word ‘one’ or ‘alone’ implies monotheism, even if it does not state it with all the subtleties of theological formulation” (*Deuteronomy* [Inter-Varsity Press, 1974], pages 121, 122). I’ll also quote what A. D. H. Mayes says to substantiate the translation “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone,” “for this sense of *’ehad*, cf. Isa. 51:2; Ezek. 33:24;...Zech. 14:9; 1 Chron. 29:1” (*Deuteronomy* [Eerdmans, 1991 reprint], page 176). I’ll quote a few sentences from what Earl S. Calland says here to show that this Hebrew word (*’echad*) was sometimes used for a *oneness* that consisted of more than one part. “To the Jews v. 4 is not only an assertion of monotheism, it is also an assertion of the numerical oneness of God contradictory to the Christian view of the Trinity of the Godhead. This kind of oneness, however, runs contrary to the use of



*Worship?; Who Do We Pray To?; and The Name Yahweh and God the Father and God the Son.* They are all available on my internet site (Google to Karl Kemp Teaching).

See pages 13-16 of my paper *More on the Trinity* for a fuller discussion on Deut. 6:4, which is one of the verses most often used by those who hold a oneness view of God and deny the Trinity, than I gave in footnote 41. I'll quote part of a sentence from that I said there, I believe that "the proper way to understand Deut. 6:4 (the way intended by the ultimate Author of the Bible) is to see that the name Yahweh refers to God the Father, as it typically does throughout the Old Testament, not to the Trinity, even as the word "God" typically refers to God the Father throughout the New Testament." But it is very significant that the name Yahweh is used for God the Son in the Old Testament several times, even as the word God is used for God the Son in the New Testament several times, demonstrating His deity. I also mentioned that God's revelation is progressive, and the Old Testament was written before God wanted to fully reveal the Person of God the Son and the Trinity.

We don't have to understand all the details to accept the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. (How could we understand all the details about God when He hasn't revealed them to us and when we are dealing with details from a dimension far above our present dimension.) God the Son became a man, but He was much more than just a man; He never ceased being deity; He was the God-man; He was not spiritually dead; and He never sinned.

The Lord Jesus Christ clearly manifested (as an *image*) God the Father and His nature (what He was like) through being who He was (the God-man) and through saying the things that He said and doing the things that He did., **the firstborn of all creation** [I prefer the NIV's "the firstborn over all creation."]. [Many (including the Jehovah's Witnesses) have appealed to these words ("the firstborn of all creation") to argue that Jesus Christ is not deity, that He was only the *first* being to be *born* of (created by) God.<sup>42</sup> Orthodox Christianity has always agreed that that doctrine is heresy, a serious deviation from the balanced truth taught by the Bible. If He had been created, He would not be deity/God. There are many verses in the Bible that clearly show that God the Son is deity, an *uncreated* Being, who always existed with God the Father, and through whom all things were created (cf., e.g., Isa. 9:6; John 1:1-18; 20:28; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:2, 3; and there are many more such verses).<sup>43</sup>

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*'echad* in the sense of a unity made up of several parts. In Exod. 25:6, 11, the fifty gold clasps are used to hold the curtains together so that the tent would be a unit (*'echad*). ..." (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 3 [Zondervan, 1992], page 65).

<sup>42</sup> Some orthodox Christians (especially in the past) and some translations of the New Testament (including the NASB, KJV, and the NKJV) refer to God the Son as the "only begotten [Son]" in John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9 (also compare John 1:18), but (as it is discussed in some detail in this paper under John 1:14) those Christians did not mean to communicate the idea that there was a time that God the Son did not exist; they believed that He eternally existed, being eternally generated by the Father. As we discussed in some detail under John 1:14, the most common view in our day (which is reflected in the newer translations of the New Testament, including the NIV, NEB, RSV, the *New American Bible*, and the *Jerusalem Bible*) is that the Greek adjective translated "only begotten" should be translated "one of a kind/unique" or the equivalent.

<sup>43</sup> The deity of Christ and the distinction between Him (God the Son) and God the Father is discussed in the study of Isaiah 9:1-7 in my paper on selected eschatological prophecies from the book of Isaiah (see under Isa. 9:6 and the two-page discussion located at the end of that chapter). Also see the discussion on

It is not difficult to interpret these words (“the firstborn [over] all creation”) in a way that fits the biblical doctrine of the deity of Christ and that fits a biblical use of the word *firstborn*. The word *firstborn*, like many words in the Bible, is sometimes used in a figurative (non-literal) sense. Consider Ex. 4:22, for example, “Then you [Moses] shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD [Yahweh], Israel is My son, My firstborn.’” It is clear that the nation Israel was not *born first* (did not exist first) in any literal sense. What God was saying here was that He had a special relationship with Israel vis-a-vis His relationship with the other nations, very much including Pharaoh’s Egypt. Israel enjoyed a privileged relationship with God, like the privileged relationship of the *firstborn* son in his family in the ancient world. God was telling Pharaoh that he had better hasten to free Israel from bondage to Egypt and let His people go—Israel was very special to Him.

There are two comparable uses of the word *firstborn* in the Old Testament, uses where there is no idea whatsoever of someone literally being *born first* (Psalm 89:27; Jer. 31:9). Also, there is an important and interesting figurative use of the word *firstborn* in Heb. 12:23. I’ll quote Heb. 12:22-24, “But you [speaking to born-again Christians, and contrasting the glory of the new covenant with the old covenant given at Mt. Sinai] have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, (23) and to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect,<sup>44</sup> (24) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel [the blood of Abel cried for vengeance (Gen. 4:8-15); the blood of Christ brings full salvation to those who submit to the gospel in faith.]” The Greek word translated *firstborn* in Heb. 12:23 is plural, as is the participle that follows this word and is tied to this word, “who are enrolled [in heaven].” The *firstborn* ones here are new-covenant believers (Christians). They were not *born first* in any literal sense, but they enjoy the privileged status of being *firstborn* sons of God (through union with, and salvation in, the Lord Jesus Christ).

When the apostle Paul called Jesus Christ “the firstborn [over] all creation” here in Col. 1:15, he did not mean to communicate the idea that the Son was a created being or that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist. He was simply saying, using figurative language, that Jesus Christ has the privileged status of being the firstborn Son over all creation. As the apostle continues in verses 16, 17 (and he has already informed us that Christ “is the image of the invisible God”), he gives something of the basis for the fact that Christ can be called “the firstborn [over] all creation,” including the facts that all things that have ever been created have been created by/through Him and for Him and that He is head over (has authority over) all things that have been created. Note that verse 16 starts with the word “for.”] **(16) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.** [On all things being created by/through the Son of God, see under John 1:3 in this paper. Some of the *thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities, both visible and*

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the deity of Christ in the book of Revelation under Rev. 21:6 in my paper on Revelation chapters 20-22. Both papers are located on my internet site (karlkempteachingministries.com).

<sup>44</sup> These words at the end of verse 23 are discussed on pages 166, 167 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.

*invisible*, in God’s universe, are evil (being headed up by Satan; compare, for example, Col. 2:15), but it is important for us to know that they were not created evil (Satan rebelled through pride and many have followed him in his rebellion against God), and it is important to know that all evil beings/persons (which includes that part of mankind that does not repent) will ultimately be subjugated and removed from God’s kingdom through the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ (see under Col. 1:20).] **(17) He is before all things** [In that “all things have been created through Him,” it is clear that He existed *before* all things that were created. But Paul undoubtedly intended to say more than that here. The Greek preposition (*pro*) translated “before” here was sometimes used in the sense of *before* in status or position, which fits Christ perfectly and fits this context perfectly.], **and in Him all things hold together** [“consist” KJV; NKJV]. [All things that were created *consist* and *hold together* in an organized way in Christ—in divine order, including the laws of physics and chemistry. If not for the entrance of sin, everything would still be in divine order. After God has finished His work of saving, glorifying, and judging, His universe will be perfect (all evil will have been removed and cast into the lake of fire).] **(18) He is also head of the body, the church** [In the preceding verses (verses 15-17), the apostle has shown (using different words) that Christ is the *head* over all creation. Here he shows that Christ is also head (head in a very special sense) over the church, the body of Christ.]; **and He is the beginning** [Christ is the *beginning* of the Christian church in the sense that the church (in a very special sense) has its *origin* in Him. As we have seen in the preceding verses, all things that exist originated in Him (cf. Rev. 3:14).], **the firstborn from [“out from”] the dead** [“from among the dead” NIV. As in Rev. 1:5, these words mean that Christ was the first man (though He was much more than just a man) to leave physical death behind and to be born into the fullness of eternal life. We (all believers, those who have died and those still living on the earth at the time of Christ’s return) will follow Him in that birth when He returns.<sup>45</sup> Christ is called “the firstborn among many brethren” in Rom. 8:29. After we have been born into the fullness of eternal life, we will have “become conformed to the image [of Christ]” (Rom. 8:29). We will not, of course, become deity or be worshipped with God the Son, but we will be glorified and reign with Him forever.], **so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything** [“so that in everything he may have the supremacy” NIV; “that in all things He may have the preeminence” NKJV]. **(19) For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him** [“in Christ.” Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him [in Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” Compare John 1:16. As the apostle will discuss in some detail in Colossians chapter 2, everything that we could ever need forever has been provided through new-covenant salvation in union with Christ Jesus. We do not have to look elsewhere (for example, to angels, men, the flesh, or to religious works that have not been prescribed in the new covenant, very much including the ceremonial works of the old covenant. As a matter of fact, for us to look elsewhere is to insult God and His new-covenant plan of salvation and for us to ensure that we will not receive everything that we need (that is, if we look somewhere else than to Christ and the full salvation that has been provided in Him). Here in verse 19, however, in this context with verse 20, the emphasis is on the

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<sup>45</sup> I have discussed this glorious birth for the saints extensively in my eschatological writings. Start with Rev. 12:5 in my book, *The Mid-Week Rapture* (chapter 21).

fact that Christ has everything He needs<sup>46</sup> (being the God the Son, and the God-man who has fully solved the sin, Satan, spiritual death problem in His atoning death, resurrection, and ascension) to restore peace and divine order to God's universe, including His glorifying His people and the creation itself and His judging and removing all unrepentant rebels.], **(20) and through Him [Christ] to reconcile all things to Himself** [The translation *reconcile* is a common translation for the Greek verb used here, but this translation is easily misunderstood, and some have understood this verse in a heretical way. They have come up with the doctrine of the *ultimate reconciliation of all things*. Those who hold that doctrine insist that eventually all people and all other fallen beings, even the devil, will be reconciled to God; they will be reconciled to God in the sense that they will repent, be saved, and have a place in His eternal kingdom. (Some don't go beyond speaking of the reconciliation of all people, and some allow for the possible loss of a small percentage of people.)

That doctrine is based on a wrong interpretation of this verse (and they typically use a few other verses too<sup>47</sup>) that contradicts a rather large number of verses that are quite clear on the point that the devil and those who follow him (including a large number of mankind) will have their eternal destiny in the lake of fire—and that isn't salvation (e.g., Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8; and 22:15).

What Paul meant here is that all things will be *reconciled* to God, one way, or another. Those among mankind<sup>48</sup> who will be saved (the elect) will be *reconciled* to God through repenting and submitting in faith to His salvation, to His lordship, and to His divine order. Those who continue in rebellion against God, without repentance (the devil, fallen angels, demons, and a large number of people), will be *reconciled* to God through being subdued (cf. Col. 2:15; Phil. 2:10, 11), judged, and removed from God's kingdom forever, which will establish *peace* in His universe/kingdom. There will be *peace* in the sense that the rebellion, strife, and warfare will be brought to an end; there will be no place for these things in God's ultimate kingdom. Note the word *peace* as this verse continues.

This verse goes on to show that *peace* will be established through Christ on the basis of His atoning death. The Bible makes it quite clear that Satan and his followers are overthrown through Christ and His atoning death (cf., e.g., John 12:31-33; 16:11; and Heb. 2:5-14<sup>49</sup>). For one thing, Satan gained authority over man through the sin of Adam,<sup>50</sup> but Christ took away that authority by bearing the sin of Adam and his offspring with the guilt and penalties (including the major penalties of spiritual death and the bondage to sin that comes with spiritual death [see Romans chapter 5, for example, which is discussed in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin: Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*]). He gives new-covenant believers spiritual life and makes them righteous and holy (cf., e.g., Romans chapters 6 and 8;

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<sup>46</sup> For one thing, everything that the triune God has is available to Him (cf., e.g., Col. 2:9).

<sup>47</sup> Ephesians 1:10 is another key verse (written by the apostle Paul) that is often used in a distorted way to come up with the doctrine of the ultimate reconciliation of all beings. That verse is discussed in my paper that includes a verse-by-verse study of Ephesians chapter 1.

<sup>48</sup> The Bible does not speak of the devil, evil angels, or demons ever repenting and being saved; it speaks quite clearly of their being cast into the eternal lake of fire.

<sup>49</sup> Hebrews 2:5-14 are discussed under the verse-by-verse discussion of Psalm 8 in my paper on selected eschatological psalms.

<sup>50</sup> The sin of Adam's offspring has intensified the problem.

Col. 1:9-14 [these three super-important passages are discussed in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*; 2:13-15).], [to God the Father] **having made peace through the blood of His [Christ's] cross; through Him [through Christ], I say whether things on earth or things in heaven.** [I would translate “in the heavenly places” here or “in the heavens.”<sup>51</sup> In the margin the NASB says, “Lit [in] *the heavens*.” The NAB has “in the heavens.” The Greek here is exactly the same as the Greek in verse 16, which the NASB translated “in the heavens.” We often use the word “heaven” of the place where God’s throne is, but “the things in the heavens/heavenly places” spoken of here include Satan and his hosts in the spiritual dimension.] **(21)** [Colossians 1:21-23 are discussed in more detail on pages 186-190 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.] **And although you were formerly alienated** [The apostle is addressing Gentile Christians. They had (before they became Christians) been alienated from God through sin, and they, unlike the Jews, did not have a saving covenant with God. The apostle discusses this alienation from God and from His covenant people in Eph. 2:11-22.] **and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds** [These Gentiles (speaking of the time before they were saved from sin and spiritual death through faith in Christ) had been “hostile in mind.” They had been hostile in their thinking against God and the laws of God, and this hostility had been manifested in their sinful living, having been “engaged in evil deeds [works].” (Wrong thinking always leads to wrong living. The way we think in our hearts makes all the difference.) Part of the problem, of course, was that they had been under the influence of the god of this world and his demons (cf., e.g., Eph. 2:1-3), and they had been taught about many gods, but still they were responsible before God—they were without excuse for their sin (cf., e.g., Rom. 1:18-32), and especially after He sent the gospel to them.

I have observed over the years that most Christians, even including most ministers, do not have an adequate understanding of the word *mind* as it is typically used in the Bible, including here in Col. 1:21. They typically limit the mind to the head, and many ministers point to their head when they mention the mind. It is true that we think with our heads, but it is also true that our most important thinking takes place in our hearts/spirits, and especially when it comes to our thoughts about God and our priorities, attitudes, and motives. When the apostle spoke of being *hostile in mind* here he was definitely including the *thinking* that we do in our hearts/spirits. A major aspect of our salvation in Christ is that God renews our minds (that is He renews our minds to the extent we submit to Him and His Word through faith)—He enables us by the Holy Spirit to think right in our hearts/spirits and to live right (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:1-9; 12:1, 2; and Eph. 4:17-24).<sup>52</sup>], **(22) yet He** [I agree with the widespread viewpoint that “He” here refers to God the Father. For one thing, the context with verses 19, 20 strongly favors this viewpoint.] **has now reconciled you in His fleshly body** [The Greek here should be translated something like, “by the body of His [Christ's] flesh.” The NIV has, “by Christ’s physical body.”] **through death** [In other words, God the Father has reconciled us (He has saved us) through the atoning death of His Son, the Lamb of God. Romans 5:10 says, “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through

<sup>51</sup> The Greek has the noun for *heaven* in a plural form, and it has the definite article (similar to our “the”) with this noun.

