

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians

Chapter 1

Jesus Christ: the True Authority in Heaven and on Earth

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)
by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

I. Introduction

Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome ca. 55-57 A.D. Although he had never been to the city of Colossae, he had visited and evangelized a good many cities and towns in western Asia Minor, and he had many contacts throughout the area through the spreading of the Word that occurred as a result of his ministry. One such person was Epaphras, a gifted teacher who had previously met and studied under Paul (possibly during his tenure in Ephesus), and who had subsequently evangelized and taught the believers in Colossae. Epaphras had also apparently accompanied Paul to Rome, possibly having joined in the mission to send relief to Jerusalem that resulted in Paul's imprisonment, or possibly having come to Rome to find Paul when he learned of his situation. However that may be, we know that Epaphras was present with Paul when he wrote this letter (Col.4:12; Philem.1:23), and it is not too much to say Paul had been informed of the trouble brewing in Colossae from him and/or others who likewise made their way to Rome and looked Paul up during his two years there (Acts 28:30), notably also Onesimus (Col.4:9; Philem.1:10). After having the situation (Gnostics and Jewish mystics purveying their false doctrines to the detriment of the Colossians' faith) confirmed by multiple parties, in order to combat and confront these heresies, Paul gave himself over in the Spirit to the difficult task of writing this beautiful epistle which tells us so much about the true Authority and Creator who gave up His life for us, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

II. Translation

(1) Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
(2) to you in Colossae, holy and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) We give thanks [for you] to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whenever we pray [for you], (4) having heard of your faith in Jesus Christ and the love which you have for all the holy ones (5) on account of the hope which is stored up for you in the heavens, which [hope] you [first] heard about in the word of truth, the good news (6) which gospel, once it reached you, just as is the case everywhere else in the entire world, so also with you has been producing results and growing [in you], from the day you heard about and gained full knowledge of the grace of God in truth. (7) Just as you [first] learned [about the truth of the gospel] from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, (8) who also made clear to us your love in the Spirit.

(9) For this reason we also from the [very] day we heard [of your love] do not cease praying on your behalf and asking that you be fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, (10) that you might walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by means of the full knowledge of God, (11) being empowered with all power according to His glorious might for all perseverance and patience, with joy (12) giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the holy ones in the light [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. (14) In Him (i.e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin], the forgiveness of our sins.

(15) [Jesus Christ] is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. (18) And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. (19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.

(21) You were once alienated from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil. (22) Yet God has now accomplished reconciliation [for you] through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation – [this you will do] (23) if you remain solidly grounded and firmly fixed in your faith, and unmoved from your hope in the gospel which you have heard proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which [gospel] I, Paul, have become a minister.

(24) Now I rejoice in what I am suffering on your account and I am filling up what is lacking in the tribulations of Christ in my own body on behalf of His Body which is the Church. (25) It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), (26) that is, [to make known] the mystery hidden from ages and from generations [past], but now revealed to His holy ones. (27) To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you. (28) It is Him we are proclaiming as we warn every [believer] and teach every [believer] in all wisdom so that we may bring every [believer] to completeness in Christ Jesus. (29) It is to that end that I am working so strenuously with His energy which is being powerfully transmitted to me.

Colossians 1:1-29

III. Summary and Paraphrase of Chapter One

As Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ is the true authority in heaven and on earth.

I, Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ appointed by Him through the will of God, along with our brother Timothy am writing to you believers in Colossae, reminding you of the holiness to which you have pledged yourselves (to refrain from what you ought not to do), and the faithfulness to which you ought to aspire (to continue doing the things believers ought to do). May God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ grant you their gracious favor and peaceful prosperity (which always result from these things).

Ever since I heard about you I have been praying for you constantly, thanking the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for you and for your faith and for the love which you have for all other believers. I know that this faith and love of yours flow from the hope – of resurrection and reward – that you have stored up in heaven. You first heard about that hope of a blessed eternity through the Word of truth, namely, the good news about salvation through Jesus Christ. Once this gospel reached you, it began to produce spiritual fruit and spiritual growth in you – just as it has been doing everywhere else in the world. That has been the pattern for you ever since you not only heard about but also accepted by faith the full knowledge of God's grace which is given to those who respond to the truth. I know that you first learned all this from Epaphras. He is our fellow servant in Christ – and much beloved by us. And he is also a faithful minister of Christ to you. He is the one who made clear to us the love you have and are practicing through the Holy Spirit.

So from that very day we haven't ceased to pray for you, petitioning the Lord that you be filled up to the full with full acceptance of what God's will for you actually is in genuine wisdom and true spiritual insight – as opposed to Gnostic theosophy which merely masquerades as such. We ask this so that you might do what the Lord really wants you to do, growing spiritually so as to please Him, producing a genuine crop for Him by doing things that really do please Him – as opposed to the insanity of Gnostic "warfare" and the like. So keep on growing through actual full knowledge of the truth, the *epignosis* of acceptance of the truth by faith – as opposed to the false Gnostic *pleroma* some are trying to pass off as the truth. Be empowered in every way through His glorious power in the Spirit – the true source of empowerment as opposed to the lies of the Gnostics. That is the way to true perseverance and patience with God's joy. So keep on giving thanks to the Father who has given us everything we need to win a full share of the reward Christ has won for us with His true victory over evil. The Father is the source of our eternal inheritance which we shall enjoy forever in His light with all of our brothers and sisters. So turn your back on all those Gnostic fantasies (and those of Jewish mystics too). The Father alone is the One who has rescued us from the powers of darkness in this world and brought us safely into the kingdom of His beloved Son our Savior Jesus Christ. And in Christ alone we have been ransomed from sin and have been forgiven for everything we have done.

Reject the lies of the Gnostics and mystics. It is Jesus Christ who is the exact image of the one, true invisible God. It is He who is the firstborn with preeminent status over all of God's creation. He is the One who created everything. Not only what we see but also everything invisible which actually exists, including everything in the angelic realm,

whether the elect or the fallen of every rank: thrones, authorities, rulers, powers – everything was created by Him, through Him and for Him. Jesus Christ, the Logos, existed before everything else in the world, and all that is in the world only continues to exist and subsist in Him. It is Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Body, His Bride, the Church. It is Jesus Christ who is absolute Ruler of the Church and of all creation. He is the Firstborn by right and the Firstborn by the confirmation of His resurrection from the dead. Through His incarnation, through His sacrifice on the cross, and through His resurrection Jesus Christ has received the honor to be and has been demonstrated to be the One who occupies first place in all things. For it was always the Father's will, purpose and good pleasure for Jesus Christ to be the embodiment and the fulfillment of His plan. It is through His Son that the Father is resolving the devil's rebellion and bringing harmony and completion to all things – not through the lies about Gnostic combat and sacrifices and mystic legalism to which some of you have seemed to have succumbed. Jesus Christ is the means the Father has employed and is employing to bring about the ultimate reconciliation of the present conflict: victory and peace in all things and to all things whether in heaven or on earth through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross: the precious blood of Christ.

When you were unbelievers, everything you did and thought bespoke your alienation from God. But when you believed in Christ, the Father reconciled you to Himself, having paid for that restoration through the death of His very own Son. Now you are holy, sanctified, separated from the evil in this world, forgiven all sin and delivered from the judgment to come – as long as you hold fast to your faith in Christ and refuse to be moved from the precious hope you have of life eternal through Jesus Christ. That is the promise of the gospel, the good news you heard and embraced, which is being made known throughout the entire world, the good news which I, Paul, have been appointed to proclaim, God's true knowledge that leads to life eternal – as opposed to what is falsely called "knowledge" by the Gnostics and mystics and which leads to hell.

Here in prison I am suffering – for you – and I rejoice because in doing so I am bringing a true fulfillment, a true completion (as opposed to the Gnostic attempt to hijack that godly concept), to the tribulations Christ promised me, bearing them in my body, so to speak, on behalf of His Body which is His Church. It is this Church that I serve through the commission Christ gave me to provide you with the truth, to dispense it as a good steward of His household which you are. The Father's purpose in all this is to bring genuine fulfillment and completion to His plan in the only godly way that can happen – not through so called secret knowledge, dangerous dabbling with demons and detestable behavior those Gnostics are preaching but through teaching the truth, making known God's true mystery which was hidden from all who went before us but has now been revealed to us who believe in Jesus Christ. To all who love the actual truth of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ it is the Father's good pleasure for us to understand the incomparable wealth that is to be found in the unveiling of this true and godly and glorious mystery for you gentiles (as opposed to the mere fantasies of the Gnostics) as well as to us Jews (as opposed to mystical perversions of the Law): the true mystery now revealed is that as believers in Him, Christ is now fully in you – and that union and

fellowship with Him is what gives you confidence that you will share in His glory to come. And so it is Jesus Christ whom we proclaim as we warn every believer to stay away from false teaching (there are no secret doctrines which are true), dangerous practices (you cannot involve yourself in combat with demonic forces in truth; you can only be influenced by them or worse), and immoral or self-righteous behavior (whether lascivious or ascetic, Gnostic rites and mystic fantasies only lead to hell in the end). Instead, we teach the truth so that we may lead everyone who believes in Christ to spiritual maturity and stability in Him. That is why I am working so zealously, relying not on my own strength but working powerfully through His power which is being transmitted to me in such a powerful way.

IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verses One through Two

(1) Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, (2) to you in Colossae, holy and faithful brethren in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Colossians 1:1-2

Paul: Saul of Tarsus adopted the Greek name "Paul", meaning "small", at some point during the first apostolic journey as we surmise from the following:

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said . . .
Acts 13:9 NIV

Paul was a man of great ability, one who had been called to the ministry by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-21; 26:9-18), given by the Lord and by the Holy Spirit the gift highest in authority in the Church, that of apostle. The gift Paul was given was not just the missionary gift of apostle but apostleship with a capital "A". He was the replacement for Judas and thus one of the college of twelve recruited and empowered by our Lord to expand and organize His Church following the coming of the Holy Spirit. We also know from the book of Acts and from the epistles, that Paul was more instrumental in building up the Church of Jesus Christ than any of the other twelve. And yet this choice of names emphasizes his underlying humility. Instead of becoming overly proud, he took the obligation placed upon him by the Lord with the utmost seriousness.

(15) "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. (16) 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. (17) I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them (18) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' "

Acts 26:15-18 NIV

(9) For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

1st Corinthians 15:9-10 NIV

In contrast to Paul's genuine desire to help those he ministered to, those who are not actually servants of the Lord have a tendency to use and abuse believers and unbelievers who foolishly submit to their false authority. This was, no doubt, the situation in Colossae where Jewish mystics steeped in legalism and Gnostic teachers serving the devil were doing their best to enslave the believers there – many of them very new to the faith – in their systems of works and asceticism. Exalting themselves and their supposed authority and superior knowledge was one way of awing the Colossians who found these teachings tempting. This Paul never does. He does not shy away from owning the legitimate authority that is his by right as an apostle of Jesus Christ, but he also never browbeats his charges into submission, choosing instead always to woo them to the truth in the love of Jesus Christ.

Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

2nd Corinthians 1:24 NIV

Apostle of Jesus Christ through the Will of God: There is no indefinite article present here in the Greek, no "an". Paul does not describe himself as "an apostle" but calls himself what he most definitely was: "Apostle of Jesus Christ". That is not to say that there weren't others (there were eleven, although by this time we know that some of them at least were no longer alive: Acts 12:1-2). But in light of the situation in Colossae Paul is empowered by the Spirit to begin this epistle with this imprimatur, reinforced with the explicit statement that his apostolic authority was bestowed upon him by the very will of God the Father.

This is not the only place that Paul is given to stamp his authority on an epistle in this manner (we find similar phraseology at 1Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:1; Eph.1:1; 2Tim.1:1; cf. Gal.1:1; 1Tim.1:1), but inasmuch as when writing to congregations of whose respect for him he was assured he leaves out the title "apostle" altogether (in Philippians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians and Philemon), we are to take this particular phrasing as significant: Paul did not appoint himself to this position. He was chosen to be an apostle by Jesus Christ Himself (Acts 22:21; cf. Acts 22:15), in keeping with the will of God the Father for the carrying out of His perfect plan (1Tim.1:1).

Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

Galatians 1:1 NIV

With this stamp of divine approval prominently displayed, not in arrogance but in humble appreciation of the responsibility it entailed to the Body of Christ, Paul sets this epistle in direct

opposition to the falsely claimed authority wrongfully arrogated to themselves by the Jewish and Gentile Gnostic and mystic teachers who were attempting to peel off as many of the new Colossian believers as possible to follow them and their apparently attractive lies.

Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them.
Galatians 4:17 NIV

These individuals were acting in the service of Satan and also their own self-interest – for none of these false teachers shared their secrets for free. But Paul was honestly striving for the good of every believer who might have occasion to hear his letter read, with no thought of personal gain, seeking only to protect and edify the Church of His Savior and ours, Jesus Christ.

Many people seek power and authority, and the manner in which these individuals were doing so and the rewards which the false teachers in Colossae were pursuing in doing so followed the way of the world entirely: seeking to benefit from the exaltation of their positions. But Paul never let our Lord's purpose and our Lord's words drop from his heart, making use of the authority he had been given only for the good of the Church.

(25) Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. (26) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, (27) and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:25-29 NIV

Timothy: It is clear from the fact that Paul mentions Timothy as his fellow worker in the gospel not only in this salutation but in five other epistles (2Cor.1:1; Phil.1:1; 1Thes.1:1; 2Thes.1:1; Phil.1:1), that Paul considered him his most faithful helper in the work of the kingdom, and, for this reason, Paul often entrusted his most pressing missions to Timothy.

(19) I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. (20) I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. (21) For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (22) But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.
Philippians 2:19-22 NIV

For one thing, by mentioning Timothy as his colleague in edifying the Church of Jesus Christ, Paul demonstrates that his was not a "one man operation". Paul wrote this epistle in the Spirit, and he was the apostle appointed by Jesus Christ to bring the gospel to the gentiles, but Paul had help – as we see not only in the book of Acts but also in the salutations at the beginnings of his letters and in the (sometimes quite extensive) greetings at the conclusions of them. Even the greatest of the great cannot "do it alone" – and Paul was careful never to give the impression that he was an exception to this rule.

Holy and Faithful Brethren

. . . to you in Colossae, holy and faithful *brethren* in Christ Jesus.
Colossians 1:2a

By "brethren" Paul means all the believers in Colossae regardless of gender or age or ethnic or social status (cf. Gal.3:28; Col.3:11). Paul uses this word, "brothers", to emphasize our oneness as members of the Father's family and of Christ's Bride, His Body, His Church. This is not a divisive term but a deliberately inclusive one, reminding everyone listening to this letter being read that we are all equal members of the Body of Christ.

(4) For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.
Romans 12:4-5 NKJV

So while Paul, as an apostle, of course possessed great authority, with this salutation he reminds his readers that he is no more important to Christ than any of them are. He is not, therefore, talking down to them. Rather, he is, loving big brother that he is, attempting to lead them forward spiritually for their own benefit, helping them to do their best and eager for them to do so, just as any truly loving big brother would do and desire for his younger siblings.

. . . to you in Colossae, *holy and faithful* brethren in Christ Jesus.
Colossians 1:2a

This double description is also not meant to restrict the scope of the readership. It is certainly possible, and, given some of the content of the letter, almost certainly the case that not every believer in Colossae was walking in a "holy and faithful" way. Paul makes use here of a technique of which we often find the Spirit approving, namely, the description of the recipients of a letter as they *should* be in order to encourage them to live up to that standard (cf. 1Jn.3:6-9).

