

Colossians Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. Let's start with my title, "Who are we, who's God, and what does that mean?" Now there's an all encompassing challenge! Before I explain all that, and what it's got to do with the New Testament Book of Colossians, let's start with the always important, why should we care question? I'll just say that if we believe God exists and He created us to make a difference for Him, you've come to the right place. I write these studies for people who already believe Jesus is God. My standard question is "now what". A big part of "now what" is grasping just who we are as both people and believers. In this chapter, we'll even discuss the difference between those who simply believe Jesus is God and those who are "doing something about it". That's a sample of the types of issues addressed in this short letter. If that peaks your interest, read on. First I've got an overwhelming urge to explain the "who, what where's and why's" of Colossians, as to understand it better.
 - a) Let's begin with who: It was written by Paul the Apostle. There is no doubt as the early church leaders, who's writings we still have to this day from the late 1st and 2nd Century swear it's "the" Paul who wrote this letter. The book opens by claiming Paul and Timothy wrote it. Most scholars believe Timothy was in the room with Paul, so it's Paul's way of saying "Timothy and I were here when I penned this letter, but I (Paul) was the one who actually wrote (or dictated) it."
 - b) Now a bit about the who it was written to. To the best of our knowledge Paul never went to Colosse. OK, where or what is Colosse? Let's start with the fact it was a city. While the exact location is debated, it was in a valley that is part of what is today Turkey. If you are familiar with the city of Ephesus in the bible, Colosse is about 100 miles east. The reason I am giving some of this background is it will help to understand why Paul is writing to the Christians living there. It was a major wool exporter during the time of the Medo-Persian Empire. By Paul's time 400-500 years later, the city lost popularity as the Romans changed the main roads so Colosse became "off the beaten path". An earthquake destroyed it some time relatively soon after Paul's letter, which is why the exact location is debated today!
 - i) Now for the "why should we care" part. One of the reasons Paul wrote this letter is because the Christian church was battling "New Age" mysticism, which existed by different names back then. The short version is Jewish "mystics" as opposed to the devout Orthodox Jewish types mixed with the locals and were teaching all sorts of false things about Jesus, including the idea that Jesus is "something less than fully God". It's the forerunner to what become known as Gnostic beliefs. So you know, it's the idea that God's perfect, the world is evil, therefore any "god" that interacts in this world must be less than "the" perfect God. This false religion turned many from the true God because of this view. The Christian church fought this false idea for centuries. It's the idea of being "spiritual" enough to please God. Anyway, Paul uses this letter to argue against it teaching who God is and who we are!
 - ii) OK then, what if that's not me? What if I don't care about any of this? The answer is sooner or later, we'll deal with someone who claims they're "spiritual". Details from this letter explain what's false by focusing on what's true! I'll explain with an illustration in the next paragraph. First I need to state that so far, I've covered the who and the where of this letter. I also talked about the why, as I explained Paul's motive to write this letter in the first place. OK then, back to it:
 - c) The next issue is "how". That leads to my illustration promise. What I'm about to teach is commonly used by bank tellers. If you spend a lot of time counting real money, it helps you to spot fake money, because you handle the real so much. The same idea works with Christianity. The more you know the "real thing" the easier it is to spot the fake! Paul spends time here instructing on what's the "real thing" so we'll spot the phonies when we come across them. That's the motivation!

