

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians

The goal of this Bible Class is to give the students a working knowledge of the Epistle to the Colossians. It is based on an expository approach to teaching the Bible, preparing the students for the worship of our Savior. The various lessons are to be viewed by the teacher as thematic suggestions to help with preparation. While the lessons are not intended to be read to the class word for word, the main ideas should be the substance of what is taught. The teacher, in preparation for the class, should consider reading through the whole curriculum before beginning the class, as well as the book of Colossians several times. This will provide the instructor with a broad and comprehensive understanding of the Epistle as it is being taught.

It is important that the instructor be not only knowledgeable about the material, but also able to teach it with enthusiasm and conviction. Students best learn from teachers that are themselves excited about the Scriptures. The use of maps, diagrams, white boards etc. is extremely helpful. Some of these have been provided in the curriculum. It is suggested that the class be conducted in an interactive manner. This can be accomplished by having them read short portions of the scripture texts, asking them questions, and wholeheartedly encouraging them to ask questions. All students should be encouraged to bring a Bible to class. The students will be provided with a handout for each lesson which includes some blanks and a few true/false questions to be filled in/answered while the lesson is being taught. Some of the answers will be found in the text of the lesson underlined and in **bold** and *italicized* type. It may be helpful to the students to write the answers on the white board as you work through the lesson.

The inclusion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism as part of the curriculum is designed to help the students acquire a broad understanding of Christian doctrine along with the specific Bible teaching. The Elders of the church will coordinate the specific questions and answers to be used in the class.

It will become evident to the teacher that this course curriculum, while not dealing with every verse and concept in the book of Colossians is comprehensive and deeply theological. It is designed to help the students understand the books in their wider biblical context, with emphasis on its place in the redemptive history of God's covenant people. The students will be confronted with and asked to understand and remember some difficult concepts. It should be remembered that children are able to comprehend much more than we often give them credit for.

While this class will be a challenge for both the teacher and the students, the rewards for the efforts of those in the class will be surprising and exciting.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians

Lesson 1 – Introduction, Background and Chapters 1-2

Class Objectives

- 1) To introduce the students to the author, recipients, historical context and overall scope of the Epistle to the Colossians;**
- 2) To instruct the students regarding biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the first two chapters**

❖ **Greetings** – Pray with the students for the Lord’s blessing on their class this term

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

Introduce yourself

Introduce your substitute teacher

The teacher is asked to take attendance at the beginning of each class period in order to provide encouragement and extra help to students when they miss a class.

Make sure all class members know each other’s **names**.

Requirements – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

There will be **questions asked** regarding the outlines of the books and some other material

Memory verses will be assigned

We will take **attendance** each week and have some **accountability** questions as well. For the next few weeks, the question will be, “**Have you gotten a good night’s sleep, brought your Bible and writing materials, worked on your memorization, and done any other assigned homework?**”

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism** – Briefly go over the question(s) and answer(s) for this quarter.

❖ **Schedule**

This lesson will be one of introduction to the Epistle to the Colossians. The remainder of the epistle will be taught next week. Lesson 2 is from Colossians 3 and 4, and is titled: “Seeking the Riches of Christ”

❖ **Lesson, pt 1 – Introduction to the Colossian Epistle**

The book of Colossians is another epistle in the Apostle Paul’s “What it Means to Be a Member of the New Covenant” series of letters to 1st-century New Covenant believers. As a standalone epistle, Colossians carries wonderful merit and is an

encouragement to Christians of all eras. Taken as one of the “series”, however, this epistle takes on even greater meaning, as it builds upon the case Paul makes in other letters regarding the “newness” of the New Covenant, the necessity of perceiving and resisting the insidiousness of anti-Christian Judaism, of biblically breaking with the Old Covenant, and living as a citizen of the new Kingdom Age.

As is the case with many books of Scripture, the epistle to the Colossians is rich in its complexity. Colossians may be outlined using a rough chiasm; not all sections carry exact “watertight” references to the others, but there are patterns within the corresponding sections that may be useful for students to memorize in order to gain a better understanding of the thrust of the letter. See below:

- A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. Prayer, thanksgiving, and a worthy walk (1:3-1:12)
 - C. Christ the image of God (1:13-29)
 - D. Old treasures vs. New (2:1-23)
 - E. Seek Christ above (3:1-4)
 - D’. Old man vs. New (3:5-8)
 - C’. The Church the image of Christ (3:9-14)
 - B’. Prayer, thanksgiving, and a worthy walk (3:15-4:6)
- A’. Closing Salutation (4:7-18)

A brief summary of the epistle to the Colossians is as follows.