Holiness or sanctification (English synonyms for the same biblical concept) has to do with separation from everything in the world which is profane, sinful and evil. As with salvation, wherein we believers are saved (positionally: Eph.2:5); are being saved (experientially: Phil.2:12), and will be saved, delivered from this world of sin and death in resurrection (ultimately: 1Pet.1:9), so also with sanctification. As believers, we are rendered holy when we are saved and made one with the Holy One, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (positional sanctification: 1Cor.6:11), and in resurrection we shall be eternally holy (ultimate sanctification: Rev.20:6). In the meantime, we have received the Holy Spirit to aid us in our objective of being sanctified and holy in our behavior here and now in this world (experiential sanctification: 2Cor.7:1).

Of these two, sanctification/holiness concerns our spiritual defense, while faithfulness is the word Paul uses to focus on our spiritual offense. As believers, we strive to stay away from sin and evil and all unbecoming conduct. It is right and proper that we should do so (understanding

of course that none of us will ever be perfect in these bodies of sin, this side of the resurrection, and knowing that we need to be continually confessing the sins we do commit as we all do commit them: 1Jn.1:6-10). However, just as no one ever won a war or a contest on defense alone, so also in the Christian life our defensive posture's purpose is to provide a base for our positive spiritual advance, our growth, progress and production, our "offense" in the Christian lives the Lord has given us to exploit by making use of the spiritual gifts we have been blessed to receive. Every Christian has been given gifts and every believer has been assigned a ministry by the Lord (1Cor.12:1-11). Neither the former nor the latter will be obvious at the point of salvation, but as we grow, *if* we grow, we will come to realize what our gifts are and to what particular service to the Body of Christ we have been called. Once we become mature, once we have been tested and refined, and once we come into the ministry the Lord has for us, at that point it is necessary for us to display "faithfulness", reliability in the consistency of our continuing growth, further progress in the passing of the increasingly challenging testing we will receive, and, very importantly, in being faithful to the ministry the Lord has given us, whatever that may be. As with the parable of the talents, we are all given different "amounts" (different gifts, opportunities, and effects which come from the Lord, not from us), but we will be rewarded by the perfect Judge for what we actually do if we remain faithful to the task assigned.

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.
1st Corinthians 4:2 ESV

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
Galatians 6:9

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.
1st Peter 4:10 NIV

Grace and Peace:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Colossians 1:2b

This is a common salutation and ending to letters used by Paul elsewhere as well (e.g., Rom.1:2; Phil.1:2; 2Pet.1:2; etc.), which nicely summarizes the plan of God for our lives: The Lord provides what we need (grace, His favor given to us without us meriting it), and if we respond, the result is that as we grow in that grace we come to have peace, true, biblical peace, the *shalom* of fullness and completeness which includes all manner of spiritual prosperity here and now, leading to eternal rewards in the future.¹ That is Paul's wish for all the Colossians. That is our wish for each other as we fight the fight down here on the battlefield of the devil's world.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

¹ See Peter #12.

Isaiah 26:3 NIV

"Peace I leave for you; peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you."
John 14:27

So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with
God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Romans 5:1

(4) Rejoice in the Lord all the time! I will say it again, rejoice! (5) Let your
reasonableness be known to all men – the Lord is near. (6) Don't worry about anything,
but in everything let your requests be made known to God in prayer and in petition with
thanksgiving, (7) and [then] the peace of God which surpasses every thought will guard
your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) So as you go forward, brothers, [keep
meditating on] all the many [wonderful things you have learned], things that are true,
godly, righteous, holy, pleasing [to God], reverent – if you have [developed] any virtues
[in your Christian walk] and if you have [any hope of] praise [from God at the judgment]
– these are the things you should be thinking about. (9) [All these same things] which you
have learned, and have received [into your hearts by believing them], and have heard
about and observed me [doing in my walk], go do likewise (i.e., grow, progress, produce).
Then the God of peace will be with you.
Philippians 4:4-9

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body;
and be thankful.
Colossians 3:15 NKJV

This true fullness, completeness, peace in the biblical sense, is what the Colossian believers
ought to have been focused on, not the false "fullness" promised by the Gnostics and mystic
teachers of the Law who were only peddling falsehoods, lies that would only in the end take
away whatever genuine peace these believers had won through prior spiritual growth.

Verses Three through Eight

(3) We give thanks [for you] to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whenever we
pray [for you], (4) having heard of your faith in Jesus Christ and the love which you have
for all the holy ones (5) on account of the hope which is stored up for you in the heavens,
which [hope] you [first] heard about in the word of truth, the good news (6) which gospel,
once it reached you, just as is the case everywhere else in the entire world, so also with
you has been producing results and growing [in you], from the day you heard about and
gained full knowledge of the grace of God in truth. (7) Just as you [first] learned [about
the truth of the gospel] from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant who is a faithful
minister of Christ on your behalf, (8) who also made clear to us your love in the Spirit.
Colossians 1:3-8

Thanks:

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

John 14:14 NIV

"The Lord's prayer", as Jesus taught it to His disciples, is addressed to the Father – as most prayers in the Bible are. But as the verse above makes clear, we believers today, especially after the cross, resurrection, and gift of the Spirit, are allowed to pray to our Lord Jesus Christ directly. This in no way undermines the Father's authority. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are "one" in ways that we are not able to comprehend this side of heaven and have never had a disagreement or difference of opinion. Paul, however, gives thanks here to the Father to demonstrate that he accepts the Father as the absolute authority in the plan of God, and rightly so. For in the plan of God the Father acts as the planner, the Son as the One who carries out the plan, and the Spirit as the One who empowers it, all "roles", so to speak, that they willingly took on in complete harmony before the creation of this present universe and in seamlessly perfect coordination. Emphasizing the Father's role here thus correspondingly emphasizes the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ, an important truth that some strains of Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism were attacking. While the Trinity are all co-equal, co-eternal, and con-substantial in their deity, our Lord Jesus Christ took on the subordinate role of the Son when He likewise took on true humanity by becoming a human being as well as being God.

The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Psalms 110:1

(21) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. (22) For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. (23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., all believers at the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet.

1st Corinthians 15:21-25

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Paul thus gives due deference to the Father here in verses three and four just as he did earlier (in verse two) precisely so as to cut the ground from under his Jewish opponents in Colossae who would be only too happy to suggest that he was disrespecting the Father by exalting Christ. That was one of the lies Paul had to keep in mind in this epistle along with the other major set of heresies in this regard, mostly coming from the Gnostic camp, namely the attacks on the person and work of Christ, whether claiming that Christ was not really human on the one hand or not truly divine on the other. Without a correct appreciation of the Trinity and/or without a solid understanding of the person of Christ as a genuine human being and actual God in one unique person forever, no believer's faith is on solid ground. For this reason alone, the evil one and his human agents are always seeking to attack these fundamental doctrines.²

Faith, Hope and Love:

(4) . . . having heard of your faith in Jesus Christ and the love which you have for all the holy ones (5) on account of the hope which is stored up for you in the heavens.
Colossians 1:4-5

Paul very often distills the Christian life and the virtues which ought to characterize it into these three: faith, hope and love:

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
1st Corinthians 13:13 NKJV

We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
1st Thessalonians 1:3 NIV

These are not the only Christian virtues, of course (Peter has a longer list at 2Pet.1:5-7), nor does Paul always include all three of these (e.g., Gal.5:6). But it certainly suited Paul's purposes here to do what he does also in the two passages cited above, namely, to use these three virtues to delineate the plan of God for each individual Christian's life. Faith in Christ is what saves us and also characterizes our spiritual growth as we continue to believe the written word just as we have committed ourselves to the Living Word Himself. Hope focuses on the eternal glories, resurrection and reward, which will be ours at our Lord's return, and thus helps us to endure whatever testing and trials may come our way as we progress in our Christian walk. And love, which is based upon that hope and faith, motivates us to help our brothers and sisters in Christ grow and progress as well, as we minister to them according to the spiritual gifts we have been given in order to build up the Body of Christ. Since it was Paul's task assigned to him by the Lord Himself to promote this process, he is demonstrably grateful when it is indeed taking place, even if as in this instance indirectly through others who have benefitted from his ministry efforts.

² For the former, please see BB 1: Theology; for the latter, BB 4A: Christology.

Rather than competing in a worldly way, Paul is joyous about and thankful for those coming to Christ and growing in Christ, even if he has never met them or visited their city. And he wants to do everything within his power to support that growth, progress and production – which in this case will entail a powerful refutation of false teaching through sharing with these believers what is true.

The Good News: The Greek word *euangelion* often translated gospel as in verse five means "good news". In secular Greek it can be employed in group settings as the report of a major victory. Just as the news of VE day and VJ day was received with wild celebration in the waning days of World War II, so also the "good news" we have received ought to be appreciated and treasured by us with even greater joy. After all, the good news, the really *great* news, is that our Lord has won the victory of victories on the cross! He has conquered sin and death by taking away all of our sins, and in so doing has triumphed over the devil and his fallen angels who were hell-bent upon taking us all to perdition with them. No victory has ever been or ever could be greater – because all of angelic and human history pivots around the cross. The cross is the foundation of the plan of God just as our Lord Jesus Christ is its Cornerstone.

(14) [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. (15) [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:14-15

That is why Paul connects this good news of victory with our eternal hope, "the hope which is stored up for you in the heavens, which [hope] you [first] heard about in the word of truth, the good news" (Col.1:5): through the cross, through our Lord's victory, we have hope, absolute confidence, in our own personal victory over death through the resurrection which our Lord has bought for us by dying for our sins.

(22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24a) This is the hope with which we were saved.
Romans 8:22-24a

Results of the Gospel:

. . . which gospel, once it reached you, just as is the case everywhere else in the entire world, so also with you has been producing results and growing [in you], from the day you heard about and gained full knowledge of the grace of God in truth.
Colossians 1:6

The Word of God is powerful beyond our limited human understanding.

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's thoughts and deliberations. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13

That is true individually and also collectively, since Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

(1) The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being.

John 1:1-3

Therefore the Word of God always produces results, and always the results which God intended from before the beginning of creation.

(10) "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, (11) so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11 NIV

In our context, the result produced by the written word which is the very thinking of Him who is the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ (i.e., "the mind of Christ": 1Cor.2:16), is the spiritual growth, progress and production which Paul was striving to aid and support throughout the Church. The gospel, the good news, is thus not merely the basic information about Jesus and His sacrifice for us necessary to accomplish our salvation but the entire realm of truth: everything in the Bible is "good news", leading us closer to the kingdom in all of our thinking, purposing and acting – if we respond to it in the Spirit. If we do, then our personal "results" will not only be helpful to ourselves in earning a good eternal reward, but will also contribute to the glorious process of the building up of the Church of Jesus Christ as we, individual members of His Body, do our part to support the growth of the whole.

In this way (i.e., by "embracing the truth" in v.15), the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:16

For it is from this Source (i.e., the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ) that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed (with and by the truth) through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.

Full-Knowledge of the Grace of God: The "full knowledge" to which Paul refers to here is not mere *gnosis* / "knowledge" (cf. "Gnostic / Gnosticism"), but *epi-gnosis*, a word specifically employed by Paul to distinguish God's truth in our hearts which has been fully understood and embraced in our hearts through *believing* it in the power of the Holy Spirit. James tells us not to be mere "hearers of the word" but "doers" (Jas.1:22). And while that injunction certainly does not exclude following through in our actions upon the truth we have learned, it also most definitely includes *believing* the truth of what we are being taught when the Holy Spirit makes that truth clear to us in our hearts. Only *full* knowledge is of any use to anyone. Only when the unbeliever not only hears the gospel but responds to it *in faith* does salvation result. Only when believers not only expose themselves to good teaching but also *believe* the truth they are being taught does spiritual growth result.³

(9) But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". (10) And God has revealed [these very things] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything, even the deep things of God. (11) For who knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way too no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people. (14) Now the unspiritual man does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do have the very thinking (lit., "mind") of Christ (i.e., His truth from the Spirit).
1st Corinthians 2:9-16

(14) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, (15) from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name, (16) that He may grant you according to the riches of His glory to be powerfully strengthened in your inner person through His Spirit, (17) so that, rooted and grounded in love, Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, (18) so that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height [of His love for you], (19) [that is], so that you may know the love of Christ which outstrips [human] understanding [in every way], and so that you may be filled up [to the brim] with the entire "fullness" of God.
Ephesians 3:14-19

³ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.6.e, "Faith Epistemology"; and BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.3.a.3, "Spiritual Growth Epistemology".

In contrast to actual truth which may be known and become useful only through believing it in the Spirit, what the Gnostics and Jewish mystical teachers in Colossae were proffering was anything but the truth. It claimed to be "knowledge", secret, special knowledge that opened doors into otherwise hidden arenas of spiritual warfare and supernatural power. This sort of false promise has always been attractive to some people. Satan knows how to tempt us, and his followers, seen and unseen, have been honing their skills in doing so ever since mankind fell. It seems to be a universal truth based upon the proclivities of our sin natures that what we don't have is more attractive and compelling than what we do have – and especially if we can't have it or can only get it through questionable activities. Seducing believers who are otherwise on the right track with such tactics has been a satanic specialty since the beginning. Paul seeks to counter this dangerous trend in Colossae by opposing "*gnosis*" with the truth of "*epignosis*".

Epaphras:

(7) Just as you [first] learned [about the truth of the gospel] from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, (8) who also made clear to us your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 1:7-8

Epaphras is Paul's main (but not his only) contact with the Colossian church. Mentioning him by name in this complimentary way and reminding the Colossian believers of his role in leading them to Christ accomplishes several things. First, it lets the readers know that Paul is well-informed about them and their situation, that this epistle is a well-aimed missile, in other words, and not a shot in the dark, so that they should take everything Paul writes to them in deadly earnest and not excuse themselves by thinking that even though he is an apostle, he is "an outsider". Secondly, by wrapping his arms around Epaphras in this way he gives that noble pastor-teacher's authority what must have been a very needful boost. The problems in Colossae which Paul has chosen to attack indirectly by directly affirming principles of truth which refute the heresies that church was then confronting were obviously not only known to Epaphras but we can be sure they were upsetting him greatly. He had not been able on his own or with the help of other elders in that town to turn back the tide of false teaching washing over his church from the twin threats of the Gnostics and Jewish mystics. And so he had turned to Paul for help. He certainly received it. The letter Paul wrote as a result contains one of the clearest presentations of the humanity and deity and precious work of our Savior Jesus Christ, sufficient on its own to refute all heretical attacks on the person and work of our Lord.

Verses Nine through Fourteen

(9) For this reason we also from the [very] day we heard [of your love] do not cease praying on your behalf and asking that you be fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, (10) that you might walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by means of the full knowledge of God, (11) being empowered with all power according to His glorious might for all perseverance and patience, with joy (12) giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the holy

ones in the light [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. (14) In Him (i.e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin], the forgiveness of our sins.
Colossians 1:9-14

Love: We saw earlier in the chapter how that faith, hope and love are Paul's way of summarizing the proper Christian life as those virtues correspond to spiritual growth, progress in passing tests, and production to benefit the Body of Christ. Paul is thus signaling these believers whom he has never met that while as an apostle he is responsible for the spiritual welfare of the entire Church, he is most eager to encourage and help those believers and those churches that are truly "positive" to the truth and striving to do what our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to do. He "heard" about the enthusiasm of the Colossian believers (i.e., their "love") from Epaphras, and he is keen to fan that flame, which endeavor in this instance will require refuting the false teachers and false teachings which threatened to nip in the bud their fine start for Christ.