2. Next a few words on why Colosse. As best we can tell Paul was never there. In the book of Acts it says Paul spent three years in Ephesus (in Turkey today) on his third missionary journey (See Acts 20:31). During all that time many got saved and spread the word about Jesus to other cities. In this letter, (1:7) a man named Epaphras was the guy who spread the message from Ephesus to Colosse. If all that bores, you, just know that Paul wrote this letter while he was a prisoner in Rome waiting for his trial, around the year AD 62. That's not when Paul died. Christian history teaches that Paul survived that trial. Four years later, he was arrested and killed for his faith. My simple point is he wrote it this letter from a prison cell and Epaphras is the one who delivered it to the church in the city of Colosse. I should also add, that this city was near the city of Laodicea as Paul suggests at the end of this letter that those two cities exchange his letters. No, we don't have Paul's letter to Laodicea, which shows that not all of Paul's letters made it to the bible. The point is Paul meant for his letters to be circulated and just designed for the residents of one city to read! The city of "Laodicea" is biblically famous as John discusses it in the book of Revelation!
3. OK now you know more than ever cared to know about a city you probably never heard of other than the fact there is a bible book based on this city. You've now got the who, what, where's and why's of this book and it's time to discuss Chapter 1. For those new to bible studies, chapter and text numbers were not added to roughly 1,200 to 1,300 AD. Still chapter breaks are good way to separate out these lessons, so this one will cover chapter one. Now you know that, let's continue:
4. When I started this lesson, I stated my lesson title is, "Who we are, who God is, and what does all of that mean". I'm sticking to it. Time to explain:
 - a) Verse 1 focuses on who wrote the letter and who was with Paul when he wrote it.
 - b) Verse 2 focuses on who the letter was written to, believers in Colosse. Then it gives Paul's standard greeting of God's grace and peace to that church.
 - c) Then Paul spends six verses explaining why he wrote this letter to them. He says that he's praying for them and heard how this church is making a difference for Jesus and being a good influence for Him. Paul gives Epaphras credit for being the first believer there. Paul discusses how one man making a difference by creating a church full of believers there. It is a praise fest of verses, explaining Paul's gratitude for how God has worked there.
 - d) Verses 9 to 14 are essentially a prayer for Christian growth there. These verses are some of my favorites and I use them as a daily prayer to remind myself why Christians have been called to be separated for God's use. More on that when we get there.
 - e) Verses 15 to 20 focus on who God is, as to start getting into the heart of the message. Paul is arguing against false views about God by focusing on the real thing! He explains what that means in terms of our relationship with Him. Paul ends this session with a reminder that we're reconciled to God through the cross as if to imply no "mystic or spiritual" thing makes any difference. It's the age old argument that we can't earn our salvation by trying hard enough.
 - f) The last part of the chapter focuses on the fact we were alienated from Jesus before we got the idea that He died for us. Then of all things, Paul reminds us that we're called to suffer for the Gospel's sake. Let me explain that: Anytime you're really making a difference for Jesus or leading people to Him, as I've learned "stuff happens". Expect it. The good news is it's a proof that you are making a difference for the God of the Universe when bad stuff occurs when making that difference. The point is "expect it, it comes with the territory"!
 - g) Paul sort of wraps this section up by saying in effect "it's worth it". Remember he's writing to people who don't have bible books. It's a matter of trusting in His guidance and doing the right thing no matter what.
 - h) OK John, you've been rambling for almost two pages. What should we get out of this? If you're a believer, the key point as usual is God's called us not only to trust in His payment for our sins, but also to "get involved with the program". That's what Paul's teaching these believers who he's never met and that's the message for you and me as well.
 - i) OK then, time to actually start on Verse 1 of Chapter 1.

5. Chapter 1, Verse 1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
²To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:
- a) When we get a personal handwritten letter in the mail, we usually must turn to the very end to see who wrote it (if it's not on the envelope). My simple point is in Paul's day, the person writing it, started with their name so we know who wrote it.
 - b) The next thing to note is Paul claims he was an apostle. For the bible newcomers, Paul is not one of the original twelve. He got saved many years later. Paul's not claiming to be one of the "twelve". He's just saying that he's convinced that God the Father called him to be a living witness for Jesus and make it his life's work to preach Jesus. "Apostle" simply means "sent one". If we're convinced that Jesus is God and desire to use our lives to be a witness for that fact, in that sense, we too can be "sent one's". Personally, I can't name any greater purpose for living than to be used by the God who created us in the first place! It doesn't mean we have to be perfect. It just means we must trust Jesus is God and go live to make a difference for Him in the world around us. OK, then, back to the greeting!
 - c) Most scholars argue that Timothy didn't co-write the letter as I stated in my intro. He just happened to be in the room with Paul as he wrote it so Paul wanted to give Timothy some credit as if to say, "Hey, me and my buddy want to tell you guys something!"
 - d) That leads to the recipient reference. Paul's speaking to believers in the city of Colosse. Let me pause to discuss the reference to the "holy" versus the "faithful brothers"? Scholars debate whether or not those terms refer to "one in the same". Since I'm here, let me throw in my opinion! The word translated "holy" refers to people who's been set apart by God. My favorite illustration is if we have a special plate in our house that only one person can ever use. Just as that plate has been "set apart", so those God's called to be "One of His" is also set apart. It's sort of strange to accept the idea that God knows that not everybody is saved ahead of time. It's the idea that God has perfect knowledge and it is not something we have. If one chooses to believe Jesus is God and we're trusting Him to guide our lives, we are "holy" whether we like it or not. Since God knows all things, He is aware of that choice before we ever made it.
 - i) OK, with that "theological knot" explained, let me move on to the word translated, "faithful". Think of it as the difference between one who truly believes Jesus is our God and one who does something about it! One can truly believe that, but never show any proof to others around them. I see it as those who "barely make it into heaven" versus those who get eternal rewards for "Putting their lives where their mouths are". I know most of us already understand all of that, but newcomers are always part of this study, and I needed to get that speech out of my system!
 - e) Finally, keep in mind that Paul's never been to Colosse. Most likely Paul's only knowledge of those who claim to be Christians living there came from a man named Epaphras. We'll get introduced to him in Verse 7. Apparently, Epaphras was visiting Paul in Rome while he was waiting for his trial. Since Epaphras was from Colosse, I picture him telling Paul about the good news of the believers there as well as the problems they dealt with. Those problems had to do with false views about Jesus that were common in that community.
 - f) One has to remember that the bible didn't exist in those days. It's possible those living in that community had parts of New Testament books or even Old Testament scrolls, but it's not like it is today with that knowledge being commonplace. Therefore, Paul saw the need to "straighten out" false views that were common in that area, in order to help that church grow as believers. The reason we should care, is what Paul teaches about the truth versus false ideas of Christianity, creep in and out of our societies even today. What's known as "New Age" philosophy is not new at all. It's as big then as it is today, but with different titles and names. If you walk into a book store, many of us would be surprised just how popular "New Age" is, based on the number of books available on the subject. Anyway, it is a subject Paul wanted to tackle "head on" which he does in this letter.