<sup>52</sup> See pages 116-120, 138, 139 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* on these verses from Romans, and see on Eph. 4:17-24 in my paper that includes a verse-by-verse study Ephesians chapter 4.

the death of His Son...”], **in order to present you before Him** [Himself] **holy and blameless and beyond reproach** [Paul is speaking here of our being *presented* before God at the end of this age (cf., e.g., Col. 1:28; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23; and Jude 1:24).<sup>53</sup> We must be ready for that day of judgment, so we can be found “before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.” For all such people the day of judgment will be a great blessing.

Paul was not speaking here of our gradually being made *holy and blameless and beyond reproach* (of a lifelong sanctifying process) as so many think he was (though it is true that we must continue to grow more like the Lord Jesus Christ; cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18). Nor was he speaking of our being made *holy and blameless and beyond reproach* by a transformation at the end (though it is true that all true Christians will be glorified at that time). As Paul continues he shows that he is speaking here in verse 22 of Christians being *holy and blameless and beyond reproach now*, and of our maintaining that status until the end of our lives, or until Jesus returns.

The New Testament is full of passages like the following one from the apostle Paul that confirm what I said in the last paragraph, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; (15) so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (16) holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ [when we will be presented before God] I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain” (Phil. 2:14-16). Paul would have *toiled in vain* (in one sense) if the Philippian Christians had all backsliden (which wasn’t about to happen) and were not ready to stand before God in judgment at the end. (Actually Paul would not have *toiled in vain* in a personal sense, even if all the Philippian Christians had backsliden, as long as he had faithfully fulfilled his ministry before God.)

I’ll also quote Phil. 2:12, 13 (the two verses that come just before the three verses just quoted), “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.” As these verses show, we have our part to play. God does not make us get saved, or make us stay saved; He does not make us get holy, or make us stay holy—we must *work out our salvation with fear and trembling* through faith. The *fear and trembling* go with fearing to sin against God, knowing that we will sin if we do not continually appropriate and cooperate with His sufficient grace through faith. The Bible, from the beginning to the

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<sup>53</sup> 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13 are discussed on pages 183-185 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*; 1 Thess. 5:23 on pages 178, 179; and Jude 1:24 in endnote 5 on pages 217, 218 of that book. All three passages are extremely important to help us see the apostle Paul’s viewpoint here in Col. 1:21-23, especially 1 Thess. 3:10-13 and 5:23, in that these verses were also written by Paul. The discussions of all three passages are part of the last chapter of my book, “Holiness and Victory Over Sin.” The entire content of that lengthy chapter (pages 169-219) is relevant to the interpretation of Col. 1:21-23. Colossians 1:21-23 are discussed there too, on pages 186-190.

I consider the teaching of that chapter to be extremely important, along with the corroborating content of much of the rest of the book that helps confirm the good-news viewpoint that God really has called and enabled us to be holy and have the victory over sin now. I am sorry to say that most Christians do not agree with this viewpoint. The two most common interpretations for passages like Col. 1:21-23 are that we will finally be holy at the end of the race, after we die, and especially after we are glorified, or that we are holy now, but only in a legal, positional sense, not that we do (or even can) stop sinning until after we are glorified.

end, teaches that we must fear sinning against God. Philippians 2:13 makes it quite clear that we are totally dependent on God's grace, but that does not mean that we don't have a role to play in His salvation plan (as confirmed by Phil. 2:12, 14-16 and a very large number of other verses in the Bible). *Faith* is the most important word used in the New Testament to describe *our* role (what God requires of us). *Repentance* is another key word.

Paul wasn't naive. He knew that there were many born-again Christians (including some at Colossae) who, for one reason or another, had never become *holy and blameless and beyond reproach* (or who had fallen from that state), but he also knew that being *holy and blameless and beyond reproach* was God's will for every Christian and that His grace was sufficient through the blood of Christ and by the mighty indwelling Holy Spirit. This is good news, very good news! It is God's will that we be sanctified/transformed! To all the Christians who were not living in the center of God's will, Paul's message was get *holy now* with top priority (by God's grace in Christ) and then stay holy until the end (by God's grace in Christ).

I'll quote a paragraph from what I said on the meaning of these words in Col. 1:22 in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (page 188), "holy [*hagios*] and blameless [*amōmos*]. These words are also used together in Eph. 1:4 and 5:27. I believe these words are used in Eph. 1:4 and 5:27 with the sense that Christians are enabled to be (and are required to be) holy and blameless (basically) from the time of conversion – this is the Christian ideal. (See the discussion of Eph. 5:27 under *hagiazō* [the Greek verb that is translated *sanctify/make holy*] earlier in this chapter. Ephesians 1:4 is discussed under Eph. 5:27.) The viewpoint of Col. 1:22, 23 is essentially the same as Eph. 1:4 and 5:27. It is assumed that the readers are holy and blameless; but here in Col. 1:22, 23 the apostle emphasizes the need for his readers to maintain this state (by the grace of God) until the day of judgment. Then they will be presented before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach. (Cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23; Jude 1:24.)"

I have learned over the years that most Christians do not think it is possible for Christians to live in a state of holiness or that God actually calls us to such a walk in the New Testament (most believe, for one thing, that there are quite a few verses in the New Testament that teach that it is impossible for Christians to stop sinning as long as we still live in this world), but to me it is clear that they are wrong. These things are discussed in some detail throughout *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and in many of my papers. Again, let say that what I am sharing is *good* news, *very good* news!

We do not have to continue sinning; we are not supposed to continue sinning. But holiness and victory over sin are far from being automatic, and the warfare against us is intense; we need all the enabling grace that God has made available to us. We still have the all-to-real potential to sin; the old man/the flesh still wants to manifest itself in sin; and the world and the devil and his demons are committed to facilitate our sinning if we leave any room for them whatsoever.

Holiness and victory over sin come by the grace of God in Christ *through faith*. One major problem is that most Christians do not have faith that it is possible to stop sinning. I am not speculating; they will tell you that they don't believe that it is possible for them to stop sinning. As I mentioned, many (large numbers) do not even believe that the Bible teaches that God has called us to stop sinning, or has provided the grace for us to stop sinning, or expects us to stop sinning.

Something is terribly wrong where Christians are not even trying to stop sinning, and we have a lot of that in our day. The message of the gospel isn't sin, get forgiven, and then go sin some more. I'm not saying that Christians lose their salvation if they commit a sin, but we must be quick to repent; one sin *is* a big deal! My primary goal is to help Christians see that the Bible teaches that God hates sin and He sacrificed His Son for us so that we could and would make it a top priority to live in the righteousness and holiness of God and stop sinning. "He Himself bore our sins [with the guilt and the penalties] in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin [stop sinning] and live to righteousness..." (1 Pet. 2:24).

We don't need more condemnation in the body of Christ, but we do need the commitment of faith (faith based on what the New Testament actually teaches) to be set apart (holy) for God and live for Him by His grace, in accordance with His revealed will. The warfare against holiness is intense, but God is a Mighty God; He is good; and His sanctifying grace is sufficient for those who make it top priority to learn about and then appropriate and cooperate with that grace (which includes all the work of His Spirit) through faith.]—**(23) if indeed you continue in the faith** [To continue in the faith (in Christianity) includes continuing in the truth of the gospel (correct doctrine) by faith and continuing in the holy and righteous lifestyle provided and required by the gospel by faith.] **firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel** [I'll quote a few sentences from what I said in my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (page 189). "The hope of the gospel speaks of the glory that all true Christians will begin to share at the time of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf., e.g., Col. 1:5, 27; 3:4; Rom. 5:2; 8:17-25. Colossians 1:5 says: 'because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel.) To 'continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast' is to 'not [be] moved away from the hope of the gospel.' Those who do not continue in the faith forfeit the hope of the gospel."] **that you have heard** [The apostle knew, as he mentioned in this epistle, that some of the Colossian Christians were being tempted to waver from a *firmly established and steadfast state*, to waver on the basics of the gospel, but he wrote here from the point of view that the Colossian Christians were *firmly established and steadfast*. I'll quote a paragraph from *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (pages 187, 188) to demonstrate that Paul wrote from that general viewpoint. "The Christians at Colossae were no longer 'alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds' (Col. 1:21). They had been renewed in mind and were now engaged in righteous deeds. The old man had been buried (Col. 2:11, 12), and they had 'laid aside the old self [man] with its *evil* practices' (Col. 3:9). They had been made alive together with Christ (Col. 2:12, 13), and they had 'put on the new (man), which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him' (Col. 3:10 KJV). Colossians 2:5-7 NKJV says: 'For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. (6) As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, (7) rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.' Colossians 4:12 says: 'Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondsman of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.' As the apostle continues in Col. 1:22, he writes from the viewpoint that the Colossian Christians are already 'holy and blameless and beyond reproach,' and in Col. 1:23 he writes from the viewpoint that they are 'firmly established and steadfast' in the faith. Other statements by the apostle in this epistle show, however, that he was being somewhat generous in saying these things. (Cf., e.g., Col. 1:9-11, 28, 29; 2:1-4, 16-23; 3:1-4; 4:13.) He knew, for one thing, that some false teaching had been accepted



by some at Colossae.”], **which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (24) Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake** [Paul did not enjoy suffering, but he could rejoice in his sufferings that came with his commission to take the gospel to the world, because he knew that he was doing the will of God and that his ministry was bringing great blessing to a large number of people, especially the Gentiles who were becoming Christians, in that he was the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7, 8). He also knew that his faithfulness would be rewarded.], **and in my flesh** [The words “in my flesh” here mean in my existence with a physical body in this present world. He accomplished what he did in/by the Spirit, not in/by the flesh.] **I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.** [It must be understood that Christ’s atoning work stands complete; nothing that the apostle Paul, or anybody else, could do was/is needed to complete that all-important work. But it is also true that Christ had shown Paul that his apostolic ministry, as he took the gospel to the world, which was a necessary part of the outworking of God’s plan of salvation, would involve much suffering for Paul (cf., e.g., Acts 9:15, 16; 20:17-24; 21:11-13; 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23-27; 2 Tim. 1:8; and 2:9, 10). Also, the *afflictions* that the apostle Paul bore (and not just Paul’s) can be called “Christ’s afflictions” in that Paul was sent by Christ, in that the hatred of Satan and the world against Paul was a manifestation of their hatred against Christ (cf., e.g., Matt. 10:24, 25; John 15:18-21; 17:14), and in that Christ Himself is afflicted when His people are afflicted (cf. Acts 9:4, 5). The New Testament makes it clear that all true Christians, and not just ministers, will know some suffering through spiritual warfare, persecution, etc. (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:17, 18).] **(25) Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God** [cf. Eph. 3:2] **bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of** [“So that I might fully carry out the *preaching of*” is all one word in the Greek (an aorist infinitive of the verb *plēroō*). The NIV has, “to present to you the word of God in its fullness”; the NKJV has, “to fulfill the word of God.” Romans 15:19 is an important cross-reference; it will help us understand the meaning of the verb here. I’ll quote Rom. 15:18-20, “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, (19) in the power of signs and wonders in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached [These words are a translation of a perfect infinitive of the verb *plēroō*. The NKJV also has “I have fully preached” in Rom. 15:19, and the NIV has “I have fully proclaimed.”] the gospel of Christ. (20) And thus I aspired to preach the gospel....”

The use of this verb in the context of Rom. 15:18-20 strongly suggests that it means something more than *fully preaching/proclaiming* the gospel. This verb seems to cover Paul’s *fulfilling* his apostolic ministry as he took the gospel to the world, including his using the apostolic authority and power and the charismatic gifts that came with the stewardship committed to him. I believe *plēroō* is used in the same full sense here in Col. 1:25. We could translate something like, “so that I might fully carry out *the ministry* of the word of God *assigned to me by God.*”] **the word of God** [referring to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ], **(26) that is, the mystery which has been hidden [in God] from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints**

[“Saints” is a translation of the Greek adjective *hagios* (in a plural form). The NASB translates *hagios* as follows in the New Testament: Holy (92 times), holy (62), Holy of Holies (1), holy one (5), holy ones (1), holy place (7), most holy (1), saint (1), saints (59), saints’ (1), and sanctuary (2). For Christians to be *saints* (and all Christians are called to be saints) means that they are *holy*; they are *set apart* from sin and Satan for God. To the extent they are not set apart from sin and Satan for God, they are not holy/saints. We need to make it a top priority to become holy in a full sense and then to abide in that state (through God’s sufficient grace in Christ by faith).

The apostle uses the word *mystery* in verses 26, 27. He goes on to show what he means by this word here, and there are several other passages that add to our understanding of the meaning of this word (see Rom. 16:25-27; Eph. 1:3-14<sup>54</sup>; 3:1-13; Col. 2:2, 3; and 4:3). Verses 26, 27 show that Christians can and should know and understand this *mystery* because it has been revealed to Christians. It is called a *mystery* because it *was hidden* in God in times past, not because it is hidden now; these things were not revealed in the Old Testament, but it permitted glimpses into the riches of the glory of God’s salvation plans for the world that centered in the Lord Jesus Christ.], **(27) to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory** [cf. Eph. 1:18; 3:16] **of this mystery among the Gentiles** [A major feature of this *mystery* that has now been revealed (especially through the apostle Paul) is that God purposed to fully include Gentiles (all who submit to the gospel in faith) in His salvation plans for true Israel. This fact was, of course, very relevant for the initial recipients of Paul’s epistle (letter) to the Colossians, who were (at least for the most part) *Gentiles*.], **which is Christ in you** [Every true Christian is literally united with the Lord Jesus Christ (and with God the Father through Christ), and He dwells in us through the Holy Spirit (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:9, 10).], **the hope of glory**. [Those in whom Christ dwells have “the hope of glory,” which means that they have the *hope* of inheriting eternal *glory* when Christ returns at the end of this age. Unlike the way the word *hope* is used in English, the word *hope* here does not mean *I think it may happen*. The *hope* (the thing we are hoping for) is still future, but there is no doubt about our being glorified and inheriting eternal glory at the right time (God’s time). The only thing required of us is to make sure that we continue to abide in Christ through faith. If we turn our backs on Him and our covenant (not a good idea!), we forfeit eternal glory.<sup>55</sup>] **(28) We proclaim Him** [Christ], **admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete** [The KJV, NKJV, and NIV have *perfect* here, instead of *complete*. I prefer *perfect*, but we must understand what this word means here, and what it does not mean (see below).] **in Christ**. [Christ died for all mankind, and all are called to repent and submit to Him in faith (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4-6). But Paul spent most of his time dealing with those who were open to the gospel (the elect), who submitted to Christ in faith. Paul exhorted and *admonished* all people to repent and submit to Christ in the light of the fact that the day of judgment is at hand (e.g., Acts 17:30, 31), but most of his exhorting and *admonishing* was directed to Christians who needed to repent and begin to fully walk after the Spirit through faith (setting aside fleshiness and worldliness) thereby becoming *holy and blameless and beyond reproach*. Many of Paul’s epistles are filled with such exhortations and *admonishments*.

<sup>54</sup> Ephesians chapter 1 is discussed in a verse-by-verse manner in a paper on my internet site.

<sup>55</sup> See my paper *Once Saved, Always Saved?*

This verse speaks of the same all-important *presentation* before God at the end of this age that was spoken of in verse 22. In that verse Paul spoke of our being presented *holy and blameless and beyond reproach*. As we discussed there, Paul wrote from the point of view that his recipients were in that state already (the Christians who were/are not in that state must make it top priority to get in that state and then to abide in that state). In the next verse (verse 23), Paul admonished his readers to continue in that state, so they will be fully ready to stand before God.