Praying: Many people lead busy lives, but Paul made use of the time the Lord gave him possibly better than any other believer who has ever lived. Not only was he constantly ministering to other believers, individually and collectively, but he also took pains whenever he had the opportunity to do so to work at his trade with his own hands so as not to be a burden to others (cf. Acts 20:34; 1Cor.4:12). Praying – and doing it correctly – is time-intensive (Acts 6:1-4). So when Paul said he was praying for someone or some group, we may be sure that he was telling the truth and we must also understand that it was a genuine sacrifice for him to be doing so – because there is only so much time in anyone's experience on this earth, and Paul left very little of this valuable resource "on the table", so to speak. He used it all for the glory of God and his service to Christ's Church.

(15) Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, (16) making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
Ephesians 5:15-16 ESV

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
Colossians 4:5 ESV

Prayer is one ministry that all believers can engage in regardless of their spiritual growth status or spiritual gifts. It does involve sacrificial dedication of one's time – to do it right. But like all other spiritual production for the Lord, if done worthily it is worthy of reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.
Colossians 4:2 NKJV

Pray without ceasing!
1st Thessalonians 5:17 NKJV

(1) I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made

for all people – (2) for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (3) This is good, and pleases God our Savior, (4) who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
1st Timothy 2:1-4 NIV

Fulfilled:

(9) For this reason we also from the [very] day we heard [of your love] do not cease praying on your behalf and asking that you be fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,
Colossians 1:9

A more literal translation of "that you be fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will" would be "that you be filled up according to the *epignosis* of His will". That is, the filling in question is with "full knowledge" or *epignosis*, the "beyond mere *gnosis*" knowledge that can only be gained by believing truth with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul is thus not merely telling us to "know" the will of God, but to have a very deep and truthful understanding of what that will is for us all in general and for each of us individually. For we cannot respond to His will correctly if we do not understand very specifically what that will is.

This is indeed still an issue in the church-visible today where we see all manner of travesties being performed, putatively "to please God". Whereas if the people who were engaging in these pointless and in some cases dangerous behaviors really knew something about the Bible, that is, had "full knowledge" of its truths, *epignosis* as opposed to mere knowledge (or even incorrect misconceptions), they would, one hopes, not engage in them at all. Believers today submit to water-baptism, focus on extraneous matters in trying to expand their churches (anything but supporting and providing the teaching of the Word), engage in politics, etc., because "It's God's will!" – or so they imagine. But if a person does not really know the Bible, has not taken the time and effort in doing things the right way, God's way, to grow spiritually, and is only acting on emotion and incomplete or even false information instead, then doing God's actual will will be impossible – since in truth said individuals do not really know what it is. It is also true, of course, that in many cases said individuals are not really interested in what God wants. Instead, they are substituting what they want and calling it "God's will" – as if He would ever be pleased with human effort offered up in place of what He has actually told us to do.

(3) In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. (4) And Abel also brought an offering – fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, (5) but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. (6) Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? (7) If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."
Genesis 4:3-7 NIV

We can surmise from what Paul writes here and how he writes it that this was a problem in Colossae as well. Many, apparently too many believers were finding the mystical and gnostic false teachings and the behavior that accompanied them very attractive. And what better way to excuse oneself to do what one really wants to do than to proclaim it to be "God's will"? The Lord's remonstrance with Cain is thus paralleled here by Paul's implicit rejecting of the Colossian believers' attempt to do God's will the wrong way by indicating very strongly the correct approach. To grow they must be "fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will". Full acceptance is *epignosis*, that is, understanding it with the help of the Spirit **and** believing it, accepting it as true and committing then to carrying it out. Through Bible study, we learn what God's will for us is in all things, great and small, we accept those truths through faith and in the Spirit, **and** we then follow up through obedience to the truth we have learned. That is how we are "fulfilled", namely, grow spiritually and enter into the process of fulfilling our Lord's mandate for growth, progress and production.

(16) Redeem your time, for the days are evil. (17) For this reason do not be foolish but learn what the Lord's will is. (18) And don't get drunk with wine which is dissipating, but instead **be made [spiritually] full** (i.e., "be fulfilled") through the [Holy] Spirit.
Ephesians 5:16-18

Drinking wine is an action which leads to a heightened physical/emotional state; listening to the truth in the power of the Spirit and believing it leads to a heightened spiritual state. The former may do no spiritual harm (depending on the totality of the circumstances), but only the latter produces growth and renders a believer better equipped to pass tests and prepare for and engage in ministry. "Fulfillment" is from the Greek verb *pleroo* from which also the Greek noun *pleroma*, "fullness" is derived. *Pleroma* was a key word in the Gnostic vocabulary and is employed here by Paul very deliberately. In Gnosticism, it referred to "the full complement" of the divine, the totality of *aeons* or divine beings, interaction with whom was a fundamental part of the putative "spiritual warfare" that some of the Colossian believers found appealing. Employing the word here as Paul does is a direct slap in the face to any and all who had made the mistake of going down that false path. In truth, all genuine "fullness" comes only from the one true God Himself. All other representations are false and satanic.

(22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, **the fullness** of the One who **fills up** all things in all ways.
Ephesians 1:22-23

(14) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, (15) from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name, (16) that He may grant you according to the riches of His glory to be powerfully strengthened in your inner person through His Spirit, (17) so that, rooted and grounded in love, Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, (18) so that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height [of His love for you], (19) [that is], so that you may know the love of Christ which outstrips [human] understanding [in every way], and so that you may be **filled up** [to the brim] with the entire "**fullness**" of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19

(11) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, (12) to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (13) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the [full] knowledge (*epignosis*) of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of *the fullness* of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV

(9) For in Him (i.e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the *fullness* of deity in bodily form. (10) And you have received your complete *fulfillment* in Him who is the Head of every ruler and [every] power.

Colossians 2:9-10

Wisdom and Spiritual Understanding: What is wisdom? First and foremost, wisdom is understanding our place as human beings in the plan of our great and glorious all-sovereign God.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.

Psalms 111:10 NKJV

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7 NIV

(28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear.

(29) For our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:28-29

That is what it means to be "fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will", namely, to subordinate our will to His will, first in accepting Jesus Christ . . .

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life."

John 6:40a NIV

. . . then after salvation, to obey Him in all things at all times.

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Luke 6:46 NIV

Doing the will of God requires us to know the will of God. And that in turn necessitates our diligent embrace of His plan for us all, spiritual growth, progress and production. We understand that we belong to Him and that we are responsible to obey our heavenly Father and the One unto

whom He has given all authority, our dear Savior Jesus Christ (Matt.28:18). We understand this fundamental truth through hearing it taught, understanding it through the Holy Spirit, and committing it to our hearts by believing it. That is how we are "fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will", "made spiritually full in complete understanding (*epignosis*) of the will of God". And once we know what to do, our job is to do it.

Committing ourselves to respond to the will of God because that is the only safe path forward for a believer in Jesus Christ is thus true wisdom. Learning exactly what that means in different life-situations is a matter of application; that is what the second word in our context, "spiritual understanding", refers to. "*Synesis*" (Gr. σύνεσις) in secular Greek means intellectual ability overall or a grasp of a particular subject. It can be translated "intelligence", "insight", "understanding", "comprehension", etc. In the New Testament, the word occurs six other times (Mk.12:33; Lk. 2:47; 1Cor.1:19; Eph.3:4; Col.2:2; 2Tim.2:7). In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (known as the Septuagint), "*synesis*" most often translates the Hebrew word "*biynah*" (הִבִּינָה) and its cognates ("knowledge", "understanding"). What all of these usages have in common in relation to wisdom is that they represent a practical understanding of what is right as opposed to the theoretical span of wisdom. We understand that fearing God is something in which we should always delight (cf. Is.11:1-3a), but what does that mean when it comes to applying this important precept in our day to day lives? "Spiritual understanding" is the practical application of biblical principles to our daily walk with the Lord. As with all other things, this takes practice and close attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. But navigating all the difficult situations that confront believers in this world in a godly way is impossible without solid spiritual maturity.

(8) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (9) Now the fruit light produces accords with all goodness, righteousness and truth. (10) So [in all things] you should [always] be calculating what it is that pleases the Lord. (11) And do not participate in dark deeds which bear no fruit. But rather expose them as such. (12) For the things done in darkness by those [who reject the truth] are shameful even to mention. (13) But all things become visible [for what they really are] when they are illuminated by the light, (14) because everything which has been made visible [through such illumination] is light. That is why it says, "Arise, sleeper! Awake from the dead, and Christ will shine [His light of truth] upon you!" (15) So be very careful how you are walking – ***not as those who are unwise but as those who are wise***. (16) Redeem your time, for the days are evil. (17) For this reason do not be foolish but learn what the Lord's will is. (18) And don't get drunk with wine which is dissipating, but instead be made [spiritually] full through the [Holy] Spirit.
Ephesians 5:8-18

Walk Worthy, Bear Fruit, and Grow:

(9) For this reason we also from the [very] day we heard [of your love] do not cease praying on your behalf and asking that you be fulfilled in regard to the full acceptance of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, (10) that you might walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by

means of the full knowledge (*epignosis*) of God.
Colossians 1:9-10

In verse ten, we see the purpose behind Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers to be "filled up" with *epignosis*, made full spiritually in accepting in complete understanding God's will "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding": to walk worthily, bear fruit, and grow spiritually. In other words, understanding God's will and believing it to the point of being willing to put it into practice wisely (in principle: wisdom) and prudently (in practice: spiritual understanding) is the fundamental prerequisite for carrying out the plan of God for our lives now summarized by Paul in verse ten: "that you might walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by means of the full knowledge of God".

The reader will note that this is precisely the same shorthand for the plan of God we have been employing in this ministry for many years: spiritual growth, spiritual progress and spiritual production. The one difference is that Paul, as is often the case in his writings, varies the order here, putting growth last instead of first – but that is entirely understandable inasmuch as the prerequisite he has prayed for is assumed to have already been achieved. The Colossian believers have already gained – or will, in the fulfillment of Paul's prayer – a basic level of spiritual maturity so as to have gotten to the point of being willing to commit whole-heartedly to the entire program God has for them. Once they do, a worthy walk (progress), and the commencement of significant ministry that bears fruit (production) should follow.

Why, then, does Paul add at the last, "and growing by means of the full knowledge of God"? He does so because spiritual growth should never come to an end as long as we are on this earth. Even the most mature believer, even the most advanced Bible teacher, needs to grow in the Word every day, and there should never be a day when we ignore the essential task of taking in our spiritual food any more than we would neglect physical food – and indeed the former is even more important than the latter. Paul's delaying or rather reemphasizing this important principle at the end of the sentence also allows him to remind us of the means by which we grow, namely, "by means of the full knowledge of God". This "full knowledge" is, again, *epignosis*, not merely "knowledge" (*gnosis* – the forte of the Gnostics), but knowledge which is both true (as opposed to the lies the purveyors of Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism were peddling at Colossae) **and** believed. It is faith – in the truth – that seals that truth in our hearts as the Spirit makes the truth we are taught understandable to us and we treasure it up by believing it. Only such knowledge, truth believed and made real to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, produces spiritual growth and is thus useful for application in our walk, supporting and informing the ministries the Lord gives to all who are willing to carry out His will (1Cor.12:1-13).

We walk worthily of the Lord so as to "please Him in all things" by doing what He wants us to do – and we can only know that in principle through a deep understanding of the truth of scripture which we have believed (wisdom) and then discern correctly what it is right to do in actual situations in life through applying that truth (spiritual understanding). Only by attaining a certain level of spiritual maturity can we hope to navigate daily life in a godly way – and how much more is that not the case when it comes to the testing all mature believers receive? For that reason alone, it is often the case that the immature often seem to be getting a "free ride" in this

world – but in fact it is the case that our Lord is not putting on them more than they can handle (1Cor.10:13): difficult testing is meant to strengthen our faith but it will never do so if we have not first grown in that sufficiently to be able to endure it.

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.
1st Peter 1:6-9

We bear fruit through helping others, to grow, to endure testing, to be saved in the first place, ministering in accordance with whatever spiritual gifts we have received and in whatever ministries the Lord leads us to. We believers are all one Body, and the Body is designed to help itself in this way, with each part doing its job to the benefit of all the others.

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.
Ephesians 4:11-16

We grow by seeking out, hearing, believing and embracing "the full knowledge of God" (*epignosis*: truth believed), a process as we have affirmed above which ought to be a daily commitment and one which will never cease to be needful as long as we are in these bodies here on earth. Everything we are, everything we do, everything we aspire to, has to do with the truth of the Word of God.

All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness.
2nd Timothy 3:16

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; it acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.
Hebrews 4:12

Now grow up through the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
2nd Peter 3:18

Empowered:

. . . being empowered with all power according to His glorious might for all perseverance and patience, with joy.
Colossians 1:11

Prior to the above, Paul had just reminded his readers of the essential process of the plan of God for their lives. His purpose in doing so was, of course, to stir them up to remembrance of the essential truths related thereto as all good teaching always must do (cf. 2Pet.1:12-13), but also to establish a base-line, so to speak, of good behavior as a hedge against the deceptive false teaching that was presently plaguing their church. By saying, in effect, "this is what you should be doing", Paul is also implying, "and the opposite is what you should *not* be doing".

Being "empowered with all power according to His glorious might" may seem a bit pleonastic and repetitive, but that is deliberate. One reason some Christians stray from consistent spiritual growth is a certain fatigue which sets in whenever the pressures of life are allowed to overwhelm the sense of joy in the Lord that all believers experience at salvation. When the road seems long and difficult, rather than taking pains to focus on the One who saved our lives and on the glories ahead, it is not uncommon for believers to first back off from the proper approach of diligent and disciplined Bible study, however good the ministry they have access to (that of Epaphras and company in the case of the Colossians). And once the right approach is neglected, it is usually only a matter of time before the evil one trots out a substitute, an easier, more entertaining path which offers the false promise of reviving that earlier glow but with more exciting fare that requires less self-discipline to adopt.

There were apparently many such in Colossae who for just such reasons had turned aside to the Gnostics and mystics or were being tempted to do so. Before Paul directs his epistle to those lost sheep, he first seeks to reinvigorate that part of the flock that is merely drifting in the wrong direction from spiritual weariness. We have, Paul assures us, all the power we need to do what the Lord is calling us to do. We have the Holy Spirit. If we are merely willing to accede to His leadership, we will be "empowered with all power according to His glorious might", the power of God which is greater than anything in this world – and certainly far greater than any opposition we will ever face or weakness we will ever feel. That is the truth, God's own truth, even though it may seem impossible to human eyes.

(29) He gives power to the weak,
And to those who have no might He increases strength.