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God in the unique position of God-Man, has exclusive creative and redemptive authority over all creation. He alone has carried out the work of superseding the Old Covenant Levitical system and rendering it obsolete. Having risen as the Firstborn from the dead, He bears authority over all systems, rule, principalities and powers in all the created order. Turning from the shadows of Christ displayed in the Old Covenant, and fixing our eyes on Christ and His supremacy – both on earth and in heaven – enables us to live as New Men in the New Age.

The word “wisdom” is used six times by Paul throughout this epistle, both in reference to his teachings as well as his exhortations regarding the saints’ walk in Christ. The idea of riches or treasure is also prevalent in Colossians. Paul declares that all treasures of wisdom are hidden in Christ, and prays that the saints attain the riches of the knowledge of Christ (ch.1:27, 2:2-3); later he exhorts them that the Word of Christ, i.e., the gospel, should dwell in them “richly” (ch.3:17).

Historical and Biblical Background

Written from during Paul's imprisonment in **Rome** around the years **A.D. 61-62** (ch.4:3; cf. Acts 28), the epistle to the Colossians is named as such, being written to saints living in **Colosse**, a Phrygian city which was located on the Lycus River (a tributary of the Maeander). It was about 12 miles above Laodicea, and near the great road from Ephesus to the Euphrates, and was consequently of some mercantile importance. **Laodicea** was a city of prominence and wealth, as well as being the location of an important medical school of that era.

Not only the cities themselves, but the area around these cities was also very wealthy. The land was fertile and the pastures produced great flocks of sheep. The area was a great center for the wool industry and the associated trade of the dyeing of woolen garments. The wealthy city of Laodicea was the financial headquarters for the whole area and the political center for the district. Thousands of people visited Hierapolis to bathe in the spas and drink the water due to the claims that the water had medicinal benefits. Even though Colosse was at one time as important as both Laodicea and Hierapolis, by the time Paul wrote to Colosse it was a small, fairly insignificant town. While Laodicea remained an important city until the 4th century, after the 1st century the city of Colosse fell into decay, and the modern town of Chonas or Chonum now occupies a site near its ruins.

Into the area of Lydia and Phrygia Antiochus the Great had sent 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon and Mesopotamia. These Jews prospered more than the Gentiles who lived in the area. Eventually, Jews from Palestine moved into the region for "the wines and baths of Phrygia." It has been estimated that in the year 62 B.C. the Jewish population was as high as 50,000 (William Barclay, Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, p. 93).

The cities of Syria, Asia, and Galatia (Phrygia) were densely populated with Jews relocated here during the centuries after the exile and prior to Christ. From Acts 14-15 and the letter to the Galatians it appears that Judaizers had a stronghold in the synagogues of Galatia and Phrygia, just as they did elsewhere during this time. This is evidenced by the fact that the baptism of John was commonly known in this region. Additionally, the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest in the region of Ephesus, attempted to cast out demons in Jesus' name and were frustrated.

It does not appear that Paul had visited this city when he wrote his letter to the church there, acknowledging that many of the brethren at Colosse had never seen his "face in the flesh" (ch.1:2). He also expresses in his letter to Philemon (Ph. 1:22) his hope to visit it on being delivered from his imprisonment. From the

epistle it is generally concluded that **Epaphras**, a fellow-worker with Paul, had established the church at Colosse. Epaphras was a "faithful minister of Christ" (Col. 1:7). Epaphras, a resident of Colosse, had great zeal for the brethren in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:12-13).

The church at Colosse was composed mainly of Gentiles (Col. 1:21). But due to the prevalent influence of the dispersed Jews in this region, it would have been necessary for Paul to address the issue of the "oldness" of the Old vs. the "newness" of the New Covenant with the church at Colosse, just as he did with the Galatians and Ephesians. In fact, several sections of Colossians closely mirror sections in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. Given the similarities between these two books, any undertaking to study Colossians ought to include a review of Ephesians as well, as well as the Apocalyptic letter to the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:14-22).

❖ Lesson, pt 2 – Colossians 1-2: The Supremacy of Christ and the Gospel

Memory Verse:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Col. 1:15-17

❖ Chapter 1

Verses 1-2: Salutation

As he began the letter to the Philippians, Paul also begins the Colossian letter by introducing himself and his comrade, **Timothy**. Frequently Paul wrote letters with close companions or friends at his side, who often conveyed his writings to the recipients in person. In making the letter a joint one, Paul thus demonstrated his fellowship and solidarity with his fellow workers, as well as commending them to the church at large.