The New Testament teaches that Christians are called and enabled to be *relatively perfect*. I am not speaking of *absolute perfection*. For one thing, we must keep on growing throughout our Christian lives, and we certainly do not arrive at a place where we cannot be tempted or cannot sin as long as we live in this world,<sup>56</sup> far from it. For Christians to be *relatively perfect* covers the same ground as their abiding in a state of being *holy and blameless and beyond reproach*, which was spoken of in Col. 1:22, 23. For Christians to be relatively perfect they must know the balanced truth of the gospel, and they must walk in that truth and in the Spirit of God on a continuous basis by faith. Many Christians do not adequately know and understand the balanced truth of the gospel, and even if we know it we can still have doubts in our hearts; many Christians have doubts regarding whether they can stop sinning, for example. Christians (born-again Christians) don't have to put forth much effort to be fleshly and worldly; a walk in/after/by the Holy Spirit by faith is far from being automatic.

There are quite a few other verses in the New Testament that use the same Greek adjective (*teleios*) that was translated *complete/perfect* here, or the Greek verb that was derived from this adjective that is often translated "to make perfect" (*teleioō*), that will help us understand the meaning of this word here in Col. 1:28 (see Col. 4:12; Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 2:6 with 3:1-3; Phil. 3:12, 15; Heb. 10:14; and 11:40).<sup>57</sup>

The New Testament shows that it is possible for born-again Christians to be less than fully ready to stand before God and still make heaven their home (cf. 1 Cor. 3:14, 15; 2 John 1:8), where they will only suffer the loss of (some) rewards. That scenario would apply to Christians who were faithful to Christ in the basics but who were living to some extent in the flesh, instead of in the Spirit. But the apostle would be quick to point out that we dare not be satisfied with anything less than God's will for our lives (and that does not leave room for any sin, fleshiness, worldliness); when we become Christians we sign a contract (so to speak) to be faithful to God by His grace (to be in the center of His will is the only really secure place to be). All too often in our day prospective converts are not informed that becoming a Christian (according to the terms of God's covenant/contract) includes agreeing to be faithful to God, to be set apart for

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<sup>56</sup> The apostle Paul makes it quite clear in Gal. 5:16-25, for example, that Christians can be tempted and they can sin. The warfare against us by the world, the flesh (the old man), and the devil will continue as long as we live in this present world. (See on Gal. 5:16-25 on pages 195-200 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*.)

<sup>57</sup> There is an important discussion of this topic (including a discussion of some of these verses) under Phil. 3:12 and 15 in my paper that includes a verse-by-verse study of Philippians chapter 3. On Heb. 10:14; 11:40, see pages 157-159; 166, 167 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. All these verses are quite important to understand relative perfection, and holiness and victory over sin. Also see the subsection titled "A Discussion on the Overall Teaching of the Book of Ephesians Regarding How Long It Should Take for Christians to Become Holy/Spiritual (by the Spirit)/Relatively Perfect" in my verse-by-verse study of Ephesians chapter 4.

Him, and to live for Him in His righteousness and holiness by His grace forever.] **(29)**  
**For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.** [It is essential for us to understand the balance between God's part and our part. Our Christian lives and ministries are totally dependent on God's grace, and He must receive all the glory; for one thing, we cannot earn heaven. But it also true that we must appropriate and cooperate with God's grace. God's grace did not *force* Paul to be faithful in his Christian life or his ministry—it *enabled* him to be faithful.]

## COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 2

**For I want you to know how great a struggle** [cf. Col. 1:29; 4:12] **I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea** [cf. Col. 4:13, 15, 16; Rev. 1:11; and 3:14], **and for all those who have not personally seen my face** [The apostle Paul had never met the Christians at Colossae, or Laodicea, which was a city near Colossae, but he knew all about their affairs through Epaphras, who was a minister from Colossae (cf. Col. 1:4, 7, 8; 4:13-16). (In Col. 4:13 Paul also mentions Hieropolis, another neighboring city.) We don't know all the details regarding the relationship between Paul and Epaphras; he may have been a convert of Paul; anyway, it is clear that Epaphras was under the apostolic ministry of the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Col. 1:7).

The apostle Paul was genuinely and deeply concerned for the welfare of the Christians at Colossae (and the neighboring cities, etc.), including his consistent praying for them (cf. Col. 1:9-14). He considered himself responsible for them as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Col. 1:24; 2:1, 5; 4:7-9, 16); he considered them to be in the privileged category of those who had been chosen by God (see Col. 3:12).], **(2) that their hearts may be encouraged** [As Paul continues he spells out several key things that would enable these Christians to have *encouraged* hearts (being *encouraged* probably includes being *strengthened* here).], **having been knit together in love** [“and united in love” NIV. The apostle knew (for one thing) that the Christians at Colossae (or anywhere else) could not be knit together/united in love in any adequate sense unless they were united in their understanding of, and submission to, the foundational truths of Christianity. He deals with these foundational truths extensively in this epistle, very much including the rest of this verse and the following verses, knowing that some false views had surfaced at Colossae (cf., e.g., Col. 2:4, 8-23). Paul was fully committed to do everything he could do to make sure that these Christians did not fall short of what God intended for them through salvation in Christ Jesus, including his intercessory prayer, his writing this epistle and sending it to them (and other epistles as required), his sending other ministers to them (cf. Col. 4:7-9), and his going there himself as God would lead.

Christians cannot be united in love in any adequate sense unless they are united in knowing and holding the basic truths of the gospel and unless they are united in living in accordance with the basic truths of the gospel, including living in righteousness and holiness by grace/the Spirit through faith. We do not have to agree on every detail to be united in love, but we must agree on the foundational doctrines of Christianity. True Christianity cannot exist apart from the foundational truths of the gospel—we are saved by faith, faith in Christ, faith in God, faith in the gospel.], **and attaining to all the wealth that comes** [or, “riches that come”] **from the full assurance** [or “certainty”] **of understanding** [As I mentioned, Paul knew that some false viewpoints had surfaced at Colossae. He dealt with false viewpoints throughout the rest of chapter 2. Those viewpoints were leading to confusion and strife in the church, and, even more importantly, the truth of the all-important gospel of salvation was being distorted by those viewpoints. The effectiveness of the gospel is diluted by every false viewpoint we accept, and some false viewpoints are so serious that they distort the gospel to such an extent that it no longer is the gospel—it cannot save. How necessary it is for Christians to attain to all the riches that come from knowing the full, balanced truth of the gospel,

from knowing (with full assurance) that what we believe is the full, balanced truth of the gospel, and from knowing that we are fully committed in our hearts to live in agreement with the truth of the gospel (by His sufficient grace through faith).

How could the Christians at Colossae have the full assurance/certainty of understanding regarding the foundational doctrines of Christianity? I can guarantee you that some of the false ideas circulating in the early church sounded quite plausible; some of them were being promoted by competent Christians (sometimes leaders in the church) and by Christians who were very sincere, or even zealous, regarding their faith. (I am not saying that all the false viewpoints circulating at Colossae came from genuine Christians; there were false Christians and false apostles in the early Church too.) What the Christians at Colossae needed to do was to hear God's appointed authority regarding the content of the gospel.

God had appointed Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. He had revealed to Paul, more than to anyone else, the details regarding His salvation plans for the Gentiles. But Paul was not out there starting his own church. There was only one church, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the other apostles (the twelve apostles) were eventually in agreement that Paul was chosen by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles (cf., e.g., Acts 15:1-35; Gal. 2:6-10). This did not mean, of course, that other apostles did not minister to Gentiles too.

I am quite sure (based on what happened elsewhere, at Corinth, for example) that there were "Christians" (some of them undoubtedly born-again Christians) that could have cared less what the apostle Paul said. They considered their viewpoints more valid than Paul's, and they were not about to submit to what he taught. That attitude would lead them to trouble with God, sooner, or later. Anyway, there was no doubting where the Colossian Christians had to go to get God's viewpoint regarding the true, full, balanced foundational doctrines of Christianity.

How can we Christians living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have the full assurance/certainty of understanding regarding the foundational doctrines of Christianity? We have the apostolic writings contained in the New Testament; they contain the foundational truths that originated with God. The Bible is the Word of God.

The fact that we are saved by faith (faith in God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ) makes it of crucial importance for us to fully understand the basics of the gospel. We must make this a top priority, but I find that all-too-many Christians are content to assume that whatever they think about the gospel, or whatever they have been taught, is good enough. Such viewpoints can be very dangerous.

Our faith (and our walk in faith) cannot rise above our understanding of God's saving Word (His gospel). To the extent we do not know, or do not understand (or misunderstand), the gospel, we will necessarily fail to live in the center of God's will. It is also true, of course, that even if we have an adequate understanding of the gospel, we still will not live in the center of God's will if do not live/walk in agreement with the basics of the gospel *by grace through faith*. Paul makes it very clear in this epistle (and in his teaching in general) that we must submit (from our hearts in faith) to live in line with the gospel if we want to experience the riches (cf. Eph. 1:7, 18; 3:16) of the salvation that God has given us in Christ., **resulting in a true knowledge** [It is quite acceptable to translate the Greek noun (*epignōsis*) *knowledge* here, instead of *true knowledge*; the NKJV and NIV both have *knowledge*. Either way, the apostle is certainly

speaking of *true* knowledge. We will speak further about this all-important knowledge as we continue.] **of God’s mystery, that is Christ Himself** [The apostle had just spoken of his doing everything he could possibly do to make sure that these Christians would attain to all the riches that come from the full assurance/certainty of understanding the foundational truths of Christianity. Now, with these following words, he shows that a full assurance/certainty of understanding the basics of the gospel will open the door for them to *know*—very much including their having an *experiential knowledge* of, and their *knowing* in the full sense that they should *know*—God’s mystery, which as we have seen (see under Col. 1:26, 27) speaks of new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus, which is spelled out in the gospel, and which includes, as Paul states here, a personal, experiential knowledge of Christ *Himself* (we are literally united with Him in/by the Holy Spirit), who is at the center of, and who is the foundation for, God’s new-covenant salvation.] **(3) in whom [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** [All the *wisdom and knowledge* (and everything else that we could ever need forever) is contained in (and available to us in, and *only* in) the Lord Jesus Christ; He is our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption, etc. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30). As the apostle continues, he shows that some of the ideas that had surfaced at Colossae were, one way, or another, promoting the viewpoint that Christians need sources of wisdom, knowledge, power, help, etc. beyond the resources made available in Christ Jesus. For one thing, they need something more than Christ to make them fully acceptable and fully pleasing to God the Father. One false viewpoint the apostle had to deal with was the idea that Gentile Christians needed to add the ceremonial works of the old covenant to their Christianity, including circumcision (verses 11-17); another viewpoint was that they needed to worship angels (verse 18); and another was that they must add self-abasement and severe treatment of the body (verse 23) to their Christianity if they really want to please God and have full salvation.] **(4) I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. (5) For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit** [Compare 1 Cor. 5:3. In one sense the apostle was with them, but the really important thing was that Christ Himself was literally dwelling in them by the Holy Spirit.], **rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. (6) Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him** [Paul’s readers had received Christ Jesus the Lord (our Christianity is not valid if we do not think and live in line with the fact the Jesus Christ *is Lord, our Lord*<sup>58</sup>) and had become born-again Christians through submitting to the gospel (the gospel that was sent from heaven) that came to them through Epaphras (see Col. 1:1-8, especially verse 7). Significantly, as Col. 1:7 shows, they had received the gospel in the full, accurate form that had come from God through the apostle Paul. That gospel did not need to be modified, or (supposedly) improved.

Every modification of (addition to, or subtraction from) that gospel was (and is) a negative; it detracted from Christianity and rendered the gospel less effective, and some modifications were serious enough to render that modified “gospel” totally ineffective (it could not save). Nevertheless, some viewpoints had surfaced at Colossae purporting to be able to improve the gospel that Epaphras had brought to them (to make it complete by adding things to it, or even to fix up that message so that it could save the Colossians). But Paul exhorts his readers to stick with the gospel that they had received

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<sup>58</sup> If He is *our Lord* we must (we will) obey Him and live for Him (cf. Luke 6:46).

and to continue to walk in Christ in line with that complete gospel.], **(7) having been firmly rooted and now** [I would skip the word *now*, which was added by the NASB in italics. The word behind “and” *is* included in the Greek.] **being built up in Him** [I would skip the word “being” included by the NASB. The KJV; NKJV; and NIV do not include it. I don’t believe Paul was speaking of a process of *being built up* here. (The fact that some skip the word “being” does not mean that they necessarily agree that Paul did not include the idea of a building-up process here. It is clear that many do not agree.) I agree that we should always be growing (and being built up), including the fact that new believers are being added to the body of Christ, but I believe Paul was speaking from the (positive) viewpoint here that his readers at Colossae (through the ministry of Epaphras, and by the grace/Spirit/work of God) already represented a solidly built building resting on a solid foundation. (See under Col. 1:22, 23.)

The Greek verb (actually it a present participle passive formed from this verb) used here (*epoikodomeō*) was used in a similar way in Eph. 2:20, “having been built [aorist participle passive] on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone.” Also, note that the words “having been firmly rooted” (Col. 2:7) speak of an existing state, not a process; furthermore, I believe the words that follow, “and established in your [the] faith” also speak of an existing state, not a process.] **and established in your faith** [The Greek has the definite article with the noun for faith here. I would translate “the faith” (instead of “your faith”) with the NIV; NKJV. The New Testament frequently speaks of “the faith,” referring to Christianity. Being established in the faith includes *holding* the truth of God’s word (especially the gospel) and *living in line with* the truth of the gospel (by grace through faith).], **just as you were instructed** [by Epaphras, who brought the full, accurate gospel to Colossae], **and overflowing with gratitude.** [To the extent Christians are experiencing the glorious saving grace of God in Christ they will overflow with gratitude/thanksgiving.] **(8) See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy** [“Philosophy” was translated from the Greek noun *philosophia*, which means a *love of wisdom*. Here Paul was referring to a love of *human/worldly (or demonic) wisdom* (cf. Col. 2:23), not the all-important *wisdom* of God.] **and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world** [Colossians 2:20-23 with Gal. 4:3-11 suffice to show what Paul means by “the elementary principles [or, things] of the world.” They include the ceremonial regulations of the old covenant<sup>59</sup>; Paul frequently had to deal with Christians (sometimes even born-again Christians) who insisted that Gentile believers must be circumcised and submit to the ceremonial works of the old covenant. He dealt with this topic extensively in his epistle to the Galatians.], **rather than according to Christ.** [The apostle knew that some of the Christians at Colossae were being challenged to “improve” their Christianity with things like those mentioned in this verse, things that were not part of the salvation package that centers in Christ Jesus that God has offered to man in the gospel. The problem was that such things, when added to Christianity, failed to improve Christianity, as was claimed, and such things detracted from the effectiveness of the gospel. Any deviation from the

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<sup>59</sup> In Gal. 4:1-11 the apostle also shows that “the elemental things of the world,” which are mentioned in Gal. 4:3 (cf. 4:9), include the religious works that Paul’s Gentile readers (who were now Christians) did when they were pagans.



gospel of God is serious business and could distort the gospel to such an extent that it would no longer be the gospel that saves (cf., e.g., Gal. 1:6-9; 5:2-4).