(30) Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
(31) But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:29-31 NKJV

The above was written to believers who had the Spirit "with them" (Jn.14:17); but we have the Holy Spirit "in us", and thus have no excuse for allowing ourselves to become lethargic about doing what our Lord is desiring us to do. We may face great opposition from the evil one, but we need never to forget that God always provides the power for us to do what we have been called to do.⁴

Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.
Zechariah 4:6 KJV

If we live because of the Spirit, let us also walk by means of the Spirit.
Galatians 5:25

For God [through His Spirit] is the One who is empowering you both to desire [what is right] and to put it into practice for the accomplishment of His good pleasure.
Philippians 2:13

For greater is He who is in you (i.e., the Spirit) than he who is in the world (i.e., Satan).
1st John 4:4b

Perseverance, Patience and Joy:

. . . being empowered with all power according to His glorious might *for all perseverance and patience, with joy.*
Colossians 1:11

One important purpose of our empowerment by the Spirit has to do with our ability to endure the difficulties and the ill-treatment of this world. In the power of God, we are able to hold up under whatever pressure we are being called upon to withstand, remembering that God will never require us to undergo anything that is actually impossible for us to get through with His help (1Cor.10:13). Paul considers this part of our Christian walk by breaking it down into its two primary components, "perseverance" and "patience". The former (Gk. *hypomone*; etymologically, "abidance under") refers to the necessary ability honed under pressure from all the trials we have endured in the past, to stand fast under testing, even when that is difficult, without giving into the pressure so as to stop doing what the Lord wants us to do (or do anything

⁴ See BB 5: Pneumatology: the Study of the Holy Spirit.

He would be displeased with).

(12) I know how to handle humiliation; I also know how to handle prosperity. I have learned by experience in each and every way how to handle being abundantly provided for and being impoverished, being in prosperity and being in a state of deprivation. (13) I have the strength to endure all [extremes] in the One who empowers me to do so.
Philippians 4:12-13

Patience is similar (Gk. *makrothymia*; etymologically "great [endurance] of anger"), but refers to our mature ability to overlook the slights and humiliations of this world and the people in it so as not to lose heart on the one hand or engage in unwise and angry retaliation on the other. Patience is a virtue (Prov.25:15; Eccl.7:8; 2Cor.6:6; Col.1:11; 3:12; Jas.1:2-4; 5:10), but one which even mature believers may find difficult to deploy when under intense pressure (even if we have read the book of Job many times).

Neither one of these virtuous behaviors can be maintained for very long without the Spirit's help (and certainly not by the spiritually immature). Once we have progressed to the point of being able to carry out this mandate, however, the next step in our spiritual progression is to take pains to retain our joy in the Lord, in all the wonderful things He has done for us and in all the glories to come, even when times are hard and we find ourselves having to exercise perseverance and patience in a deliberate and conscious way while the testing continues.

(2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful.
(3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.
James 1:2-4

Inheritance in the Light:

. . . giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the holy ones in the light.
Colossians 1:12

We believers have so many things to be thankful for.⁵ We are looking forward to an eternal body, to an eternal home in New Jerusalem, to eternal rewards, and to fellowship with each other in glory and light in the presence of our dear Savior and heavenly Father forever. So many wonderful blessings await – not the least of which being our salvation, our deliverance from the darkness, trials and tribulations of this terrible world . . . and from the lake of fire. Truly, we have much to be thankful for and for that reason should be continually giving thanks to our dear heavenly Father who has purchased all these blessings for us at the ineffable price of the death of His own beloved Son, our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

⁵ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section III, "What it Means to be Saved".

[Jesus Christ], who gave Himself on behalf of our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.
Galatians 1:4

Gnostics and mystics made and continue to make much of light versus darkness, suggesting that there is a struggle between two essentially equal contending parties, and further claiming that human beings can enter into this struggle in aid of the light. We believers who hew close to the truth of scripture know full well that "God is light" and that "in Him is no darkness at all" (1Jn.1:5 NKJV). We are also well aware that the time and the power of darkness have nothing to do with God but with the evil one and his followers (Lk.22:53). But there is no "struggle". From the moment that God decreed creation, His victory in the conflict between good and evil had already been foreordained, with that victory being won at the cross. God does not need our help. We are the ones who are in dire need of His help. And it is the height of arrogance to assume otherwise. Presenting our Savior and the devil as if on the same plane in any regard is a satanic ruse, one much employed by the teachers of Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism who were undermining the faith of many of the Colossian believers. It is the Father who has "rendered us sufficient to receive our share in the inheritance of the holy ones in the light" through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ alone. For He is the true light of the world, and only in Him are we liberated from the darkness so as to be fit to inherit in eternity's glorious light.

(4) In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. (5) And this light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not quenched it.
John 1:4-5

"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
John 8:12b

"I have come into the world as a light, in order that everyone who believes in Me may not abide in darkness."
John 12:46

In Jesus, the true Light (Jn.1:9), as "children of light" (Jn.12:36; Eph.5:8; cf. Lk.16:8; Matt.5:14), we enter the kingdom of light and exit the kingdom of darkness (Col.1:12-13; cf. Acts 26:18), having put our faith in the life-giving truth of the One who came into a world of darkness to bring us safely into the light of eternal life (1Pet.2:9; cf. Acts 26:23).

Rescued from the Power of Darkness:

[The Father] who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.
Colossians 1:13

Here we have the first instance of Paul directly opposing the truth to the lies of the Gnostic and Jewish mystics. Having just affirmed that we believers have been "*empowered* with all *power*

according to His glorious ***might*** (i.e., "power"), and having assured us of our "inheritance . . . in the ***light***", Paul now goes on to view this important truth from the opposite side of things: we have been rescued from the ***power*** of ***darkness*** so as to be heirs of the kingdom of the Son, the kingdom of light. Promising empowerment and enlightenment, the servants of Satan who were troubling the Colossian church were in fact leading them into the kingdom of the devil whose power is based upon darkness, obscuring the truth with his system of lies. So while these teachers were putting an enticing face on their false doctrines, behind the patina of "knowledge" which seemed "desirable" was only darkness and death – precisely in the same way as we see all cultic, occult and new age teaching working today (as will become ever more apparent once antichrist's false religion has come to the fore during the Tribulation).

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was ***pleasant to the eyes***, and a tree ***desirable*** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3:6 NKJV

(17) "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them (18) to open their eyes and turn them from ***darkness to light***, and ***from the power of Satan*** to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Acts 26:17-18 NIV

(13) For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for ***Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light***.

2nd Corinthians 11:13-14 NIV

(9) The coming of the lawless one is according to ***the working of Satan***, with all ***power, signs, and lying wonders***, (10) and with all unrighteous ***deception*** among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10 NKJV

God the Father is the One who has rescued us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His one and only beloved Son. God paid a price for us beyond understanding that we might not perish but have eternal life (Jn.3:16). For any believer to fail to appreciate the cross is the height of ingratitude and represents a dangerous disregard for divine authority. For as our God and our Creator, Jesus Christ has a fundamental right to our obedience and respect – and as our Savior who died on the cross to cover all of our sins with His blood, His spiritual death on our behalf, He possesses an undeniable claim to our eternal gratitude as well. Turning away to false teaching out of boredom or in search of titillation – as some of the Colossian believers were doing – was beyond disrespectful and tantamount to the sin of idolatry in seeking after false gods. That is especially true for those who succumb to Gnostic teachings about aeons, demiurges and involvement with angels (and demons).

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the

One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe (i.e., time-space). (3) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who [in His deity] sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins [in His humanity], He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (4) [And at His session (v.3), Jesus] became [manifestly] superior to the angels to the degree that He received as [a part of] His inheritance a Name so much more glorious than theirs.
Hebrews 1:1-4

His is the true power. His is the true light. He is the only way of salvation. And only by diligent attention to Him and His word can there be any spiritual safety, any growth, and progress, and production worthy of reward.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
2nd Corinthians 5:10 NIV

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."
Revelation 22:12 NKJV

Into the Kingdom:

[The Father] who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.
Colossians 1:13

This is the positive side of following the Lord, believing in Jesus Christ in the first place, then taking up our crosses and following Him thereafter. Paul sets this blessed and fundamental result, namely, our possession now of the eternal kingdom of light in principle and forever in future practice, in direct opposition to the "[ruling] power (i.e., kingdom) of darkness" from which we have been rescued by the grace of God alone. "In principle" at the present time, it is important to reiterate. The prodigal son was heir to all that his father had, but he distanced himself from that blessed situation and would have lost out entirely and forever if he had failed to repent and return. The same can be said of the Jerusalem believers at this and a somewhat later time whom Paul labored to save through his efforts on their behalf in writing the book of Hebrews. From what the letter to the Colossians contains, we do not have indications of similar, large-scale backsliding, but there were enough believers who were dallying with Gnostic and Jewish ideas for Paul to feel the need in the Spirit to write this letter.

It is certainly true, as we have already noted, that the positive teachings of the book of Colossians are many and wonderful; we have also seen that Paul's refutation of the false teaching that was troubling that church is, for the most part, done in the same way we see in this verse; that is to say, the inferiority of the false is definitively displayed by comparing it to the brilliant superiority of what is true. Can anything be better than light? Certainly not darkness! Can anything be

better than Christ's kingdom? Certainly not that of the devil! This strict opposition is intended to leave the Colossians in no doubt about the fact that they cannot dabble in Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism and at the same time remain confident about their present, positional hold on the coming kingdom – because in so doing they are in fact playing with fire by setting at least one foot into that other "kingdom".

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

1st Corinthians 10:21 NKJV

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

1st John 3:8b NIV

It would be well for believers throughout the world today, standing as we do on the threshold of the Tribulation, to recognize and admit that much of what they are involved in at present is in essence not much different from the Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism which was leading some of the Colossian believers astray in Paul's day. All lies are fundamentally hostile to the truth (1Jn.1:21b). Therefore all practices being engaged in by the church-visible today which are not authorized by scripture are in effect working at cross purposes with God's truth, especially when such practices are heavily laced with satanic falsehoods, whether legalistic or hedonistic.

In the final analysis, it makes no difference whether, e.g., a person is led into grace-subverting legalism through false teachings about water-baptism on the one hand, or conscience corroding hedonism through false teachings about exorcism on the other. The number and designations of these tyrannical, hyper-Messianic, charismatic, new age and occult-like manifestations of modern day Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism are too many to name or discuss. Suffice it to say that genuine teaching of the Word of God in churches these days has become so rare, that a believer who enters any church door nowadays stands a better chance of being exposed to such falsehoods than he/she does of receiving any serious Bible teaching sufficient to lead to spiritual growth. For that reason alone, Colossians can be seen as an epistle meet for the entire Church today, and ever more critically so as we "see the time fast approaching" (Heb.10:25).⁶

Ransom and Forgiveness:

In Him (i.e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin], the forgiveness of our sins.
Colossians 1:14

This was an important addition on Paul's part to bring the Colossians' thinking back into line. We all need to be reminded from time to time of the cross: we owe everything, absolutely everything, to our dear Savior and His sacrifice on our behalf. Without that sacrifice, there could have been no forgiveness. Without the cross, we were all facing condemnation, the lake of fire. Having been delivered by the blood of Christ, Jesus' atoning for all of our sins on the cross, and

⁶ See Colossians: Introduction, section II.B, "The Colossian Heresies"; and Hebrews Chapter Ten, "Egregious Trends".

having been vouchsafed eternal life in resurrection in New Jerusalem in place of hell, how should we not be grateful to the depths of our hearts?

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 1:7 NIV

The phraseology in both passages is the same, we believers "possess ransoming/redemption" by virtue of Christ's sacrifice and our appropriation of His victory on the cross "by grace, through faith" (Eph.2:8). "Ransoming" is the Greek word *apolytrosis*, stemming from the root *ly-* meaning to release (cf. catalyst; analyze; paralysis). In usage, the word refers to release of a prisoner from the power of his captors through paying a ransom.

(56) Now the stinger of death is the sin [nature] (i.e., it produces our sin), and the power of sin is the Law (i.e., it reveals our sin). (57) But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

1st Corinthians 15:56-57

(14) Therefore since "these children" (i.e., believers given to Christ by the Father: v.13) are flesh and blood, [Christ] took on the same [flesh and blood] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile [to God] those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death.

Hebrews 2:14-15

The "blood of Christ", our Lord's being judged for all of our sins and the sins of the entire world, is the "coin of the realm" necessary to pay the price of our ransom.⁷ Nothing else is acceptable to the Father. And Christ *did* pay – in full. That is why and that is how we believers have been delivered from the power of sin and from the power of the evil one, from death and from damnation, entirely on account of what Jesus Christ did for us.

We can never allow this fundamental truth of our salvation to fall from our hearts. Some people wear crucifixes over their hearts, but we who honor our Lord and His sacrifice with all of our hearts need to make these truths the absolute bedrock of how we think and act rather than how we superficially appear. But to do as some of the Colossian believers were doing, in essence to reject the importance of the cross by giving ourselves over to legalistic or antinomian mysticism or Gnosticism was an affront to the grace of God by which we are saved – and to our dear Savior who died for us.

How much more is that not the case today with believers who are involving themselves in similar vain distractions instead of doing what our Lord wants us to do, to grow, to progress and to

⁷ See BB 4A: Christology, section II, "The Saving Work of Jesus Christ"; and Hebrews Chapter 9, "Redemption".

produce for Him? For those believers were only just receiving this detailed discussion of the truth; but we have had the book of Colossians since the day we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

Verses Fifteen through Twenty

(15) [Jesus Christ] is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. (18) And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. (19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.
Colossians 1:15-20

The Exact Image:

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe (i.e., time-space). (3a) He is ***the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence***, the One who [in His deity] sustains the universe by His mighty Word.
Hebrews 1:1-3a

The word translated "image" above is the Greek *character*, transliterated directly into English as our "character". It originally had the meaning of an indelible stamp which identifies or manifests the object upon which it is impressed.

(24) "Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." (25) "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
Luke 20:24-25 NKJV

The word "image" in the passage from Luke's gospel quoted above (Lk.20:24-25; cf. Matt.22:20-21; Mk.12:16-17) is not *character* (as in Heb.1:3), however, but the Greek word *eikon* (from which English "icon"), and that is the word we find in our context as well. But the phraseology in the Hebrews' passage and in our context is parallel, with both expressing the nature of the relationship between Father and Son in a way that we human beings ought to be able to understand. Just as the marking on a Roman coin identifies it as ultimately belonging to Caesar and representing his authority, so this glorious "exact image" represents our Lord's true divine essence and glory as One being God as well as man, One sent by the Father and thus possessing

the Father's authority. The Son in His humanity bears "the stamp" of the Father's deity so perspicuously that His own deity is undeniable.

(10) "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. (11) Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves."

John 14:10-11 NKJV

(1) What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ]. (2) And this life appeared, and we have seen [it], and we bear witness [to it], and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was in the presence of the Father and [then] *appeared to us*.

1st John 1:1-2

Although God the Father is invisible – as is the Spirit and is the deity of Christ – our Lord took on true humanity in order to enter into this world to be our perfect sacrifice, our Savior. We *can* see Him, and through our Lord's manifestation of the glory of God in human form, we see the Father as well.

(8) Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." (9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father' "?

John 14:8-9 NKJV

Jesus Christ has always been the revealed member of the Trinity. Even instances in the Old Testament which may seem to be appearances of the Father are usually instances of Jesus Christ appearing in Christophany (compare with Is.6:10 with Jn.12:40-41), representing the Father on the Father's authority as the One destined to be sent into the world to save it (Jn.3:16-17; 12:47).⁸ So for the Colossian believers to prefer mystic or Gnostic representations of God which relegated Christ to an inferior role (as both systems did) was to deny His co-equal glory and deity, truths which are fundamental to understanding the person and work of Christ upon which salvation is based.

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."