6. Verse 2b: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.
- a) If you read through the New Testament, you may notice this is Paul's favorite way to start a letter. It's his way of saying "hello". Since I'm opening this letter by covering the basics, let me explain that God's grace always comes prior to God's peace. Remember that Paul is Jewish and trained to be a "rabbi". In that thought, the idea of "peace" is an overwhelming sense of calm that everything is going to be ok. It is the idea that we're at peace with God. It is because God's "grace" is upon us, that we can have that peace. It is the idea that we're unconditionally forgiven of every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit if we are trusting in God Himself to pay for those sins, so then and only then can we have the type of peace Paul's describing here. Again, I know a lot of us Christian veterans know all that but again, we're only on Verse 2, and it's important to go over the basics before we'll start on the heart of the message. OK then, let's continue:
7. Verse 3: We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you.
- a) Speaking of knowing one's bible well, one realizes Paul loves run on sentences. It's as if he only pauses to catch his breath, and then "spews out more" and "has no time for periods".
 - b) With that understood, let me say a few things about what Paul is opening up here to start his letter. Again, realize that Paul's never been there. Yet, he's saying he's always praying for that church. It doesn't mean every time Paul prayed, it's for them. It means that when "their in mind", Paul prays for them. Again, keep in mind that New Testament theology's a "new thing". It's not like this church had manuals on how to be Christians. That is why we see Paul starting with the "basics" of teaching that we pray to God the Father through Jesus who is the Messiah ("Christ" is the Greek translation of the Jewish word Messiah). It is not Jesus "last name", it's a title for Him.
 - c) Since I'm in that neighborhood, let me explain why we pray "that way". It's not a formality we must do every time. It's a reminder that it's God the Father we pray to. It is to remind us that because Jesus paid for all our sins, we have the privilege to approach the Father, to petition Him with our requests. Yes, God hears the prayers of those who do not know all of this, or no one would be saved in the first place. It's Paul's way of teaching a "biblical" truth through his letters. It's like my illustration of playing with "real money" so we know the fake stuff when we feel it!
 - d) Most of us make the mistake of thinking of prayer as only asking for things we don't have at any given moment. Pray should also be gratitude for what we do have! Paul's grateful for the fact there are believers in the city of Colosse. Let me ask the question, why should Paul care about this? He's never been there and only indirectly responsible for the Gospel to be spread there. Paul preached it to Epaphras (a man) and he's the one who spread the Gospel to that city. The underlying question is why be grateful for others to believe what we believe? It's not a lack of confidence in Paul's faith. It's the realization that the Gospel message is the truth! The fact it spreads quickly and people accept it quickly is one proof of the validity of the Gospel message. The fact that multitudes turn from false view about God to the truth of the Gospel shows the power that message has as it spreads!
 - e) Speaking of being grateful, Paul's just getting warmed up. He's not only grateful that they are believers in Jesus, but they are "putting their money where their mouth is". It appears they are using their live to make a difference for Jesus and spreading the word about Him. In other words, they get the "truth" about how life really works. It's my standard point of realizing the reason God gave us life isn't so we can just use it for our own pleasure. It's so we can use the most valuable thing God give us, our time, to make a difference for Him in the world around us. When people accept the Gospel message, that "Jesus did it all", and now we're to be a witness for Him, life now makes a lot more sense! That's the point here!