For one thing, all these things were done in the flesh; none of them were of the Spirit, or empowered by the Spirit. They did not bring God's word and His will (true wisdom) to God's people, or help make them righteous and holy. And to the extent God's people spend their time doing these things in the flesh, it robs from their ability to do fruitful things in/by the Spirit. Furthermore, Christ is not glorified through these things; these things lead to confusion and lack of unity in the body of Christ; and those doing these things tend to be proud of what they are doing and tend to criticize those not doing them, which are big negatives.] **(9) For in Him** [Christ] **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form** [Compare Col. 1:19. The apostle is not confusing the Persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit here. (See my paper, *More on the Trinity*. For one thing, Col. 2:8-18 are discussed in the last section of that paper. Also see *Who Do We Worship?*; *Who Do We Pray?*: and *The Name Yahweh and God the Father and God the Son*. He is simply making the point that all that the triune God has (and that certainly includes everything we could ever need forever) is available in Christ Jesus, who is deity (the God-man) and who is united with (one with) God the Father and God the Spirit. (And we are united with the God-man.) And if everything we could ever need forever has been provided in Christ Jesus, we certainly need not look elsewhere for anything. The Bible (both Old and New Testaments) makes it quite clear that God considers it serious sin for His people to look elsewhere than to Him for the things that they need, or for them to try to modify the covenant(s) He has made with them.], **(10) and in Him you have been made complete** [We could translate "you have been made full." This other translation helps show the relationship between the perfect participle of the verb *plēroō* used here and the noun *plērōma* (this noun was derived from this verb) that was translated *fullness* in verse 9. The NIV has, "you have been given fullness in Christ." We have been made full (or, given the fullness) in the sense that everything that we could ever need forever has been given to us in new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus. Compare Eph. 1:23; 3:19.], **and He is the head over** [He has authority over] **all rule and authority** [cf. Eph. 1:10, 21-23; Col. 1:15-18; and 2:15]; **(11) and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands** [cf. Eph. 2:11], **in the removal** ["putting off" NIV] **of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ** [The apostle deals with circumcision here because circumcision had become an issue at Colossae, as it had many other places. Some were undoubtedly insisting that the Gentile Christians at Colossae must be circumcised physically; verses 14-17 help show that circumcision was part of the ceremonial works of the old covenant that were being added to the gospel that Epaphras had brought to Colossae. Paul *strongly* fought against any such modifications of the gospel (cf., e.g., Gal. 1:6-12; 2:11-21; 3:1-3; 5:1-6; and 6:11-15).

What Paul says here in verses 11-13 is that born-again Gentile Christians (including those at Colossae), who had received the far-greater circumcision, "the circumcision made without hands," "the circumcision of Christ," that is, the circumcision (the cutting away/removal) of all that was sinful from their hearts and lives) that enabled them to be dead to the old man and to be alive for God (through, and in union with, Christ Jesus and by the Holy Spirit), living in God's righteousness and holiness, do not need the old-

covenant physical circumcision in the flesh. See Rom. 2:26-29; Phil. 3:3 on the true circumcision.<sup>60</sup>

“The removal of the body of the flesh” means essentially the same thing as the putting off of the old man, the crucifixion of the old man, and the death and burial of the old man, which are spoken of by the apostle Paul (cf., e.g., Col. 3:3, 5-9; Rom. 6:2-11; Gal. 2:20; 5:24; and Eph. 4:22).]; **(12) having been buried with Him in baptism** [Paul is speaking of the old man dying and being buried with Christ in water baptism, as in Rom. 6:3, 4. The idea is *not* that water baptism has the power to put the old man to death, but that water baptism is the most appropriate (biblical) occasion for converts to complete the transactions of putting off sins (total forgiveness), of becoming united with Christ Jesus, of appropriating His atoning death as their death and dying with Him (He died in our place, bearing our sins with the guilt and the penalties), and of being buried with Him. I am not saying that these things cannot be accomplished before, after, or apart from water baptism, but that the occasion of water baptism is the most appropriate time to complete these transactions according to the teaching and pattern of the New Testament.<sup>61</sup>

God is the only one with the authority and power to put to death the old man so that we (His new creations) can leave sin behind and live for Him in righteousness and holiness. He accomplishes this glorious work through Christ Jesus (through His all-important atoning death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His present ministry as our great high priest at His right hand) and through the work of the Holy Spirit.], **in which** [The Greek could be translated “in which,” with “which” referring to water baptism, but I don’t believe that is what Paul intended. I believe the Greek should be translated “in whom,” with “whom” referring to Christ Jesus.<sup>62</sup> The translation of the NIV communicates the right idea here (at least this translation does not force the idea on you that we are raised with Christ *in water baptism*), “having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

We are saved through union with Christ Jesus, a union that begins when we (having heard and understood the basics of the gospel) repent and submit to Him as Savior and Lord from our hearts, when we appropriate His atoning death by faith and die to the old man (at least in the ideal case we would die to the old man at that time). Also, even as we die with Him, we are raised with Him (in union with Him by the indwelling Holy Spirit) to walk in newness of life, in righteousness and holiness (cf., e.g., Col. 3:1-11; Rom. 6:1-23; 8:1-14; Gal. 2:20, 21; 5:16-25). This glorious union with Christ (the New Testament frequently mentions that we are “in Him”) will last forever (assuming, of

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<sup>60</sup> These verses from Romans are discussed on page 74 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* and in my paper, *The Christian, the Law and Legalism*. Philippians chapter 3 is discussed verse-by-verse in a paper. Both paper are on my internet site.

<sup>61</sup> On water baptism see under 1 Cor. 15:29 in my paper that includes 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and pages 125-128 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (be sure to include the endnotes).

<sup>62</sup> See page 135 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*. I don’t believe Paul intended to say more than that we die and are buried with Christ at baptism. That is a lot to say. After baptism (in the typical New Testament pattern) it was time for the life-giving, sanctifying, gift-dispensing Spirit to come. See pages 125-128 of *Holiness and Victory Over Sin* (with the endnotes); the coming of the Spirit after water baptism is discussed there too. On baptism in the Spirit/receiving the gift of the Spirit see under John 1:33 in my paper on John 1:19-4:54. Other references are cited there. As I mentioned, I am not saying that the Spirit could not come before, or apart from, water baptism.

course, that we continue on in faith); before long that union will take us to eternal glory, where He is.] **you were also raised up with Him** [We have been raised up with Him in a spiritual (by the Spirit) sense (as in Rom. 6:1-14; Col. 3:1-11); we will be raised with Him in the full and final sense (which includes the resurrection and glorification of our bodies) at the end of this age.] **through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead** [cf. Acts 2:24; Eph. 2:5, 6; and Col. 3:1]. [God is the one who saves us—He sent His Son to die for us; He raised Him from the dead; He sends the gospel to us; He enables us to die to the old man; He gives us spiritual life (starting with the new birth) and makes us new creations; He enables us to live in His righteousness and holiness; etc. The triune God must receive all the glory for our salvation that comes to us totally on the basis of grace (it was totally unearned). It is also true, however, as these words of Col. 2:12 clearly demonstrate, that God designed His salvation plan in such a way that we are not saved apart from our repenting and submitting to God the Father, Christ Jesus, and the gospel of salvation *through faith*. We will not die to the old man, be raised with Christ, or walk in/by/after the Spirit on a continuous basis and keep the old man from manifesting itself in sinful works apart from our continuously walking in faith (a faith that must be based on what the New Testament teaches). As I have discussed in some detail in my writings, the fact that we must appropriate and cooperate with God’s saving grace by faith does not at all conflict with the fact that we are saved totally by grace.

Faith is our part; it is our *response* to His grace; faith is not a work (at least it is not a work in any improper sense of the word *work*), and we cannot boast of faith any more than a drowning man can boast in the fact that he took hold of a rope that was thrown to him.<sup>63</sup> We must have **faith in the working of God**. We must believe that He sent His Son to die for us, that He raised Him from the dead, that we have been invited to become united with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and forever, and that in union with Him (as new creations) we have the authority and power through the indwelling Holy Spirit to live as God wants us to live, in humility, truth, righteousness, and holiness. We must appropriate and cooperate with the grace of God through faith in accordance with the terms of the covenant He has made with us, which centers in the gospel of salvation in His beloved Son.] **(13) When you were dead** [spiritually dead] **in your transgressions** [cf. Eph. 2:1, 5] **and the uncircumcision of your flesh** [In this context, including what Paul just said in verse 11 about the spiritual circumcision we receive in Christ Jesus that results in the removal of the body of the flesh (in other words, the spiritual circumcision that enables us to die to the flesh/the old man and to walk by the Spirit on a continuous basis), these words (“the uncircumcision of your flesh”) should undoubtedly be understood in a spiritual sense. The NIV has, “in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature.”], **He made you alive together with Him** [Compare Eph. 2:5. God the Father has made us *alive* (by the *life* of God that comes to us when the Spirit of *life* comes to dwell in us [cf. Rom. 8:2, 9]) through and in union with Christ Jesus. We died with Christ and we are raised with Him “through faith in the working of God.”], **having forgiven us all our transgressions** [Being forgiven all our transgressions is a major feature of new-covenant salvation in Christ. He bore our sins/transgressions with the guilt so we could be totally forgiven. Paul goes on in verse 14 to show that Christ’s atoning death, which brought forth the glorious new covenant,

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<sup>63</sup> See the Introduction of my *A Paper on Faith*.

set aside the old covenant that could not solve the spiritual death/bondage to sin problem (God hadn't given it for that purpose); in fact, as Paul frequently mentions, the old covenant (the Mosaic Law), though it was good and from God, resulted in an intensification of the sin problem (see under verse 14). Then in verse 15, Paul shows that Christ, by setting aside the old covenant and ushering in the new covenant in His blood, disarmed Satan and his hosts.

I mentioned that Christ died for us bearing our sin with the guilt so that we could be forgiven. But He did a whole lot more than that. He bore our sin with the guilt and the penalties. For one major thing, He bore the penalty of spiritual death (I didn't say He died spiritually), so we could get out from under that penalty (that penalty that started with the rebellion of Adam) and be born again. And He bore the bondage to sin that came with spiritual death, so we could be redeemed out of the kingdom of sin, death, darkness, and demons and live for God in righteousness and holiness. His atoning death stripped sin, Satan, and spiritual death of their authority over us (see under verse 15). Our victory over sin and Satan is far from being automatic, however; we must walk in faith on a continuous basis and overcome these enemies of God by the grace/Spirit of God in Christ.], **(14) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us** [“having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us” NIV; “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us” NKJV.], **which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.** [The apostle is speaking here of the Mosaic Law (which was the foundation for the old covenant) being taken out of the way; the old covenant had to be set aside to make way for the new covenant. See Eph. 2:15, for example. The apostle speaks there of Christ's “abolishing in His flesh...the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances,” and (in the context of Eph. 2:11-22) he shows that Christ is the only One who can save us (whether Jews or Gentiles) and enable us to have access to God the Father in the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18).

The old covenant could not solve the sin problem, and Paul frequently makes the point that the Mosaic Law intensified the sin problem (see Rom. 4:15; 5:13, 14; 7:5-14; 1 Cor. 15:56; and Gal. 3:19). (God used that intensification to help force the sin problem out in the open and to demonstrate the seriousness of the sin problem. Most people are slow to see, and reluctant to acknowledge, that they have a sin problem, and very few understand the serious depth of the sin problem. Mankind desperately needs a savior from sin—Jesus Christ is that Savior!) In the sense that the Mosaic Law intensified the sin problem, it was “against us” and “hostile to us.” The Mosaic Law and the old covenant were nailed to the cross in the sense that they were set aside to make way for the new covenant that was established on the basis of the atoning death of Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the cross.

We desperately need the balanced truth of what the apostle Paul teaches about Christians and the Mosaic Law. I dealt with this topic in some detail, aiming for the balanced truth, in my paper titled *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*. On the one hand, Paul has some negative things to say about the Law, like what he says here, but the bottom line of what he says amounts to a criticism of sinful man in the flesh not being able to keep the Law (cf., e.g., Rom. 8:1-9), not of the Law itself. The Mosaic Law was from God, and it was good, but He didn't give the old covenant to solve the

sin problem, rather to set the stage for the all-important new covenant in the blood of Christ.

Two primary factors forced Paul to deal with the Mosaic Law and the old covenant in a negative sense. Most of Paul's countrymen were rejecting Christ and holding to the Mosaic Law and the old covenant, as if that was all they needed to save them. Once Christ had come, it was no longer an option to stick with the old covenant.<sup>64</sup> The new covenant in the blood of Christ was no afterthought with God. Before the foundation of the world, He had already planned to send His Son to solve the sin, spiritual death, Satan problem (cf., e.g., 1 Pet. 1:18-20; Gen. 3:15). Also, and this proved to be a serious problem for the apostle to the Gentiles, the Judaizers (and those who sided with them) exhorted the Gentile Christians to forsake (or at least to substantially modify) the gospel preached by Paul and to acknowledge that God requires them to submit to the ceremonial works of the Mosaic Law, starting with circumcision.

The apostle Paul taught that we are not under the Mosaic Law (cf., e.g., Col. 2:14; Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 1:19; and 3:23-25). But—and this is extremely important—he also taught that a key bottom-line of Christianity is that Christians *are enabled* (by the grace and Spirit of God that come with the new covenant) and *are required* to keep the requirements of the Law (cf., e.g., Rom. 2:26, 27; 8:4; and 1 Cor. 7:19).<sup>65</sup> The only major qualification that the apostle would make here is that Christians are not required to keep the ceremonial law of the old covenant.] **(15) When He** [God the Father] **had disarmed the rulers and authorities** [Compare Col. 1:13; 2:10. God disarmed Satan and his underlings through the atoning death (and resurrection) of Christ Jesus and the ushering in of new-covenant salvation. Satan (along with sin and spiritual death) had gained authority over man through the rebellion of Adam, and all the subsequent sins of mankind had enhanced his position as god of this world. The first chapters of Genesis show that Satan had no authority over Adam (or mankind) until after Adam rebelled, and the Bible makes it clear that Satan has been overthrown (but his overthrow has not been fully manifested yet) through the atoning death (and resurrection) of Jesus Christ (see John 12:31, 33; 16:11; and Heb. 2:14; cf. Gen. 3:15).], **He** [God the Father] **made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him** [through Christ Jesus]. [See Eph. 4:8.<sup>66</sup> God made a public display of His triumph over Satan and his hosts through the Lord Jesus Christ. For a start, the resurrection of Christ manifested that the sin and spiritual death problem had been solved in His atoning death and that sin, Satan, and death had been overthrown (cf. Rom. 4:25). Every time a person becomes a born-again Christian and starts living for God in righteousness and holiness it demonstrates that sin, Satan, and spiritual death have been overthrown. So too for every victory that comes to pass through the name of

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<sup>64</sup> The believers who lived during the days of the old covenant will be saved, but they will be saved through what Christ did for them, not through the old covenant apart from Christ. (For one thing, Paul taught that none of them fully kept the Law.) The old covenant sacrifices foreshadowed the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and His Sacrifice made those sacrifices effective, to the point they were effective. There were two areas where the old covenant sacrifices were totally ineffective. First, and foremost, those sacrifices could not take away the sin of Adam with its penalty of spiritual death (and bondage to sin) for his descendants (all mankind). And, second, those sacrifices could not atone for the willful, defiant sins of the sons of Israel with their guilt and penalties.

<sup>65</sup> These verses are discussed in my paper *The Christian, the Law, and Legalism*, for one place.

<sup>66</sup> This verse is discussed in my paper that includes Ephesians chapter 4.

the Lord Jesus Christ and for every demon that is defeated and/or cast out through His name.] **(16) Therefore** [since the old covenant has been set aside to make way for the new covenant] **no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink** [cf., e.g., Heb. 9:10] **or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day** [It seems clear that some “Christians” were judging Paul’s Christian readers at Colossae because they weren’t following their modified “gospel”; it was modified from the gospel proclaimed by the apostle Paul and Epaphras. The things Paul listed here, and circumcision (see verse 11), were all part of the ceremonial works of the old covenant that some were trying to push on the Gentile Christians at Colossae. It is possible that some of the religious works listed here came from other sources too. The things that Paul goes on to mention in verse 18 do not seem to have been derived from the old covenant.]—**(17) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.** [Compare Heb. 8:5; 10:1.<sup>67</sup> The ceremonial works of the old covenant, including the sacrificial offerings, have been set aside now that the reality of new-covenant salvation has become available through the incarnation, sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit of the Lamb of God.] **(18) Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in** [“insisting on” NRSV] **self-abasement** [“or *humility*” NASB margin] **and the worship of the angels** [“Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility<sup>68</sup> and worship of angels...” NKJV. “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize” NIV. I’ll quote part of what the BAGD Greek Lexicon (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) says regarding the Greek verb (*katabrabeuō*) translated “let no one defraud you of your reward” by the NIV (this verb was not used anywhere else in the New Testament), “ ‘decide against’ (as umpire), and so rob of a prize, condemn [someone]....” The meaning of this verb here is quite similar to the meaning of the verb “no one is to act as your judge” in verse 16.