John 5:39 NKJV

(3) And to the degree that our gospel really is covered by a veil, it is obscured in this way only in the case of those who are perishing. (4) For in the case of such persons, the god of this world has blinded the minds of these unbelievers, in order to prevent the shining forth unto them of the light of the gospel of Christ's glory – even *Him who is the very*

⁸ See BB 1: Theology, section II.C, "The Trinity in the Old Testament".

image [eikon] of God.
2nd Corinthians 4:3-4

Firstborn of all Creation: "Firstborn *of* creation" here is meant in the sense of "*over* all creation", expressing Christ's primacy in everything having to do with His authority over the created world of time and space. The title thus has to do not so much with primogeniture as it does with expressing our Lord's authority as given to Him by the Father whose firstborn He is. Jewish mysticism sought to deny the humanity of Christ; Gnosticism sought to demote Him in its scheme of aeons, demiurges, angels and demons; with this phrase Paul reminds his readers that Jesus Christ is supreme in the plan of God as only God's Firstborn can be, so that implicitly any reduction of His status in their hearts as a result of the false teaching they are giving ear to dishonors Him greatly.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the *firstborn* among many brethren.
Romans 8:29 NKJV

But when He brings back the *Firstborn* into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him!"
Hebrews 1:6

Christ's humility during the first advent was necessary for Him to fulfill the plan of God, to carry out the sacrifice of sacrifices upon which everything depends. But that lack of visible glory, unseen at least by those with hardened hearts, was only temporary.

(4) "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. (5) And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."
John 17:4-5 NKJV

(29) "Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory."
Matthew 24:29-30

Everything was Created by Him and for Him:

Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him.
Colossians 1:16

It is hard to imagine a clearer expression than this of the deity of Jesus Christ and of His status as

the Creator. One has to wonder in regard to those Christians, even those reputed to be theologians or "men of the cloth", who have expressed doubts about both truths, whether or not they have bothered to read Colossians? And if they have, whether or not they believe the Bible?

In any translation, the above is clear enough: Jesus Christ created everything, both the visible universe and everything unseen as well – and only God could do that! Furthermore, in addition to being created "by Him" and "through Him" (expressing all direct and indirect means of creation), everything was created "for Him", meaning unequivocally that Jesus Christ is also the *reason* for creation. The world exists *for Him*. Any possible doubts about His authority over the world – and over all who are in the world – are thus irrefutable and definitively erased. There would be no world without Jesus Christ. He is the One who made it, and it was made for Him; He is the One who made us, and we were made for Him.

(6) "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (7) Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. (8) For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. (9) I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. (10) And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."

John 17:6-10 NKJV

(21) Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: (22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. (23) And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

1st Corinthians 3:21-23 NKJV

(11) For both the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers, (12) as He says: "I will proclaim Your name to My brothers. In the midst of the assembly I shall praise you" (Ps.22:22). (13) and elsewhere, "I [too] shall put My confidence in Him, [the Father]" (Is.8:17); and elsewhere, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me" (Is.8:18).
Hebrews 2:12-13

So then we believers, and the creation as a whole, are, essentially, a gift from the Father to the Son. Believers who have gained even a nominal level of spiritual maturity and at least a passing familiarity with scripture and its doctrines understand that God is triune, that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all coequally, coeternally and consubstantially God.⁹ We also understand that in space and time, in the world, that is, each person of the Godhead has a particular "role to play" (for want of a better way of expressing these sublime truths of which we as finite human beings can only hope to have a limited understanding this side of heaven). The Father is the ultimate authority in the plan of God and the Spirit is the One who empowers it. But Jesus Christ is the

⁹ See BB 1: Theology, section II, "The Persons of God: the Trinity".

plan Himself, the Logos, the One who executes the plan from the beginning to the end, Alpha and Omega. Nothing could exist without Jesus Christ, the One who in accordance with the plan of the Father took on the role of being that very plan, creating everything so as to be the heir of all that is or ever will be.

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed *heir of all things*, [the One] *through whom He created the universe* (i.e., time-space).

Hebrews 1:1-2

Not to be overlooked in our passage is the expansion by Paul of what we find in the Hebrews passage above to explain creation as not only what is visible but also everything which is invisible, meaning that all angelic creation is also just that, part of creation, and thus is also both the product of Christ's creative work and completely subordinate to Him – precisely the opposite of the heretical teachings of the Jewish mysticism and Gnosticism.

Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, *things invisible* as well as those visible – *whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers*, everything was created through Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:16

We have explained in detail elsewhere how that "thrones, authorities, rulers and powers" are angelic ranks.¹⁰ Suffice it to say here that these four terms are mainly referencing fallen angels, with "thrones" being the satanic equivalent of elect angelic elders (Rev.4:4ff.), "authorities" (cf. Eph.3:10), "rulers" (i.e., "lordships"; cf. Eph.1:21), being rank and file demons, and "powers" occupying a middle place (cf. Eph.6:12).

(19) [to understand] what the surpassing greatness of His power unto us who believe [truly is] – according to the very exercise of this powerful might of His (20) which He (i.e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] (21) *far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship* and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. (22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.

Ephesians 1:19-23

No one reading Paul's epistle could have any doubt about the fact that all angels of whatever rank and of whatever status, elect or fallen, were created by Jesus Christ and thus subordinate to Him in every way. That being the case, by putting things in such a strong, positive way, it should have

¹⁰ See BB 2A: Angelology, sections II.9.3, "The Organization of the Elect Angels"; and II.9.6, "The Organization of the Fallen Angels".

been clear to all that involving themselves in "helping God" through Gnostic combat or otherwise venerating angels to the detriment of the majesty of our Lord and Savior was not only wrong but exceedingly spiritually dangerous.

(10b) Reckless, self-willed, not fearing to blaspheme angelic powers (lit., "glories"), (11) [although] this is a place where even [elect] angels, of much greater strength and power, [will not go, so as to] bring against them (i.e., the demons) a blasphemous judgment before the Lord (i.e., to curse them).
2nd Peter 2:10b-11

(8) In the same way these [false teachers], deluding themselves with false visions, defile their flesh, reject all authority, and bring slander against angels (i.e., Gnostic "combat" with aeons). (9) But [even] the archangel Michael, when he was contending and disputing with the devil over Moses' body, did not dare to pronounce a slanderous judgment against him, but said [instead], "May the Lord rebuke you!" (10) But these men blaspheme about things of which they know nothing!
Jude 1:8-10a

The same warnings apply today. Any Christian foolish enough to involve him/herself in any sort of supposed "spiritual warfare", "doing battle" with demonic forces, engaging in exorcism, speaking in tongues, giving in to ecstatic behavior, falling down "slain in the Spirit", laughing uncontrollably and unaccountably or any other such obviously *non*-spiritual behavior is asking for trouble. The day is quickly coming when antichrist and his false prophet will make use of these and all manner of other "new age" type machinations to deceive and enslave the human race to the will of the beast and his master, Satan. Undermining one's own genuinely spiritual defenses before the fact is the height of folly – and will no doubt contribute to the virulence of the Great Apostasy.¹¹

He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him:

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe (i.e., time-space). (3a) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who [in His deity] *sustains the universe* by His mighty Word.
Hebrews 1:1-3a

It is a sobering thought, or at least it should be, that the continued existence of the entire material universe depends upon the will of God, on our Savior's conscious resolve to keep it so. Human beings, especially unbelievers, have a tendency to take existence for granted, as if it were something independent of God and of God's will – as most do not believe in God. Even among believers, especially in our Laodicean era, it is common to encounter this false way of thinking.

¹¹ See CT 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

In practical terms, there is not a great deal of difference between failing to understand just how "big" God is (for want of a better way of saying it) and not believing in Him at all. In fact, He created it all **and** it only continues to exist because He wills it so. If it were not the will of God for "all things" to continue, they would disappear in an instant. Blessedly, that will not happen, because God in the person of Jesus Christ has wed Himself irrevocably to this creation, taking on true humanity to save it – to save us. "And so will we ever be with the Lord" (1Thes.4:17). But that He is the Creator and that speculative human theories of the origin and composition of the universe are mere satanic lies is patently evident and also confirmed by the Word of God.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1

By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.
Hebrews 11:3 ESV

Jesus Christ existed "before everything" (Col.1:17; cf. Jn.1:1-3), and everything that exists, exists in Him (cf. Heb.1:1-3), having been created for Him and by Him (Col.1:16).

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.
Romans 11:36 NKJV

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.
1st Corinthians 8:6 NKJV

As God, our Savior existed in eternity past with the Father and the Spirit before there was a universe, before He created time and space.

(1) The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. (2) This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. (3) Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. (4) In Him was life, and this life was the light of men.
John 1:1-4

How would Jesus Christ **not** then be superior in every way to all angelic and all other entities, real or imagined (in the fantasies of Jewish mystics and Gnostic teachers)?

(3) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who [in His deity] sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins [in His humanity], He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (4) [And at His session (v.3), Jesus] became [manifestly] superior to the angels to the degree that He received as [a part of] His inheritance a Name so much more glorious than theirs.

Hebrews 1:3-4

These are basic principles of truth, obvious from a simple reading of the Bible, principles which every baby Christian should know and understand. Dabbling in false teachings which called them into question (as at least some of the Colossian believers were doing) was a good way to undermine and eventually to destroy their faith. Once the truth is rejected, lies always seep in to take its place. That was true then with Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism; that is true today with new age teaching of every sort, no matter how defined.

(18) Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and the *adoration of angels*, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, (19) yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is *from this Source*, [Jesus Christ], that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.

Colossians 2:18-19

The Head of the Body: The Church, Greek *ekklesia* or "assembly", is often referred to in the New Testament as "the Body of Christ" (e.g., 1Cor.12:12), of which our Lord Jesus is "the Head" (1Cor.11:3; 12:21; Eph.4:15-16; 5:22-33; Col.1:18; 2:10; 2:19). This name stresses the intimate connection between Jesus and us whom He loves, being so close to Him as to be just as indistinguishable from Him as the head is from the body.

(22) And [the Father] subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.

Ephesians 1:22-23

This blessed biblical metaphor tells us a great deal about our relationship to Jesus Christ and to our fellow believers. Just as the head rules the body, so Christ rules the Church. Just as the head is aware of how the body is functioning, so nothing is hidden from Him who is our Head. Just as the body's proper task is to support the decisions and activities which the head chooses, so the Body of Christ is here on earth to carry out the will of God and to please our Master Jesus Christ. And just as the head directs the body to care for itself in its health and welfare, so our perfect Ruler knows what is best for us all, individually and collectively, and would never abandon or forsake any part of His Body, no matter how small.

This metaphor also communicates to us an obvious truth which the church-visible finds easy to ignore: the body is only healthy and effective when all of its parts are functioning properly with each doing its part to contribute to the welfare of the whole. This is what we all strive for in terms of our own bodies. Failing to recognize how important bodily health is to our Lord – the health of His Body the Church – is a grave oversight. And while the physical body is nurtured and cared for by physical means, the Body of Christ is meant to nurture itself by spiritual means, with each of us responsible for one another as intimate parts of the Lord's Body, carrying out our responsibilities to Him and to one another through the application of our various spiritual gifts:

(26) If one part [of the Body] suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (27) Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1st Corinthians 12:26-27 NIV

(15) . . . but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16

(18) Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and the adoration of angels, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, (19) yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews (i.e., each believer functioning in our personal ministries to one another), and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.

Colossians 2:18-19

When we are saved, believers are baptized into Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, becoming one with Him and with each other forevermore (1Cor.12:13; Eph.4:4). From that point forward, we believers are now intimately part of the Body of Christ, intimate parts of Him, belonging to Him, our Head, and to each other, members of His Body, for all eternity (Rom.12:4-5; 1Cor.6:15; 10:17; 11:13; cf. Matt.26:26; Mk.14:22; Lk.22:19; 1Cor.10:16; 11:24; Eph.1:22; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4-6; 4:12; 4:16; 5:23; 5:30; Col.1:18; 1:24; 2:10; 2:19; 3:15).

(12) For just as the body is one and has many members, and the members of the body, though many, are [yet] a single body, so also is Christ. (13) Indeed, we were all baptized by [the] One Spirit into [that] one Body, whether Jews or Greeks (i.e., gentiles), whether slaves or free men, and we have all been given to drink of [the] One Spirit.

1st Corinthians 12:12-13

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.

Colossians 1:24 NKJV

At least some of the Colossian believers were forgetting these truths, failing to appreciate the fact that by giving their attention to other things, to false teaching which denigrated Christ by virtue of exalting angelic (and demonic) entities, they were in danger of serious reproof from the One who was their legitimate Head to whom all awe and reverence and respect was properly due.

And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He *who is [its] Ruler*.

Colossians 1:18a

Firstborn from the Dead: In verse fifteen Paul referred to our Lord as "the firstborn of all creation", and we explained that term as referencing our Lord's priority of authority based upon His deity. He possesses preeminent status *over* all of God's creation as the One who created it. Thus that title expressed Christ's primacy in everything having to do with the created world of time and space based upon the authority given to Him by the Father whose firstborn He is. That status of "firstborn", His by divine right, has also been confirmed through His resurrection from the dead. Through His incarnation, through His sacrifice on the cross, and through His resurrection, Jesus Christ has received and has been demonstrated to be the One who occupies first place in all things.

And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things.
Colossians 1:18

Only by being God and man could Jesus be the Firstborn in both senses, the One who through His sacrifice for us and victory on the cross would *earn* confirmation of the privileges of rulership, priesthood, and double portion which were His by virtue of who He is (Rom.8:29; Heb.1:6).

. . . and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, *the firstborn from the dead*, and *the ruler over* the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.
Revelation 1:5 NKJV

Since Jesus is the one and only Son of God (Jn.1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; 1Jn.4:9), His status of firstborn refers not to any order of birth but rather to the privileges that fall to the lot of the firstborn, namely, rulership (Dan.7:13-14; Matt.22:41-45; 28:18; Col.1:18; Heb.2:10; 3:1-6; Rev.2:27), priesthood (Heb.5:6; 7:13-14), and double portion of inheritance (Rev.19:9; cf. Deut.21:15-17). As with His priesthood and His Messiahship, Jesus' status of "firstborn" is a privilege confirmed/earned through His sacrificing of Himself for us all on the cross, the "firstborn from the dead" (Col.1:18; Rev.1:5); for it is His death for us that forms the basis for His receiving all of the rights and privileges of firstborn status (cf. Gen.49:4; and Heb.12:16, where it is made clear that this privilege is based upon merit) . . .

I will also appoint Him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.
Psalm 89:27 NIV

But when He brings back the Firstborn into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him! (Ps.97:7b)"
Hebrews 1:6

. . . and it is His resurrection, ascension and session that confirm them.

"The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' "

Psalm 110:1b NIV

(3) [The gospel] which is about [God's] Son, the One who was born of the seed of David according to His human nature (lit., "flesh"), (4) and **demonstrated** to be God's Son by the power of the Spirit of Holiness **through resurrection** from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 1:3-4

He was handed over (i.e., forsaken) on account of our transgressions (i.e., to redeem us from sin), and was raised up on account of our justification (i.e., so that we too could be raised, having been justified by His death).

Romans 4:25

When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:3b

As a result of His victory on the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom.8:29 KJV). It is to that end that we believers have been predestined to be "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom.8:29 KJV) – because we are His in every way. We are His Bride, His Body, His Church. We are "the joy" that was set before Him in anticipation of which "He endured the cross, scorning its shame", and then in victory "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb.12:2 NIV). Remembering Jesus and what He has done for us entails being mindful of His absolute authority won in the crucible of fiery judgment wherein He rescued us from our sins. Failing to give our Lord that proper respect at all times in our heart of hearts leads to the sort of spiritual unfaithfulness some of the Colossian believers were dallying with – just as such dallying always leads to enervating the reverence we should always have for One who is our all in all.