- f) Realize that in this "run on sentence" Paul is teaching them about heaven's existence, and about the idea of God's existence and heaven's reality! There are no Old Testament quotes in this book, but the basics of heaven and hell are taught along with God's existence. It's a realization that all of this is true and all of have a built in nature to "worship something".
 - i) When we learn of God's truth, it gives us a desire to want to learn more about it. It is what Paul's doing here in his run sentence. Paul's reminding them of the basics that they already know as if to say, "I've been preaching this stuff all my life. I can tell you guys are "spot on", and I'm bursting with joy not what I did, but that God is working through all of you to make a difference for Him just as He's working in the lives of us here in Rome! It's a "keep at it" message that they're going the right way in life and are doing God's will!"
 - ii) That reminds me, how do we know when we're doing God's will? It's easier than you think. As long as we're praying for His guidance, and spending regular time in His word, we just make the best decisions we can given the situation in front of us, without violating His principals for our life! It's about the desire to use our life as a witness for Him and letting Him guide us how He wants to do that. Then go do what is logical and what one's gift is, to make that difference. OK then, back to Paul and what he's preaching here!
 - g) Finally Paul is implying there is no "magic formula" that you still need to learn. It's Paul's way of saying, "you already got it, now keep going!" Remember what Paul is warning of is the "Mystic" views that make the rounds that "If we really wants to get close to God, we must do "this or that". The false view making the rounds is the world is evil, therefore all that occurs in this world is evil and must be avoided. That's one of the basic ideas taught in "New Age" philosophy and by just drawing close to "spiritual forces" we can avoid all that is evil in this world. Christianity is the opposite. It's that God created this world and He wants us to interact in it, to make a difference for Him. Paul's convinced that Colosse Christians got this truth and aren't falling for what's "popular in town" at that moment!
8. Verse 6: All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.
- a) It never ceases to amaze me how fast the Gospel message spread, not by force acceptance, but simply by one person telling another or a small group about Jesus. Within a century of Jesus dying on the cross, there were devout believers all over Europe, Asia and Africa. It's no coincidence that the Gospel message spread fast when the Roman Empire peaked. The Gospel spread fast when pretty much all the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea was part of the Roman Empire. Christians took advantage of the roads the Romans built. It is a reason word of Jesus spread quickly. As opposed to Islam, which grew a lot by force the spread of Christianity was strictly word of mouth. Realize Israel, was nothing significant on the map of the Roman Empire. Jesus, a condemned criminal, that the vast majority of the Roman world never heard of, and within hundred years, millions of people swore of their allegiance to Him! The point is it's amazing growth in a fairly short time span. That is what Paul was aware of, and comments about it Verse 6.
 - b) If you ever want proof that Jesus is God, simply think about how quickly His story spread around the world and the vast public acceptance despite the penalty for being a Christian!
 - c) With all that spreading, Paul decides to write a letter to people he's never met, and also is an insignificant place that's not on the "beaten path". It shows that Paul cares about those believers in "unimportant" places, and not just the big cities or say Israel.
 - d) OK then, why Colosse? I think because it's a good example of the danger of turning from the true Gospel to a false one! Because this danger existed there, Paul wanted to use them as an example of how to preach "the truth" when surrounded by the "false."

- e) Keep in mind that Christians living there, didn't know a lot. Paul's not speaking to those of a Jewish background but non-Jewish people who mainly know that Jesus was someone killed in Israel and rose again and was God. Apparently the Christians there were taught the basics of the "Trinity" here as Paul explains the Spirit of God, Jesus and God the Father so far in this letter.
 - f) Paul is also not shy about giving Epaphras the credit for spreading the Gospel message to this town. Paul didn't say, "I'm the one God called to preach the Gospel and someone did happen to bring it there just like it's spread all over the place!" Instead, he singled him out as to say be grateful that God used this man to bring the truth of the Gospel to you. Since he did that, the way you pay him back is to "Pass it forward" and share the love you have from learning about the Gospel so others can share in it's truth. The point is the Gospel is never meant to be an exclusive club of, "I'm in, your not, that's your problem". God called us to be a living witness for Him. Because we don't know who is saved, we're to preach Jesus to all people. In summary, Paul's saying "Thank Epaphras and pass it forward!"
 - g) All that leads to my favorite part of this chapter, verses that I pray over almost daily!
9. Verse 9: For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.
- a) Let me start with the question, why do I use these verses as a daily prayer? Because just as Paul wanted the Colosse Christians to realize just how much God loved them and desires that we grow in His love, so we can use these verses to remind ourselves why we're saved in the first place, so we can use our lives for the greatest purpose one can, to make a major difference for the God who created us in the first place! Anyway, these verses are good to think about if we're asking, "Ok, what does God want with me anyway?" With that lofty introduction completed, let me break down this four verse prayer into pieces so you'll get why they're so special to me, and hopefully they can become special to you as well!
 - b) Let's start with Verse 9. Paul wants the Colosse Christians and us to realize that since they first gave our lives to Jesus, there are people who've prayed for them. God desires to work through people to lead more believers to Him. I've met people who's said, "no one prayed for me when I got saved". Then, years later they've met say, their spouse who've said they have been praying for their future spouse for decades! My simple point is the reason you are a believer, is at the least someone who don't know has been praying for you for you to accept the Gospel message, just as there are people I've been praying for, for years, who at this time are not believers! All I'm saying is whether you realize it or not, just as Paul was praying for believers in a place as "trivial" as Colosse, so there are people who are praying for you and have prayed for you. For what it's worth, I've got people who pray daily for this ministry, and the main reason it "bears fruit" is I've got prayer ministers making this a place that God can use for His glory.
 - c) The reason I'm getting into all of this is I want all of us to grasp that not only are we saved but we're saved for a purpose! God needs people on the "front lines" making a difference and He needs people on the "back lines" praying for the front liners! Thus, prayer is a big part of living the Christian life for that reason.
 - d) Now that I've beaten to death the necessity of intercessory prayer, let's get back to Verse 9 and discuss the specifics of what Paul wants to pray for: " God to fill you (that is us!) with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" It's the idea of God desiring we know what is His will for us, and we be filled with all (key word) of His spiritual wisdom and understanding.

