

COLOSSIANS

ALIVE IN CHRIST

(2) "Christ's Superiority and Our Hope" HIGHLIGHT: Colossians 1:15-29 NLT

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

Colossians 1 (NLT)

vv. 15-29

15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

16 for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

17 He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.

18 Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.

He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.
So he is first in everything.

19 For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,

20 and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. **22** Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

24 I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. **25** God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. **26** This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. **27** For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

28 So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. **29** That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

EXPLAIN

E

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

Carl Sagan (astronomer and professor at Cornell U. for almost 30 years) wrote, "As long as there have been humans we have searched for our place in the cosmos. Where are we? Who are we? We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of the universe in which there are far more galaxies than people" (quoted by Donald Williams in his commentary on *Psalms*). Humankind without God is left with words like insignificant, humdrum, and forgotten to describe our plight as people. Paul emphatically states in Colossians we are not forgotten nor insignificant. We are loved dearly by God. "God loved me so much that He was willing to suffer the loss of His Son, and even more amazingly, He was willing to allow His Son to suffer the loss of Him at the cross" (Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love*, p.60 [he is referencing *John 3:16* and *Mark 15:34*]).

vv.15-17 The church at Colossae was in danger of losing the center of Christianity—Jesus. Jesus incarnated (God became flesh), Jesus crucified (to reconcile us to God, Jesus resurrected (to prove the validity of His death), and Jesus ascended (to receive His throne before which one day every eye shall see and every tongue confess He is Lord of all). The big question in our minds (though we may suppress it) is "What is God like?" Paul says, "Look at **Christ, the visible image of the invisible God.**" I love Christmas, but I must never forget this Baby born in the manger **existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation.** Whether the Little Lord Jesus cried, I don't know. But I know this—the Creator Jesus spoke and the universe was created (see *Psalms 33:6-9; Isaiah 40:26*), and **He holds all creation together** (see *Hebrews 3:1-3*). The message to us today is that "giving Jesus prominence but not preeminence is to spurn the love of the Father."

vv.18-20 "Christ is the heartbeat of the entire created universe." His heartbeat jump-started creation. And now, because we are part of **His body, the church**, His heart beats in us—we are alive in Christ because He is alive in us! If we are to be the church as Christ intended, we must remember (1) the church originated with Christ. It is His doing, not ours; and (2) the church depends on Christ continually as the source of energy and power. He is the **head of the church**. Not just in the sense of being the most important and having control, but rather in the sense that all the forces of the body are brought together in the head. The head is the seat of life that permeates the members, uniting them into an organic whole. When the church is vitally connected to **Christ in whom all of God's fullness was pleased to live**, knee-

jerk reactions will cease. Instead, there will be a movement coordinated by Christ Himself at which the world will marvel (the world may not join the effort, but they can't help but notice). Through **Christ's blood on the cross God is reconciling everything to Himself**. The church's role is take part in that reconciliation under the uniting power of the Head—Jesus. We can do that because we are a new creation, a fellowship of *resurrection life*.

vv.21-22 Life in Christ is available to all—even the worst of us. It is for those who run from God either because they don't feel they need Him, or because they are too ashamed to come to Him. Either way, they are **far away from Him**. Some of us have shaken our fists in God's face and declared "we are the masters of our fate," making ourselves God's **enemies**. Even if we wanted to join ranks with God, we are not sure there can be a peace treaty (**reconciliation**) with Him. But God is the one who invites us **into His own presence** at the peace table. The treaty has already been signed by the **death of Jesus**. If we come to the table we can be **holy and blameless**—without fault, set apart, special. Remember the picture of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32: the young man wasted all the inheritance. But when he decided to come home, the Father ran and kissed him, put a new robe on him and gave him new shoes, and gave him the family credit card. He walked into the house cleaned up—just like nothing had ever gone wrong, not because his offenses against his Father were minor (they weren't [see *vv.15 and 30*]), but because the Father wanted to **reconcile him to Himself**. He who was dead is now alive; he who was lost is now found. Because of the tender mercies of the Father the shamed young man had new life. It can happen to us too if we will run to the Father's open arms.

v.23 Reconciliation with God deserves utmost care lest we **drift away from the assurance ("hope" NIV and ESV) of the Good News**. Hebrews says "hope is an anchor" (6:18-19). Anchors fight against drift—but only if they are used correctly. They have to be dropped to the bottom of the lake/river/ocean. Then the anchor must be constantly checked. Winds can create waves that lift the boat, causing the anchor to lose contact with the bottom. Now you know why the fish quit biting—you have drifted from your favorite fishing spot. If our anchor is not steadfast and sure, winds of doubt can move us from our confidence in the good news; currents can take us out of the place of assurance. And the joy of the Lord slips away.

vv.24-29 Christ died and was raised from the dead so *He could build His church, and all the powers of hell could never conquer it* (see *Matthew 16:18*). But the church must be built up (*Ephesians 4:12*). The church must be rooted in God's love (*Ephesians 3:17*). The church must not only grow outwardly (evangelism), but also grow up (*Hebrews 5:11-14*). Paul was ready to **serve [Christ's] church** even if he had to suffer (agonize, *Colossians 2:1*) for doing so (remember, he was in prison when writing this letter; see *Philippians 1:12-14*). Suffering falls to us all, but not all suffering is honorable (*1 Peter 4:15*). "But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by His name!...So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for He will never fail you" (*1 Peter 4:16, 19*). Paul considered his suffering for the church as **participating in the sufferings of Christ**. "To suffer in the service of Christ is not a penalty, it is a privilege and an honor, for it is sharing in the work of Christ" (William Barclay). Paul would do anything—even suffer—so that all people might **know...the riches and glory of Christ**. And what is that great treasure?—**Christ lives in you, the assurance of sharing His glory**. Does Christ live in me? Have I invited Him to animate my life, my thoughts, my motives? Does what matters most to God matter most to me? It did for Paul. **That's why [he] worked and struggled so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that [worked in him]**. Christ was his treasure for which he would give up everything (see *Matthew 13:44-46*).

Christ gave up everything for us (*Philippians 2:5-8*). Is it too much to ask that we live for Him? We have Christ's mighty power that works within us. Let's not give Him prominence; let's make Him preeminent.

A

APPLY

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. Why is it important to know that Jesus was present and active during the creation of the world? (See verses 15-17)
3. What does it mean that Jesus is, "the head of the church" (v. 18)?
4. Paul warns his readers in verse 23, "Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News". What kind of temptations do you face that pull you away from the good news?
5. How would you summarize what Paul has said so far in Colossians (*chapter 1*)?

R

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Consider your life over the course of 2020. What has dominated your mind? What has been "front and center" in your desires? Have you given thought to the supremacy of Christ in 2020? Spend time journaling about the supremacy of Christ and how this might change the way you think and what you desire for the remainder of 2020.
2. How are you involved in telling others about Christ and disciplining them (verse 28)? Consider joining/starting a [d]Group, where you walk through scripture with other believers. This is a great **start** to sharing Christ with others and maturing in your faith.

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