The Fulfillment of His Plan:

(19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:19-20

The Greek text here says, literally, that it pleased the Father "for all fullness to dwell in Him [Jesus Christ]". However, "fullness" is the Greek word *pleroma*, a key Gnostic word, as we have seen, meaning the entire realm of all things divine and spiritual wherein the "combat" between good and evil is taking place. We believers understand that there is nothing like a dichotomy in fact because the devil and his forces are mere creatures and nothing to be compared to Almighty God.

What Gnostics (and Jewish mystics) saw as perpetual, we who believe in Jesus Christ understand as very limited in time; what those unbelievers see as capable of many possible resolutions, we know for certain to have been ordained in absolute detail in eternity past. All that is presently happening, all that has happened, and all that will transpire until the day of eternity arrives is playing out in accordance with the divine decree of God, the "plan of God" as we have termed it. And that plan, that carrying out of the will of God, His "good pleasure" (v.19), expressed in totality before creation has always been summed up to "reside entirely" in Jesus Christ (v.19), the One whose task it is to perform God's plan for salvation, "to reconcile everything to Himself" (v.20).

Consequently, "for all fullness to dwell in Him" expresses God the Father's plan for creation wherein Jesus Christ is the Victor in bringing about an eternity populated by creatures made in the image of God who have willingly chosen for Him, all accomplished and paid for by Christ's victory on the cross; for "He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him" (v.17).

(28) And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also glorified (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life).
Romans 8:28-30

It is Jesus Christ who *is* the Logos. The Word of God incarnate, the very "plan of God" Himself.

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

The plan of God is, so to speak, "the big picture". To understand "the big picture" one has to start with Jesus Christ – for there is no one and nothing "bigger" in the plan of God than He who was ordained to carry it out, creating the world and saving it through His incarnation, perfect life and ministry, and death for us all on the cross. And now that His mission has been completed, now that He has been resurrected, ascended to the Father and taken His seat at the Father's right hand, waiting for that glorious future day when God the Father will make His enemies, "a footstool for your feet" (Ps.110:1; Lk.20:43; Acts 2:35; Heb.1:3), any and all doubt about the authority and the power and the glory of the Messiah has been indisputably eradicated forever – for those who believe the truth.

How, then, could any believer with a modicum of understanding of scripture allow him/herself to be deluded into thinking that the plan was still in flux, that God somehow needed help, that Jesus Christ was somehow – God forbid! – to be considered on a par with the evil one? Even if not

expressed in such stark terms, that was the essence of the Gnostic and Jewish mystical teaching of Paul's day – and that is the essence of all new age and occult beliefs in our own day as well. It may be true that believers then as now do not initially enter into such circles in full understanding of their demonic nature, but that is hardly an excuse for not turning away in horror just as soon as they hear our Lord being defamed in such a way.

"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all."

1st Chronicles 29:11 NIV

While lack of proper reverence for the Lord leads to folly, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps.111:10; Prov.9:10); and one way in which to see His power and glory and wisdom and might with crystal clarity is by considering as Paul is doing here His absolute control over all things as the One who has and is carrying out the plan of God in absolute perfection.

How great are your works, O Lord! Your plans are very intricate!

Psalms 92:5 NET

"Who has performed and done it,
Calling the generations from the beginning?

'I, the Lord, am the first;

And with the last I am He.' "

Isaiah 41:4 NKJV

"Behold, the former things have come to pass,

And new things I declare;

Before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Isaiah 42:9 NKJV

"Indeed I have spoken it;

I will also bring it to pass.

I have purposed it;

I will also do it."

Isaiah 46:11b NKJV

"I have declared the former things from the beginning;

They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it.

Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass."

Isaiah 48:3 NKJV

The plan of God is all-comprehensive, dictating absolutely everything that has happened in this world and everything that will happen. From the subatomic level to the universal, nothing can happen unless God has decreed it. And God decreed everything in perfect foreknowledge of everything that would happen, incorporating into His perfect plan every free will decision every

single one of His creatures made in His image would make, syncing everything in perfect harmony to achieve the perfect result of salvation for all who are willing and self-condemnation for all who are not willing to respond to His great mercy.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!
Romans 11:33 NKJV

If we would only come to appreciate how completely in control our God is of everything in the most minute detail, we would progress a long way towards trusting Him even at times when things in our little corner of the universe may seem completely out of control.

(29) "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. (30) And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."
Matthew 10:29-31 NIV

The Reconciliation of All Things:

(19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.
Colossians 1:19-20

The successful completion of the plan by Jesus Christ who is "the plan", the Word, the Logos incarnate, has as its objective as stated above for God to "reconcile everything to Himself through Him (i.e., Jesus Christ)". This passage also makes clear that it is Christ's victory on the cross, His atoning for all human sins, that accomplishes this reconciliation which is the plan of God's ultimate objective. Further, this passage also delineates the scope of the reconciliation which is the objective of God's plan: "all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col.1:20 ESV). And while this does literally mean "everything", the peace which reconciliation brings is made specifically between God and His children, angels and mankind alike.

(14) [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. (15) [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:14-15

As the passage above explains, this completion of the plan of God, this reconciliation and making of peace between God and those He created, has not been a peaceful process but a great conflict. And the victory in this war has been won by God at the highest possible cost: the precious blood of Christ, our Lord and Savior's death in the darkness for every single human sin.

How does all this have anything to do with angels? First, we see from the passage that it was by means of the cross that God defeated the devil and his followers in this conflict which has been raging since the devil first rebelled. Second, we see that it was through the victory of the cross that God stripped the devil and his followers of their power. Third, we see that it was through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice in dying for our sins that God triumphed over Satan once and for all. For humanity, as we have seen in the past, is God's answer to the devil's rebellion.¹²

Satan thought to put God "in a box", so to speak, by inducing a third of angelic kind to turn away from God and follow him instead. How could a loving God condemn his creatures, especially when such a judgment would rend the fabric of perfect harmony and completeness that previously existed? God could and would do just that. But He created mankind to demonstrate His ability to replace Satan and his followers. And in the process – completely unanticipated by the devil – God demonstrated His great wisdom, His great mercy, and His great love for His creatures by sacrificing His one and only beloved Son to fulfill what had always been the perfect plan to reconcile all things and restore peace.

(8) "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord, (9) "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."
Isaiah 55:8-9

Thus the plan of God is at once incalculable and easily understandable. No one could ever comprehend the magnitude of wisdom and power necessary to foreknow and then foreordain every single thing that has ever happened or will happen in the material realm. How much more so in the spiritual realm where so much is unknown to us? Who can even imagine the immensity of knowledge and skill required to know and understand ahead of time every thought, every emotion, every decision of every free will creature, human and angelic, and arrange them flawlessly into the one perfect plan which produces the exact and perfect conclusion that God had always intended, that God absolutely foreordained?

(16) When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on the earth – his eyes not sleeping day or night – (17) then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.
Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 NIV

Discussions of the plan of God generally also involve consideration of the devil and his revolt, precisely because God's plan is designed to test and reveal the true heart of every creature created in His image. Creating a universe in which some of His creatures had free will inevitably resulted in some rejecting His authority from that very free will.

¹² See SR 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall from Grace.

One of the truly extraordinary features of God's plan is thus allowing those made in His image the opportunity to choose their own eternal destiny and to demonstrate within "time" the genuineness of their decision. For angels, the decision to stay loyal or rebel has already been made (e.g., Jn.16:11). For human beings, as long as we are alive, we all have the opportunity to return to God from our fallen state (and none of us would have done any better than Adam and Eve) as a result of the gracious gift of Jesus Christ and His great victory on the cross.

Thus scripture in general and Paul in Colossians in particular (in refutation of Gnostic and Jewish mystical distortion of these fundamental truths) have much to say about the enemy whenever God's plan for defeating him is discussed (as in our context verses, Col.2:18-19);¹³ for this connection, i.e., between angelic rebellion, human sinfulness and the need for reconciliation provided by Christ's sacrifice, is the essential nexus of God's plan.

(17) The seventy-two returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" (18) And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star."
Luke 10:17-18

"Now the judgment of this world is [imminent]. Now the ruler of this world is about to be cast out [of it]."
John 12:31

(8) "When [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: (9) regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me, [the only One who can forgive their sins]; (10) regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to be seeing Me any longer [as the standard of righteousness]; (11) regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been convicted [already, demonstrating that all who do not believe are destined for judgment]."
John 16:8-11

Now the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet.
Romans 16:20

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:15

(14) Therefore since "these children" (i.e., believers given to Christ by the Father: v.13) are flesh and blood, [Christ] took on the same [flesh and blood] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile [to God] those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death.

¹³ These matters are covered extensively in the Satanic Rebellion series; see also BB 2A: Angelology; and BB 2B: Eschatology.

Hebrews 2:14-15

[Jesus Christ], who, having traveled to heaven, is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

1st Peter 3:22

The one who is committing sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God appeared, that He might put an end to the devil's deeds.

1st John 3:8

The cross produced God's total victory over Satan and his followers in the conflict which has been raging since before the restoration of the heavens and the earth begun in Genesis 1:2. The cross is the lynchpin, the fulcrum, the foundation, the key to God's plan, and Jesus Christ is thus the Victor who wins the victory and thus resolves the conflict once and for all, restoring peace, harmony and completeness to God's creation through the "reconciliation of all things" described in our context (Col.1:20). Simply put, Jesus Christ *is* the plan of God, the Logos, the Word, the "plan" (as the Greek word *logos* can be translated), He who was always destined to be the One who resolved everything by taking on human flesh and dying for the sins of the world.

Thus the cross (and the restoration it made possible) is not an afterthought. God forbid! Through His complete and perfect foreknowledge of everything that would happen, God has planned and ordained everything which has happened and everything that ever will. His ability to do so was never in doubt (for anyone, human or angel, who has even a rudimentary appreciation of His glory). What the devil had counted on was a supposed self-imposed inability to punish his rebellion on account of an assumed conflict between the justice of God (which would require judgment) and the love of God (which would require the possibility of reconciliation and the restoration of perfection – impossible in the devil's arrogant thinking). That God would create an entirely new species of creature likewise endowed with the image of God, and that God would subsequently take on human flesh in order to die for all of their sins when they fell from grace was a series of events unimaginable by Satan and his followers – and, fully appreciated, the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His death for us on the cross are indeed profoundly and wondrously exhilarating and awe-inspiring for us today who have received eternal life and deliverance from the grave thereby.

(5) How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts! (6) Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, (7) that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. (8) But you, Lord, are forever exalted.

Psalms 92:5-8 NIV

In outline form, to thoroughly refute and defeat the devil and bring His world back to perfection required God to judge the world for its evil, then restore it thereafter, creating a new species made in His image which would replace Satan and his followers. God did, is doing and will do

this in three phases (as we have studied previously).¹⁴

1. Phase I: Constitution: Lays the foundation for the eternal victory (the "much" phase).

- a. Judgment I: the Genesis Gap
- b. Restoration I: the Seven Days of Re-creation
- c. Replacement I: the First and the Last Adams

2. Phase II: Completion

- a. Judgment II: the Tribulation
- b. Restoration II: the Millennium
- c. Replacement II: Christ the King and His Church

3. Phase III: Consummation

- a. Judgment III: the Final Judgments
- b. Restoration III: the New Heavens and the New Earth
- c. Replacement III: the Advent of the Father

This sublime and transcendent design had always been the plan since before God made the original universe in Genesis 1:1 – or any of the angels. After Satan's rebellion, God and His holy angels sequestered themselves in the third heaven and left the world to the devil and his followers. Then, after an unknown period of time, probably of very long duration, sufficient at least to demonstrate unequivocally to angelic kind how dysfunctional a world ruled by the devil would be, God rendered judgment on Satan's realm, plunging it into darkness and flooding it with the waters above. We are not told how long the devil's followers were left in darkness, contemplating their fate, shocked and surprised that Satan's assurances about what God could and would do were nothing but the barest lies. But we do know that the restoration of the world in seven days, necessary to provide the environment for creation of God's replacement for the devil and his angels, was met with joy by angelic kind.

(7) "When the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy, (8) who shut up the sea behind doors, when it burst forth from the womb, (9) when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness?"

Job 38:7-9

The creation of mankind, completely unanticipated by the devil, set the stage for the carrying out of the final judgment against him and his followers. Once humanity had reached the tally of the angels who rebelled (which, absent intervention, they would surely do in short order), the last vestige of Satan's arrogant assumptions upon which his rebellion was based would be wiped away: yes, he and his *could* be replaced.

The fall of mankind, orchestrated by the devil's craftiness, rather than derailing the plan of God was in fact absolutely essential for it. Sin put humanity into a no-win situation of eventual physical death followed by inevitable eternal condemnation. But it also made us ideal candidates

¹⁴ In the Satanic Rebellion series; see also BB 2B: Eschatology.

for God's grace. Yes, God could and would and *did* provide for reconciliation, not for fallen angels who would have no part of God's mercy, but for those human beings who would, given the opportunity, respond to that great mercy so as to be saved. The price required for this to take place was and is beyond imagination: God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and dying for the sins of every single human being who had or would ever live.

(14) [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. (15) [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:14-15

Now that the cross is history, now that the victory of victories has been won, God's plan is on the cusp of moving into its second phase, the exploitation of the victory during the present age wherein the instrument for one-to-one replacement of Satan's followers, the Church of Jesus Christ, is being called out and formed. At its completion, during the Tribulation and immediately thereafter, God will judge not the world (which the devil corrupted) but the devil's followers, human and angelic (with the seven thunder judgments), and will restore peace and prosperity on the earth during the Millennium under the rule of the perfect King, the Messiah (wherein a second echelon of believers will be called out, providing a double portion for the Son of God).

The final phase of the plan of God will follow in short order after the thousand years comes to an end, with all evil and evil doers terminally judged and removed from God's creation, with the world itself replaced by a better one "in which righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13), with New Jerusalem descending from heaven to be the eternal capital of the eternal state ruled by the Father and the Son together with only light and life and bliss and joy forever and ever, amen! In the end, things will be better to an infinite degree than was the case before, and the key, the bedrock, the foundation and cornerstone of the entire plan is Jesus Christ.

(11) "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' (12) Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
Acts 4:11-12 NKJV

Paul's laser-like focus on Jesus Christ and the plan of God, of which He is the very heart, is by itself, therefore, an effective and absolute refutation of all the lies of the Gnostics and Jewish mystics who were attempting to corrupt the church at Colossae – if only the recipients of this blessed letter would take pains to read it, understand it and apply it, drawing the proper and unavoidable implications of the majesty of Jesus Christ who is the very Logos.

