

## Colossians

**1:1.** “the brother Timothy.” In this context the word “brother” does not indicate a fellow Christian, because Timothy was obviously a Christian, as it does a “helper” or “co-worker” (cp. Peter O’Brian, *Word Biblical Commentary*).

**1:2.** “holy ones and faithful brothers.” These are not two different groups—one group of saints and another group of faithful brothers. Rather this salutation is directed at the one and same group of Christians at Colossi. This is an example of when the Greek *kai* (and), can act like “even,” making the construction read something such as, “holy ones, even faithful brothers.”

**1:3.** “we give thanks...when we pray for you.” Although there is no corresponding word for “when” in this verse, its sense comes from the present participle “praying,” *proseuchomai* (#4336 προσεύχομαι). This is the temporal use of the participle, answering the question, *when?* The main action of this sentence is “we give thanks” and the present participle elaborates both the time when and manner by which thanks is given—“we give thanks when we pray.” This is because “the *present* participle is normally *contemporaneous* in time to the action of the main verb. This is especially so when it is related to a present tense main verb,” as it is here, since the verb for “we give thanks” is also in the present tense (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 625). In other words, the action of giving thanks occurs simultaneous to the action of praying. This fact is missed in translations that do not read “when we pray,” (e.g., KJV, ASV, NASB). The reading, “we give thanks to God...praying always for you,” does not necessarily communicate that the actions of giving thanks and praying are contemporaneous. Better are translations such as the REV, ESV, NIV, NET, and HCSB, which accurately translate the participle in its temporal sense by employing the word “when.”

**1:4.** “since.” This is coming from the causal sense of the participle (Cp. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 631). Although there is no actual word for “since” in the Greek text, it is implied in the use of the participle. Other translations read, “because,” or “for.” The hearing of the Colossians faith and love marks the causal grounds for Paul’s giving thanks in verse three.

**“of you faith... of your love.”** In the Greek these are not genitive phrases, even though they are translated with the “of” formula. Rather, the words “faith” and “love” are simply the direct objects (in the accusative case) of the verb “heard.” The Greeks were comfortable saying “We heard your faith and love,” but in English we say, “We heard *of* your faith and love.”

**1:5.** “hope.” The Greek noun is *elpis* (#1680 ἐλπίς), and it means “hope,” “that which is expected.” In Greek, the noun “hope” (*elpis*) is easily distinguishable from the verb “hope” (*elpizō*), but since English uses “hope” for both the noun and verb it is important to be aware of which it is. The verb “hope” refers to our expectation, while the noun “hope” usually refers to the content of the hope--the things we will receive in the future. Thus, new bodies and everlasting life with Christ on a new earth are part of our “hope” (noun), and what we hope (verb) for in the future. (see commentary on 2 Cor. 1:10).

**“is being stored up.”** This is the present participle of *apokeimai* (#606 ἀπόκειμαι), thus the “is being.” Our hope is presently in the process of being “stored up,” “put away as safekeeping,” “reserve[d] as reward or recompense” (BDAG). This corresponds to the Lords teaching in Matthew 6:20, “store up [*thēsauroizō*] (#2343

θησαυρίζω)] for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Because we are continuously earning rewards, our hope is continually being stored up. The theology of most translators is that, once you die, going to heaven is our reward, and since that hope is the same for all Christians, it makes no sense to speak of storing up more hope. This is perhaps why a majority of versions read, “the hope laid up for you in heaven,” expressing a onetime action, rather than acknowledging the continual process of the storing up. But salvation is not a same-hope-for-everyone-ticket-to-heaven; rather, some are storing up for themselves a greater hope by the actions of obedience in this life, a hope to be delivered when the Lord pays back what is due for the things done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). If Christianity were without the concept of rewards, with the equal payment of simply eternal life for all regardless of who strove to put off the flesh and who just “got in,” then we should expect this verse to have the aorist participle, reflecting a onetime salvation-only hope. But it is present, not aorist, meaning we are still continuously in the process of storing up our hope now. This fact is in contrast to the unrepentant, whose deeds are “storing up wrath” for themselves (Rom. 2:5).

**“in the heavens.”** A powerful truth, added for comfort. The good that we do is recorded by God and no human can take it away from us. It is safely in good hands. Jesus told us not to store up treasures on earth where it can be taken from us, but to store up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21).

**“word of truth, which is the Good News.”** The Greek reads, “the word of the truth of the gospel.” The phrase “of the gospel” is the genitive of apposition, which is when the word in the genitive is equated with the same thing to which it stands in relation to (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 95). In this case the gospel is related to the word of truth, and the word of truth *is* the gospel.

**1:6.** “in truth.” Paul says the Colossians understood the grace of God “in truth.” The meaning of this phrase is not that they “truly, really did understand” but that their knowledge was true knowledge (cp. Meyer; Lange). In other words, it is describing the qualitative character of their knowledge. The other interpretive option is to understand this phrase to mean, You know the grace of God in its *genuine character*, that is, you know it as it *truly* is (Kistemaker; NJB). The difference between the two is slight, one primarily of focus. “True knowledge” emphasizes the *knowledge* of the grace, while knowing the grace as it truly is emphasizes the character of the *grace* that is known.

**1:7.** Epaphras. This is a shortened form of Epaphroditus, a very common Greek name of the time (O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary*). It is related to the goddess Aphrodite. Epaphras is mentioned here, in 4:12, and in Philemon 23. He may be the same person as in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18, but due to the commonness of the name, there is no way to conclude that with certainty.

**“your.”** On whose behalf was Epaphras a minister? Our text reads, “On your behalf,” that is, Epaphras serves as a minister on the behalf of the Colossians (cp. ESV; NRSV; HCSB; NAB). There is a variant, however, that reads “our” behalf, as though he were sent from Paul and company as a minister on Paul’s behalf (cp. NIV; NASB; NET; ASV). But the reading “your” is more likely. The translation “on behalf of” comes from *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ), which means “for your sake,” “for your advantage.” Paul is saying Epaphras was a minister for the Colossians advantage, his ministry was for their sake.

**1:8.** “in the spirit.” Although the Greek has no definite article, the preposition *en* can make the noun definite. The Greek has the phrase *en pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), and the

preposition *en* only takes the dative case. The most likely meaning of the dative is to show the association between love and spirit: love “in connection with” the spirit. God’s gift of holy spirit works within us in many ways to the end that we are loving. For one thing, God can energize our love via the spirit. God is always working in us so that we want to do, and do, His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Also, there is the fruit of the spirit that is love (Gal. 5:22), which is different from our “natural” or “human” love and flows out of the new spiritual nature that is born within us (Gal. 5:17). And there is love and joy that we have because we know that due to the New Birth and being permanently sealed with the gift of holy spirit we are guaranteed everlasting life. So the phrase “love in the spirit” needs to be understood as “love that comes from our connection with the spirit.”

**1:9.** “through.” The Greek is *en* (#1722 ἐν), which is to be understood here in the sense of “means” or “instrument” (cp. BDAG, def. 5). Spiritual wisdom and understanding are the *means through which* the Colossians are filled with the knowledge of the will of God.

**1:10.** “clear knowledge.” The Greek is *epignosis* (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), which is composed of the Greek word for “knowledge” with the prefix *epi* as an intensifier—*full and clear knowledge*. Cp. Hendriksen’s translation, “clear knowledge.” Luow-Nida define the term as, “To possess more or less definite information about, possibly with a degree of thoroughness or competence—‘to know about, to know definitely about.’” The Colossians already have knowledge of God, Paul only prays that such knowledge would be ever increasing in its fullness and clarity, that they would know “definitely” about Him.

**1:11.** “glorious might.” The Greek reads, “might of his glory.” It is the attributive genitive, which is when the word in the genitive case (“glory”) acts as an adjective describing the head noun (“might”). So “might of his glory” becomes “his glorious might.” It is beneficial to translate the genitive phrase as what it means rather than to retain the reading “might of his glory” because the English reader can easily misunderstand the literal reading. Can glory have might? The phrase as it stands literally puts *glory* as the thing which we are strengthened by, rather than by God’s strength, i.e., His might.

**“endurance.”** This Greek word *hupomonē* (#5281 ὑπομονή) is usually translated “patience.” However, the word can also have the meaning of endurance, which best fits the context here. *Hupomonē* is patience with things, while *makrothumia* is long-suffering with people, see commentary on Galatians 5:22.

**1:12.** “giving thanks with joy.” The phrase “with joy” goes with “giving thanks” rather than with “patience” in verse 11. Grammatically, it could go with either, so why then is our rendering to be preferred? The answer lies in considering the parallel structure of participles beginning in verse 10. In the Greek the words “bearing fruit,” “growing,” and “being strengthened” are all participles that have their modifiers preceding them in the text: “in every good deed, bearing fruit and growing; “in all power, being strengthened,” and likewise here in verse 12, “with joy, giving thanks.” (Cp. Lenski).