Paul here salutes the church, and identifies those, to whom he is writing, as "...the saints and faithful brethren who are in Colosse." In order to remind believers of his connection to Jesus, his authority, and care for the churches, more often than not Paul opens his epistles by including a brief reminder of his apostolic authority. It is no different here with the Colossian saints; Paul calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ "by the will of God," reminding them of his authority and from where he received it. This authoritative salutation could be due to the fact that Paul had

never visited Colosse personally; therefore he reminded them of his position as apostle in order for them to more closely heed his words in the epistle. Not long after this in the beginning of his letter, he also reminds them of his “stewardship from God,” which was bestowed upon Paul not only for the sake of the Colossians but for all the saints (ch.1:25-29).

Next, as he does in each of his epistles, Paul pronounces a blessing upon the church: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This exact same salutation is used by Paul for his letters to the Ephesians and Philippians also. Blessing the church in this manner presupposes Paul’s apostolic authority to declare and announce God’s grace to the world. Not only does this assume the authority of the apostle, it also assumes the relationship of the apostle to his Lord and benefactor, and Paul’s responsibility and right to speak for Him. Note that it is a plural blessing from a plural source: the Triune God. Jesus and the Father – Who along with the Holy Spirit – while distinct in their functional roles in the “economic Trinity,” are equal in their power to supply the Church with grace, peace, and all manner of temporal and eternal blessings.

Verses 3-12: Prayer, Thanksgiving, and a Worthy Walk

Paul prays for the Colossians, giving thanks for their faith, hope and love (see 1 Cor. 13:13) and for their testimony. Paul’s prayer here is similar to his prayer for the Ephesians. In both letters he praises God for their election, and the Lord’s calling and work in the Church (Eph 1:3-22); for the Colossian saints Paul says he prays without ceasing (v.3,9). In both letters, Paul prays that the saints will be given wisdom, understanding and strength, to know the love of God, to understand His will, and be filled with power to walk according to it. Along with the preaching of the Word, prayer is the other primary apostolic duty (Acts 6:4); this, in fact, is the solemn duty of all those who are called to lead or judge the people of God in any capacity (1 Sam. 12:23). Accordingly, the Westminster Larger Catechism appropriately states in question 129:

“What is required of superiors towards their inferiors?”

It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel, and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproof, and chastising such as do ill; protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body: and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honour to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.”

Verses 13-23: Christ the image of God

After acknowledging God's great work of salvation and grace, Paul reminds them of the nature and character of Him Whom they are worshipping. The Father has powerfully saved us, and has conveyed us into the kingdom of His beloved Son (v.13; cf. Matt.3:17, 17:5). It is critical to note that the Son, Jesus Christ, is not *made* in the image of the Father, as Adam was; rather Jesus *is* the incarnate image of God, who is invisible (v.15). This comports with the book of Hebrews' description of Jesus as "being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Heb.1:3). Paul declares, as does John in his gospel (Jn.1:1-3), that Jesus created all things, and is before all things. As the God-Man, He is more than a vicegerent of God on earth; He is the source and purpose of all that exists (v.16).

Orthodox (and RCC) Distinctive: The Deity of Jesus Christ

It is readily apparent that all the apostates, cults, and false religions of the world fail to avow what the orthodox Church avows regarding Jesus, namely that He is both the Son of God and God the Son. While it is important to retain a holistic perspective in our interpretation of biblical doctrine, arguably the deity of Jesus Christ is the most vital doctrine for a Christian to apprehend and believe. The early Church from the fourth to the sixth century held several councils to debate and discern the nature of Jesus. From these councils came creeds which declare and affirm in various ways – and painstaking detail – Who Jesus Christ is, His relationship to the Father, His virgin birth, and describe His nature and work.

One early creed, the Formula of Chalcedon, clearly describes the divine nature of Jesus, and is biblically supported by Paul's statements here in Colossians 1:

*Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood... of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood...as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin... recognized in two natures, **without confusion, without change, without division, without separation**; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.*

RCC affirms this, teaching that "*We believe that God is one God, yet three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost...that God the Son, namely Jesus Christ, though existing eternally in the Godhead, was born to the virgin Mary...*". Many Scriptures prove Jesus is both equal to and is Himself God (cf. Jn.5:28, 8:58,20:28). If Jesus is not both

true God and true Man, then our hope in Him is in vain: apart from the unity of His Godhead and manhood He cannot save us, and salvation must come from elsewhere.