(54) And when this corruptible [body] puts on incorruption and this mortal [body] puts on immortality, then will be fulfilled this prophecy which has been written: "Death has been swallowed up in victory (Is.25:8). (55) Where is your victory, O death? Where is your stinger, O death (Hos.13:14)?" (56) Now the stinger of death is the sin [nature] (i.e., it

produces our sin), and the power of sin is the Law (i.e., it reveals our sin). (57) ***But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!***
1st Corinthians 15:54-57

Verses Twenty-One through Twenty-Three

(21) You were once alienated from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil. (22) Yet God has now accomplished reconciliation [for you] through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation – [this you will do] (23) if you remain solidly grounded and firmly fixed in your faith, and unmoved from your hope in the gospel which you have heard proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which [gospel] I, Paul, have become a minister.
Colossians 1:21-23

Alienated: The fall resulted in all mankind being alienated from God at birth. Apart from our Lord (who was virgin-born without a sin nature and never sinned thereafter), we are all born with a body which contains a sin nature (Rom.5:12a; 1Cor.15:22). As a result we all sin (Rom.3:23; 5:12b). Absent, therefore, a miraculous intervention on our behalf, after we all die physically we would then be subject to judgment as this world and life in it as it is cannot go on forever (Heb.9:27).¹⁵

(17) This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, (18) having their understanding darkened, being ***alienated*** from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; (19) who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.
Ephesians 4:17-19 NKJV

Alienation from God is the natural state of mankind after the fall. Before salvation, without the Spirit, all our thinking is "futility of mind", "ignorance and blindness of heart", with our very thoughts being "hostile" towards Him, and all that we do offensive to Him as we think and speak and act according to our sinful flesh.

(6) The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (7) The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.
Romans 8:6-7 NIV

Reconciliation: Reconciliation is the answer to alienation.¹⁶ That is true in human terms as

¹⁵ All of these matters are covered in BB 3B: Hamartiology.

¹⁶ See BB 4A: Christology, section II.9, "Reconciliation"; and Hebrews chapter 2, under "Reconcile".

well. But in regard to our relationship to God, our unique situation as sinful human beings after the fall meant that there was absolutely nothing that *we* could do to effect that reconciliation with God which alone would relieve us of the triple curse of being dead to Him now, dying physically in due time, and being condemned to the second death thereafter (Rev.2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8).

(24) What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? (25) Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!
Romans 7:24-25 NIV

Only God could save us. Only God could effect that reconciliation which would remove the alienation from Him that would otherwise condemn us to hell. Only God could do it. And God the Father *did* do it! By sacrificing His beloved Son our dear Savior on our behalf.

(18) And all things come from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) for that God was [and is] in Christ making overtures of reconciliation between the world and Himself – not taking their transgressions into account – and has entrusted us with this message (lit., "word") of reconciliation. (20) As ambassadors of Christ, as though God were urging you through us, we beg you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God!
2nd Corinthians 5:18-20

The Death of Christ in His Physical Body: The phrasing "physical body" may seem a somewhat odd thing for Paul to say, but it is indeed a fairly literal translation of the Greek we find here, "in the body of the flesh of Him":

In the body of his flesh through death . . .
Colossians 1:22 KJV

. . . by Christ's physical body through death . . .
Colossians 1:22 NIV

. . . by his physical body through his death . . .
Colossians 1:22 CSB

. . . in His fleshly body through death . . .
Colossians 1:22 NASB

We know of a certainty that it was through the spiritual death of Christ on the cross, that is, His bearing of our sins "in His body on the tree" (1Pet.2:24) that He was "made sin for us" (2Cor.5:21): by being judged in our place for all of our sins, He suffered the penalty of death for us all.¹⁷

¹⁷ See BB 4A: Christology, sections 4, "The Blood of Christ", and 5, "The Spiritual Death of Christ".

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?
Psalm 22:1b NKJV

But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
Isaiah 53:5 NKJV

So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.
John 19:30 NKJV

Salvation was "finished/completed" *before* our Lord gave up His physical life, the full price of our redemption being paid by Him in the three hours of darkness on the cross which preceded. Why, then, does Paul put things in this (at least potentially confusing) way? He does so for the same reason that John made a point of describing the separation of blood and sera in Christ's body after He released His spirit, namely, to refute that body of lies, of which Gnosticism and Jewish mysticism formed a part, which sought to deny the true humanity of our Lord (just as these and other forms of false teaching also seek to deny His deity).

(34) But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. (35) And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.
John 19:34-35 NKJV

(6) This is the One who came through water, blood and Spirit – not by means of water only but by means of water and blood – and it is the Spirit who testifies [to the truth of this], because the Spirit is the truth; (7) because there are three who bear witness, (8) the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three have the same purpose.
1st John 5:6-8

Stand before Him:

(10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also belittle your brother? For we will all stand before God's tribunal (11) as it is written: "As I live", says the Lord, "every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will praise God" (Is.45:23). (12) So then each of us will give an account concerning himself to God.
Romans 14:10-12

For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless.
2nd Corinthians 5:10

The Lord Jesus Christ will judge every human being prior to the commencement of eternity. All who have believed since Adam and Eve unto the return of our Lord will "stand before Him" at the Judgment Seat of Christ following His second advent return to "receive recompense for what [each of us] has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless" (2Cor.5:10).

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

The doctrine of the judgment and reward of the Church is a very important one for helping us believers motivate ourselves to persevere in doing what the Lord wants us to do in this life: grow, progress and produce, and we have covered it in detail before.¹⁸ Suffice it to say here that Paul does not reference crowns or rewards or the details of judgment such as we find in the quote immediately above. His purpose here is to reassure the Colossian believers who are doing what is right that they can have confidence in anticipation of this judgment, solid in the expectation that they will indeed "stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation – if you remain solidly grounded and firmly fixed in your faith".

The qualification is important indeed, because it is only by maintaining our faith, our trust, our belief in Jesus Christ "firm until the end" (Heb.3:6; 3:14), that we have ultimate assurance of salvation. The not too subtle message to his readers here is that on the one hand they do not need to go running off after false teaching which insinuates that unless they indulge in the ungodly rites proffered they are "not really saved"; and on the other hand that it is only through the perseverance of our faith that we shall stand before the Lord "holy, without blemish and free from accusation". For it is by the blood of Christ that we have been cleansed (2Pet.1:9); not through any effort on our part – as if God could ever find the works of our sinful flesh acceptable. Therefore without Jesus Christ we would be lost.

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."
John 3:18 NKJV

¹⁸ See especially in CT: 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

Remain Solidly Grounded, Firmly Fixed in your Faith, Unmoved from your Hope: "*If*", Paul says, the Colossians do this, *then* they will "stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation". This and many other similar passages in scripture make it very clear that Calvinistic insistence on the impossibility of a genuine believer failing to persevere (often described today in fundamentalist and evangelical circles as "once saved, always saved"), is dangerous nonsense (e.g., Jn.15:5-6; Rom.11:22-23; 1Cor.6:9-11; 15:1-2; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:3-7; 1Tim.6:9; 2Jn.1:8-9). As the passage from 2nd Timothy 2:11-13 cited above shows clearly enough, the Lord is not going to deny Himself if we choose to deny Him: "If we disown Him, He will also disown us" (v.12). Salvation is absolute and absolutely secure . . . for *believers*. But only believers are saved. So if a believer reverts to being an unbeliever by disowning Christ, rejecting Him and abandoning faith, then that assurance of salvation no longer applies.

(20) "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away (lit., "is tripped up")."
Matthew 13:20-21 ESV

"And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away (lit., "apostatizes")."
Luke 8:13 ESV

It is also very important to say here, given the great volume of false teaching in the church-visible today on this subject, that just because our salvation is not so secure that it will not survive our rejection of Jesus Christ, that does not mean that it is terribly insecure either, subject to being lost for some sin or lapse or failure on our part. The only "unpardonable sin" is that of rejecting Christ. For just as only believers are saved, all believers *are* saved. As long as we maintain faith with our Lord and Savior, our salvation is indeed absolutely secure. It's all about faith.

(28) "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (29) My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."
John 10:28-29 NIV

Believers in Paul's day and believers today cannot afford to let ourselves be manipulated by either extreme of false doctrine on this issue. We are neither so secure in our salvation that we can survive turning our backs absolutely on our Lord, nor so insecure that our salvation depends on us being perfect. Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is the One who saved us, who is saving us, and who will ultimately bring us safely home. As long as we belong to Him, we have nothing to

fear from this world – so that we should always hold Him in utmost respect (Is.11:3); but we certainly ought to fear doing anything that pushes us away from Him who is our only hope, especially terminally so (Rev.14:9-13).

The Gospel Proclaimed: We reviewed the meaning of the word gospel, "good news" in Greek, in our treatment of verse five above. Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ has always been "the issue", the reason why every one of us is here in this world, to accept – or reject – the Father's gracious offer of life eternal through accepting His Son our Savior and His work on the cross in dying for us. That has *always* been the issue, ever since Adam and Eve responded in faith to God's grace after the fall as evidenced by their donning of clothing made from animal skins (representing the death of Christ) in place of their "fig leaves" (representing human works which cannot save). And while Paul, certainly, had not personally proclaimed this good news everywhere around the literal world at this time, who can doubt that the Word has since his day circled the globe innumerable times since (through the Bible of which his writings were given to be a significant part)?

If some cynics want to assume that God is somehow unfair because in many places and at many times in the past from their limited knowledge and human vantage point it may seem to them that the gospel was unavailable, we who trust the Lord more than we do our own eyes and ears know better.¹⁹ We understand that everyone is put in just the proper place for them in human history, with God knowing absolutely and before creation began what each of us would decide and how circumstances would affect that choice. Wanting all to be saved (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9), we can be sure that our just and merciful God put us all in just the right time and place. And if at any time and in any place anyone did indeed desire the truth, they did in fact receive it. For God is not limited by time and space, and He has all manner of miraculous means available, through angelic or human agency. The fact that we may not be privy to such things, does not mean that they did not happen or exist. Eventually, this verse will be literally fulfilled in a most remarkable and undeniable way.

(6) Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had *the eternal gospel* to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. (7) He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."
Revelation 14:6-7 NIV

Paul a Minister:

. . . of which [gospel] I, Paul, have become a minister.
Colossians 1:23b

Note: "a minister" (Gk. *diakonos*, from which "deacon"), not "an apostle". Why did Paul feel the need to say this, and why did he describe himself with the title of "minister", "servant", and

¹⁹ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section I, "God's Plan to Save You"; and section II, "How to be Saved".

not "apostle" – which he clearly was and which title he elsewhere is not shy about claiming (e.g., Col.1:1)?

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but *ministers* through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?
1st Corinthians 3:5 NKJV

[God], who also made us sufficient as *ministers* of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
2nd Corinthians 3:6 NKJV

But in all things we commend ourselves as *ministers* of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses.
2nd Corinthians 6:4 NKJV

(22) Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. (23) Are they *ministers* of Christ? – I speak as a fool – ***I am more***: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.
2nd Corinthians 11:22-23 NKJV

In all of the passages above, the word "ministers" translates the same Greek word as in our context (*diakonos*; from which our English "deacon"), referring to servants who minister in their masters' stead. With this designation, Paul at once stresses his subordination to the Lord and the fact that it is Jesus Christ who is behind his service to the gospel – proclaiming the gospel was not his idea or unique to him in any way (cf. Gal.1:11-12); the gospel is God's good news of salvation through the great gift of His Son. Thus calling himself a servant – Christ's servant – at once makes clear the source of the truth of the gospel (so that readers should ultimately not attribute this epistle to "Paul" but to the Spirit), as it also reveals his humility: his ministry is not self-appointed; he received it from the Lord (Gal.1:1).

The final passage quoted above gives us the answer to the second question posed above: Paul ***is*** a genuine minister of Jesus Christ. But what about the other so called "servants" claiming to be from God who were attempting to lead the Colossian believers astray? Paul ***was*** but they definitely were ***not*** servants of Jesus Christ, and assuming or saying otherwise would be to "speak as a fool" (2Cor.11:23).

(13) For men of this sort are false apostles, workers of guile, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (14) And it is no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (15) So it comes as no surprise that his servants (*diakonoï*) also masquerade as servants (*diakonoï*) of righteousness. Their end will be according to their deeds.
2nd Corinthians 11:13-15

Verses Twenty-Four through Twenty-Nine

(24) Now I rejoice in what I am suffering on your account and I am filling up what is lacking in the tribulations of Christ in my own body on behalf of His Body which is the Church. (25) It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), (26) that is, [to make known] the mystery hidden from ages and from generations [past], but now revealed to His holy ones. (27) To all such God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you. (28) It is Him we are proclaiming as we warn every [believer] and teach every [believer] in all wisdom so that we may bring every [believer] to completeness in Christ Jesus. (29) It is to that end that I am working so strenuously with His energy which is being powerfully transmitted to me.

Colossians 1:24-29

Rejoice in Suffering: The word *pathema* (from which root we get "pathos" in English) is actually in the plural here and refers to a number of instances of suffering: ordeals, afflictions, hardships. Thus Paul puts this in a very graphic and tangible way rather than in a merely conceptual one. In his imprisonment, Paul *is* suffering on behalf of the Colossians and on behalf of all the other believers in the Church of Jesus Christ: no believer was ever opposed by the devil more forcefully than Paul was – because no believer ever made a greater difference for our Lord and His Church than Paul did, and Satan did everything he could to hinder that great effort.

(6) Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, (7) or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. (8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (10) That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
2nd Corinthians 10:6-10 NIV

It is safe to say that *no one* enjoys suffering – no normal person, that is. Paul did not like the hardships and pain he endured in the pursuit of the expansion of the Church, but he did rejoice in the spiritual victories and successes that our Lord gave him to see and to facilitate in the prosecution of his apostolic ministry. Paul rejoiced *in spite* of what he was suffering, because along with that suffering came the great grace and power of God which empowered his ministry.

The opposition he encountered, the resistance and hostility from sources seen and unseen which produced the suffering was not in itself a cause of rejoicing, but it reaffirmed with absolute certainty that he was doing what Jesus Christ wanted him to do. Otherwise, why would Satan be opposing him so vigorously? This is a principle that all advancing believers need to keep firmly in mind. Rather than losing heart when things go wrong or when we are in pain from one adverse situation or another, we ought to remember that unless we are the objects of significant

divine discipline on account of some obvious failure, that pain, that suffering, that pressure is merely validating our good spiritual progress and application: the devil will always seek to oppose all serious growth, progress and especially production wherever and whenever he can.

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, ***your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials*** (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This ***validation*** of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. ***For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy*** that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

1st Peter 1:3-9

Filling up what is Lacking in the Tribulations of Christ: Paul tells us that he was suffering "in my own body" for the sake of "the Body of Christ". This was no empty boast. Nor was it vainglorious for him to say so. This was a simple statement of fact.

(15) But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. (16) I will show him ***how much he must suffer*** for my name."

Acts 9:15-16 NIV

And indeed, throughout his ministry Paul shared in "the sufferings of Christ", possibly more than anyone else in the history of the Church (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 2Tim.2:12; 1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; 10:21; 10:38-39; Lk.9:23; 14:27; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12), fulfilling this prophecy many times over (Acts 9:16; cf. 1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11; 2Tim.3:11; et passim in Acts and the Pauline Epistles). The "sufferings ***of*** Christ" thus means, "the sufferings that come to exceptional believers like Paul in the course of serving Christ and in emulation of what He endured".

(21) It is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps. (22) He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth. (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.

1st Peter 2:21-23

(2) Turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:2-3

So when in our context Paul says "I am filling up what is lacking in the tribulations of Christ in my own body on behalf of His Body which is the Church", he means that he is fulfilling the prophecy given about him by our Lord, a prophecy which applies to all believers, although admittedly to a lesser degree. Paul is not complaining, nor is he bragging. He is stating fact, and the fact of this intense suffering of his on behalf of the spiritual growth of the Colossians and all other believers is a testimony to the legitimacy of his ministry and his authority in accomplishing it as coming directly from our Lord. Thus Paul's ministry – and the words of this letter empowered and inspired by the Spirit – stand in stark contrast to the self-serving efforts and false doctrines of the Gnostics and Jewish mystics who were attempting to draw believers away from the truth so as to follow and support themselves instead (Acts 20:29-30).