Here in verses 18, 19 the apostle Paul exhorts his readers to totally ignore the false judgments of those “Christians” who were delighting in self-abasement (or, *false* humility) and the worship of angels, who were trying to convince his readers that their Christianity was not valid. Those “Christians” did not know what they were talking about, and they certainly did not have the authority to decide what constitutes authentic Christianity. Those “Christians” could have been different than the ones pushing ceremonial works of the old covenant.

It isn’t necessary for us to know all the details regarding the false teachers and their false teachings that were circulating at Colossae at that time. When we know the true gospel, we are qualified to recognize and reject false teachers and false teachings (teachings that are not part of the true gospel), no matter what the details.<sup>69</sup>

We don’t know for sure exactly what Paul meant by self-abasement (or *false* humility), but verse 23 apparently gives us some insight with the added words, “and

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<sup>67</sup> The book of Hebrews deals extensively with the inability of the Law to solve the sin and spiritual death problem and with the setting aside of the ceremonial works of the old covenant.

<sup>68</sup> The word *false* was not included in the Greek, but it is clear that the apostle was not speaking of true, biblical humility here, or in verse 23.

<sup>69</sup> I have heard that most of the training people receive to become expert at recognizing counterfeit bills (money) consists of studying the genuine articles. Any bills that fail to match the genuine in every detail are necessarily counterfeit.

severe treatment of the body.” See under verse 23. As verse 19 shows, the primary problem behind all the issues raised in verses 8-23 was that some “Christians” were not holding fast to the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the body of Christ, in accordance with the words of the gospel of God’s new covenant—they were modifying the gospel.

Based on what Paul goes on to say in the rest of this verse, those “Christians” apparently based (at least to some extent) their “delighting in self-abasement [or *false* humility] and the worship of the angels” on spiritual experiences they had had, probably including having seen angels and having received instructions from them. The apostle Paul made it quite clear that he had no respect for the spiritual experiences those “Christians” had had, or for the revelations they had received. As we discussed above, Paul didn’t leave room for anyone to modify the gospel in any way.

The revelations those “Christians” had received undoubtedly came from evil angels (or demons [cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; James 3:15; 1 John 4:1-6]) who were passing themselves off as angels loyal to God. Like the apostle Paul said, “for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). There is no doubting the fact that Satan and his followers have come up with some clever counterfeits for the truth and clever modifications of the gospel over the years. How can we know the truth? In the first place we must carefully check any revelation against what God has already revealed (in the Bible) as the gospel through his chosen channels, including the apostle Paul. The Christians at Colossae were able to check out what the false teachers were saying with the apostle Paul himself. He could verify that Epaphras had shared the true gospel and the full gospel with them. Also, God has put gifts in the church, like discerning of spirits and words of wisdom and words of knowledge (cf. 1 Cor. 12:8-10), to help us differentiate between what is of God and what is of Satan. (We must also be aware of the fact that there are demonic counterfeit spiritual gifts.) It seems that man in the flesh is able to come up with plenty of errors on his own too, without the devil’s “help.”

Regarding “the worship of angels,” I assume that those “Christians” were pushing the worship of supposedly good angels, angels supposedly loyal to God. The Bible makes it quite clear that God’s angels play a major role in the outworking of His salvation plans in both Old Testament days and new-covenant days, but it is equally clear that we are not to look to angels, pray to them, or worship them in any way. God’s angels (those loyal to Him), even the greatest of them, will not accept worship (cf., e.g., Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9).

The false teachers were undoubtedly pushing the idea that God has set things up in a way that we must deal with these angels (as mediators between God and man<sup>70</sup>) for many things (like wisdom, revelation, guidance, miracles, healing, provision, and protection), rather than dealing directly with Him. Some false teachers may have said that they were too humble to deal directly with God.

Angels are very much involved with many aspects of our Christian lives (we must be thankful to God for them and their work), but it is God we must look to for all things, even when He uses His angels to bless us. We must look to Him (the triune God) and to Him alone for all things, worship Him and Him alone, and give Him and Him alone all the glory for all things. Angels loyal to God agree one-hundred percent with this viewpoint; they know that we must maintain divine order in God’s kingdom at all

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<sup>70</sup> The Lord Jesus Christ is the only *mediator* we will ever need; what a *mediator* (cf., e.g., 1 Tim. 2:5; Col. 1:18, 19; 2:8-10).

times—God has had more than enough of angelic rebellion, and of human rebellion.], **taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated** [“puffed up” with fleshly pride; the NKJV has, “vainly puffed up”; the NIV has, “puffs him up”] **without cause by his fleshly mind** [The “mind [way of thinking] of [the] flesh” goes with the old man; it is contrasted with having a mind/way of thinking that is in/by/of the Spirit of God. Those who are *not* born again and indwelt by the Spirit of God necessarily think and walk by the flesh (see Rom. 8:1-11). But it is also true that born-again Christians can think and walk according to the old man/the flesh to a significant extent; a walk in/by/after the Spirit is far from being automatic. I didn’t say it was acceptable Christianity for Christians to walk in/by the flesh part of the time; a big part of what it means to be a Christian is to leave the old man/the flesh behind (to be dead to it) and to walk on a continuous basis in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God in/by/after the Spirit by faith.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 demonstrate that born-again Christians can be fleshy (which includes thinking in/by the flesh), and they also demonstrates that the apostle Paul did not consider this to be acceptable Christianity, and especially after a person has been a Christian for a while. Thinking and walking in/by the flesh is a very dangerous thing for Christians to do. Paul frequently warned Christians of this fact, including throughout his epistles to the Corinthians. To the extent we are walking in/by the flesh, we are not walking in/by the Spirit, or walking in/by faith. Christians are enabled and required to walk by/in/after the Spirit on a continuous basis by faith.

Were these “Christian” innovators mentioned in verses 18, 19 born-again Christians. It is quite possible that they had been born again, it is even possible that they (or some of them) still were in the category of being born-again Christians, but they clearly had fallen into serious error, and they were in grave danger of losing their salvation if they had not lost it already (that is, if they ever had salvation in the first place). Whether those “Christians” were born again, or not (God is the Judge on such matters), the Colossians certainly could not afford to listen to them or follow them.

It is significant that Paul shows here that the *self-abasement/humility* of the false teachers was *false* in that it was rooted in fleshly *pride* (*pride* [being *puffed up*] is the opposite of true *humility*; it is a manifestation of the old man/the flesh). Pride is at the root of so much sin, including many of the religious works and other innovations that have been added to Christianity over the years. For one thing, the devil knows how to appeal to the pride of man; we must be very careful; all of us have the all-to-real potential to let the old man live and manifest itself in pride (or other sin). Humans tend to like religious works; they like to think they are earning (at least to some extent) their salvation; and they like to think they are better than other Christians/people.], **(19)** [Ephesians 4:11-16 (especially 4:15, 16) have much in common with this verse, and they will help us understand this verse. Those verses are discussed in some detail in my paper that includes Ephesians chapter 4 on my internet site.] **and not holding fast to the head** [We must hold fast to Christ Jesus, the head over the body of Christ (and, as Col. 1:15-20; 2:10 show, the head over all things that have been created). The apostle has strongly emphasized the fact that everything we could ever need has been provided and is available in Christ Jesus (in new-covenant salvation in Christ Jesus). We need not, and we must not, look anywhere else (like to worldly wisdom, Christian innovations in the flesh, angels [even the good angels], the occult, or other gods and



religions). God is a jealous God! He demands faithfulness! He will not tolerate spiritual adultery!], **from whom the entire body, being supplied** [“nourished” NKJV] **and held together** [“knit together” NKJV] **by** [I would translate “through.”<sup>71</sup>] **the joints and ligaments** [Apparently Paul’s idea here (which is very similar with what he said in Eph. 4:15, 16) is that Christ *supplies* the Christian churches (the body of Christ) with basic things like the true gospel, and He *holds* them *together* (helps keep them united in the truth and righteousness of God) *through* the five-fold ministry that He has set in the church (Eph. 4:11; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28), which in the case of the church at Colossae, refers especially to Paul and Epaphras.], **grows with a growth which is from God.** [Compare Eph. 4:15, 16. If we are grounded in the basics of the gospel and doing the things that we are enabled and required to do by grace through faith, our *growth*, which is of God, will take care of itself. That includes our growing in wisdom and knowledge and growing more like the Lord Jesus Christ every day, as we live in a state of holiness (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), and our growing in numbers as new members are added to the body of Christ worldwide.<sup>72</sup>] **(20) If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world** [The “elementary principles of the world” are discussed under Col. 2:8. Christians (by definition of the Word of God) are enabled and required to be dead to sin (we are to live as those who are dead to sin), to Satan and his kingdom of evil, to spiritual death, and “to the elementary principles of the world.”], **why, as if you were living in the world** [cf. Gal. 4:9], **do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, (21) “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”** [These decrees undoubtedly include some of the ceremonial works of the old covenant (see Col. 2:11-17).] **(22) (which all refer to things destined to perish with use** [Things that can be handled, tasted, or touched are physical things that will eventually pass away to make room for God’s new, glorified earth (cf., e.g., Mark 7:14-23; 1 Cor. 6:13; and Rev. 20:11).]—**in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men** [cf. Matt. 15:9; Titus 1:14]? [The ceremonial works of the old covenant came, of course, by God’s command through Moses, but those works have been set aside (they have not been included in the new covenant), in accordance with the revelation of God. The problem was that some “Christians” were telling the Christians at Colossae that they were commanded by God to do these things. As Paul informs us, what these “Christians” were teaching and commanding amounted to nothing more than “the commandments and teachings of men” (some of which they probably got from evil angels/demons).] **(23) These are matters which have** [“matters having”], **to be sure, the appearance of wisdom** [But this is worldly/fleshly wisdom, not the wisdom of God. “All the treasures of [true] wisdom and knowledge” are found in Christ” (Col. 2:3).] **in self-made** [“self-imposed”

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<sup>71</sup> “Through” is the most common way to translate the Greek preposition (*dia*) used here when it is used with the genitive case, as it is here.

<sup>72</sup> The primary need of many Christians in Paul’s day (including some Christians at Colossae), as in our day, was the need to become established in the balanced truth of God’s Word and living in the righteousness and holiness of God by grace/the Spirit through faith and to continue to walk in that state on a continuous basis. It could be said that we *grow* into this state, but I believe it is inappropriate and confusing to call that transformation *growth*. I don’t believe Paul included that type of growth here; as we have discussed, he wrote this epistle from the viewpoint that his readers were holy and blameless already. We don’t want to communicate the idea (as it so often is done in our day) that a state of righteousness, holiness, and victory over sin is something we must always be growing towards, but never really achieving in this life (that we will necessarily continue to sin throughout the rest of our life on earth).

NIV; NKJV] **religion and self-abasement** [The Greek noun behind “self-abasement” or “*false* humility” was also used in verse 18. The NKJV has, “*false* humility” here and in verse 18; the NIV has “false humility” in both verses. As I mentioned under verse 18, the following words here in verse 23 (“and severe treatment of the body”) probably help explain what Paul meant by “self-abasement” or “*false* humility” here in Colossians chapter 2. Those “Christians” could have been “humbling” themselves with things like excessive fastings<sup>73</sup> and other forms of self-denial, like not eating many kinds of food or drinking anything but water, like not wearing sufficient clothing to keep warm and not wearing shoes, and like depriving themselves of sufficient sleep.

The “Christians” doing these things undoubtedly made sure that everyone knew what they were doing, which isn’t humility. The primary problem was that they were modifying God’s gospel—they were communicating the idea that they were superior Christians and that anyone not doing what they were doing was missing God’s will. They were wrong in their attitudes, and their motives were undoubtedly suspect too, as is typical with those who promote a different gospel. Some “Christians” are zealous for religious works that they may be seen by men and be glorified by men, that they might win followers to themselves and their gospel, and that they might receive better financial support from other Christians. We always have to watch our attitudes and motives; it is all too easy for born-again Christians to walk in the old man/the flesh to a significant extent, and if we are not open to God and correction it is probable that we will not even know that we are doing it.

It is possible, I believe, for Christians to humble themselves with self-denial beyond what God requires in a way that will glorify Him and work for good if they can do such things with the right attitudes and motives.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, however, they would have to make it very clear that they were not making any such things part of the gospel or suggesting that it made them superior to other Christians. Typically things like that would be between God and the Christian and no one else would even know that they were doing them.

I’m not trying to promote the idea that we should put a priority on doing more than what God requires. For one thing, very often the motivation to do such things is pride. The gigantic need that we have in our day is to begin to fully do the things that God does require by His grace through faith. He has called us to a very high calling—to live in the center of His will, in humility, truth, love, righteousness, and holiness, accomplishing our assignments in the body of Christ.] **and severe treatment of the body** [“harsh treatment of the body” NIV; “neglect of the body” NKJV], **but are of** [Instead of “*but are of*,” I suggest translating (in italics), *but having*, building on the participle “having” used near the beginning of the verse.] **no value against fleshly**

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<sup>73</sup> The Bible sometimes ties humbling of self with fasting (cf., e.g., Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). I’ll quote what James D. G. Dunn says (under Col. 2:18) regarding the meaning of the Greek noun translated “self-abasement/*false* humility” (*Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [Eerdmans, 1996], pages 178, 179). “*Tapeiophrosunē* usually means ‘humility,’ but most follow the observation that the LXX [Septuagint] uses the repeated phrase ‘to humble (*tapeinoō*) one’s soul’ in the sense of ‘to mortify oneself’ (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32) or more specifically ‘to fast’ (Psalm 35:13; Isa. 58:3, 5; Judith 4:9; see also Psalm 69:10; *Psalms of Solomon* 3:8); *tapeiophrosunē* is clearly used in this latter sense in Hermas, *Visions* 3.10.6 and *Similitudes* 5.3.7 [early Christian writings]. . . .”

<sup>74</sup> It seems that the apostle Paul himself fits in that category to some extent (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 2:9; and 2 Thess. 3:8, 9).

**indulgence.** [Not only did the religious works like those being pushed at Colossae fail to have any value against the indulgence of the flesh; they were a manifestation of the flesh, manifesting things like pride.

I believe these last words of verse 23 are extremely insightful (by the revelation of God) and important. Man in the *flesh* can do all kinds of religious things that look good, but they cannot begin to solve the sin problem—they cannot make us righteous and holy; they don't have the authority or power to dethrone sin in the flesh. Our help has to come from beyond (from outside) man in the flesh. Our help has to come from God. Every good thing comes from God, and only from Him (including truth, life, righteousness, holiness, godliness, divine order, peace, health, purpose, and eternal glory). Holiness and victory over sin can only come to Christians by grace through faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we appropriate what God has done for us in the Sacrifice of His Son and in offering us full salvation through the new covenant in His blood.

Many sincere Christians strive endlessly in the flesh, trying to please God and become righteous and holy. To the extent we are striving in the flesh, it can never work, no matter how devoted and sincere we are. Our part is faith (faith in God and His Word), and faith has nothing to do with striving in the flesh. We must cooperate with God's grace/Spirit and work out our salvation through faith, but that is something very different than striving in the flesh.