The fullness of the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – was pleased, in fact, to dwell in the Man, Jesus Christ (v.19, ch.2:9), so that through Him all the created order and everything in it would be reconciled to Himself. The means of reconciliation is nothing less than Jesus’ death on the cross (v.22). By his bodily death and resurrection Christ – the God-Man – has reunited God and man, who formerly was alienated from God by first the Fall of Adam, as well as the ongoing sinful actions of his own choosing (v.21). The aim of this reconciliation is the restoration of man to his original state, as the holy, blameless, and irreproachable son of God (v.22, ch.3:9-10; cf. 2 Cor.5:18-19).

Paul next reminds the Colossians of his role as an apostolic minister of the gospel, and of his toiling to preach, teach and warn “every man” (v.29). The term “every man” is likely a reference to the fact that the Gentiles, who formerly were without Christ and outside of the covenant, have now been brought into fellowship with God by means of the covenant (cf. Eph.2:12-13). This is the “mystery which was hidden from ages and generations, but now has been revealed” (v.26-27); Paul’s apostleship is in fact a stewardship of grace, granted to him by God to reveal this glorious and heretofore hidden mystery to the world (v.25; cf. Eph. 3:1-7). Paul as a prisoner (ch.4:3,10,18) rejoices in his sufferings for Christ, as he is identified with Jesus, Who is actually the One being persecuted.

❖ Chapter 2, v.1-21: Old Treasures vs. New

This section focuses on the treasures of knowing Christ, and the revelation given to the Gentiles in Christ, as distinct from the Old Covenant Church (the Jews). Paul starts by reiterating his prayer and labor for the Colossian (and Laodicean) saints, that they might comprehend the mystery of God and of Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v.2-3). Paul again reminds the Colossians of the place Jesus holds, as both the head and substance (body) of all things (v.9).

The primary reason for Paul’s reminder here in this section is to contrast the teachings of Judaism against the teaching of Christ. The apostle exhorts them to continue in the faith as they received it, and not be “cheated” out of their rich reward in Him (v.8, 18). The Judaizers were about in all the churches, deceiving Gentile believers into accepting a “2nd class Christian” status, unless they were circumcised (cf. Gal.3:1). It was no different here in Colosse. Paul responds to

these teachings by declaring that Gentiles have indeed been circumcised, undergoing a “circumcision made without hands...by the circumcision of Christ” (v.11). Set apart by the baptism they had undergone in Christ, the Colossians were united to Jesus in His death, and had been raised together with Him, having been forgiven all their trespasses (v.12-13).

The death of Christ effectively “wiped out” all of the Levitical requirements that stood in the way of Gentile participation in the covenant (v.14). By being united to Christ in His death, the Colossians no longer had an obligation to follow Old Covenant rituals to be members of and participate in the covenant. This was in effect a “disarming” of the **“principalities and powers” (v.15) who presided over the Old Covenant (i.e., the Jewish rulers)**. Jesus has won the battle against these powers that were fighting in the heavenly places to maintain their favored position in the covenant (cf. Eph.6:12). Hence when Jerusalem is about to fall, in John’s apocalyptic vision he sees stars fall from heaven; this portends the final downfall of the Israel’s leaders, who refused to submit to Jesus (Rev.6:13). But the Old Covenant had been rendered obsolete, and their authority was taken away.

No one can judge the Colossian Gentile believers now, in “food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon, or Sabbaths” (v. 16). These Levitical ordinances were merely shadows, cast by the approaching light of Messiah in the New Age. The writer to the Hebrews also affirms that the law and its shadowy ceremonies were essentially copies of “the heavenly things”, those being “the good things to come” with the advent of the Messiah (cf. Heb.8:5,10:1). No longer bound to these shadows, New Covenant believers are joined to the Incarnate, Resurrected Christ, Who is – and has always been – the substance [literally, “body”] of the covenant (v.17).

Therefore we should allow no one – Jew or Gentile – to defraud us of our “reward”, our treasure of the knowledge of Christ. We have “died with Christ from the basic principles [elements] of the world” (v.20), and therefore **should no longer subject ourselves to the regulations of the Old Covenant, which revolve around touching, tasting, and handling (i.e., the purity laws of Lev.11-15)**.