(29) "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (30) Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."

Acts 20:29-30 NIV

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

2nd Timothy 4:3 NIV

This is no doubt why Paul uses the unique phraseology here: "filling up in my flesh what is lacking". The verb is based on the same root as the noun we have discussed above under our discussion of "fulfilled" in verse nine, *pleroma*. That word, as we have seen, was used by the Gnostics as a technical term for "the full complement" of the divine, the totality of *aeons* or divine beings in the Gnostic panoply. Engaging in putative "spiritual warfare" on behalf of good deities and in opposition to evil ones was apparently very appealing to some of the immature Colossian believers who were listening to the Gnostics (and to similar teaching from Jewish mystics), just as it is to many in our own day who have similarly fallen afoul of "new age" false teachings. With this strikingly distinctive phrasing, Paul brings all such individuals up short by confounding their assumptions about this concept: *godly* "fulfillment" involves suffering for God in the way that *He* ordains, namely, pushing through opposition to do what Jesus Christ wants done. But doing what *we* may want to do (or what false teachers are egging us on to do) is no sort of true "fulfillment" at all.

Dispensing the Truth:

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God.
Colossians 1:25 KJV

Of which [Church] I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.
Colossians 1:25 NKJV

It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*).
Colossians 1:25

Most versions conflate the important ideas in this verse in an attempt, we may assume, to make the English more understandable. Confusion has resulted in any case, especially over the words "dispensation / stewardship" and "word/plan/*logos*" (about which latter word, see below).

Following the lead of C. I. Scofield, fundamentalist and evangelical schools of thought have misread and greatly misapplied the idea of "dispensations", so the NKJV is to be commended for rendering the Greek word *oikonomia* as "stewardship" instead. What the so-called "doctrine of dispensations" does have right, to the extent that variations on that teaching get it right, is to distinguish between different periods in world history from the divine point of view. What is almost universally misunderstood, however, is that the distinction between, e.g., the Jewish Age and the Age of the Church, is **not** the composition of them from the standpoint of believers – as we are all members of the Body of Christ from Adam and Eve until the last believer saved during the Tribulation – but rather the **manner** in which the "stewardship" is empowered and carried out.²⁰

(42) The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager (lit., "dispenser", fr. *oikonomos*) whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions."
Luke 12:42-44 NIV

An *oikonomos* is, literally, a "household manager" or "steward", one who distributes and dispenses to the members of the household the food and clothing and all other essentials of which they have need in order to live and do the tasks for which they are responsible. That is the essential analogy upon which the biblical concept of "dispensations" rests. All believers are the Lord's "servants" (e.g., Lk.17:10). And we all have need of being provided with the essentials necessary to do the tasks the Lord requires of us in this world. That means first and foremost

²⁰ See in SR 5: The Seven Millennial Days of Human History, section II.5, "The Five Dispensational Divisions of Human History"; 6B: Ecclesiology, section I.B.5.a, "The Dispensation of the Spirit"; and Hebrews Chapter 1, section I.e., "Dispensations".

biblical truth. For we are all responsible for providing ourselves and those dependent upon us with food, clothing and shelter, but provision for our spiritual growth always comes from somewhere and someone else – even in the case of those with the gift of pastor-teacher until after many years they reach that point in their preparation where they are capable of providing for themselves as well as for others.

It is the difference in the **means** which the Lord uses to make these necessary provisions of the truth necessary to grow that defines and characterizes the different dispensations. Patriarchs and heads of households did this job prior to the Law, priests and Levites as well as specially empowered prophets after the Law was given, apostles and specially gifted individuals during the pre-canon, apostolic period, and pastor-teachers in our own time. In addition to reaffirming his authority as one appointed by the Lord Himself, with this phrasing Paul not so subtly reminds the Colossians that it is only he and those similarly gifted and commissioned who have the right and the ability to "dispense the truth" – something that definitely does **not** apply to the Gnostic and mystic false teachers to whom some of these believers were giving their allegiance.

(7b) . . . according to the riches of His grace (8) which He has caused to abound towards us in all wisdom and understanding, (9) [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed, according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ], (10) **for administering** (Gk. *oikonomia*, "dispensation") this [present] fulfillment of the epochs (i.e., the Church Age), so that all things may be incorporated into Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth.
Ephesians 1:7b-10

Bring Completeness to the Plan:

It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*).
Colossians 1:25

We have covered the plan of God in our treatment of Colossians 1:19-21 above when discussing God the Father's "reconciliation of all things" in Christ. In verse twenty-five, Paul returns to this theme in describing his personal mandate as a minister of Christ, that is, his responsibilities for dispensing the truth for the sake of building up and expanding the Church of Jesus Christ. That is what "brings completeness", fullness, true and godly *pleroma* (as opposed to the false doctrines being bruited about in Colossae), to the plan of God.

The word translated "plan" here is the Greek *logos*, a term meaning "word" but also the truth and purpose behind the word, and of course in scripture **the** Word, Jesus Christ (cf. Col.1:5; 1:25; 2:23; 3:16; 3:17; 4:3; 4:6).

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14

Jesus Christ, His incarnation and fulfillment of the Father's mission to die for the sins of the world, *is* the plan. Our Lord did indeed complete the victory of the cross and His resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand demonstrate that victorious fulfillment. What remains is for His Body, His Bride, His Church to be fulfilled as well, and the Church Age is the era in which this wonderful event has been taking place. Paul was given the specific responsibility of carrying the gospel message to the gentiles for this very purpose.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – (2) if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, (3) how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, (4) by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), (5) which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: (6) that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, (7) of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Ephesians 3:1-7 NKJV

Jesus Christ the glorious, resurrected God-man who has won the victory of victories, His truth, the word of God from Him who is the Word of God, and His Church, His Bride, His Body and glorious assembly, this is the plan of God in its complete and holy fulfillment. And all substitutes are merely Satan's lies.

(28) Later, knowing that everything had now been *finished* (lit., "completed"), and so that Scripture would be *fulfilled*, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." (29) A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. (30) When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is *finished* (lit., "completed")." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:28-30 NIV

The Mystery Hidden and Revealed:

(25) It is of this [Church] that I, [Paul], have become a minister according to God's mandate given to me for dispensing [the truth] to you, in order to bring completeness to God's plan (lit., "word", Gk. *logos*), (26) that is, [to make known] the mystery hidden from ages and from generations [past], but now revealed to His holy ones.

Colossians 1:25-26

The Logos, the Word of God, the Plan of God, the Mystery of God, while discrete references to our Lord emphasizing different aspects of His victory, are in another sense overlapping and identical. For our Lord *is* the Word (Rev.19:13), He *is* the Logos (Jn.1:1-14), He *is* the Plan of God (Col.1:25), and He *is* the Mystery which has now been revealed to us who love Him (Eph.3:4; 5:32; Col.2:2; 4:3; 1Tim.3:16), and, in short order, will be to the entire world as well.

(5) And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted his right hand to

heaven (6) and swore to the One who lives forever and ever, the One who created heaven and everything in it and the earth and everything in it, that there would be no further delay (lit., "time"), (7) but that in the days of the seventh angel's call, when he is about to blow his trumpet, *the mystery* of God will be **concluded** in the exact manner in which He has proclaimed its good news (lit. "gave its gospel") to his servants and to his prophets.
Revelation 10:5-7

The conclusion of the mystery referred to above is the conclusion of the plan of God, the bringing in of the Kingdom in exploitation of the victory Christ won at the cross, the fulfillment of all of God's promises and prophecies and the conclusion of time as we know it.

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., that "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we await with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells. 2nd Peter 3:7-13 (cf. Ps.102:26; Is.13:13; 34:4; 51:6; Hag.2:6; 2:21; Matt.5:18; 24:35; Mk.13:31; Lk.21:33; Heb.12:25-29; Rev.6:14; 20:11)

When he launched his rebellion, Satan had no idea of how God had preordained his defeat. And throughout the time before our Lord came to earth to save us, the precise nature of His coming and the way in which He would achieve the ultimate victory were only dimly foreshadowed (cf. 1Pet.1:12). Before the incarnation, before the cross, before the resurrection, ascension and session of our victorious Lord Jesus Christ, all of these things were "mysteries", sublime truths whose details and import would only be revealed when our Lord was revealed.

. . . the mystery hidden from ages and from generations [past], but now revealed to His holy ones.
Colossians 1:26

Further, the full revelation of the nature of the exploitation of His victory through the expansion of the Church, His Body, His Bride which was to replace Satan and his followers, would also only be revealed as the apostles were given to understand it and explain it through the Spirit in the completed Word of God (cf. 1Cor.2:7; Eph.3:9; 1Pet.1:12).

(25) Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with *the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past*, (26) but *now revealed* and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, *so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith*.

Romans 16:25-26 NIV (cf. Eph.1:9-11; 3:6)

And when the Church has been completed, when all of our brothers and sisters have finally been called out and incorporated into the Body of Christ, Jesus will return for His Bride, revealed in glory once and for all, and "the mystery of God will be concluded in the exact manner in which He has proclaimed its good news (lit. "gave its gospel") to his servants and to his prophets" (Rev.10:7), with what was lost replaced to the glory of God.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.

Revelation 1:1a KJV

Christ your Hope of Glory:

To all such (i.e., believers) God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – *is in you*.

Colossians 1:27

Glory is light. Glory is eternity. Glory is the resurrection. Glory is eternal reward. Glory is New Jerusalem. Glory is blessed fellowship with each other in the Church and with the entire family of God in sublime unity, peace and joy forever in the light. Glory is being with our dear Savior, Jesus Christ, and with our heavenly Father, praising them and enjoying being with them and with each other world without end. Amen!

(9) After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (10) and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Revelation 7:9-10 NKJV

Meanwhile, we have the *hope* of that glory, the confident expectation that on the other side of this place of wrath and tears all these glories will be fulfilled for us exactly as promised. And while we are in this place of darkness awaiting the everlasting light, we take the greatest joy in the fellowship we have together of being "in Christ" (Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 1Pet.5:14)²¹, and of having Christ "in us" (Jn.14:20; Rom.8:10;

²¹ See BB 4B: Soteriology, section III.2.j, "Union with Christ and Oneness with the Father and Spirit"; and BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.2.b.1.c.1, "In Christ".

2Cor.13:5; Eph.3:17; Col.1:27).²²

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

John 14:23 NIV

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1st John 1:3 NIV

The mystery is the plan fulfilled by Jesus Christ wherein we who are gentiles have been incorporated into His Body, the Church, and the wealth of that mystery is salvation – along with all of its rewards and the glories to come.

"The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with my Father on His throne."

Revelation 3:21

For us who believe, Jesus Christ and the plan of God He has and is carrying out are no "mysteries" but fully revealed, sublime truths upon which we have based our entire lives. It is abominable to even imagine trading the least bit of eternal blessing with our dear Savior and with each other for any secrets of mystical false teachings no matter how tantalizing, since they are in fact only the devil's lies. We know better, and so should the believers in Colossae have done.

(24) "Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to [Jezebel's] teaching and have not learned *Satan's so-called deep secrets*, I will not impose any other burden on you, (25) except to hold on to what you have until I come."

Revelation 2:24-25 NIV

Completeness in Christ:

It is Him we are proclaiming as we warn every [believer] and teach every [believer] in all wisdom so that we may bring every [believer] to completeness in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 1:28

Jesus Christ is the substance of all true Bible teaching. It is Him we proclaim whenever we share the truth of the Word of God. As Paul affirms here, that "true teaching" consists of "warning" and "teaching in all wisdom". The former element entails exposing everything false and dangerous so as to protect Christ's sheep from wolves, not only from overtly sinful behavior and more subtle temptations, but also from false teachers and other agents of the devil who are endeavoring to lead believers astray: i.e., helping believers to build up their spiritual defenses.

The latter element entails, on the one hand, explaining, illuminating, exegeting and delineating

²² See SR 1, section II.6.h, "Our Own Personal Eden".

all of the Bible's truths; on the other hand, it also entails teaching believers how to apply these truths to the varied and variable circumstances of their lives – *not* weighing in on their decisions but teaching them valid principles of application that help make the doctrines they have learned all the more meaningful for navigating the devil's world so as to keep growing, progressing and, eventually, producing a good crop for Jesus Christ.

Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!
2nd Timothy 4:2

It is all about Jesus Christ. We believers in Him are here after salvation for His good pleasure. That does not at all mean that we should deny ourselves any enjoyment in this life or that our Lord would even want that (certainly not as some sort of "good work" in and of itself). What our Lord *does* expect from us is for us to keep growing spiritually, keep passing the tests that come our way through faith and proper application of the truth we have believed, and then to help others in this godly process by ministering to them according to the spiritual gifts we have received in the ministries our Lord assigns to us. That is Paul's objective, namely, to effect the greatest growth and production of the greatest number of believers he can, so that as many as possible might become "complete in Christ", that is, "fully mature" (Greek *teleios*)²³, and thus capable of helping others do likewise in the virtuous circle our Lord intends.

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.
Ephesians 4:11-16

To that End:

It is to that end that I am working so strenuously with His energy which is being powerfully transmitted to me.
Colossians 1:29

Nurturing the Body of Christ was Paul's heart's desire. He humbly acknowledges that his efforts

²³ See BB 6A: Peripateology, section I.2.A.7, "The Result of the Process: Spiritual Maturity".

on behalf of the Church were greatly supported by the strength and power which the Lord provided him through the Spirit. That same benefit is available to us all, whenever we respond to the truth as we should. We all have the indwelling of the Spirit and the limitless reserves of God's grace – but *we* still have to *do* whatever it is that the Lord is calling us to do. And the same was true of Paul.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

1st Corinthians 15:10 ESV

Next to Moses (Num.12:3), Paul – whose name in Greek, chosen by himself, means "small" (Acts 13:9) – may have been the humblest believer who ever lived. So what he says above is not an idle boast nor a statement made out of arrogance. Rather it was reluctantly made out of humility and a desire to bring the Corinthian believers to a proper appreciation of the ministry they were doubting – *not* for Paul's personal benefit but for their own. This attitude, of putting Jesus Christ and His Church before all else, even before his own reputation and well-being, is a window into Paul's heart, and the picture we receive from that verse and from our context where he is "working so strenuously with His energy . . . to that end", namely, the spiritual protection, growth, progress and production of the believers in Colossae, is evident in all of Paul's epistles (and in Luke's description of his ministry efforts in the book of Acts).

(4) Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; (5) in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; (6) in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; (7) in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; (8) through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; (9) known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; (10) sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

2nd Corinthians 6:4-10 NIV

So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?

2nd Corinthians 12:15 NIV

God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:8 NIV

(7) Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, (8) so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. (9) Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

1st Thessalonians 2:7-9 NIV

No doubt Paul, who had never been to the church at Colossae, would have preferred to have made a visit there so as to have been able to deliver this message – and much additional teaching – in person.²⁴ But Paul was in prison in Rome. He had only heard about the snares and temptations besetting the Colossians second hand. So Paul was doing what he could, not ignoring the problem just because his normal method of in-person teaching was presently impossible, but making use of the opportunity the Lord presented him (possibly being the return to Colossae of Epaphras and Onesimus in the company of Tychicus), to do battle for Christ's Church – an example we ought all to take to heart.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.
1st Corinthians 11:1 NIV

²⁴ Paul may have done so after his release. He certainly intended to as he writes to Philemon whom he had led to the Lord (possibly having met him in Ephesus): "Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers" (Philem.1:22 NIV).