- i) Let me start here with the reminder that in the bible, "All means all, and that's all that all means!" Yes, I love that expression!
- ii) Also keep in mind that the Christians in Colosse didn't have bibles. They had to trust in God with limited knowledge of Him. So if you're thinking I don't know that much about the bible to be used by God greatly, realize Paul is praying for a bunch of people who didn't even have bibles! My point is if Paul wanted them to be used by God in a great way, what excuse do we have even if our knowledge of Him is limited at this point in our lives? All I'm saying is this pray for Colosse can be easily applied to you and me and that's why I use it daily.
- iii) Next, let me talk about "spiritual wisdom and understanding". Some people think it's one in the same. Consider the difference between what is understanding versus what is wisdom. Understanding is knowing for example, what's the right thing to do. Wisdom is actually applying it! Therefore, Paul's saying may you know what is the right thing to do and may you actually do it! That's the point here!
- e) Hey look, there's a Verse 10! Verse 9 taught why people are praying for us and what it is they're praying for. That leads to the all important "why" question. That's Verse 10. Since it's been a page, let me write it again: "that you (yes that's us) may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God". God doesn't want us to know all about Him, just so we can know it. He wants use our lives to make a difference for Him! That is what living a life worthy of Him is all about! That is what "bearing fruit" for Him is all about. That's what growing in the knowledge of Him is all about. It's the "why" of this prayer.
 - i) OK then, time to get practical. No we can't all write bible studies. I really love to ask people, "If money was irrelevant, what would you want to do all day? Let me also add, that if we get travel out of our system, how would we want to use all of our time, if money was irrelevant?" I love the answers that I get. I then encourage people to work toward that goal, as that's how God wants to use you. It may be in a job setting. It may be where you love to hang out. It's a matter of doing what it is you can't stand not doing combined with what talents God's given us and finding a way to use that for His glory! That in effect, is what Paul's praying for when he wrote this verse! Yes it changes over time. Still, there's no greater purpose than to use our lives for His glory. That's why I love to hear what people, especially those of us who trust in Jesus would love to do if money is irrelevant.
- f) If Verse 10 is the "why", Verse 11 is the "how". It says, "being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience". All this means is God's going to prove all (there's that "all" again) the power, endurance and the patience we require to use our lives for His glory. In those moments where we think, I can't do "that", remember that the God who created all things is (not wants to, "is") giving us the power we need so can have endurance and patience! What greater source can we ask for than God Himself providing that for us!
 - i) Let me think of a horrid situation. Suppose we're in way to much pain to go out to make a difference for Jesus. Suppose we're laying in bed, in too much pain to even pray this prayer! This verse does not mean every moment we can go around being a great witness to everyone we meet! Sometimes we need to be on the "back line" praying and sometimes God wants us on the front line "doing". Both are equally important to God. Even if its letting others minister to us in our pain. My point is simply the fact that no matter the situation, God wants to prove us with the power the endurance and patience to do His (key word) will at that moment!
- g) That finally leads us to Verse 12: It reads, "joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." That means don't be grateful for the gifts God's given us, but for the fact we're saved to begin with!

- i) The point is from God's perspective, "It's no big deal that He's given us all that we need to make a difference for Him!" What God wants from us in exchange for all of that is our gratitude to Him! Yes He wants us to use those gifts to make a major difference for Him in the world around us, but even before we do that, He desires we show gratitude to Him. It's not for His ego that He wants our gratitude. It's so we appreciate Him and what He does for us! That's the point.
 - h) OK, I just spent two pages beating these verses to death. Yes they've been a big part of my life for years, so I wanted to share my love of these verses with you. Much more than that, I'd love you to make them a personal part of your life, so that each us can realize all God's doing for us, and what He expects us to do with the gifts He has given us! OK, then I can now move on to Verse 13 now!
- 10. Verse 13: For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
 - a) In Verse 13, we're back to another "why". Remember that Paul wrote this letter to help the church there deal with false issues about Christianity. We get our first hint of that here in these verses.
 - b) It begins with the reminder of what happens to us when we get saved! It's far more than a change of our religious views. If we believe Jesus is God, died for all our sins and believe He's in charge our life, whether we grasp all that means or not, we're now going to be part of an eternal kingdom with God. It means we're no longer going to hell! I'm one of those people who believe one can't lose one's salvation. How does one become "unborn again"? Yes we can question if one was ever saved to begin with, but once one accepts those basic facts about Jesus and trust Him to guide our lives, we can't sin enough to lose that. Yes, I believe we can lose rewards if we mess up, but not our salvation! That's the essential idea of these two verses, and yes we're ready to move on!
- 11. Verse 15: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
 - a) Beginning in this verse, we get into the heart of Paul's message, to explain what is true vs. what's false about Christianity. Again, it is like regularly handling real paper money as to better recognize any fake stuff! That's what Paul wants to do through most of this letter!
 - b) OK, let's get at it, starting with explaining this verse! If you look at most fathers and their sons, you can see the family resemblance. That's sort of what Paul's saying here. It is sort of the idea of "like Father, like Son" and if you want to understand who "the" God is, then you need to understand who "the" Son is. Paul's going to explain who Jesus is beginning in the next verse. First I need to talk about "firstborn over all creation".
 - c) That word "firstborn" can mean either "first to be born" or a title. A simple example is in the book of Genesis. Joseph had two sons. The oldest was Manasseh as stated in Genesis 48:14, but Jacob (Joseph's father) blessed his younger brother Ephraim effectively giving him the title of "Firstborn". In fact, Jeremiah makes that obvious as he states that Ephraim is "My firstborn" (Jeremiah 31:9). My simple point is the word firstborn can literally mean one who is born first or it can be a title. Some will incorrectly argue that God made Jesus and then Jesus made all things. There are lots of complicated ways to prove Jesus is God, but I personally like Hebrews 3:4 which states the builder of all things is God. Yes I know one can argue that God made all things with Jesus, but that's not how the verse reads. I'd also argue that Proverbs Chapter 8 describes God making all things and Verse 30 tells of one "besides Him" as He worked. Bottom line, Jesus always existed, and then became in human form when He became man. OK enough of that, Verse 16.
- 12. Verse 16: For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.
 - a) Well, if Verse 15 had tough implications, consider this one. It argues that all things which are in heaven (the skies, atmosphere) and on the earth and even things we can't see, were made by Jesus and for Jesus. That includes Satan Himself as well as all things that exist!