**“qualified.”** The word for “qualified” is *hikanoō* (#2427 ἱκανόω), which the versions translate as either “qualified” or “enabled”/“made fit.” The word really means both. It points to a making sufficient and fitting out so that one is hence qualified.

**“you.”** There is a textual variant that reads “us” rather than “you” (cp. KJV; ASV; NASB). The word “you” is the best reading, however. It is much more likely the reading

“us” arose as a scribal assimilation to match the “us” in verse 13, than for a change from “us” to “you” (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*).

**“part.”** The Greek word is *meris* (#3310 μερίς), which can mean a “part” or a “share.” While either translation is quite good, the word “share” usually indicates ownership in part, such as when children have to “share” a toy. In the Millennial Kingdom that is coming in the future, the earth will be divided up to those who deserve an inheritance, and each person will get a “part,” according to what they deserve. Thus, for example, “Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (Micah 4:4).

**“allotment.”** The Greek is *klēros* (#2819 κληρος ; pronounced clay-ros). Originally the word *klēros* was used of an object that was used in casting or drawing lots; usually a pebble, a potsherd (broken piece of pottery), or a piece of wood. Then it came to be used for what was won or obtained by lot, i.e., an allotted portion. The Messianic Kingdom will cover the earth (Dan. 2:35, 44), and there will be portions allotted to different tribes and people (Ezek. 45:1-8; 47:13-48:29). Meyer (*Colossians*), writes, “This *klēros*, of which the Christians are possessors ideally before the Parousia and thereafter really, is the theocratic designation of the property of the Messianic kingdom, and the *meris tou klērou* [“part of the allotment”] is the share of individuals in the same.”

**“the kingdom of light.”** This phrase goes with the preceding phrase about the part of the allotment, and points to the realm of light, i.e., the Age to Come, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. O’Brian (*Word Biblical Commentary*) writes, “...the inheritance for which the all powerful Father had fitted them was in the realm of the light of the age to come.” Lightfoot (*Colossians*) writes: “The portion of the saints is situated in the kingdom of light.” Some commentators refer to the light being what we have now, inclusive of the blessings and knowledge of God, but that does not seem to make sense in this context. The blessings we have from God right now are not an allotted portion, we all have access fully to the knowledge and blessings of God. The only true “allotment” of the Christians will occur in the future Messianic Kingdom on earth, and although we are all qualified to receive a share, different people will receive different allotments based on what they have done for Christ in their lives. Some people who have faithfully served Christ will receive a rich welcome (2 Pet. 1:11), while others will be ashamed (1 John 2:28).

**1:13.** “authority.” The Greek word is *exousia* (#1849 ἐξουσία), and means “authority,” not “power” which would be *dunamis* (#1411 δύναμις) or perhaps *kratos* (#2904 κράτος). Each Christian has been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, and now legally belongs to God. We are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19), and we have been redeemed (bought back) from sin and death, and transferred to the Kingdom of the Son. Since we are not under the authority of darkness (the Devil), he cannot legally afflict us. Nevertheless, Christians are regularly mistreated and even killed by the “power” of darkness that controls this world. The Devil is a liar and murderer, and he does not recognize God’s legal authority. However, even though we are not under the legal “authority” of darkness, because we live on earth, we are still greatly affected by the powers of evil.

**1:14.** This verse in the KJV and YLT go along with a textual variant, which adds the words “through his blood.” This phrase was most likely an interpolation from Ephesians 1:7. We believe it probably originated as a marginal note added for clarification by a scribe, which subsequently got copied into the text. If the reading with “through his

blood” were original, there would be no reason for scribes to omit the phrase (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*).

**“redemption.”** This is the figure of speech prophetic perfect—speaking of a future event as past to emphasize the certainty of its occurrence. Although, through Christ’s atoning work we have been presently redeemed, the fullness of our redemption is yet future, as there are other verses that speak of our redemption as a future act (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30). See also, *The Christian’s Hope*, pg. 239; and commentary on Ephesians 2:6 for more on the prophetic perfect.

**1:15.** “image.” The Greek word is *eikōn* (#1504 εἰκὼν), and it means “image.” Jesus was the image of God in the sense in which he said that if we had seen him we had seen the Father. Trinitarians claim that this verse shows that Jesus is God, but that cannot be the case, because it speaks of Christ being “the image [*eikon*] of the invisible God.” If Christ were “God,” then the verse would simply say so, rather than that he was the “image” of God. The Father is plainly called “God” in dozens of places, and this would have been a good place to say that Jesus was God. Instead, we are told that Christ is the *image* of God. If one thing is the “image” of another thing, then the “image” and the “original” are not the same thing. The Father *is* God, and that is why there is no verse that calls the Father the image of God. Calling Jesus the image of God is very good evidence he is not God. There are Trinitarian theologians who assert that the word *eikon* (from which we get the English word “icon,” meaning “image,” or “representation”) means “manifestation” here in Colossians, and that Christ is the manifestation of God. We believe that conclusion is unwarranted. The word *eikon* occurs 23 times in the New Testament, and it is clearly used as “image” in the common sense of the word. It is used of the image of Caesar on a coin, of idols that are manmade images of gods, of Old Testament things that were only an image of the reality we have today. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that Christians are changed into the “image” of the Lord as we reflect his glory. All these verses use “image” in the common sense of the word, *i.e.*, a representation separate from the original. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says, “A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the *image* and glory of God.” Just as Christ is called the image of God, so men are called the image of God. We are not as exact an image as Christ is because we are marred by sin, but nevertheless the Bible does call us the “image” of God. Thus, the wording about being the image of God is the same for us as it is for Christ. The words in the Word must be read and understood in their common and ordinary meaning unless good reason can be given to alter that meaning. In this case, the common meaning of “image” is “likeness” or “resemblance,” and it is used that way every time in the New Testament. Surely if the word “image” took on a new meaning when it referred to Christ, the Bible would let us know that. Since it does not, we assert that the use of “image” is the same whether it refers to an image on a coin, an image of a god, or for both Christ and Christians as the image of God. Jesus is not God, but he so closely resembled God in how he lived and acted that he is called the image of God.

**“The firstborn of all creation.”** This phrase refers to Christ being the firstfruits of those raised from the dead (cp. 1 Cor. 15:20). The Greek is “the firstborn of all creation” (or, “the firstborn of every creature,” since there is no article before “creation”), but the exact significance of the genitive is debated. It could be partitive, *i.e.*, the firstborn out of the creation, which is true and makes sense, since Jesus was indeed the first person ever to be raised in a new, everlasting body. However this interpretation is rejected by

Trinitarians on the basis of their claim that Jesus was not in fact part of the creation at all, but is actually the eternal God. The genitive can be a genitive of relation, that is, the firstborn in relation to other creations, but we must be clear about what that would mean. It could easily mean just firstborn in time, but that explanation is usually rejected by Trinitarians because it does not inherently give godhood to Jesus. Some Trinitarians prefer the genitive of comparison (cp. Lenski), because that would make Christ inherently better than the others who were raised from the dead. While Christ is no doubt better than that other saved people who will be raised from the dead, the genitive in the verse certainly does not have to be supportive of the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, the idea of the comparative genitive combined with the doctrine of the Trinity is why some versions translate the verse into English as “the firstborn over all creation,” which is actually an interpretation of what the Greek means, rather than a translation of the Greek. God likely used the genitive because it is indicative of many things, which is the beauty of the genitive case: it can emphasize several things at one time. As a partitive genitive it shows Jesus is part of God’s creation, which he is, and as a comparative genitive it, combined with the elevated status of any “firstborn” male in the biblical culture, shows that God has given rank and privileges to Jesus Christ. In biblical society, being the firstborn had privileges associated with it that Jesus Christ, as the firstborn, certainly receives.

**1:16.** “created.” This verse is not referring to Jesus creating the world in the beginning. It is referring to Jesus creating the positions of authority that are needed to run his Church, which started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). God delegated “all authority” to Christ (Matt. 28:18), which would include the authority to create. Ephesians 2:15 confirms this by saying that Christ created “one new man” (his Church) out of Jew and Gentile. Also, by pouring out the gift of holy spirit into each believer (Acts 2:33,38), the Lord Jesus has created something new in each of them, that is, the “new man,” their new nature (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 4:24). The Church of the Body of Christ (the Christian Church) was a brand new entity, created by Christ on the Day of Pentecost out of Jew and Gentile. He had to also create the structure and positions that would allow it to function, both in the spiritual world (positions for the angels that would minister to the Church--see Rev. 1:1, “his angel”) and in the physical world (positions and ministries here on earth--see Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:7-11). The Bible describes the physical and spiritual realities that Christ created by the phrase, “things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

Many people think that because Colossians 1:16 says, “For by him all things were created” that the verse is speaking of the original creation of the universe and that therefore Jesus must be God. That is not the case. To discover what this verse is saying, we must read the entire verse with an understanding of the usage of words and figures of speech. The study of legitimate figures of speech is an involved one, and the best work we know of was done in 1898 by E. W. Bullinger, titled *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*.