Again Hebrews exhorts us to “leave the elementary principles” behind, going on to perfection, growing up in covenantal maturity in the Kingdom Age (cf. Gal 4:9-10). Note that it is a voluntary submission that Paul discourages the Colossians from undergoing: “you subject yourselves...,” he says (v. 20-21). Because the Old Covenant is obsolete, these regulations now are mere “commandments and doctrines of men,” which only appear to be effective in taming the sinful heart, but in fact are vain (v.22-23, cf. Jer.17:9; Heb.9:9,10:1), and fleshly [i.e., Levitical].

Only the once-for-all shed blood of Christ avails to remove the guilt of sin, cleanse the conscience, and empower the believer unto good works (Heb.10:19-22).

Excursus: The Laodicean Connection

Paul refers to the Laodicean church four times in this epistle (ch.2:1; 4:13,15-16), and exhorts the Colossians to read the letter from Laodicea, as well as receive and read the letter they received (ch.4:16). The six mile distance between Laodicea and Colosse made it easy for this to occur (see above). We never hear of this letter or its contents outside of Paul's mention of it in the Colossian epistle; however, Laodicea did later receive an epistle that is recorded in Scripture, this one from Jesus (Rev.3:14-22). With the fourfold mention of Laodicea in Paul's letter to Colosse, it is highly likely that the Laodicean letter in Revelation and Paul's letter to Colosse are connected in some way(s). But what are these connections?

We know that Laodicea was a wealthy city, with a famous medical school. Following the earthquake around AD 60, the citizens of Laodicea were offered aid from Rome, but refused and rebuilt the city from their own wealth without any outside assistance. Additionally, we know from history that there were many Jews in this region, who had been relocated there by Antiochus (see above). Given the proximity of Laodicea to Colosse, this would likely mean that the infiltration of Judaizers and the issues they created by would be common to both churches.

There are clues to this, and evidence of the mutual problem of Judaism in both Colosse and Laodicea and the relationship of the issues facing both churches. First, in John's apocalyptic letter Jesus introduces himself to Laodicea as "the beginning [origin] of the creation of God" (Rev.3:14). Similarly, in the opening of Colossians, Jesus is said to be the Firstborn over all creation, with all things being created by Him, and He is before all things (ch.1:15-18). Jesus also says to Laodicea He is the Faithful and True Witness (Rev.3:14), as opposed to the Judaistic false teachers who were attempting to spoil Colosse through philosophy and empty deceit (ch.2:8-10).

Second, Jesus harshly rebukes the Church at Laodicea, reminding them of their prideful, blind assertion of affluence (Rev.3:17-18). Jesus exhorts them to "buy" from Him, gold, garments, and eye salve. This correlates to the exhortations to the Colossians, regarding treasures of wisdom being found only in Christ, the reward of knowing Him, and the riches of the glorious revelation God has granted the Church (ch.1:27,2:2-3,18). Just as Paul warned the Colossians to guard this treasure (ch.2:8,18), Jesus subsequently warns the Laodiceans, and admonishes them to repent, acknowledging they have lost it.

Finally, the rebuke of the Laodicean church for their repugnant, lukewarm state is likely due to their turning away from Christ and turning toward Judaism, as Galatia

did; Laodicea had become lukewarm because they were halting between the two Covenants and two Churches, and mixing these two (i.e., Judaism vs. Jesus).

Lesson Summary

The Colossian church was birthed by Epaphras, and although Paul never visited there, he had a deep-felt concern for the Colossians. Paul desired them to recognize the all riches of the New Covenant they had received in Christ, Who is the Image of God, and the Firstborn over all. Not only this, Paul wanted them to reject any insinuation by Judaistic teachers that the Colossians were “2nd class Christians”, and thereby give up their reward; rather they had all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Jesus.

Next week this theme will continue, as the Colossians are exhorted to continue to seek Christ who is above, and walk worthy of His calling.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians
Lesson 1 – Introduction and Chapters 1-2

Class Objectives

- 1) To introduce the author, recipients, historical context and overall scope of the Epistle to the Colossians;
- 2) To apply the biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the first two chapters

❖ **Greetings**

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

Requirements – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

Memory verses will be assigned

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Schedule** – Today – The Supremacy of Christ and the Gospel
Week 2 – Colossians Conclusion

❖ **Lesson – Introduction, Background, and Chapters 1-2**

A. Authorship –

Who wrote Colossians? _____ and _____ v. 1

B. Historical / Geographical Context

1. Time

- Colossians was written by Paul during his first imprisonment around the year _____?