I have observed over the years that many Christians think that the apostle Paul taught that our sin problems center in (originate with) our physical bodies. They think that the word *flesh*, which is used here at the end of verse 23 (the more literal translation is “the indulgence of the flesh”), speaks of our physical bodies.<sup>75</sup> There is no doubting the fact that sin and Satan try to use our physical bodies in various ways (sexual sins, addiction to drugs, or gluttony, for example) to get us into sin, but the apostle Paul was using the word *flesh* in a much fuller sense here, as he so often did.

The *flesh* is the old man (spirit, soul, and body) that still wants to manifest itself in sin (sometimes with the help of demons). Temptations often come through the physical body, but sin is a matter of the heart/the inner man (cf., e.g., Mark 7:14-23). The only way we can keep the old man/the flesh from manifesting itself in sinful ways is to always walk in/by/after the Holy Spirit through faith, based on what God has done for us through and in Christ Jesus (which is spelled out in God's Word). God didn't create man to be able to function as man should (and must) independent of Him. We are dependent on God, but sin separates us from Him (starting with the sin of Adam).

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<sup>75</sup> I have often heard Christians (including, somewhat surprisingly, Christians who don't believe in the doctrine once saved, necessarily always saved) say that the spirit/inner man is once for all purified and kept pure once we are born again. 2 Corinthians 7:1, by itself, should suffice to show that that viewpoint is wrong, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved [Paul was writing to born-again Christians], let us cleanse [or, purify] ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

We must discipline ourselves (spirit, soul, and body) by the grace/the Spirit of God in Christ. Clearly there is a place for biblical fasting, and when such activities are done with the right attitudes and motives and in/by the Spirit they can help us discipline ourselves. As Paul continues in chapter 3, he gets into some detail regarding how we must think and live (through faith) to appropriate God's sanctifying grace.]

## COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 3

**Therefore if** [The NIV has “since” instead of “if,” which is reasonable in that this is a class 1 conditional sentence in the Greek, which means that the “if” clause is considered to be true.] **you have been raised up with Christ** [We were made alive with Christ and raised up Him (cf. Eph. 2:5, 6) in/by the Holy Spirit, through faith, at the time we became born-again Christians (see Col. 2:12, 13).], **keep seeking the things above** [“Seeking the things above” (which includes making God and the things of God top priority, with a strong emphasis here on things like righteousness, holiness, and the fruit of the Spirit), is something we must do on a continuous basis as we appropriate and cooperate with God’s grace by faith (in accordance with the requirement of the gospel). This isn’t something that takes place automatically while we are passive. Faith is active. We must know and understand what God requires of us and think and walk that way (by His grace, and for His glory).], **where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God** [cf. Psalm 110:1; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55, 56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; and 1 Pet. 3:22<sup>76</sup>]. **(2) Set your mind on** [“Set your minds on” NKJV; NIV; “Be intent on” NASB margin; “set your affection on” KJV. The Greek verb used here (*phroneō*) could be translated “think on,” which would be quite acceptable as long as we understand that Paul was speaking (for the most part) of the *thinking* (including our priorities, attitudes, and motives) that we do in our hearts. I have discovered over the years that most Christians wrongly think that the words *think* and *mind* (as they are used in the Bible) are limited to what we do with our heads. Most of our important thinking takes place in our hearts (spirits/souls/inner man). Our hearts, including the thinking we do in our hearts, must be fixed on God and the things of God so that His will may be accomplished in our lives. We live on the earth, but our primary citizenship (even now) is in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20).] **the things above, not on the things that are on earth** [cf., e.g., Matt. 16:23; Phil. 3:19]. **(3) For you have died** [We have died (through union with Christ) to sin, to the flesh/the old man, and to this world, whose god is the devil (see Col. 2:11, 12, 20; 2 Cor. 4:4).] **and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, who is our life** [cf. John 11:25; 14:6; and 1 John 5:12], **is revealed** [manifested], **then you also will be revealed** [manifested] **with Him in glory.** [Compare, for example, Rom. 8:17-25; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; Eph. 2:5-7; Phil. 3:20; 21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Pet. 1:13; and 1 John 2:28; 3:2. The Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven, but we are united with Him now (and through Him with God the Father) through the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9-14). What Paul means by *your life is hidden* is that it has not (for the most part) been revealed/manifested yet. Most of the glory of our salvation, in union with the Lord Jesus Christ, is reserved for the (near) future. The glory of that eternal life will be revealed/manifested when the Lord Jesus Christ is manifested at the time of His second coming. At that time we will be *glorified* and raptured into the heavenly dimension to begin to reign with Him.

Even though most of the glory is reserved for the (near) future, everything we need for this present life has been provided through new-covenant salvation in union with the

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<sup>76</sup> It seems to me that these verses, by themselves, should suffice to show that the oneness view of God is wrong.

Lord Jesus Christ. Especially relevant in this context is the fact that God has provided everything we need to live in/by/after the Holy Spirit in the truth, righteousness, and holiness of God, doing the will of God.] **(5) Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead** [In the margin the NASB has, “Lit. *put to death the members which are on the earth.*” The NKJV has, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication...” The NIV has, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality...” I believe the translation “put to death” is better. Paul is exhorting his readers to make sure that they are living as those who have truly died to sin, to the old man/the flesh, and to Satan and his kingdom. Anything that remains of sin must be put to death now with top priority (cf., e.g., Col. 3:6-9; Rom. 6:6, 12-14; 8:12-14; Eph. 4:22-32; James 1:21-23; and 1 Pet. 2:1).

Paul was undoubtedly making some reference to the members of our physical *bodies* with his use of the word *members* here (as with his use of the word *body* in Rom. 6:6; 7:24; and 8:13), but it was a rather loose reference (as it was in the verses just cited from Romans): Sometimes the apostle used the word *body* in the same non-literal sense that he often used the word *flesh*, speaking of the old man, and not at all limited to the physical body.<sup>77</sup> We live on the earth in physical bodies, bodies that enable us to function in the world below (on the earth). The members of the body are very often involved when sins are committed (cf. Rom. 6:13). It must be understood, however, that sin originates in the heart, not in the physical body.

To put to death the members which are on the earth means the same thing as putting to death the old man/the flesh and the works of the old man/the flesh. The NIV has, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” The bottom line of what the apostle Paul says here, as he so often says it, is that Christians are supposed to be dead to all sin (in the sense they stop sinning, not that they cannot be tempted to sin, and not that they cannot sin), and if they still are sinning in any way, they must make it top priority to stop all sin now. Continuing in sin is not an option; see verse 6.] **to immorality** [“Lit *fornication*” (margin of NASB)], **impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed** [or, “covetousness”; the KJV; NKJV have “covetousness”], **which amounts to idolatry** [Compare Eph. 5:5. Greed/covetousness amounts to idolatry in that it amounts to bowing down before/worshipping money and the things money can buy]. **(6) For it is because of these things that [on account of which things] the wrath of God<sup>78</sup> will**

<sup>77</sup> I’ll quote a paragraph from what J. B. Lightfoot says regarding “the members” here in verse 5, “Each person has a two fold moral personality. There is in him the ‘old man,’ and there is in him also ‘the new’ (verses 9, 10). The old man with all his members must be pitilessly slain. It is plain that [the members] here is used, like [man] in ver. 9, not physically, but morally. Our actual limbs may be either [of the earth] or [of heaven], according as they are made instruments for the world or for Christ: just as we—our whole being—may identify ourselves with the [old man] or with the [new man] of our two fold potentiality. For this use of the physical, as a symbol of the moral of which it is the potential instrument, compare Matt. 5:29 [“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you....”]” (*Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [Zondervan, 1974 reprint], page 211).

<sup>78</sup> Many Christians in our day speak only of the *love* of God; they have very little (if any) conception of His *wrath*. I’ll quote several sentences from David E. Garland on this topic (*Colossians and Philemon* [Zondervan, 1998], page 216). “A survey of faith maturity in Christians [apparently not at all limited to evangelical Christians] discovered that most believe that God is forgiving (97%) and loving (96%), but far fewer believe that God is judging (37%) or punishes those who do wrong (19%). [footnote: Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church*... (Abingdon, 1993), 44.] These Christians probably doubt that a God of such inclusive love could judge with such inflexible wrath. ... The best-selling book

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*Conversations With God*, by Neale Donald Walsch [G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1996], represents the current opinion on God's wrath. It portrays a chummy God who patronizes sin, since there is no objective right and wrong. According to Walsch, God smiles on all that we do and only asks that we do our best. Paul's mention of the 'wrath of God' presents an opportunity to help people recognize the reality of God's wrath and to disabuse them of common misunderstandings of it."

I discussed the love of God and the wrath of God in some detail, aiming for the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches, as part of my study of Ephesians chapter 1 that is on my internet site. I'll include extensive excerpts from that study here. "There's a lot of teaching around the body of Christ about God's unconditional love. I believe much of this teaching is simply wrong, and it can be dangerous. It goes beyond the balanced teaching of the Bible to tell people that God will always continue to love them just the same no matter what they believe or what they do. This out-of-balance teaching is one reason there's so little fear of God and so little repentance and motivation for righteousness and holiness in so many Christians.

Let's not see how far we can push the love and grace of God. It's not that we can in ourselves be worthy of, or earn, God's love, but if we continue to reject and disdain His love and grace [including His sanctifying grace], we will ultimately be confronted with His eternal wrath. Compare, for example, Rom. 2:4-10; Gal. 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph. 2:3 ('children of wrath,' on the path that culminates in God's wrath in the day of His wrath); 5:1-7; and Col. 3:5-11. The Old Testament verses that spoke of God's never-ending love for Israel, by the way, did not cover those individuals who willfully (and without repentance) forsook their covenant with God. Sincere Christians who love God and are living for Him in truth and righteousness are not in danger of facing God's eternal wrath, but they can block the full flow of His experiential love through failing to live in the center of His will. Let's not settle for less than God's will for us – for His full glory, and for our sakes.

It's true, of course, that we must emphasize God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. (The devil and his hosts spend a lot of time attacking God's people, telling them that God doesn't love them, when He does; telling them they have committed the unpardonable sin, when they haven't; telling them they never can stop sinning, that God's grace isn't sufficient; etc.) But it's not acceptable to put all the emphasis here. It won't work! We need the full gospel (which includes the balanced gospel)! God knows our hearts; He knows if we are making Him and His Word top priority in our hearts. If we're not, we're going to have to make it top priority to change by His sufficient grace in Christ through faith" (page 8).

"...many Christians have accepted worldly ideas about what love means (the world of our day loves words like love, tolerance, and peace), ideas that substantially miss, and often directly contradict, dominant themes of the Bible. The primary problem that I am concerned with – and it is a very serious problem – is the idea that since God is love, He cannot have great wrath, eternal wrath, and He certainly cannot cast people into hell. This idea contradicts the Bible; it is also one of the main reasons that there is so little repentance and fear of God among so many Christians in our day. Why take the warnings of the Bible seriously" (page 19)?

"Let's briefly consider John 3:16. This is a significant verse, but many read way too much into it and do not balance out what is said here with the rest of the verses in the passage (and the rest of the Bible). John 3:16, 18, for example, show that those that willfully reject the gospel are condemned already (that is, they are condemned from the time that they willfully reject the gospel, unless they later repent) and that the wrath of God (not the love of God) abides on them. In a very real sense, they have already had their final judgment. [I had a footnote here, "John 5:24 shows that it is also true, and it is a glorious truth indeed, that those who do submit in faith have already had their final judgment. This does not mean that they could not later reverse this judgment if they are foolish enough to turn away from their commitment to Christ and His salvation."] When God sent His Son, He knew what was in the hearts of all people. He knew that many were committed to evil and that they would not receive Christ or submit to the gospel in faith. He knew that Christ's coming would force such people to manifest what was in their hearts – Christ's coming to such people, or the gospel's coming to them, greatly increases their sinful status before God (see, e.g. John 3:19-21; 15:18-25)" (pages 20, 21).

"For God to love mankind unconditionally would mean that His love would not be conditioned by (that is, it would have nothing to do with) what the people did, or did not do (including repentance and faith in Christ). As I mentioned, in most ways this view is simply wrong. God's blessing all people with the sun and rain (Matt. 5:43) and, more importantly, His desire that all people repent and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) are areas where it is appropriate to speak of His unconditional love" (page 21).

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“In this discussion about the love of God, I am not dealing with God’s emotions. I am dealing almost entirely with His final (eternal) judgment of all people. Are we going to experience His eternal love, enjoying an eternal love relationship with Him, living in His presence in His eternal kingdom that is literally full of glory and abiding in all the blessings that He has prepared for those who love Him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9)? Or, are we going to be totally separated from Him in the eternal lake of fire experiencing His eternal wrath? Even if He did continue to have feelings of love for the people He cast into hell, it would not affect their eternal destinies; according to the Bible, they will experience His eternal wrath, not His eternal love. There is an emotional component of love, but love is a lot more than emotions – love is an action word. If we want to experience the eternal, abiding love of God, we must live the way He requires us to live (by the sanctifying grace of God in Christ through faith); we will be judged according to our works (cf., e.g., Rom. 2:2-13; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; 6:7-9; Eph. 5:3-7; and Rev. 22:11, 12) [Our works demonstrate whether our faith is genuine, or not.]” (page 21).

I’ll quote the brief remarks I made regarding the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). “This parable warns that although there were ten virgins at the beginning (they were all born-again Christians, who initially had oil in their lamps, which lamps were burning [Matt. 25:8]), only five of the virgins were ready when the bridegroom returned. Christ gave this teaching to exhort all Christians of the need to make it top priority to get ready and stay ready for His return. The bridegroom says to the five foolish virgins, who were not ready for His return, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ Those are not the kind of words we want to hear from Christ at the end. (We will not hear such words if we make God, His truth, His Spirit, His righteousness, and His kingdom top priority. In other words, we will not hear such words from Christ if we meet His conditions for salvation.) Those words spoken to the five foolish virgins hardly fit the idea of God’s unconditional, never-ending love. ... To face the wrath of God on judgment day will be quite the opposite of experiencing His love” (pages 21, 22).

“God’s judgments *never* are arbitrary; He is a good God, and His judgments are *always* righteous. He is a God of great mercy, but there are, as there must be, definite limits to His mercy. His righteousness and His love for His people require that He eventually remove those who persist in sin and never will repent; they cause chaos in His kingdom; they destroy divine order; they attack His people; etc.” (page 23).

“James 4:4 speaks of people *making themselves enemies of God* by becoming friends of the world; James 4:6 speaks of God’s *being opposed to the proud*. Neither of these expressions goes with abiding in the love of God” (page 23).

Luke chapter 15, with its three parables (including the parable of the prodigal son), strongly emphasizes the point that heaven rejoices when sinners repent. This chapter was dealing, for the most part, with the repentance of backslidden children of God, but I believe it has much application for the repentance of all mankind. The parable of the prodigal son deals with a prodigal son who repents; it powerfully illustrates the point that God greatly loved this son and strongly desired his repentance. What about those prodigal sons who never do repent? ... It seems clear that those who do not repent will not be able to experience the Father’s love, and especially not after the age of grace is over and the final judgment has taken place.

Repentance is not optional, and if we put off repenting while clinging to some out-of-balance understanding of God’s love, we are making a big mistake. The time will come when it is too late to repent. ...” (page 24).

“I winced as I read parts of what Clark Pinnock, a contemporary evangelical scholar, said in his article written to advocate *annihilationism* and to reject the traditional view that God will literally send people to eternal torment. This is an important topic in its own right, but the primary reason that I wanted to quote from the article here is that Pinnock bases his rejection of the traditional view of hell to a significant extent (as the quotations will show) on the mistaken idea that such a view is incompatible with God’s love, goodness, and justice. Something must be wrong with our ideas about God’s love, goodness, and justice if our ideas force us to reject what the Bible says about His wrath, vengeance, and hell. We cannot afford to challenge God by saying that if the traditional view of hell is true, then God is not a God of love, goodness, and justice. ‘... what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing His wrath on us? ... Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?’ (Rom. 3:5, 6).