To understand this verse, we must be aware that when the word “all” (or “every” or “everything”) is used, it is often used in a limited sense. For example, when Absalom was holding a council against his father, David, 2 Samuel 17:14 says that “all the men of Israel” agreed on advice that was given. “All” the men of Israel were not there, but the verse uses “all” in its limited sense, meaning, “all” who were there. Another example is Jeremiah 26:8, which says that “all the people” seized Jeremiah to put him to death, but

the context makes it very clear that “all the people” were not even present. Again, “all” is being used in a limited sense. The Bible says of Christians, “know all things” (1 John 2:20), but surely there is no Christian who actually believes that he knows everything. The point is that whenever we read the word “all,” we must determine whether it is being used in the wide sense of “all in the universe,” or in the narrow sense of “all in a certain context.” When Colossians 1:16 says “all things were created by him,” we know it is using a limited sense of “all,” from both the context and the scope of Scripture.

Another thing we must understand in order to correctly interpret Colossians 1:16 is the figure of speech called “encircling.” Bullinger notes that the Greeks called this figure of speech *epanadiplosis*, while the Romans labeled it *inclusio*, and he gives several pages of biblical examples of this figure. To understand the “encircling,” we must note that the phrase “all things were created” occurs at both the beginning and end of the verse, encircling the list of created things. The things that are “created” are not rocks, trees, birds and animals, because those things were created by God in the beginning. The things mentioned in Colossians are: “thrones or lordships or rulerships or authorities,” and these are the authorities and positions that were needed by Christ to run his Church and were created by him for that purpose. By surrounding the “thrones, lordships, etc., the figure of speech *epanadiplosis* (“encircling”) helps us to identify the proper context of “all things,” and shows us that it is the narrower sense of the word “all” that is being used in the verse.

If Colossians 1:16 was referring to Jesus Christ creating the universe in the beginning of time, we should expect it to reflect something like the wording of Genesis 1:1, and say that Jesus created the heavens and the earth, or at least innumerate some of the common things that we associate with that creation. Instead we find in this verse a list of both angelic and human positions of authority. But is that what we think of when we think of the creation of the universe? Positions of authority such as thrones and lordships? Certainly not. God made Christ the head of the Church, and he needed to set up a structure for it, and that structure consisted of spiritual beings and people in positions of authority, and Jesus created those positions with the power that God gave him: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18)

**“thrones or lordships or rulerships or authorities.”** These are some of the authorities in the spiritual world and physical world that Jesus needed to create in order to run his church.

**“thrones.”** The Greek is “thrones,” the plural of *thronos* (#2362 θρονος). Lightfoot writes: In all systems alike these ‘thrones’ belong to the highest grade of angelic beings, whose place is in the presence of God” (Lightfoot; *St. Paul’s Epistles*). We agree with Lightfoot that these “thrones” (likely a metonymy for those beings who sit on the thrones) are a high order of angelic beings, and the position was created by Christ for his Church.

**“lordships.”** The Greek is *kuriotēs* (#2963 κυριότης), from the word *kurios*, lord, which is the same word for “lord” in the phrase, “the Lord Jesus Christ.” It refers to those who have lordship. It appears by their name and their being next to the “thrones” that these also are very powerful spiritual beings.

**“rulerships or authorities.”** The Greek is *archē* (#746 αρχή) and *exousia* (#1849 εξουσία). The word *archē* refers to one who is first, a leader or ruler, while *exousia* refers to “authority.” These two words appear together ten times in the New

Testament (Luke 12:11; 20:20; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1). Sometimes they clearly refer to earthly powers (Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1); in others they refer to spiritual powers (Eph. 6:12). Jesus created positions of authority in his church in both the spiritual and physical realm. The apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers in the Church are part of the human authority structure. Although it could be argued that in this verse “rulerships or authorities” only refer to angelic rulers and were created “in the beginning,” that is an interpretation. It could just as easily be argued that in this verse the meaning, or part of the meaning, of these words refers to the human authorities in the Church, and that absolutely precludes Jesus creating “in the beginning,” because Church authorities did not exist back then.

**1:17.** “before all things.” The Greek word translated as *before* is the preposition *pro* (#4253 πρό). *Pro* can mean “before” in the sense of either space, time, or priority (see appendix on prepositions). The meaning here is that of rank or priority; Christ is *before* all things in that he holds priority of rank above everything and everyone else.

**“in him.”** This is the “in” in the sense of sphere and relation. In that light, it can be translated, “in connection with” or even sometimes, “in union with” (see note on Rom. 6:3 and Eph. 1:3). The important meaning of *en* for the study of this verse is that it can mark a close association, or a limit. Thus BDAG notes that in Colossians 1:16, “in him” means “in association with him.” BDAG lexicon notes: “Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the  $\square$ v-term is viewed as the controlling influence: *under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with...* In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often expressed by such phrases as  $\square$ v Χριστ $\square$  [in Christ],  $\square$ v κυρ $\square$  [in the Lord], etc.,...*in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind.*”

This verse is saying that in connection or association with Christ, all these positions of authority in his Church, the thrones, lordships, rulerships, and authorities are ordered and maintained. The relation of these authorities, and the authority they have, is only there by virtue of their connection and association with Christ. No spiritual or earthly authority has any true position or power apart from Christ, and apart from Christ they have no genuine or lasting relation with each other. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), and that is true.

Although there are versions that translate the *en* in an instrumental sense, as “by him” (cp. HCSB; KJV), this is too strong in this context. The authority and authorities in the Church are ordered, maintained, and “held together” due to their association with him, not “by” him. The reason that “by” is attractive to some translators is that they interpret this verse from a Trinitarian perspective and misunderstand what it is saying. They believe that Jesus is God and the verse and context are referring to the whole universe being created by, then held together by, Jesus Christ. However, Jesus Christ is not God and this verse is not speaking of the whole created universe, but of the positions of authority that Christ created for his Church.

**“are held together.”** The Greek word is *sunistēmi* (#4921 συν $\square$ στημι). The verb is intransitive (having no object) and in the perfect tense, but it has the sense of a present tense verb (Lenski), which is why the versions translate it as a present. This is a wonderful verb to express the complexity of the relationships that exist in the Church, and how Christ relates to the positions of authority he created (cp. v. 16). The sad fact is that the English cannot easily express the multiplicity of relationships that are contained

in this verb. As was pointed out above in the comment on “in him,” most commentators interpret this verse from a Trinitarian perspective and misunderstand what it is saying. This verse is speaking of the positions of authority that Christ created in the Christian Church, and how those authorities relate to Jesus and to each other. The verb has several meanings that are pertinent to how these authorities relate to each other. Moulton and Milligan state that *sunistēmi* “is very common in the papyri, and is used with a great variety of meanings.” They go on to say, “From its original meaning ‘set together,’ ‘combine,’ συν□στημι passes into the sense of ‘bring together as friends,’ ‘introduce,’ ‘recommend.’” Moulton and Milligan also list “appoint” as one of the uses, and also “establish, prove,” “stand with(by)” “acting with,” and “consist” (2 Pet. 3:5). With specific reference to Colossians 1:17, they point out the meaning “hold together” and “cohere” (Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*).

Other lexicons add some depth of use to Moulton and Milligan, and some of the relevant meanings include “to bring together” “to establish,” “to put together (i.e., unite parts into one whole)” (BDAG). Friberg’s lexicon adds “have existence, exist, continue.” Louw and Nida’s lexicon adds, “to bring together or hold together something in its proper or appropriate place or relationship.” We should note that the verb is used 16 times in the New Testament, and the majority of them refer to commending or recommending one person to another (Rom. 16:1; 2 Cor. 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 7:11; 10:12, 18 (2x); 12:11), however, that does not mean that that is the use here, although it seems to be a sub-meaning in the verse, as the authorities in the Church, and especially the human authorities that are constantly changing, are introduced and recommended to each other.