2. Place written from –

Paul was in _____ when he wrote Colossians

3. History of Church

True or False: Paul visited Colosse twice during his missionary journeys. _____

Who was the leader of the Colossian church? _____

What other church was located nearby, that is mentioned in Colossians? _____

C. The Message of Colossians

4. What is the main theme of this section of Colossians? _____

5. Finish this sentence of Paul’s: “All things were created through Him and for Him; _____
_____.”

6. Who was disarmed by the death and resurrection of Jesus? _____

7. What was the result of this disarming? _____

8. What Levitical regulations are we subject to today? _____

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians
Lesson 2 – Chapters 3-4
“Seeking the Riches of Christ”

Class Objectives

- 1) To instruct the students regarding the biblical nature of the change from the Old to the New Covenant, and the centralities;
- 2) To make application of the biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the final two chapters of Colossians

❖ **Greetings** – Pray with the students for the Lord’s blessing on their class this term

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

Introduce yourself

Introduce your substitute teacher

The teacher is asked to take attendance at the beginning of each class period in order to provide encouragement and extra help to students when they miss a class. Make sure all class members know each other’s **names**.

Requirements – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

There will be **questions asked** regarding the outlines of the books and some other material

Memory verses will be assigned

We will take **attendance** each week and have some **accountability** questions as well. For the next few weeks, the question will be, “**Have you gotten a good night’s sleep, brought your Bible and writing materials, worked on your memorization, and done any other assigned homework?**”

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism** – Briefly go over the question(s) and answer(s) for this quarter.

❖ **Schedule**

This lesson will be the final one of the Epistle to the Colossians.

❖ **Lesson 2 – The Heart of the Colossian Epistle**

This section of the letter to the Colossians forms the heart of Paul’s exhortation. Having laid the foundation by reminding them of Who Jesus is, who he (Paul) is, and what Jesus has done, he exhorts them to turn from the old, earthy covenant and

toward Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (ch.2:3).

Chapter 3:1-4: Seek Christ Above

Christ here is said to be raised, and above all; hence as opposed to seeking the earthly Levitical rituals which are of no value, believers are commanded to seek Him above (v.1-2), for in Him alone is our life (v.3). **He will someday appear, and we will also appear with Him in glory** (v.4).

While it may seem that shunning Old Covenant rites has no bearing on our lives today, seeking Christ above is a most applicable principle to Christians of every era. The Christian has definitively died to all earthly affections, which undermine his commitment to Christ. The first commandment teaches us, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex.20:1). Ultimately, **affection for anything in the created order that supersedes our affection and love for Christ is putting another god before Him**; this is why Paul goes on to say that “covetousness...is idolatry” (v.5).

Chapter 3:5-8: Old man vs. New

Because our life is in Christ alone, we must put to death any behaviors and desires that belong to the old man, who has died in Christ (v.3). **In baptism, the old man has died, has been buried, and been raised with Christ** (see ch.2:12-13); thus believers must each day, in practice, “kill the old man” and all of his sinful “members”, which bring the wrath of God (v.6-7). As Luther wrote in his Small Catechism,

Q. What does such baptizing with water indicate?

A. It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Not only are outward behaviors to be mortified, but inward attitudes, ideas, and speech must also. The old man is an angry, hateful, malicious, blasphemer and liar (v.8-9), and must be “put off”. As Gary North has said, “You can’t beat something with nothing”; hence not only must the old man be mortified, the new man must be put on in his place. It has also been said that nature abhors a vacuum; therefore evil conduct cannot merely cease without being replaced by godly conduct.

Paul alters between commanding and declaring; we have already put off the old man, yet we must continually put off the old man. Believers have been raised with Christ, are presently recreated in the image of God, and represent Christ to the world. This recreation is a definitive act, a one-for-all occurrence which God has initiated and brought to pass; yet it is also a progressive, ongoing action, and is the believer's duty to continually perform until the day of his death, or until Christ returns in glory. As the famous English Calvinist evangelist, George Whitefield, prayed often, "Let me begin to be a Christian."

Chapter 3:9-14: The Church - the image of Christ

Paul continues his exhortation, by reminding the Colossians that in their salvation they have been recreated in the image of Christ. **He is the true Prototypical Man, the Firstborn, the New Adam.** In putting Him on, we are "renewed in knowledge" (v.10), meaning we have the same intimate communion with and knowledge of God the Father as Jesus does (cf. John 17:3,21-23). Because of His work in destroying all the previously erected boundaries both of sin and natural birth, our identity is found exclusively in Him, and no longer in any racial, Levitical, or aristocratic attributes we might claim.