His view, Pinnock says, unlike the traditional view, ‘does not portray God as being a vindictive and sadistic punisher. ... Let us begin with the moral problems surrounding the traditional view, which depicts God acting in a way that contradicts his goodness and offends our moral sense. According to Christian theology the nature of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and shown to be boundlessly merciful. God loves the whole world. His heart is to invite sinners to a festive meal (Matt. 8:11).’ But what about



**come upon the sons of disobedience** [Ephesians 5:1-8 will help us understand what the apostle says here. I'll quote those verses, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; (2) and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (3) But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints [Paul isn't saying that these words ("immorality, impurity, etc.") cannot be spoken among the people of God, but that these things must not exist among the people of God. Sin is incompatible with being "saints/holy people." The NIV has, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."] (4) and *there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* (5) For this you know with certainty, that no immoral man or impure person or covetous man [The "immoral man" here corresponds with "immorality" in verse 3 (Eph. 5:3); the "impure person" here corresponds with "impurity" in verse 3; and the "covetous man" here corresponds with

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those who spurn His mercy, who reject Him as God, who fight against His righteousness and divine order, and who join the devil in his never-ending hatred of God and rebellion against Him? ... I am sure that many Christians do not have an adequate understanding of the seriousness of sin. Perhaps none of us adequately understand its seriousness. It is a very serious matter when a high-level being like Satan rebels against God and is followed by a third of the angels, by the demons, and then (to a significant extent at least) by mankind. Consider the infinite price that God paid in the incarnation and atoning death of His unique Son, the Lamb of God, to dethrone sin and Satan and all who follow him and to save those who will submit to His plan of salvation. I am totally convinced that when God's final judgment is over, after the great-white-throne judgment, our hearts will be full of praise and thanksgiving – with no complaints or suggestions on how He could have done things better. ...” (pages 24-25).

“Many Christians have accepted worldly, far-from-the-Biblical-balance ideas of God's love. I am afraid that many who call themselves Christians are not interested in the God of the Bible; some are only interested in a caricature of God derived from what man (sometimes with the *help* of the devil, even as the devil *helped* Eve see the 'truth' in the garden) thinks God must be like to be acceptable to man, or to be worthy of the worship of man.

There are many things that we do not know or fully understand (at least not yet); the Bible has not revealed them to us, but I feel confident that when the devil, evil angels, demons, and many people are cast into the eternal lake of fire it will not be because God has a hard time forgiving, far from it. I believe the dominant factor will be that those persons never will repent, and it would be impossible for them to have a place in God's eternal kingdom without causing perpetual havoc. They would not love God, or His truth, righteousness, holiness, people, etc. They would not want to have a place in God's eternal kingdom on God's terms, not that they will want the alternative.

We very often hear that there must not be a God, or even if there is a God, He must not be a good, loving God, because of all the problems in the world, problems like hunger, warfare, strife, natural disasters, plagues, and sicknesses of the inner man and the body. Some think that God should make everything go smooth on the earth while mankind, for the most part, continues to reject Him, His Son, His truth (His Word), and His righteousness. And that is only half of the problem, not only do men reject God and substitute things like secular humanism, evolution, and the god of science in His place, but they typically, whether directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, submit to and fellowship with Satan and his hosts through things like false religions, the occult, psychic powers, and demon worship, things which are forbidden in the Bible. People cannot be neutral; if we do not pursue God with all our hearts, based on His Word, we will be influenced by the devil to one degree or another. He is the 'god of this world.'

The Bible promises that God will come and make things right on the earth; the day of judgment is coming. Our top priority must be to get ready for that day. Then we will be able to judge God and straighten Him out – No! It doesn't work like that! We will be the ones who are judged. Every time we take a stand against God and His truth and righteousness, we hurt ourselves” (page 26).

“greed” in verse 3.], who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God [To not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God means not having a place in God’s eternal kingdom, the kingdom of eternal life and glory.] (6) Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. [There are many today trying to convince God’s people that all they need is forgiveness, or forgiveness and correct doctrine, or forgiveness and correct doctrine and some religious rituals, etc., but the apostle Paul consistently insisted that we are enabled *and required* to live in the righteousness and holiness of God. We must make this a top priority.] (7) Therefore do not be partakers with them; (8) for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.”

Ephesians 5:5-7 explain what Paul means here in Col. 3:6. Those who are living in sin (who are characterized by sin), who are “sons of disobedience” (Paul used these words in Col. 3:6 and Eph. 5:6), will not have “an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5). They will inherit the “wrath of God” instead (the “wrath of God” is mentioned in Col. 3:6 and Eph. 5:6). The point of Eph. 5:7 is “do not be partakers with them” of the wrath of God that is coming at the end of this age when He pours out His wrath on the sons of disobedience. All true Christians must make sure that they are not classified with the *sons of disobedience* through living in *disobedience*. True Christians don’t live in sin; they aren’t characterized by sin.

The apostle Paul sounds the same powerful warning to his Christian readers in Gal. 5:19-21. After listing many sins (works of the flesh/old man), he says, “I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” And he sounds the same powerful warning to Christians in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (in that context Paul was warning “Christians” who had been sinning, even sinning against other Christians), “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, (10) nor thieves, not *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (11) Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God.”<sup>79</sup>

In Rom. 1:18-32 the apostle speaks of the wrath of God that is manifested from heaven *now* (during this present age) against those rejecting the truth and pressing on in unrighteousness, but here in Col. 3:6 (as in Eph. 5:5-7; Gal. 5:19-21; and 1 Cor. 6:9-11) he is speaking of the wrath to come *at the end of this age*, as he did, for example, in 1 Thess. 1:10, “and to wait for His Son from heaven, who He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

Paul didn’t teach here (or anywhere else) that if a sincere Christian slips into sin he immediately loses his salvation or has become a son of disobedience (a person characterized by disobedience), but he certainly required genuine repentance and he required each Christian to make it a top priority (by grace through faith) to walk in a state of righteousness and holiness with the victory over all sin. As far as Paul was concerned any sin is too much sin. The gospel that God revealed to Paul included the good news that His sanctifying grace is sufficient. God wants to transform/sanctify us, not to condemn us. We must make it a top priority to appropriate and cooperate with His sufficient grace (for His glory and our good)!

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<sup>79</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:8-11 are discussed on pages 173, 174 and Gal. 5:16-25 on pages 195-200 of my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin; Full Salvation Through the Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Some Greek manuscripts do not include the words “upon the sons of disobedience” here in Col. 3:6, and it is quite possible that these words were not part of the original epistle (letter) that Paul sent to the Colossians. Quite a few scholars believe these words were borrowed from Eph. 5:6 and found their way into Col. 3:6 at a later date. The United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament* (fourth revised edition, 1983) includes these words in brackets “in order to indicate a measure of doubt as to their genuineness in Colossians.”<sup>80</sup>, **(7) and in them** [“in which things,” referring back to the sinful “things” of verse 6.] **you also** [you, like the other sinners] **once walked, when you were living in them** [“living in these things.” That is, back before Paul’s readers became Christians. I’ll quote Eph. 2:1, 2, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”]. **(8) But now** [“So now,” *now* that you are Christians, and in light of the fact that the day of wrath is coming against those who continue in disobedience] **you also** [you, along with the rest of the Christians], **put them all aside** [or, “put off.”<sup>81</sup> The Greek (*ta panta*) behind “them all” literally means “the all things.” *The all things* include all the sinful things that his readers had been doing before they became Christians and all the sinful things that they could potentially do now. The apostle goes on to give a partial list of such sinful things. He has already given a partial list of sinful things that must be put to death (which is the equivalent of putting them aside/putting them off) in verse 5. It was understood that everything that was sinful (by God’s definition), everything that was part of the old man (cf., e.g. Col. 3:3, 9), was to be put off/put to death once for all and completely. In Col. 3:9, the following verse, Paul adds *lying* to the list; lying is part of the old man that must be put to death/put off/put aside/laid aside (cf. Eph. 4:25).<sup>82</sup> I believe it is obvious that the apostle was exhorting his readers to stop lying, not to begin to gradually taper off lying.

I’ll quote Eph. 4:22, which uses the same Greek verb translated “put aside/put off” here in verse 8, “that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside [“put off”] the old self [man], which is being corrupted [I would translate “which is corrupt” with the KJV, or the equivalent.] in accordance with the lusts of deceit.” Ephesians 4:17-32 are important verses on the topic of holiness and victory over sin.<sup>83</sup>]: **anger, wrath, malice, slander,**

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<sup>80</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., “A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition” (United Bible Societies, 1994), page 557.

<sup>81</sup> The KJV; NKJV have “put off.” The Greek behind “put aside [put off]” is an *aorist* imperative of the verb *apotithēmi*. An *aorist* participle of a different verb (*apekduomai*) is used in verse 9 for *laying aside* the old man, but the meaning of the two verbs is essentially the same here. The Greek *aorist* imperative fits the idea of putting aside/putting off everything sinful *once for all* and *completely* and the *aorist* participle fits the idea of having laid aside the old man with its evil practices *once for all* and *completely*. The Greek participle at the beginning of verse 10, “having put on” (or the equivalent) is an *aorist* too; it fits the idea of having put on the new man *once for all* and *completely*.

<sup>82</sup> I’ll quote what J. B. Lightfoot says under *ta panta* here, “‘not only those vices which have been specially named before (ver. 5), but *all* of whatever kind.’ [Quite a few other commentators agree with this meaning for *ta panta* here.] The Apostle accordingly goes on to specify sins of a wholly different type from those already mentioned, sins of uncharitableness, such as anger, detraction, malice, and the like” (*Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [Zondervan, 1974 reprint], page 214).

<sup>83</sup> Those verses are discussed in some detail in my paper that includes Ephesians chapter 4 on my internet site.

**and abusive speech from your mouth. (9) Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside** [or “having laid aside”] **the old self** [the old man] **with its evil practices** [See under verse 8.], **(10) and have put on** [or, “having put on”] **the new self** [the new man] **who is being renewed** [I would translate “new man which is renewed” with the KJV or “new *man* who is renewed” with the NKJV. I don’t believe the apostle included any idea of a lifelong renewal/growth process here.<sup>84</sup> Paul was speaking here, I believe, as he very often did, of putting off the old man once for all and completely and putting on the new man once for all and completely, and then living on a continuous basis in a state of righteousness and holiness (by grace through faith). I have discussed this very important topic in some detail in my previous writings. For a start, see above under Col. 1:21-23, 28; 2:7, 11-15, 23; and 3:1-9. This topic is also discussed throughout my book, *Holiness and Victory Over Sin*, especially in the last three chapters of that book, and in several of my papers.

The primary question we must consider is, Does the New Testament really teach that Christians are enabled and required to live/walk in a state of righteousness and holiness with the victory over sin? If it does (and it seems clear to me that it does), we must change our thinking (to the extent required) and begin to cooperate with and to appropriate God’s sufficient sanctifying grace (that has been offered to us at a very high cost to the triune God) through faith. This is good news, very good news! If we continue to look at our weaknesses and failures, we will continue to say that we can never stop sinning as long as we live in this world.

One of the things that concerns me the most is that I don’t see many Christians (and I am speaking mostly of those who claim to be evangelical/born again Christians) fearing God or making righteousness and holiness a top priority. It seems that the majority have accepted the idea that we cannot stop sinning, so let’s just do the best we can; we’ll make room for sin and do what we can to stifle the guilt feelings. Actually this doesn’t surprise me when I see that the majority have been interpreting and teaching the Bible in ways that support this unacceptable (according to the Bible) state.] **to** [or, “unto”] **a true knowledge** [The KJV, NKJV, and NIV translate the Greek noun (*epignōsis*) “knowledge” here instead of “true knowledge,” which is quite acceptable. However we translate the noun, it is clear that Paul was speaking here of a *knowledge* that corresponds with the *truth*. He was speaking of a *knowledge* that is in accordance with the very image of the God of truth. Paul probably intended some contrast between the *lying* mentioned in verse 9 (*lying* goes with the old man and sin and Satan) and the

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<sup>84</sup> It is true, however, that the Spirit of God continuously nourishes the new man and keeps it new. And it is also true that the kingdom of God is always growing and advancing, and that we, as we are faithful to God, will be growing (we will become more like God all the time as we are changed from glory to glory—see under Col. 2:19). But the apostle was not dealing with such growth/renewal here in Col. 3:1-11. His emphasis here was all on our being dead to the old man, which includes putting off any and all sin now that hasn’t already been put off (in the ideal case all sin would have already been put off—we would be dead to sin and the old man), and on our putting on the new man once for all and completely.

We should not think in terms of a process of gradually growing out of sin, and especially not of a *lifelong* process of gradually growing out of sin—but always continuing to sin as long as we live in this world—or of a lifelong process of gradually putting on the new man. That viewpoint, which is very widespread among Christians in our day, doesn’t square with the gospel the apostle Paul (or the other writers of the New Testament) proclaimed. With that viewpoint we could never have faith to stop sinning this side of heaven. All we could have faith for is to gradually reduce the amount of sin that we commit.

*knowledge* that corresponds with the *truth* of God mentioned here. I'll say more about this knowledge as we continue.] **according to [in accordance with** (Greek preposition *kata* with the accusative case)] **the image of the One who created him** [This verse is very similar to Eph. 4:24.<sup>85</sup> I'll quote Eph. 4:24, "and put on the new man, which in the likeness of [in accordance with (Greek preposition *kata* with the accusative case)] God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Note that the apostle Paul did not speak here (Eph. 4:24) of a new creation *in process*. In a very real sense God's new creation work has been completed in the incarnation, sinless life, atoning death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in His sending forth the gospel of salvation and His pouring forth the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul didn't speak here (in Eph. 4:24) of Christians putting on the new man and then gradually being recreated unto "the righteousness and holiness of the truth." He spoke of their once for all and completely putting on the new man and then living/walking in that righteous and holy state (by grace through faith). (Some super-important aspects of God's new-creation work are still future for us, including our continued growth, our glorification, His end-time judgments that will remove all rebels, and His creation of the new heavens and new earth after the millennium.)

Ephesians 4:24 helps show that that these words of Col. 3:10 ("to [unto] a true knowledge [in accordance with] the image of the One who created him") emphasize the fact that the new man is characterized by the *righteousness* and *holiness* of God. This is not surprising, of course, in that the new man has been renewed to a true knowledge in accordance with the image of the One (the Righteous, Holy God) who created the new man.<sup>86</sup> In the new covenant (new man) God imputes and *imparts* His *righteousness* and *holiness* to believers. But we must cooperate with Him through faith and fully put off (die to) the old man and then keep the old man from manifesting itself in sin, and we must fully put on the new man and then keep it on (we walk in the new man by walking in the gospel and in the Spirit through faith). God's righteousness and holiness are not *imparted* to us while we are passive. Faith is active!

We can say the same thing several different ways: We must walk on a continuous basis in accordance with the Word of God (especially the gospel) by faith; we must walk in/by/after the Spirit on a continuous basis by faith; we must walk in the righteousness and holiness of God on a continuous basis by faith; etc.]—**(11) a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.** [The fact that there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and

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<sup>85</sup> Ephesians chapter 4 is discussed verse-by-verse in a paper on my internet site (Google to Karl Kemp Teaching).