Having an understanding of the range of meaning of the word *sunistēmi*, we are ready to see how it fits into this verse and its context. When the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus determined what it would take to administer the Church, and then created the positions to get the job done. He then “brought together,” and “appointed” spirit beings and people to fill the positions. He “introduced” and recommended them to each other, and now the authorities in the Church continue to exist and are held together by, and in relation to, him; they are maintained by him. In the case of the humans he placed in authority, such as apostles, prophets, and teachers, he continues to fill those positions generation after generation, continuing to appoint and recommend them to each other. This verse does seem to have a dominant sense of the Church being “maintained” in connection with Christ. As the authorities in the Church stay intimately connected with Christ and as Christ acts as Lord and Head, the Church is ordered, maintained, held together, and moves forward.

**1:18.** “*he* who is *its* beginning.” The Greek word “beginning” is *arche* (#746 ἀρχή), which has several meanings, including, “beginning, origin, or first cause.” Jesus Christ is the “beginning” of the Church, which is his Body. There are many events in the Bible that are referred to as the “beginning,” so what the word “beginning” refers to in any given verse depends on the context. Although most English versions read, “he is the beginning” (NIV), the word “the” is not in the Greek text. Some translators lean towards the translation “the beginning” due to their Trinitarian theology, saying that Christ was the beginning of the Church before the world began (“the beginning... goes back to creation...;” Lenski). However, there is no reason to connect “beginning” with the creation here, because the context of the verse is speaking about the Christian Church, and his being the firstborn from the dead, which happened just prior to his starting the

Church on Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus Christ is the beginning of the Church because he is its start and foundation, and his resurrection is the foundation upon which our hope rests. William Hendrickson gets it right when he writes: “By his triumphant resurrection... Christ laid the foundation for that sanctified life... This resurrection is also the beginning principle, or cause of their glorious physical resurrection” (W. Hendrickson; *New Testament Commentary*).

**“the firstborn out from among the dead.”** Jesus Christ is the first person to be raised from the dead to everlasting life. To fully understand this, it is necessary to understand that before the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no one received everlasting life (see, *Is There Death After Life* by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit). The fact that the Bible calls him the “firstborn” guarantees that there will be others. All those who are saved will be raised from the dead and granted everlasting life.

**“out from among the dead.”** The Greek reads, *ek tōn nekrōn* (ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν). Scripture teaches that when a person dies, he is dead and in the ground awaiting the resurrection, and since neither the Rapture or any of the resurrections have occurred yet, everyone who has died is still in the ground awaiting being raised. Jesus, however, was raised, so he was raised “out from among” (*ek*) “the dead *people*” (*tōn nekrōn*). For a much more complete explanation of the phrase “out from among the dead, see the commentary note on Romans 4:24.

**1:19.** “Fullness.” The Greek is *pleroma* (#4138 πλῆρωμα), and it is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament, generally referring to that which fills something up, or makes something full or complete; and it also can refer to that which is full of something. There is much scholarly discussion about this word. Some scholars (and the REV) take “Fullness” as an epithet for God in this verse (cp. *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament*), actually meaning “God in all His fullness” (cp. O’Brian, *Word Biblical Commentary*). Others note that sometimes the Greeks left “God” out of a sentence when He was clearly understood to be the subject, and thus they add it into the text and say something like the HCSB: “For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.” The two ways of handling the verse end up with the same conclusion: that it is the fullness of God that is now in Christ. However, as O’Brian points out, if the *pleroma* is seen to be the subject, the grammar can be explained easily, and there is no need to supply a subject in the sentence that is not actually stated, nor needed, for as we saw above the word *pleroma* can refer to God in all His fullness.

The use of “Fullness” for God here ties this verse in with what God is doing in Christ and in us in 2:9, 10, and points out that the Fullness of God, “His spirit, word, wisdom, and glory, are displayed” in Christ (F. F. Bruce, *NICNT, Colossians*). It also ties in the work and promises of God in the Old Testament, for OT verses such as Jeremiah 23:24 (“Do I not fill heaven and earth?) use either *pleroma* or related words. Colossians 1:19 is saying that this God who has filled heaven and earth is pleased to fill Christ.

**1:22.** “without blemish.” See note on Ephesians 1:4.

**1:29.** “And I am toiling for that *goal*.” The verse opens with the Greek phrase *eis ho*, “toward which,” that implies movement toward an end of some kind; toward a goal. Thus the NET version has, “Toward this goal,” a very clear translation. Although the Greek text has the opening phrase in the order, “For that goal I am toiling,” it seemed to read much better in English to say, “I am toiling for that goal.” The Moffatt Bible also follows that word order. Paul’s “goal” was to present every Christian mature in Christ (1:28).

This shows that every Christian should want to be mature in Christ, not just “saved.” It is sometimes said in Christianity, “Isn’t salvation the important thing?” Salvation is important, and indeed, the foundation of the Christian life. However, we should never stop there. We should always press on to personal maturity in Christ, and help others get there also.

**“struggling.”** The Greek is *agōnizomai* (#75 ἁγώνιζομαι; pronounced äg-ō-need'-zo-my), and it means to contend in the gymnastic games; to contend with adversaries, or “fight;” to contend or struggle with difficulties and dangers; to strive to obtain something. Paul uses it to refer to the great struggle he was in to move God’s causes forward in the world. Paul mentions this “struggle” a few times in Colossians: 1:29 and 4:12 (*agōnizomai*); and in 2:1 (*agōn*). Although many versions use “strive” or “fight,” and these are not bad translations, the spiritual fight we are in involves a struggle both externally and internally. We struggle with our flesh to continually and faithfully obey God, and we struggle against the world to accomplish God’s purposes.

**2:1.** “And indeed.” The Greek word is *gar* (#1063 γάρ), which is most often translated “for,” but it does not have to indicate cause or reason, and it does not here. It can also be marker of clarification or even of inference. In this case, it continues (thus “and”) and clarifies (thus “indeed”) the subject of the struggling which Paul speaks of in 1:29, and continues in 2:1. Some versions, such as the NIV do not even translate the *gar*, starting 2:1 with, “I want,” while Cassirer’s translation, *God’s New Covenant*, also has “And indeed.”

**“struggling.”** The Greek noun is *agōn* (#73 ἁγών), and it means a contest or competition, or to struggle, fight, or contend in a competition. A very literal rendition of the Greek in this verse would be: “And indeed, I want you to know how great a struggle I am having for you,” but that can be somewhat confusing, which is why versions such as the NIV and NRSV have, “I am struggling for you.” In 1:29 Paul was struggling and striving to do the will of God, and in 2:1 he was struggling for the people of Colossae and Laodicea.

**2:2.** The last phrase of this verse is best translated, “the secret of the Christ of God,” or “the secret of God’s Christ.” See *One God & One Lord*.

**2:8.** “empty, deceitful, philosophy.” The Greek literally reads, “through the philosophy and empty deceit,” but translating it literally is confusing to the English reader and misses the point the Greek text is making. This construction is the figure of speech Hendiadys (two for one; see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*) when two things are mentioned, “philosophy” and “empty deceit,” when only one thing is meant, which is, “empty, deceitful, philosophy.” In sentences, nouns always have more emphasis than adjectives, so it more strongly emphasizes the deceit of philosophy to say, “philosophy, even (*kai* can be “and” or “even”) empty deceit” than to say, “empty, deceitful, philosophy,” which is why the Greek is worded the way it is, but the latter phrase can be confusing, which outweighs the shift in emphasis.

**2:9.** “in a bodily manner.” The Greek is *sōmatikōs* (#4985 σωματικῶς), and it is an adverb. In this context it describes “dwells,” and is thus saying that what God is, His godly character and way of being, is embodied, or expressed in a mortal body, in Christ. This verse is very good proof that Jesus Christ was not God. It would make no sense to say that “what God is,” dwells in God. It is only because Christ is not God that it makes sense to say that what God is dwells in Christ. Also, the verse uses the word “God,” not

“the Father.” If Trinitarians were correct that the Father and Christ were two separate “Persons,” but both the Father and Christ were “God,” then this verse should state that in Christ dwells all the fullness of “the Father.” The verse says “God” is dwelling bodily in Christ, that is, being embodied in him. What God was, all his character and glory, dwelt in Christ in a bodily form. Some Trinitarians recognize that logically what God is could not dwell in God, and so they assert that this verse is referring to the “man” part of Christ (the doctrine of the Trinity states that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. The fact that this is logically impossible by definition is ignored and taken as one of the mysteries of the Faith). For example, Lenski writes:

“It cannot even be said that ‘all the fullness of the Deity dwells in God,’ for ‘Deity’ is only the abstract term for God himself. Deity dwells in Christ because of his human nature, it could not ‘dwell,’ ‘reside,’ in him if he had not become man. The adverb modifies the verb and emphasized the manner of the indwelling: this manner is ‘bodily,’ the idea to be expressed being the that indwelling is not mystical, not spiritual, not in the spirit of Christ alone, but in his whole human nature” (R. C. H. Lenski, commentary on Col. 2:9).