Because we are the holy and beloved children of God, recreated in the image of Christ, we must walk as those who represent Him. This means having the mercy, humility, and forbearance of Jesus Himself (cf. Phil.2:1-4). The "glue" that makes us perfect in unity with God and with fellow believers is "love, which is the bond of perfection" (v.14). As Calvin wrote in his commentary on Colossians,

"That he may commend it the more, he calls it the bond of perfection, meaning by this, that the troop of all the virtues is comprehended under it. For this truly is the rule of our whole life, and of all our actions, so that everything that is not regulated according to it is faulty, whatever attractiveness it may otherwise possess. This is the reason why it is called here the bond of perfection; because there is nothing in our life that is well regulated if it be not directed towards it, but everything that we attempt is mere waste."

As Jesus prayed for His disciples before His death, "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (Jn.17:23). Bearing the Image of Christ is first bearing the love of God the Father for Him, but also bearing Jesus' name, holiness, and title to the world.

Chapter 3:15-4:6: Prayer, thanksgiving, and a worthy walk

Having been recreated in the image and knowledge of Jesus, and because they have the love of Christ of the Father, the Colossians are exhorted to be at peace in one body, just as the Triune God is one, “and be thankful” (v.15). Thankfulness marks both the beginning of Paul’s letter (ch.1:3), and the end (ch.3:15, 4:2) of his closing exhortations to the church at Colosse.

Paul commands the Colossian believers next to submit to and allow the “word of Christ [to] dwell in you richly with all wisdom” (v.16). In Paul’s command the use of the term “word of Christ” most likely is specifically used to contrast the Old and New Covenant word(s). It is important to grasp that while the two covenants are essentially one in substance, they are unique in administration, glory, and duration (cf. 2 Cor. 3). The new “word of Christ” stands in distinction from the “old” word of Moses, and the Levitical system which accommodated it; it is not the old word of the Judaizers, but rather the word of Christ and His suffering, death and glory (i.e., superiority) which is to dwell richly in believers, and they also are to dwell on and in this word.

It is notable that according to Paul the indwelling of the word of Christ is neither an abstract action, nor an intellectual exercise and a bare contemplation or apprehension, without also influencing the outward behavior of the Christian.

Paul declares that the indwelling Word works outwardly and is exhibited in the Church, by means of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”, and “singing with grace”. These songs are not meant only to cheer, nurture, and sustain believers in the Spirit (cf. Eph.5:18-19, Jas.5:13); they are to be a means of instruction and admonition to edify believers in the Lord.

Paul continues his exhortation by an inclusive command that whatever believers do – in word or deed – they are to perform and act in the name of the Lord Jesus, with thanksgiving (v.17). Literally, in the Greek this text reads, “And everything, whatsoever you may do in word or in work, (do) all in (the) name of (the) Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and (the) Father by him”. The emphasis here is on the comprehensive nature of Jesus’ claim on our life: “everything”, “whatsoever”, and “all” that is done in word and action ought to be done in Jesus name (see also ch.3:23). Imaging the Lord Christ must be at the core of our very being, and become, as it were, instinctive and second nature to us.

Paul goes on to elucidate what he means by “whatsoever”, by calling on all believers in any every station they find themselves to obey the word of Christ. Wives, husbands, parents, children, servants, and masters (ch.3:18-4:1) cover

nearly every place or position we might occupy at any point in our lives. In each and all of these, the Christian is to submit to and imitate Christ, who was and is the perfect example of biblical obedience and holiness toward God. **Our obedience must be rendered not merely as an outward or formal submission, but rather sincerely from the heart, and with all ardor and enthusiasm toward Christ**, as He will grant us a rich reward in our serving Him (v.23-24).

RCC Exclusive: Biblical Worship, or “Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs”

The worship performed at RCC is neither haphazard nor thoughtless, especially in regard to the music selected for worship each Lord’s Day. Since RCC’s inception, her elders have taken worship music to be a matter of great concern for the Church, and have led RCC in the establishment, practice, and instruction in biblical music. While the spoken Word is the primary means of instruction, the “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” which RCC deploys in worship are a critical secondary means of instruction as well.