- b) I heard something amazing I wanted to share about DNA. For example, some aspects of a strand is meant for the brain, some for say the knee, some for the foot, etc. What scientists don't know is how does the DNA parts know where to go? The implication is that God is involved in every aspect of our being, including our physical development. The point as it relates to this verse is that all of us are created "for Him" and by Him". I'm convinced that it's much more than God creating the first humans. That's why I'm discussing this.
 - c) Remember why Paul's saying this. He wants his readers to understand exactly who Jesus is. He's battling "false religion teachers" with alternate theories about Jesus. By stating the fact that all things were made by Jesus and "for" Jesus, it's making the case that Jesus isn't a "less than fully god" deity which is the view of many false religions! Yes I could spend a page discussing all things made for Him or by Him, but you get the general idea!
13. Verse 17: He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
- a) So what does it mean by "holding all things together"? Most of us know about molecules and how electrons go around the nucleus. Magnetically speaking one's positively charged and one's negatively charged? So why don't they fly apart? It's because God's holding all things together. OK, but people living back then didn't know all of that? Yes but they did know the world exists and no one knew when it will end how it all stays together. All I'm saying is this verse teaches that God exists, and He's holding it all together. Realize Paul's speaking about Jesus doing all of this! My point is we're dealing with a God so powerful, it's beyond our ability to fully grasp what He does and how He does it!
14. Verse 18: And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
- a) Again, let's consider why Paul's writing all of this. He's effectively arguing against all the false views about who Jesus is, by explaining who the true Jesus is! That's why we get all of these details about who Jesus is in this book.
 - b) With that point made again, Paul wants us to know that not only is Jesus God, He is also the head of our church. That simply means Jesus should be the focus of who we worship in our lives! Because not only is He God, but because he's the center of who we worship, we look to Him to be in charge.
 - c) Now it's time for another controversial sentence. The next sentence Jesus is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead. Again, it doesn't mean Jesus was a created entity. It just means He was there in the beginning with God, that's it! Since He created all things, then it makes sense that He's the "beginning of all things" as a title! If you're relatively new to Christian theology, simply understand that Jesus is fully God and fully man! It's the idea that He always existed and then became "fully man" so He could relate to us as people as well as pay for our sins. Being "fully God" means that God Himself pays for our sins. It's the underlying reason why we Christians argue the "fully God and fully man" statement!
 - d) That leads to the second point about being "firstborn from the among the dead". No Jesus was not the first human to ever die. That's why it's necessary to understand that the word "Firstborn" also is a title as well as could mean "first to be born". That leads to another bit of Christian theology: How can Jesus be the "first" to rise from the dead? I'll explain:
 - i) The way I look at it, is Jesus was the first to be resurrected to enter heaven. Until it occurred, saved people before then had a "nice resting place" until Jesus could die for their sins and bring them to heaven. Some Christians argue that in Luke 16, we read a true story about hell prior to the resurrection. The short version is Jesus told of "two parts of hell" a "nice holding tank" and a bad part. Jesus said people lived in both parts. The point is if it's a truth and not a fable, then it's where people were prior to the resurrection and that's why Jesus was the first to rise from the dead!
 - e) Finally we get the reason for all of this, "So Jesus can be supreme over all things. That'd be from all of creation (which He made) to being head of the church. It's a "Jesus is God and He's in charge" so we better deal with it statement!