The idea that what God is could dwell in the man side of Christ is a contrived argument, and based upon faulty Trinitarian logic. Jesus Christ was not a divided person, with what God was dwelling in one part of him but not in the other part because that other part was God. Lenski is correct that Jesus had to be a man: “Deity [what God is]...could not ‘dwell,’ ‘reside,’ in him if he had not become man.” Jesus was the created, fully human, Son of God, and what God was, all the character of God, dwelled in him, and could do so because he was a man, not God.

**“all the fullness.”** The Greek word “fullness” is *plērōma* (#4138 πληρωμα). The noun *plērōma* occurs 17 times in the New Testament, and has various meanings that all relate to the basic meaning of the word, which is “fullness.” For example, some of the things that it refers are: to baskets full of food (Mark 6:43 and 8:20); to the full number of Gentiles (Rom. 11:12 and 25); to love being the “fullness” (i.e., fulfilling) of the Law (Rom. 13:10); to the full measure of a blessing (Rom. 15:29); to the fullness of the earth (1 Cor. 10:26); to a fulfilled time period (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10); to the Body being the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:23); to the fullness of God that each believer has (Eph. 3:19); and to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Seeing the wide variety of subjects that “fullness” refers to show us that we must understand the word in its context and from the scope of Scripture. Thus while Trinitarians want to assert that “all the fullness” means “everything God is,” it is clear that they are importing that meaning from their theology, because *plērōma* does not have to mean that. In this context *plērōma* means the same thing as it does in Ephesians 3:19, which says that each believer may be “filled with all the fullness [*plērōma*] of God.” Colossians 2:10 is saying Christ was filled with all the fullness of God, and the next verse, verse 11, says that we believers have what Christ had, and Ephesians 3:19 is saying that we should be, in a practical outward sense, filled with the *plērōma* of God also. In fact, it is very logical that since each believer has “Christ” in them (Col. 1:27), and is part of the “Body of Christ” (Eph. 5:30), and is in union with Christ (Rom. 3:3-6), and “in Christ” also partakes of the “fullness” (Col. 1:10), that the meaning of *plērōma* in these verses in Colossians refers to being filled with the character, power, and glory of God, just as Christ was. Reinier Schippers writes: “This fullness which is described in Col.

1:15-18 is entirely related to Christ's cross (v. 20), death (v. 22), and resurrection (v. 18). For this reason believers also have this fullness in him (2:10). By his cross, death and resurrection they are reconciled through faith (2:12ff.), renewed, and made to participate in his triumph" (Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 740). There is no justification in saying that because the *plērōma* is in Christ, he must be God. If "all the fullness" of what God was, being in Christ, made him God, then the next verse (v. 10), would make us God also, because it says that we have that same fullness.

No doubt *plērōma* was chosen carefully by God because of its meaning and use in the scope of Scripture (such as Ephesians 3:19), but also because of what it meant to the early Christians, because by the time Colossians was written (about 62 AD), some Christians were beginning to turn to gnosticism.

"In Christian Gnosticism *plērōma* is a technical term for the totality of the 30 aeons. This totality is closest to God but is his product; he stands over it. The *plērōma* is the supreme spiritual world from which Jesus comes and into which the spiritual enter. Implied in the use of the term are the fullness and perfection of being. In the plural the aeons are called *plērōmata*, and *plērōma* is also used at times for the Gnostics' angelic partners who help to carry them up into the spiritual world" (Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

The early Christian Gnostics were turning away from the simplicity of Christ and adding confusing mythology to the Gospel. Paul's writing that all the *plērōma* dwelt in Christ was in essence saying that there was no point in looking anywhere else for spiritual knowledge, power, or fulfillment, because it all could be found in Christ.

**"what God is."** The Greek is *theotēs* (#2320 θεότης), which is an abstract noun for God (Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon*; Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 86). Many versions translate it as "divine nature," but Louw and Nida comment: "The expression 'divine nature' may be rendered in a number of languages as 'just what God is like' or 'how God is' or 'what God is' (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*). We thought that the translation "what God is" was very clear (cp. Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible*; "all that God is"). What it means for the fullness of the *theotēs* to dwell in Christ has to be gleaned from the entire scope of Scripture, and not just the phrase or word itself, which is open to a number of interpretations. Gerhard Schneider notes: "The meaning of the Colossians passage is not entirely clear," (Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 143), and that is the reason for all the various interpretations of the phrase and the wide variety of ways it is translated. Thus different theologians have interpreted it to mean various things, including the will of God, divine grace and gift, and even "the Church" itself, along with interpretations that can be found in many translations, such as Deity, divinity, Godhead, God, "God's being," "all that God is," and "God's nature." What is clear from Scripture is that God gave Christ the gift of holy spirit and worked through him to accomplish His purposes. Thus, God was in Christ, reconciling the world (2 Cor. 5:20), and Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." This verse is not saying that Jesus was God, but rather the fullness of what God was in Christ--God's character, power, and glory, resided in Christ, and now, as per verse 10, it resides in us, and our challenge is to allow it to show forth from our flesh bodies and walk like Christ walked. For more on *theotēs* (#2320 θεότης), see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*.

**2:10.** “have been given that fullness.” The Greek of that phrase is the one word, *plēroō* (#4137 πληροω), which is the verb form of the noun *plērōma* that occurs in verse nine. The idea of “that fullness” comes from the context. Although a strict translation of the verb would be, “you have been filled,” or “you have been given fullness [or “made full”], the “fullness” that we have been given comes from our being in union with Christ (“in him”), and the fullness that Christ has is spoken of in verse nine. Since verses nine and ten are all part of the same sentence, it would likely have been better if they had not been two separate verses. The essence of the verses is: in Christ dwells all the fullness of what God is, and you [we] have been given that fullness because we are in union with him. The New American Bible has: “and you share in this fullness in him,” correctly understanding that it is “this fullness” that we have, not just any “fullness” as if the word could be separated from the context. We are able to have the fullness (for more on the meaning of “fullness,” see note on v. 9 above).

**“by being in union with him.”** The phrase “in him” refers to the union we have with Christ, which is in part due to being part of his Body (see note on Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:11). The italics are added to make the English clear.

**2:11.** “through *union with him*.” The preposition *en*, “in” [translated “through”] refers to a relationship, not a physical position (see note on Ephesians 1:3 and Romans 6:3). In this case, it is due to our being “in” union with Christ, but the reading “through” seemed much clearer in English (cp. Charles Williams, *The New Testament*, Cassirer, *God’s New Covenant*; Goodspeed’s translation). Another option of the translation would have been to repeat the pattern of verse 10, and saying, “*by being in union with him*.” This verse is making it clear that when we got born again, we became part of the Body of Christ and in union with Christ, a union that is so complete that we are said to be circumcised due to our “union with him.” The Christian was circumcised in Christ (Col. 2:11), crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), was buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4), and was raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6), and we are said to be already seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6; a future event; see note at that verse).

**“made without hands.”** The Greek word is *acheiropoiētos* (#886 χειροποίητος), a compound word made up of the alpha privative, “not,” and the words for “hand” and “do, make.” It means, “not made by hands,” “made without hands,” “not done by hands,” etc. The Jews circumcised “by hand,” but God spiritually circumcises us (thus bringing us into the covenant; cp. Gen. 17:10-14).

**“consisting of the removal of the body of flesh.”** We must understand the emphasis on “body” in this verse. When the Jews performed circumcision, only the foreskin was removed, the rest of the fleshly body remained--and caused problems. When Christians get born again, it is not just the foreskin that gets removed, but the whole fleshy body. Thus our circumcision in Christ is no ordinary circumcision! Our old man flesh nature is said to be removed (cp. Col. 3:3; “for you died”). Of course, scriptures such as Romans 7:13-25 and Galatians 5:16-18, as well as our daily experience of struggling with sin, show us that our sin nature is still alive and well, but the promise is that when we get our new bodies we will be rid of it. In the meantime, we Christians are to consider ourselves as dead to sin and not let sin reign in our bodies (Rom. 6:11, 12).

The word “removal” is the Greek *apekduōsis* (#555 ἀπεκδύσις; pronounced, äp-ek'-doo-sis). It refers to stripping off clothes, then to removing something. Friberg’s Analytical Lexicon, defines it “as an action, of clothes *stripping off, undressing*;

figuratively, of believers *being set free* from their sinful nature through union with Christ *putting off, removal* (Col. 2:11).”