<sup>86</sup> The *new man* of the new covenant spoken of here, which has been created (recreated/renewed) unto the knowledge of the truth in accordance with the image of God, is a higher creative work of God than His initial creation of man, starting with Adam. Adam was created in the image of God, and he had a right, life-flowing relationship with God, but he did not have the glorious union with the Lord Jesus Christ (the God-man) that we have as born again Christian through new-covenant salvation. Adam, in his initial creation, was formed of the dust of the earth with authority on the earth. We will inherit glorified bodies, bodies designed for life in heaven/the glorified dimension (bodies that are already bought and paid for, so to speak, through the atoning death of the Lamb of God), and we will reign with Christ (and God the Father) forever. On the contrast between what man had initially in Adam (even before the fall) and what we have through new-covenant salvation in union with the Lord Jesus Christ (the last Adam), see 1 Cor. 15:45-55. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is discussed verse-by-verse in a paper on my internet site.

uncircumcised, is relevant, for one thing, to address the false teaching that Paul dealt with in Colossians chapter 2. As the apostle said there, the *one* thing that we need is to be full recipients of new-covenant salvation in union with the Lord Jesus Christ, in accordance with the terms set out in the gospel. Whether a person is a Greek or a Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, is totally irrelevant in the new covenant.] **(12) So, as those who have been chosen of God** [The Bible teaches that God chose/elected us, as individuals, before He created the world. This is an important topic, but we desperately need the balanced truth of what the Bible teaches on this topic (as on every topic, and especially those topics of key importance).<sup>87</sup>], **holy** [As we discussed under Col. 1:22, Christians are called, enabled, and required to live in a state of holiness, set apart from sin for God.] **and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility** [The Greek uses the same noun for *humility* here that was translated “self-abasement,” speaking of a *false* humility, in Col. 2:18, 23. The context in which a word is used helps establish the meaning of that word in that context. Here in Col. 3:12 Paul is clearly speaking of genuine Christian humility.], **gentleness and patience** [“i.e., forbearance toward others [or, longsuffering]” (margin of NASB). Compare 1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 6:6.

What Paul speaks of here in verse 12, and on throughout the rest of chapter 3 and on into chapter 4, is all part of *putting on the new man once for all and completely*. The Greek verb (*enduō*) behind “put on” here (here it is an aorist imperative<sup>88</sup>) was also used in verse 10 of having put on the new man (an aorist participle was used there). The same verb was used in Eph. 4:24 (which was discussed above), and other verses. The five virtues that Paul speaks of putting on here in verse 12 can all be considered fruit that is produced by the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22, 23). Three of the virtues listed here are called fruit of the Spirit by Paul in Gal. 5:22, 23, *kindness, gentleness, and patience* (forbearance toward others; longsuffering). As Paul continues he speaks of the importance of *love* in Col. 3:14, which is the first fruit of the Spirit listed in Gal. 5:22, and he mentions *peace* in Col. 3:15, which is another of the nine fruit of the Spirit listed in Gal. 5:22, 23.]; **(13) bearing with one another** [The same Greek participle that was

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<sup>87</sup> I have made it a high priority over many years to try to discern and teach the balanced truth of what the Bible says on this topic (it isn't good enough to be satisfied with what our denomination, church, favorite minister, etc. happens to teach), which includes important questions like: Is mankind so fallen that we have no capacity to cooperate with God's grace or to have faith, so God must give saving faith to those He has chosen? (Augustine and the Calvinists say yes; many others also teach that God must give saving faith to people), or is saving faith a response to God's grace? Does God's choice/election of individuals have anything to do with His foreknowledge of differences between people, like what is in their hearts, like how they will respond to His saving grace? (Augustine and the Calvinists deny this [unconditional election].) If God has chosen an individual, is it settled that that person will necessarily become a believer and then stay a believer to the end? (Augustine and the Calvinists say yes.) Did Christ die for all (most Calvinists deny this [limited atonement]), and does God really call all people to repent and submit to the gospel in faith? See my paper *Once Saved, Always Saved?* (especially see pages 20-24 of the internet version of the paper). See my *A Paper on Faith* (much of the content of that paper is relevant to this topic; start with the Introduction). See under Eph. 1:3-14 and Rom. 8:28-30 and see the excerpts from Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* in the paper on my internet site that includes Ephesians chapters 1 and 4 and Rom. 8:16-39. See under 2 Pet. 1:10 in my paper on 2 Peter; much of the content of the Appendix of that paper is relevant to this topic too. See the Introduction to my paper on Romans chapters 9-11; most of the content of the section of that paper that deals with Romans chapter 9 is relevant to this topic, and some of the content of the sections dealing with Romans chapters 10 and 11 (especially see under Rom. 11:17-36).

<sup>88</sup> The *aorist* fits the idea of putting on the new man *once for all and completely*. See footnote 81.

translated “bearing with” here was used in Eph. 4:2, where it was translated “showing tolerance for one another in love” by the NASB.], **and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.** [This is important! For one thing, the New Testament makes it quite clear that we, who have been forgiven so much by God, must we quick to forgive others. If we don’t forgive others, God will not forgive us (cf., e.g., Matt. 6:12-15; 18:21-35). Here Paul is speaking of forgiving one another in the body of Christ.

This is another area where we desperately need the balanced truth of what the apostle Paul (and the entire Bible) teaches. Sometimes (fairly often) we need a lot more than Christians forgiving other “Christians.” (By putting the word *Christians* in quotation marks, I am not saying those persons are not born-again Christians, but that some of them may not be born-again Christians.) The body of Christ cannot function as it should if some “Christians” continue to willfully sin against other Christians, often without even asking for forgiveness, and, more importantly, without repentance.<sup>89</sup> See what Jesus said in Matt. 18:15-18 about the need for the church to confront those “Christians” who are sinning with the need to repent. God, the Judge, doesn’t forgive those who don’t repent. True repentance includes making things right to the fullest extent possible and making it a top priority to not sin any more. The apostle Paul warned those “Christians” at Corinth who were sinning against their brethren that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (See 1 Cor. 6:8-11<sup>90</sup>; the New Testament is full of such warnings.)] **(14)** [See John 17:20-26; Eph. 4:1-6.] **Beyond** [“above” NKJV] **all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.** [“Lit. *the uniting bond of perfection*” (margin of the NASB). There is something very special about God’s love. For one thing, “**God is love**, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him” (1 John 4:12). It is appropriate that those who are “chosen of God, holy and *beloved* [of God]” (Col. 3:12) walk in love, and especially toward the other Christians—*they* are “chosen of God, holy, and *beloved* [of God]” too.<sup>91</sup> “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). All the emphasis on the love of God in the fourth chapter of 1 John is regarding love for the brethren in the body of Christ.

*Love* is the first fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists in Gal. 5:22, 23, he mentions that “love is the fulfillment of *the law*” in Rom. 13:8-10 (cf., e.g., Matt. 22:36-40); and in 1

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<sup>89</sup> As individual Christians we can and we must (by an act of our will, even if it takes a while for our emotions to catch up with our decision to forgive) forgive those who sin against us, whether Christians, or not. For one thing, we are not the Judge, and God has given us the *privilege* to forgive and to turn the matter over to Him who is the Judge, the Judge who will (sooner or later) make all things right (cf., e.g., Rom. 12:17-21). The Christians church, however, has an obligation before God to deal with the obvious sin of “Christians” (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1-13). For one thing, the church has an obligation to the “Christians” who are sinning; if we love them, we will want to help them turn from everything that is sinful. When “Christians” are clearly sinning against the Word of God, it is the Word of God that is the Judge, not the Christians who (under God, and in accordance with His Word) deal with the matter.

<sup>90</sup> See under Col. 3:6 in this paper.

<sup>91</sup> God is not a respecter of persons, but that does not mean that He loves every person the same or treats them the same. It depends on how they respond to Him, to His Word, to His grace. The Bible makes it very clear, for example, that God has a special love for those who submit to Him and love Him; they are *beloved*. Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that those who continue to rebel against God to the end will be excluded from His eternal kingdom and suffer eternal torment, which isn’t a manifestation of love. God would not be a good God, or a God of love, or an effective Judge if He permitted rebellion to destroy divine order and to hurt His people forever.

Cor. 13:13 he says, “But now faith, hope, and love abide these three [Faith, hope, and love *abide* forever; they are eternal, unlike the charismatic gifts, which are for this age. The apostle’s point was not that these three virtues abide *now* (though it is true that they do abide now); the Greek word behind *now* here, like our English word *now*, was sometimes used in contexts where there was no reference to the present time.], but the greatest of these is love.”

The apostle Paul says here (in Col. 3:14) that God’s love (when Christians fully walk in that love) will bind Christians together in perfect unity.<sup>92</sup> The virtues Paul listed in verses 12, 13 *will be manifested* to the extent Christians are walking in/by/after the Spirit (by faith), which includes manifesting the fruit of the Spirit of *love (agape)*. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13 Paul speaks of *agape* love; it is clear that the characteristics of love he mentions in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 will promote unity in the body of Christ. I’ll quote 1 Cor. 13:4, 5, “Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered.*”] **(15) Let the peace of Christ** [This peace that is to characterize the body of Christ is the *peace of Christ* in that it comes from Him (cf. John 14:27) through the indwelling Spirit of peace.] **rule** [“Or *act as arbiter* [or judge, umpire]” (margin of the NASB)] **in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body** [If we do the things Paul has mentioned in Col. 3:12-14 (cf. Eph. 4:1-6), as we walk in/by/after the Spirit by faith, in accordance with Paul’s instructions (God’s commands), we *will* experience *the peace of Christ* in the body of Christ. To the extent we do not have peace, we are not functioning as “one body,” to which we have been called. I believe Paul’s primary point here is this: Think/make decisions *in your hearts* (and then act accordingly) in such a way that you do not violate the peace that is essential for there to be *one body*.

It is to be understood, of course, that it is more important for Christians to have peace with God than for them to have peace with one another. (If “Christians” do not have peace with God, their peace with one another is not worth much.) Some “Christians” have made the serious mistake of making peace between “Christians” so high of a priority that they are willing to sacrifice just about anything for the sake of unity (for the appearance of unity; it isn’t true Christian unity).

There are things we cannot sacrifice for the sake of supposed unity and still have valid Christianity. We cannot set aside foundational Christian doctrines to promote unity in the Christian church (doctrines like the virgin birth and deity of Christ; like the fact that God is the Creator and Judge of all men; the reality of miracles, angels, and demons; and like the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again at the end of this age to save

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<sup>92</sup> As I mentioned, however, we cannot have true unity in the body of Christ unless Christians are united in holding the foundational doctrines of Christianity and unless we are living in accordance with those doctrines in righteousness and holiness by grace through faith. Also, there is a definite limit to how much a Christian can really manifest the fruit of the Spirit of love apart from holding the foundational doctrines of Christianity and apart from living in accordance with those doctrines in righteousness and holiness. There is a counterfeit love and the devil doesn’t mind Christians emphasizing that love so long as they don’t have much of the real thing. *Love* is very popular in the world today (including in liberal Christianity, where they deny the basics of the gospel, in much modern psychiatry and psychology, and in other religions and the occult). One of the main emphases of this worldly love is *tolerance* that is understood to mean that there are no absolutes so you can never tell a person that what they believe is wrong or what they are doing is wrong. One exception is that they must be *intolerant* toward Christians, who insist that the Bible and Christianity are true and that those that don’t agree are necessarily in error.



His own and to judge and remove all who persist in rebellion). There is no legitimate body of Christ apart from holding the truth of the Bible (in faith) and from living in accordance with the truth of the Bible in righteousness and holiness (by grace through faith). The apostle clearly did not want his readers to submit to the false teachings he spoke of throughout chapter 2, for example, in the name of love, for the sake of peace, or for any other reason.]; **and be thankful.** [It is very important for Christians to put a high priority on being thankful to God (the triune God), and on taking time to thank Him, for the super-glorious new-covenant salvation He has freely given us at a very high cost to Himself. To the extent we understand the gospel and are walking in it by faith, we cannot help but be filled with thanksgiving. And that's true even when we are in the midst of trials. We know that He will bring us through, one way, or another, that all things work together for our good (as long as we keep doing the things God requires of us by grace through faith), and that we will end up in eternal glory, reigning with Him forever. The apostle goes on to mention *thankfulness* and *giving thanks* in the two following verses.] **(16) Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** [See Eph. 5:18-20. Apparently “the word of Christ” here means the word about Christ and the full salvation that we have in union with Him (cf., e.g., Rom. 10:17). We need to have God’s Word richly dwelling within us through reading it, studying it, hearing about it (from teachers, etc.), thinking about it (meditating on it), talking about it, singing about it, and through living it. God’s Word (especially the gospel of new-covenant salvation) is infinitely important to Christians because our faith must be based on that Word, and our Christian walk will not rise above our understanding of the covenant that God has made with us.

In this context the apostle is apparently just dealing with Christians “[letting] the word of Christ richly dwell within [them], with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another” *through corporate singing*. The NIV takes it differently, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

*Teaching* and *admonishing* were taking place through the words they were singing, but it is clear that *worship* was taking place too, as they were “singing with thankfulness in [their] hearts to God.” The fact that their corporate singing involved *teaching* and *admonishing* one another shows that (at least many of the) songs they were singing were filled with solid Christian doctrine (the Word of God).

The *psalms* they were singing undoubtedly included at least some of the psalms of the Old Testament. The “hymns” undoubtedly incorporated verses from the Old Testament (especially verses that dealt with Christ and our salvation) and from the writings of the apostles and other early Christian writings that dealt with basic Christian doctrines.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> I’ll quote part of what F. F. Bruce says here (*Epistles to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans, 1984], pages 158, 159). “It has been asked sometimes if a strict threefold classification of praise is signified in the mention of ‘psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.’ It is unlikely that any sharply demarcated division is intended, although the ‘psalms’ might be drawn from the OT Psalter (which has supplied a chief vehicle for Christian praise from primitive times), the ‘hymns’ might be Christian canticles (some of which are reproduced, in whole or in part, in the NT text [I’ll quote part of a footnote Bruce has here, “Such as... Luke 1:46-55... Luke 1:68-79 [and]... Luke 2:29-32, which have been used in Christian praise from the early centuries. Other canticles or portions of canticles have been recognized in the Christ-hymns of Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:6-11; and 1 Tim. 3:16, in the baptismal hymn of

(The apostolic writings had not yet been put together to make the New Testament at the time Paul wrote Colossians. For one thing, many of the writings that were to be incorporated into the New Testament had not been written yet.) The “spiritual songs” may have been given directly by the Holy Spirit who dwelled in the saints (cf. 1 Cor. 14:15).] **(17) Whatever you do in word or deed [cf. 1 Cor. 10:31], do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ** [Doing all things (including thinking and speaking) “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” includes doing what He (and God the Father) wants us to do (we certainly don’t want to do things that will bring a reproach on His name or the name of the Father), of doing it for Him (and God the Father), of doing it by the authority and grace given to us in union with Him, and by doing it for His glory (and for the glory of the One who sent Him).], **giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** [Compare Eph. 5:20, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.” It is very important for us to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in every way possible, but we must never forget/ignore the One who sent Him, God the Father. It seems to me that this is a major problem with many Christians in our day. One factor that lends itself to this problem is the fact that the oneness doctrine is very widely dispersed. I find that even many who say they believe in the Trinity focus only on God the Son. I am speaking of areas like who they talk about, who they pray to, who they worship (in song, for example).

I am very sure (based on what the Bible teaches) that the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to always exalt the Father more than we exalt Him. Note that the apostle Paul speaks of giving thanks *to God the Father* here, *through* Christ. I am not suggesting, of course, that is improper to give thanks to God the Son, or to pray to Him on occasion, or to sing songs that are directed to Him, but we must never ignore the Father, at whose right hand the Lord Jesus Christ is. This is part of divine order, for one thing.]

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Eph. 5:14....” Bruce is speaking of songs that were incorporated *into* the writings that became the New Testament. There is no doubting that songs were also formed *from* the writings that were destined to become part of the New Testament. Songs are still being composed in our day that are taken from the words of Scripture.]), and the ‘spiritual songs’ might be unpremeditated words sung ‘in the Spirit,’ voicing holy aspirations.”