- f) Before we continue with all this theology, time for a quick reminder of why Paul wants to get into all of this. It's like my "Playing with real money so we can spot the fake" story. It's Paul's way of arguing against false views making the rounds about Jesus by telling what's true about Him. In effect, that's the purpose of the letter! OK then, let's continue:
15. Verse 19: For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
- a) Here is one of Paul's summary verse. In effect Paul's asking the question, "Why bother?" Why was it necessary for God Himself to have Jesus 1) Create all things, 2) Be in charge of all things and 3) reconcile all things to Himself? Why not just have God the Father as the creator of all things and say, "I forgive you (us) if you believe I exist and trust in Me? Why all the "Jesus stuff?" Why have a God entity who's the creator, the head of the church and is the one who reconciled people to Himself? OK, John what's the deal? (By the way, now you understand why I titled the lesson what I did!) OK, let's begin:
- i) The first thing to grasp is the idea of God being perfect. If He's perfect, He requires "perfection" to be with Him. If God just forgives us "because He wants to" then He is not being perfect in His justice. The more you understand God's perfect nature, the more you understand the need for Jesus to reconcile people to us.
- ii) The next thing to grasp is why God created us in the first place! If God is perfect, why does He need us? Let me explain with an illustration: If you love to paint or play a musical instrument, you do it, simply because you love to do it, not for say a financial gain, but just because you love to do it. God created us, because He is full of love and wanted "something" to express that love upon! That is where we come in the picture.
- iii) All of that believe it or not, leads to the cross! God has to reconcile the fact that He is perfect with the fact He loves what He created: People. The idea of God Himself paying for sin because He wanted to reconcile His perfect justice with His love. I know most of you "get that", but its necessary to spell it out as to argue against the false views of Jesus that His love has to be earned.
- iv) Let me ask the related question: If we can't earn His love, what's the purpose for living? Yes we have to financially survive and be healthy and all that. I'm asking what does God want from us given that God Himself paid for our sins? It's for us to use our lives as a witness for Him. It's the idea that God wants to use us to lead others to Him. That's why He wants us as a good witness for Him.
- b) Yes, that's basic Christian theology, but it's necessary to grasp all of this in order to argue against what is false. That's what Paul's doing in these verses and I'm expanding upon as to help make it clear for those who haven't thought about these possibilities. OK then, let's continue: (Nine more verses, we're going to make it!)
16. Verse 21: Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--
- a) You want more proof that Christianity has got nothing to do with being a good person? It is pretty blatant in Verse 22. Let me explain, when we think of "evil behavior" we tend to think of murder and stealing. God's standard to be with Him in heaven is all the laws we have in the Old Testament (while some of those laws are cultural, so I'll just use the "Ten Commandments" as an abbreviation. Ask yourself have you ever violated any one of the Commandments even once? Recall the story in the Gospel of John when a woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus. His response was to write in the ground (the sand). We don't know what Jesus wrote, but I suspect it was part of the 10 Commandments. What is implied is that everybody who was ready to stone that woman knew they've also broken at least one of the commandments at least once in their lives.

- b) This comes down to the idea that God is perfect. Does that mean I think a parking ticket is as bad as murder? Of course not. Jesus Himself made that point! He said that the Jewish religious leaders who brought Him to Pontius Pilate "were guilty of the greater sin". (John 19:11) My point is Jesus claimed some sins are worse than others. Does that imply God's got various levels of punishment? In terms of life on this planet, yes there are. People do not get the death penalty for a parking ticket! In terms of our eternal fate, it comes back to whether we believe Jesus died for every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit. It is also a matter of believing He's in charge of our lives!
 - c) All I'm saying is all people are "alienated" from God when it comes to trusting Him to pay the complete price for our sins and have Him be in charge of our lives. I want all of us to get the idea that "evil" is more than killing multitudes of people. It has to do with the idea of trusting Him for the complete payment of our sins. In that sense, people can be evil in that they don't care about God or trusting in being a "good person" to impress Him!
 - d) Let me address those who don't believe Jesus died for all their sins, but still need to prove their worth to God "since they got saved". The big issue is motivation. If we're interested in being a good witness for Him, then we're doing it for the right reason. If we are trying to prove our worth to Him, by our deeds, then know God's not impressed by our deeds!
 - e) Anyway, Paul's pounded the point here that Jesus paid the complete price, end of issue!
17. Verse 23: if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.
- a) Verse 23 takes us right back to the question of "Is one always saved, or can one lose it"? I am one of those people who argue one can't lose it if one has already committed their life to serving Jesus and believes the basic facts about Him. Given that, what does Paul mean in this verse about "if we continue in our faith"? OK John, what's the deal? Realize if Paul is arguing against "once saved, always saved", he'd be contradicting other things that he's saying in this book and in his other letters.
 - b) To answer, remember why Paul's writing in the first place. He's talking to those who are committed Christians living in a city "threatened" by false views of Jesus. We've had some of that already and will get into it more in the next chapter. What Paul wants is Christians to be a good witness for Jesus. So if they turn from the faith to follow the "false practices" that are in the culture all around them, they'd be turning from their faith.
 - c) Let me ask a related question: What if someone believes with all their heart and soul that Jesus died for all their sins and believe He's guiding their lives, then they mess up? I'd say "welcome to the club". Let's say it's something serious like becoming an alcoholic or they are battling a drug addiction. First, I always say get help if one can. I think the world of "AA" programs that help people turn their lives around. The point is even in our struggles we can be a good witness for Jesus if we're trying to turn from sin. What if someone's not turning? Can they lose their salvation? I'd argue their a bad witness for Jesus and it will affect their rewards in heaven, but the way I view it is "God's got their back". If God cares for them, He'll work on their level to draw them back to Him! I don't try to fix people. All I can do is work on my own life! As to others, I pray for them, offer help if they ask, but I trust that God's big enough to handle them as well as me!
 - d) Meanwhile, in effect Paul's saying the same thing. That despite what's happening in their world, keep trusting in the Gospel message as Paul's preaching it here. Speaking of which:
18. Verse 24: Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--
- a) OK just when you think you've got Paul figured out, he throws a "weird curve ball" just to keep us on our toes! What does he mean by "I (Paul) rejoice in what was suffered for you!"