**“by the circumcision of Christ.”** This the instrumental dative of “in,” and the genitive, “of Christ” is a subjective genitive (cp. Lenski), pointing to the author, Christ. Meyer comments, that it is “the circumcision which is produced through Christ” (Meyer’s Commentary; Colossians, p. 298). The phrase means, the circumcision we receive due to our being in union with Christ. It is by virtue of our being in union with Christ that our whole flesh body gets “circumcised,” removed. The circumcision of Christ in this verse does not refer to the circumcision he underwent as a baby. Now it is the job of each believer to walk in such a way as to manifest this circumcision in our lives.

**2:12.** “*your baptism.*” When a person is “baptized in holy spirit” (Acts 1:5; which is the “one baptism” of Eph. 4:5), that person is “saved,” “born again,” and has become a new creation. He is at that time in union with Jesus Christ (see note on Rom. 6:3), and via this union has been circumcised with Christ (Col. 2:11), crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6), and will be seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6; see note there). Some scholars make the baptism in this verse Jesus’ baptism, but while his baptism made our union with him available, it was our baptism in holy spirit that made it a reality.

**“through faith.”** The idea is clearly that we have what we have because of our individual faith, but leaving out a modifier such as “your” before “faith” places the emphasis on “faith,” which is God’s provision, and not on what we have done to acquire salvation.

**“out from among the dead.”** See Romans 4:24. K. Wuest (*Word Studies*): “out from among the dead.”

**2:13.** “due to the transgressions.” The preferred Greek text is τοῦς παραπτῶμασιν, a dative phrase which has the emphasis of “through,” or “by reason of” (Lightfoot), “due to” (Lenski). The Greek *en* in some Greek texts, which became part of the Textus Receptus, seems to be a scribal addition (see Lightfoot, *Colossians*; Robertson (*Word Studies*). The Greek for “transgressions” is *paraptoma* (#3900 παράπτωμα) which is to “misstep,” “to fall by the wayside.” This “misstep” is not necessarily intentional, although it can be. Thus, in life, “trespasses,” are much more common than “sins.” Meanings of *paraptoma* include: “faults,” “deviations from truth,” “lapse,” “error,” “mistake,” “wrongdoing.” (See note on Eph. 1:7).

**“uncircumcision of your flesh.”** This is not referring to physical uncircumcision, as if that could keep someone from being saved. Jesus stated that “many” would come from the east and west (being uncircumcised Gentiles) and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the “sons of the Kingdom” (i.e., the Jews who were chosen to be there and were physically circumcised) would be excluded (Matt. 8:11, 12). The “uncircumcision of your flesh” is the flesh nature that everyone has, and it is in union with Christ that we undergo a circumcision made without hands (Col. 2:11), and acquire a new nature and are righteous before God.

**“having forgiven us.”** The context thus far in the chapter has been “you,” but now Paul makes it “us,” thus showing that the forgiveness of God belongs to both Jews (of which Paul was one) and Gentiles.

**2:14.** “wiped clean.” The Greek is *exaleiphō* (#1813 ἐξαλεῖφω; pronounced “ex-al-ā’-fō”), and in its basic meaning it refer to wiping something clean until no trace of what

was written before exists, “to cause to disappear by wiping” (BDAG). In the ancient world writing materials were scarce and expensive, so many of them were reused. Papyrus was sometimes washed clean and then re-written on.

“...the verb used for “blotted out” is the technical term for “washing out” the writing from a papyrus sheet. So complete was the forgiveness which Christ by his work secured, that it completely cancelled the old bond, that had hitherto been valid against us...He made the bond as though it had never been (Exod. 32:23ff; Rev. 3:5)” (*Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*; Moulton & Milligan, Hendrickson Publishers, 2004, p. viii.).

Some English versions read “erased,” and while that is not a bad translation, there were not pencils and erasers in the ancient world, so the reader may get the wrong impression. “Wiped out,” which some versions have, is fine if people do not get the wrong impression from the common use of “wipeout” today. The essence of what this is saying is the handwriting written against us is no longer there to be held against us--it is gone.

**“handwritten document.”** The Greek word is *cheirographon* (#5498 χειρογραφον), a compound word made up of “hand,” and “writing.” It refers to a handwritten document. Many versions have something about debt, such as “certificate of debt” (HCSB), or “record of debt” (ESV), but that is reading too much into the text. While it is true that *cheirographon* is used in ancient literature of a bond of debt, it is also used of other things, including deposits, labor contracts, business agreements, and even authorization to act (cp. Lenski, Colossians, p. 114). Even if, as some theologians think, the Jews bound themselves to a debt in accepting the Law, the Gentiles did not. On the other hand, the Law made not only the Jews, but the whole world guilty before God (Rom. 3:9-20). Furthermore, the Law was in a sense “God’s handwriting” for it came by the mouth of God and then by the hand of God. (Ex. 20:1; Ex. 32:16). Not many people are aware that some of the Mosaic Law was spoken from the mouth of God directly to the people, but it was. (Ex. 19:9; 20:1; Deut. 4:10-13, 15, 36; 5:4-6, 22-27; 18:14-16; Heb. 12:18-21). The only reason God stopped speaking the Law to the people was that they asked Him to stop and to speak just to Moses (Ex. 20:19).

**“which by means of regulations.”** The two word dative phrase τοῖς δόγμασιν has been translated in numerous ways, and is the reason that almost every version varies in its translation of this verse. William Hendrickson (New Testament Commentary) has an extensive entry on “which by means of.” The thesis of the verse is that the handwritten document that was against us (the Law) was hostile to us by means of all its regulations, which no one could keep (Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 3:11).

**“regulations.”** The Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα), a noun that occurs 5 times in the New Testament and means: a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed; an imperial declaration, a decree; something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma (BDAG). This word is used of the Law both here and in Eph. 2:15. In this context, “regulations” is a good translation for the tenants of the Law (cp. note on Acts 16:4; cp. NIV).

**“hostile.”** The Greek word is *hupenantios* (#5227 ὑπεναντιος), and it means “against, opposed, contrary, hostile.” In this case, “hostile” seemed like a good translation, because while God in one sense meant the Law for good (Rom. 7:12; Gal. 3:24), He also knew that it would mean that everyone would become guilty when judged

by its standards (Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 3:11), and therefore the Law brought a curse on people (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26). Thus the Law is “hostile” (“openly against”) people, because there is no way to live by it and be safe from judgment and death.

**“taken it away.”** The Greek phrase is ἔκτενεν ἡμῶν literally, “has taken it out of the midst (or middle). This is a time when the Greek literature shows us that the phrase was used idiomatically for something being “removed” (cp. *Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 308; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 189, cp. Lenski). Jesus Christ took the Law, which was hostile to us due to all the regulations that we could not keep, and he “removed” it, he did away with it. By perfectly fulfilling the Law, Jesus nailed it to his cross when he was nailed to the cross, and when he died we died to the regulations of the Law as a standard for righteousness.

**2:15.** “stripped *naked*.” The Greek word is *apekduomai* (#554 ἀπεκδόμα; pronounced “äp-ek-do'-oh-my”). The key to understanding how to translate this word, indeed, the whole verse, is by paying attention to the whole verse and how the vocabulary interrelates. In this case, the words clearly refer to a Roman “Triumph,” the triumphal march (“parade”) that was held in Rome after a war that met specific conditions, such as adding territory to the Empire (for a much more complete description of a Triumph, see the note on 2 Cor. 2:14). Once we understand the verse is referring to a Triumph, then many nuances of the verse, and many implications come to light.

The word *apekduomai* literally refers to taking off clothing, stripping off clothing (Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon*; BDAG; Liddell & Scott). Louw and Nida (Greek-English Lexicon) write: “To take off or strip off clothing; to undress, to disrobe, stripping off. ‘He stripped off the clothing of the rulers and authorities and made them a public spectacle’ (Col. 2.15). [The use in Colossians] appears to be a case of figurative usage, but it may refer to the stripping away of weapons and hence the removal of authority and power.”

It is also true, as BDAG points out, that the word can refer to “disarm,” and many versions read that way, but that is a secondary meaning, and furthermore it is difficult to see exactly how that would fit as well as “stripped” in this verse. If a person is stripped naked and chained as a prisoner in a Roman Triumph, of course he is also disarmed. On the other hand, to simply use the word “disarmed” does not fit the picture being painted by this verse, for the powers are not just “disarmed,” they are stripped, chained, and exposed to public view and ridicule.

Some commentators state that because the verb is in the middle voice that God stripped Himself in some way (cp. Wuest), but the middle is often used in an active sense and those arguments are well handled by Lenski, Hendrickson, Lange, Meyer, etc.