Commentators have differed on the meaning of these three terms here in Colossians 3:16 (cf. Eph.5:19). The “psalms: referred to here must be none other than the book of 150 Psalms, which served as the Church’s hymnbook for 3000 years. The “hymns” Paul refers to are likely biblical texts which are outside of the Psalms, which had been used by the church in song (e.g., “The Song of Moses” in Exodus15, and “David’s Last Words” in 2 Samuel 23). “Spiritual songs” could be music that references Scripture or biblical ideas; it could also be another type or genre of biblical text-based music. Regardless of the exact meaning of each of these terms, God has given a directive for the Church to exercise herself in singing, using the Bible as her primary sourcebook (see Ps.47:1,6-7; Ps.92:1-3, etc.).

The section concludes with an exhortation to continue steadfastly and watchfully in prayer (v.2-4), which is a common theme in Paul’s letters (cf. Eph.6:18; Phil.4:6; 1 Thess.5:18). Prayer must be a primary duty of all our days, and be a constant habit. Calvin writes regarding Philippians 4:6,

“In these words he exhorts the Philippians, as David does all the pious in [Psalm 55:22](#), and Peter also in [1 Peter 5:7](#), to cast all their care upon the Lord. For we are not made of iron so as not to be shaken by temptations. But this is our consolation, this is our solace — to deposit, or (to speak with greater propriety) to disburden in the bosom of God everything that harasses us. Confidence, it is true, brings tranquility to our minds, but it is only in the event of our exercising ourselves in

prayers. Whenever, therefore, we are assailed by any temptation, let us betake ourselves forthwith to prayer, as to a sacred asylum.”

Paul’s final exhortation is for the Colossians to walk wisely toward those who are outside the Church, behaving in a manner which becomes a Christian. The idea of “walk wisely” and “redeeming the time” is also used in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where he says, “See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph.5:15-16). This might refer to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, and the fact that 1st century Christians needed to not only behave prudently toward the unbelieving Jews, but also to make use of every opportunity to speak to them regarding Jesus and His work, and persuade them to acknowledge and trust in Jesus as Messiah. “Seasoned with salt” is a reference to the Levitical burnt and grain offerings, which were always offered with salt (Lev.2:13). **The Christian is to offer all his life as a living sacrifice to God (cf. Rom.12:1-2), and as such “salty” speech is to reflect his total submission and the offering of his life to God.**

Chapter 4:7-18 Closing Salutation

As is the case with most of Paul’s epistles, he ends it with a salutation and greeting from other saints that he is ministering with (cf. Rom.16:1-25; 1 Cor.16:15-19, etc.). **This long section names ten different individual believers, as well as the Church in Laodicea**, and gives commands and encouragements regarding each of them. Paul writes to both identify and praise his beloved friends, thus enabling and exhorting the Church to receive them as they would receive him. This is a wonderful example to us, as believers ought to take every opportunity to commend other Christians to those whom they are with.

Paul closes this epistle - as he does all of them – with a benediction, a declaration of blessing and grace upon the Churches. He reminds the Colossians of his status in jail, and simply asks them to remember his imprisonment, “Remember my chains” (v.18). Then in closing he utters a blessing of grace upon them, with an assurance of God’s performance of his request: “Amen.”

Lesson Summary

The Colossian church found itself in the midst of the transition between Old and New Covenants. Paul exhorted them to turn their focus from the “earthy” Levitical rituals, and toward Jesus Who was raised up and now is seated in heaven, over all creation. The Church has died with Jesus, and has been recreated in the image of the risen Lord, and must live as He did. We must walk worthily of our Lord, and everything we do must be performed as to Him; wherever we find ourselves we must image Christ and obey Him.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians
Lesson 2 – Chapters 3-4: “Seeking the Riches of Christ”

Class Objectives

- 1) To grow in knowledge of and gratitude for the historic and covenantal changes brought about by the coming of Jesus in the New Covenant**
- 2) To apply the biblical principles, exhortations, and commands in the last two chapters**

❖ **Greetings**

❖ **Attendance and Accountability**

Requirements – Writing utensils, Bibles, a good night’s sleep

Memory verses will be reviewed

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Schedule** – Today Week 2 – Colossians Conclusion

❖ **Lesson – Seeking the Riches of Christ**

A. Seek Christ Above

1. When Jesus appears at His return, where will we be? _____
2. Why is covetousness called “idolatry”? _____

B. Old Man vs. New

1. What does it mean when Paul says we “have put off the old man”?

2. Who is the New Man? _____
3. Is the death of the old man a past event? A future event? Or...? _____

4. How do believer exhibit that the word of Christ is richly indwelling them?

5. How are Christians to perform their duties toward God? _____
6. What does it mean to have speech “seasoned with salt”? _____
6. Which Church received a special greeting from Paul? _____