What was suffered on Paul's behalf and that church's behalf? I'd argue it's the suffering of Jesus, not just on the cross, but during his life's work leading up to it. Let me explain:

- i) If you study Jesus' life since his ministry began, it wasn't a "bed of roses". My point is even as God He lived a simple life, and not in a palace! He roamed from place to place and I gather without a lot of money or supplies. Recall when He was asked about giving money to Rome, He had to borrow a coin as He didn't have any coins in his pocket. (Matthew 22:18-20). Jesus lived a simple life in a remote area of a large empire, and yet was still God. Even if that's not enough to convince you, consider all the beatings He took leading up to the cross itself.
- ii) One of the toughest promises made for Christians in the New Testament is the fact that we're called to suffer for the Gospel's sake. I've always argued that if you need proof that Satan is real, try preaching the Gospel and "watch stuff happen". All I'm saying is if you're doing something to make a difference for Jesus resistance is now a factor one has to deal with it. That's what Paul meant by the suffering!
- iii) Paul was the ultimate example of that. An old joke goes, "When Paul arrived at a new town, he wanted to check out the prison, as he usually ended up there for his witness for Jesus. All I'm saying is "suffering comes with the territory for Jesus!"
- iv) So if that's the case, why bother? What's the alternative? If Jesus is God, then this is all "worth it". OK, then, time to move on.

19. Verse 26: the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- a) To explain this verse, first we need to understand what Paul meant by "Mystery". When we think of a mystery, we think of something unrevealed until now. If we're still not sure how say, something is done, it's still a mystery to us. When Paul uses the term, it refers to something hidden essentially "up to that point", but now it's no longer a mystery as lots of evidence exists that the mystery's no longer a mystery.
- b) OK John, we'll bite. What is that mystery? That until Jesus was crucified, God primarily worked through the nation of Israel. Yes I'm convinced non-Israelites were saved before then. My point is how God "worked" through mankind. It was mainly through them as a nation. Since the resurrection, the evidence is "obvious" based on the multitudes of people who have no Jewish background that believed the Gospel message. Keep in mind that the Christians living in Colosse, were mainly non-Jewish. Paul wanted to blatantly state this because of the false teachings making the rounds which included elements of Jewish cult "mysticism". Paul wanted to assure them that just as multitudes of other non-Jewish men and women around that world were being saved, so it became obvious that salvation isn't just a "Jewish thing" anymore.
- c) We Christians are saved. John as you like to say, "Now what"? We get one in Verse 27. It is the fact that we have "glorious riches" in this mystery. That's the idea that whatever it is Jesus gets for all of eternity, we as believers get to share in that. I'm not positive what that all includes, but the fact we "bet on the winning horse" has lots of benefits! It's well worth whatever suffering we must endure in this lifetime, which is Paul's point here!

20. Verse 28: We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

- a) Remember how I said I love the words "now what"? Paul's "now what" should also be our now what. To help other believers grow in their faith and trust in Jesus. Let me explain: I do not know who is saved. That's why many Christians work to lead others to Jesus, since we don't know who's saved, that's how they're doing their part as believers. God wants to use our lives as a witness for Him. That's why He called me to this writing ministry. God wants us to make a difference for Him, that's the key point!

- b) So do we have to work as hard as Paul to get saved? The New Testament teaches he came close to dying on many occasions for Jesus. Folks, exhale! That is why I love to ask, what is it we love to do or can't stand not doing? Then we ask, how can I do "that" as to make a difference for God? Yes, it involves trial and error. Yes, "work still has to be done and the trash still has to go out". All I'm saying is the greatest way to live life is for us to use what we're passionate about to make a difference for Jesus. That's what Paul's asking people to do there and that's what he's asking us to do. That's also why I titled this lesson, " Who are we, who's God, and what does that mean". Hope that inspires you to use our lives as God intended you to use it! With that said, I'll close in prayer.
- 21. Heavenly Father, we don't know you've chosen us, but we know that if we believe Jesus is God and He died for our sins and is in charge of our lives, there is no "special feeling", but we accept it as the Gospel truth. The big question of course is what do we do with that knowledge? May we use it to glorify You. Make it obvious to us what it is You desire of us today. Guide us so that we may use the most valuable thing You've given us, "our time" to make a difference for You. May the Holy Spirit guide us to make that difference. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.