**“(through him).”** God has been in a war with Satan since Satan sinned, and the victory in that war has now been assured through the work of Christ even though every battle has not yet been fought. The Greek text puts the phrase at the end of the verse, but that makes the English read awkwardly. Of more concern is that the commentators and translators are divided as to whether the dative masculine pronoun (“him” or “it”) refers to Christ or to the “cross.” Many versions read “it,” while versions such as the Holman Christian Standard Bible, ESV, NASB, and Goodspeed’s translation, read “him,” and the scholars, both ancient and modern, are as divided as the versions. Both “cross” and “Christ” seem to make sense, and indeed it could be said that both Christ and the cross are vital to the victory. However, the use of the Greek ἐν αὐτῷ (“in him,” cp. v. 6, 7, 9, 10), “in whom” (v. 11, 12) has been consistent in this section in referring to Christ, not to

something else, and it certainly is “in him,” (“in connection with him,” or “through him”) that God won the battle and was able to have the Triumph. Therefore, we believe that although the use of the pronoun retains the cross as an image in the background, the light is clearly cast on Christ himself and all that he did and accomplished.

**“made a public spectacle.”** The Greek word is *deigmatizō* (#1165 δειγματίζω; pronounced; “dag-mā-tee'-zō”), and it refers to disgracing someone in public. It is only used two times in the New Testament, the other time being when Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, and did not want to disgrace her publicly, but wanted to divorce her privately (Matt. 1:19). Being paraded through the streets of Rome in chains (and usually stripped naked), was the ultimate public disgrace, and slavery or death, often in the arena, came shortly after the Triumph procession. In fact, the Roman historian Plutarch wrote that when Antony and Cleopatra lost the war with Octavian and Octavian wanted Cleopatra to be a prisoner in his Triumph, Cleopatra committed suicide. Nonetheless, Octavian had an effigy of Cleopatra made and included that in his Triumph. In the context of the Roman Triumph, the translation “made a public spectacle” is a fitting translation (cp. NAB, NIV, NKJV).

**“leading them as captives in a Triumph procession.”** The Greek word is *thriambeuō* (#2358 θριαμβεύω); pronounced “three-am-byoo'-ō”), and it means to lead someone in a Roman Triumph procession. The words “as captives” were added to insure that the reader did not think that “to lead” simply meant “to go in front of,” but rather “to lead” as someone might lead a dog down the street on a leash. Lightfoot (*Colossians*) writes that the word is “wrongly translated in the A.V. [KJV], ‘causes us to triumph.’” He goes on to say “...it is the defeated powers of evil...who are led in public, chained to the triumphal car of Christ.”

We can see that it is tempting to remove the Triumph from the verse and turn it into a general reference of how God “triumphed” (“won”) over the forces of evil, and it does certainly make the verse easier to read for those Christians who do not know what a Roman “Triumph” is. However, although God did defeat the powers of evil, that is not what the verse is saying, and omitting the Triumph from the verse causes it to lose much of its meaning.

That the powers of evil are led in a Triumph means among other things, that they have been totally defeated. They have no weapons, in fact, no clothes. Who and what they are can be seen by everyone. They are chained and powerless. Their evil deeds are known, and they are being publically disgraced for who they are and what they have done. Furthermore, their future holds nothing but more disgrace and destruction.

As part of every Triumph, the conquering general rode in a chariot, gloriously dressed and receiving the accolades of the crowd. While this verse confirms that the victory is “through him,” through Christ, it does not specifically refer to all the glory and honor Christ will receive, although that certainly is part of the analogy. Also, in every Triumph, the general’s army followed him, enjoying the fruits of victory. By using the analogy of the Triumph, we Christians are known to be enjoying the fruits of victory, even though that, like the glory the general receives, is not specifically stated.

**2:17.** “body.” The Greek word is “body,” *sōma* (#4983 σῶμα), and this is an example of a verse that can be very confusing if it is translated literally, as it is in the KJV, “the body is of Christ.” This verse is painting a picture using the word “body,” and the “shadow” that is cast by the body. We all experience this when we walk in the sun. Our bodies cast

a shadow. The regulations of the Law about such things as eating and drinking, feasts and fasts, etc. were only a “shadow,” they were not the “body,” the substance, the “real thing” if you will. The body (reality) that casts the shadow is Christ’s. We thought it was best to translate “body” literally, but to do so and make the verse understandable by English readers we really need to add italics.

**2:18.** “disqualify you for the prize.” The Greek word is *katabrabeuō* (#2603 καταβραβεῖω; pronounced “ka-ta-bra-byoo’-ō”), and there are many different ways it can be translated. In fact, this verse has a number of words that can be translated in different ways, which explains the large number of variations among our English versions.

As Hendrickson and many other commentators point out, this word refers to the judgment of a judge or umpire who would make a decision or judgment against someone. In this case, the idea would be that someone who did not believe in Christ, and thus the actions and beliefs of the Colossian Christians, would declare them to be disqualified. Lenski writes:

This pictures the man who awards the prize in the athletic contests and denies this prize to the true Christians in Colosse, and does this mean thing in the way and on the grounds now stated. Paul says: ‘Let no man do this sort of thing to you,’ i.e., disregard him who tries it, laugh at him; the prize is yours whatever decision the fellow may hand down.”

We see that meaning of *katabrabeuō* represented in translations such as the NET Bible: “Let no one who delights in humility and the worship of angels pass judgment on you.” Based on that meaning of the word, one thing this verse pictures is people telling us we are not qualified when in fact we are, and we need to learn not to believe them. Far too often Christians are discouraged in their Christian beliefs and activities because unbelievers mock or disparage them.

Lightfoot points out that *katabrabeuō* can also refer to a fellow-competitor trying to hinder us. What often happens in life is that this person who passes judgment on us gets us to believe him, and we start to follow his ways, which does lead to us being disqualified for the prize. In light of this, the translation, “Let no one disqualify you for the prize” (NIV; cp. HCSB, ESV, NRSV) is a good one. We are not to let people tell us we are not qualified, and we are certainly not to follow their disobedient ways and become disqualified.” Here is an example of God packing a paragraph of meaning into one word, and the essence of the verse, in a very expanded form, is: “Let no one say, or try to convince you, that you are disqualified for the prize, and do not follow what they are doing and thus become disqualified.”

**“by delighting in.”** The Greek is *thelōn en* (θελων εν). The commentators and versions differ on what this phrase means in this verse. Although the root word refers to “will” or “want,” which leads to translations such as “voluntary” (KJV); doing his own will” (Darby); or “chooses to” (NJB), Lightfoot and many others show that the phrase is used to refer to delighting in, or taking pleasure in, doing something. Lightfoot notes: “The expression is common in the LXX [the Septuagint; the Greek Old Testament],” and he notes there is no valid reason not to understand it that way, as “delighting in” or “devoting himself to.”

**“false humility.”** The Greek word is simply *tapeinophrosunē* (#5012 ταπεινοφροσυνη) “humility.” Humility is generally considered to be a wonderful virtue,

so here it obviously refers to a “false humility” (NIV), or unnecessary actions that are supposed to demonstrate humility (cp. “asceticism” (ESV); “self-abasement” (NASB)). The REV adds the word “false” in italics to make the meaning plain. Many religious people do things that demonstrate their humility that are unnecessary in the Christian faith, and can even derail the freedom we have in Christ by emphasizing works rather than faith and grace.

Many commentators have pointed out that in this specific context humility and the worship of angels are likely connected because the person who was so quick to judge others was trying to create the impression that he considered himself (or mankind) too lowly to approach God, but “humbly” tried to contact Him through the mediation of angels (cp. Hendrickson).

Using angels as mediators to reach God would make perfect sense in the Patron-Client culture of the Roman world. Dignitaries and powerful people were almost always contacted through intermediaries, not directly. This also helps explain the worship of angels. Although there are likely many reasons to worship angels, part of the ritual behavior of the Patron-Client society is that when someone in a more influential position (the “Patron”) helps you, you return the favor by praising and extolling that person, particularly to others.

It certainly seems that the meaning of this verse includes someone who appears very humble by using angels and mediaries to “get to God,” and worshipping those angels in return, all the while asserting that we mere humans are not good enough to approach God. This “humility” and worship may confuse some people, but the knowledgeable Christian is not deceived. We are to approach Jesus and God directly, and worship only them. In spite of the clear directives about that in the Word of God, many people today pray to saints instead of God, often asking the saints to procure the favor of God for them.

**“the worshipping of angels.”** The Greek phrase is *thrēskeia tōn aggelōn* (θησκει τῶν ἄγγελων). The phrase seems simple and straightforward, referring to the people worshipping angels. The definite article before “angels” is evidence that the word “angel” is not used as an adjective or in a descriptive manner (“angelic piety,” or “worship practiced by angels). Neither is there a need to see here the figure hendiadys (Bullinger, *Figures*), who would make the phrase “the religious humility of angels.” If that were the case, it would seem that the humility of angels would be something to aspire to, not something to be warned about.

