

## Lesson 3 Commentary

# Christ's Identity and Work

Colossians 1:15–2:7

Colossae was under spiritual attack. False teachers had invaded, and they were infiltrating the young church there. Paul did not specifically name the errors the Colossian believers were encountering. But it appears that some people were claiming that a good God could not have created the evil world. They taught that God the Father was distant from creation and Jesus was not fully divine. Paul directly confronted this spiritual attack. His words were clear and unapologetic. He asserted that Jesus is both the creator of the world and also its Savior.

### Christ's Deity

Paul declared the preeminence of Christ. He said that Jesus was “the image of the invisible God.” In Christ, Paul said, God’s fullness “was pleased to dwell.” All of God that human beings can know is seen in Jesus. Jesus is also the “firstborn of all creation.” *Firstborn* is used here as a title of honor; the firstborn sons in Paul’s time would have been entitled to certain privileges. Paul was emphasizing a powerful truth. Jesus holds the place of highest honor above all creation. Jesus is the world’s creator, sustainer, and Savior.

*Creator.* Jesus created everything “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” It would be impossible, therefore, for Him to be a created being or a mere emanation of God. Paul referred to “thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities.” Many scholars believe he was referring to different types of spiritual beings. Paul’s readers lived among people who worshiped angels. So, warning against this error, Paul was proclaiming that everything, including angels, was created by Christ. In fact, not only were angels—and everything else in creation—made *by* Christ; they were also made *for* Him.

*Sustainer.* Jesus did not create the world and then walk away. Because of Him, in whom “all things hold together” (1:17), our world does not collapse into chaos. He sustains the whole world, and He also sustains His church. A familiar picture in the New Testament is the portrayal of the church—God’s people—as a body. Jesus is the head of this body. Men and women throughout the ages have founded denominations, started churches, and launched ministries, but there is only one head. He is Jesus, and He is preeminent.

*Savior.* Paul asserted that “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” in Christ. All that God is—love, wisdom, power, mercy, justice—dwells fully in the person of Jesus. Because of this, Jesus could do what no mere human could ever accomplish: make a way for all things to be reconciled to God. All of the world’s other religions show people trying to reach God. But the Bible shows God reaching down to us. On our own, we have no chance of winning God’s favor. We all begin as alienated and hostile, doing evil things. Our separation from God was so deep and wide that it could be bridged only by the blood of His Son. The only way we could be brought back into relationship with God was through Jesus’s death as payment for our sins. Jesus provided what we need to be reconciled to God. This message is the best news we will ever hear. By believing in Christ, we can be reconciled to our creator. He sets us free from slavery to sin.



**Think about** the claim that Jesus is God. Few people dispute that Jesus was a good teacher and a good man. The claim to His deity, however, causes many inquirers to resist. Paul was not the first to declare that Jesus is God. Jesus Himself claimed to be God when He said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). To prove His claim to deity, Jesus showed divine power by raising the dead, healing the sick, delivering the demonized, and controlling nature just by speaking. Paul didn’t say anything about Jesus that His life hadn’t already revealed.

### Paul's Work

So far, Paul had not written much about his personal circumstances. But Paul knew that the gospel he was preaching had been discredited in Colossae. Perhaps he also had been ridiculed; after all, he was writing to the Colossians while under arrest. Paul used his prisoner status to prove his commitment to spreading the good news of Christ. The apostle wrote of his struggle for the Colossian and Laodicean believers, yet he also rejoiced in his sufferings for them. He even said that he was “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” Was Paul suggesting that Christ’s sufferings had not been enough? Of course not. He had already stated that Jesus’s death on the cross fully reconciled us to God (see also Hebrews 10:14). So what was lacking? It was the suffering that

was to occur as new generations of believers made sacrifices and took risks to spread the gospel. Imprisonment was not shameful to Paul—he considered it a cause to rejoice. It was a price he was glad to pay to make God’s word fully known.



**Think about** suffering for the gospel. Believers today and through the ages have suffered for Christ. Christians can find joy in sharing Jesus’s sufferings because they also share in His glory. Those who are insulted for Christ’s name are blessed (see 1 Peter 4:13-16). Are you ever criticized for believing in God or rejected by someone when you attempt to share the gospel? Do you make sacrifices or take risks to advance Jesus’s name? If so, you are among the faithful and blessed who have shared in Christ’s sufferings.

Paul wanted the whole world to know God’s great mystery. In Colossians 1:26, this formerly hidden mystery seems to refer to the good news about Jesus through whom God’s plan of redemption was revealed (see also 2:2; 4:3). Colossians 1:27 then specifies that Gentiles were included in this mystery (see also Ephesians 3:1-11). Paul taught Jew and Gentile alike. His message was entirely different from what this audience had heard in the past. The Jews believed that God was their God exclusively. The false teachers in Colossae taught that only the most enlightened spiritually elite could find favor with God. But Paul pointed out that God had included the Colossians—who were primarily Gentiles—in His plan. Amazingly, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” was, and still is, for all people.

### Signs of Spiritual Growth

Paul exhorted the Colossian believers regarding their relationships with one another and with God. Paul outlined six qualities any group of believers needs in order to thrive and mature:

*Love.* Paul wanted the believers’ hearts to be encouraged and “knit together in love.” At the core of any strong group of believers is love. Love strengthens them against the lure of offenses and conflicts.

*Confidence in the truth.* Paul also longed for the believers to gain “full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ.” He wanted them to know the truth and to live by that truth among the people around them. He wanted them to be confident in their faith. The only mystery they needed to know was God’s mystery—and that had already been revealed in Christ.

*The ability to resist false teaching.* The Colossians needed to be sure of the truth so they would not be swayed by false doctrine. Paul knew the pressure these believers faced. Those who followed Jesus were viewed as uneducated and unsophisticated. Paul wanted to ensure the Colossians would not be misled or uprooted.

*Good organization.* Next, Paul commended the Colossians’ “good order and firmness of . . . faith in Christ.” Like a military unit going into battle, people who want to mature in Christ must employ careful planning and disciplined implementation. They need consistency and structure to stay aligned with their spiritual goals.

*A firm foundation.* Paul exhorted the believers to be “rooted and built up” in Christ. As a house is established on a firm foundation, believers must be anchored on the solid rock of Christ if they are to grow and be built up.

*Abundant thanksgiving.* Paul also wanted the Colossians—and all groups of believers—to overflow with thanksgiving. When we recognize all that God has done for us—that the great mystery has been revealed and the hope of Christ’s glory is for all of us—we cannot help but respond with praise and thanksgiving.



### Personalize the TRUTH!

Reread 1:21-22. Think about the before-and-after picture Paul presented. Which best describes you: alienated from God and marked by evil deeds? Or holy, blameless, and above reproach before God? The truth is, if you have not trusted Jesus as your Savior, then you remain separated from God. But if you believe in Christ, you are a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21)! You are pure and guiltless before God. Ask God to enable you to see your true self, the one He sees, and to experience in your daily life the reality of being holy, blameless, and above reproach in Christ.