Colossians goes to great lengths to establish the pre-eminence of Christ and that he is above all (cp. 1:15-20, 22, 28; 2:8, 9, 17). Furthermore, there is historical evidence that supports that angel worship was going on in the area of Colosse (cp. Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary*). The Church Father Irenaeus, who lived in the second century AD, who historians believe came from Smyrna in the Roman province of Asia (modern Izmir, Turkey) not far from Colosse mentioned “angelic invocations” in his writing, so it was going on in the culture (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; Book II, chapt. 32.5).

Even today there are very dedicated Christians who love God but who venerate angels and saints, so the idea that it was going on in Colosse when it was part of the native culture should not surprise us. In fact, that God does not ignore it but instead

makes a point about it should show us that prayer to saints and veneration of saints and angels is not “harmless,” but a sin in the eyes of God.

“**taking his stand on what he has seen.**” The Greek is *ha eoraken ambateuōn* (ἡ εὐρακεν ἀμβάτεων), a phrase that has led to “well nigh endless discussion” (Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary*). The word *embateuō* (#1687 ἀμβάτεω; “taking his stand”) occurs only here in the New Testament. Sir William Ramsay seems to have solved the problem about what *ambateuōn* means due to its being found in inscriptions in the Temple of Apollo, and he wrote extensively on it. It refers to being fully initiated into a mystery religion and then taking a stand on what you know (Ramsay, *The Teaching of St. Paul in Terms of the Present Day*, p. 289-299).

The word *embateuō*, which ordinarily means “to enter” or “to set foot on,” was used in a technical sense in the mystery religions of those who entered into full initiation and then took a stand on what they knew (they also apparently physically stood on something in the initiation).

Ramsay writes:

The Colossians are warned by Paul against someone, probably a known individual, who is cheating them of the prize of Christian life. Such a one would not be an outward enemy, misleading or harassing them. He is evidently a person that endangers the success of their Christian life by spreading false teaching among them as one of their own number; he had a wrong conception of the nature of the Christianity which he professed, being swayed by his older religious ideas and philosophic theories; and his influence was leading astray the minds of others. [Ramsay adds whether it was one individual or a group of people who held the same misconceptions].

The force of verse 18 is conditioned by its relation to 8 and 16. The whole passage, 8-19, consists of three connected and parallel warnings: (8) “See that there shall be no one who takes you captive by philosophy and empty illusion, after the tradition of men, after the elemental powers or rulers of the world, and not after Christ...” (16), “Let no one, then, make himself a judge (or critic), of you in meat and drink, or in respect of festival days: which are a shadow of things future, but the body *that casts the shadow* is Christ’s.” (18) “Let no one cozen you of the prize of your life-race, finding satisfaction in self-humiliation and worshipping of angels, ‘taking his stand on’ what he has seen (in the Mysteries), vainly puffed up by his unspiritual mind, and not keeping firm hold on [Christ] the Head.”

**2:19.** “the Head,” a title; suggests a person.

“joints and ligaments.” The Body owes its functionality partly due to its articulation (joints), partly to the way it stays together (ligaments). The joints and ligaments join and hold together the members of the body.

**2:20.** “Since.” The Greek word *ei* (#1487 εἰ) usually means “if,” but in some contexts it can mean “since.” Friberg’s *Lexicon* states that in some cases, *ei* “express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled; *since, because.*” R.C. H. Lenski referred to it as the “if of reality” (cp. his note on Col. 3:1). E. W. Bullinger (*Lexicon*, “if”) wrote that it: “assumes the hypothesis as an actual fact, the condition being unfulfilled, but no doubt being thrown on the supposition.” Other verses that have *ei* used in the sense of “because” or “since” include Rom. 6:8, Col. 3:1. (Cp. NIV translation, “Since...”).

**“pestered by.”** This is a passive verb. It is not middle as most versions translate it. The Colossians were not “submitting themselves” (middle) to regulations. They were being pressured to submit to them (passive), as we all often are (Cp. Lenski).

**“regulations.”** The Greek is the verb, the noun in verse 14 (see note there).  
**2:23.** “but *they are* of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” There are differences of opinion among commentators as to how this last phrase in verse 23 needs to be understood and translated. However, most modern commentators fall into one of two major camps. In the REV translation above, the translation “in stopping” comes from the Greek preposition *pros*, which, like most Greek prepositions, is very flexible and has multiple definitions. In fact, it is *pros* that is at the heart of the two major ways this last phrase of Colossians 2:23 has been interpreted. If the *pros* is seen as having the sense of “against,” as the majority of the modern versions and the REV represent it, then we end up with a translation similar in impact to the REV translation above (cp. HCSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV). Although the use of *pros* in the sense of “against” is not its most common use of *pros*, the grammar of the verse seems to support it, which is why the majority of the modern translations favor it.

If, however, *pros* is understood to mean, “to, towards,” i.e., “with a view to,” which is its most common meaning, then the translations by Hendriksen, Williams (New Testament), and the NET are possibly a better. The NET reads: “Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and false humility achieved by an unsparing treatment of the body— a wisdom with no true value— they in reality result in fleshly indulgence.” Hendriksen’s translation reads: “Regulations of this kind, though, to be sure, having a reputation for wisdom because of their self-imposed ritual, humility, and unsparing treatment of the body, are of no value whatever, (serving only) to indulge the flesh.”

The translations by Hendriksen, Williams, and the NET, make a very important point, that regulating the flesh to somehow be right in the sight of God is not valuable in and of itself, but in fact serves only to indulge the flesh. The translation in the REV, while not making that point as clearly, show that regulation of the flesh does not stop the indulgence of the flesh. True! Fleshly regulations to not stop the indulgence of the flesh, in fact, they indulge the flesh. The “humble” and “disciplined” people who were trying to influence the Colossians were actually filled with pride. They rejected God’s grace and His simple truth about Jesus Christ, and piled on regulations and extra things to believe, trying to show themselves humble by their learning and disciple. Like the leaders among the Jews, they “load people with loads *that are* grievous to carry” (Luke 11:46). It is only pride and arrogance that leads people from the simplicity of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith. Furthermore, rules that supposedly produce righteousness in the sight of God by governing the flesh are really only an indulgence of the flesh.

**3:1.** “Since.” See note on 2:20.

**3:2.** “Keep thinking about.” The Greek verb *phroneō* (5426 φρονέω; pronounce fro-nay'-oh), means to think about something, give careful consideration to something, form an opinion about something. Here it is present tense, imperative mood, so it means “keep thinking about,” not think about something just one time or simply form an opinion about. Our minds are always active, and we are always thinking about something. God commands that we keep thinking about heavenly things and the things of God.

**3:4.** “your.” There is good textual support for “your,” which is why almost all the modern versions follow that translation. Commentators suggest that Christ is called “your” life because now the Gentiles are included in Christ whereas under the Law they were excluded. Thus, by saying “your life,” Paul is emphasizing that the Gentile were included in Christ.

**3:5.** “and especially covetousness” (see Lightfoot; *Colossians*). The definite article before covetousness is important, and is translated “especially” here because that is its force in the context. It is not the entire list that is idolatry, but only covetousness (Lenski).

**3:6.** “is coming.” The present tense would normally be understood as “is now coming,” but the wrath of God that is coming is mainly coming in the future. This is what Greek grammarians refer to as a “gnomic present,” a general use of the present tense to represent something without a specific reference to when. The present tense is also used because there is indeed a sense in which ungodly people are under the wrath of God at this time (cp. Rom. 1:18).

**“upon the sons of disobedience.”** This phrase is omitted in many early manuscripts, and thus left out of many versions. Its omission would cause reader to want to complete the thought, and the parallel in Eph. 5:6 is a ready source for completion, which would explain how it could have been added if the original did not have it.

However, there is enough evidence for it that it is left in brackets in the UBS and NA Greek texts, and it does seem to need to be there since verse 7 has “you also.”

**3:8.** “even you.” The commentators differ as to what the words καὶ ὑμεῖς in this verse refer to, which accounts for the many differences in the way this verse is translated. We thought that it most likely represented the fact that the believers of Colosse were to not do any of the things Paul was about to list, and not to think that they could overlook cleaning themselves of them. Too many times believers do not get truly serious about living godly lives, and give themselves a “pass” on things like anger and shameful speech.

**“defaming speech.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning of as they were used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. (For more on *blasphēmia*, see note on Matt. 9:3).

**“dirty talk.”** The Greek word is hard to define, and this verse would be a good place to argue for an expanded translation. (#148 *aischrologia*; αἰσχρολογία). Vulgar, low, obscene, abusive, shameful, foul, abusive, etc. all fit. “Obscene, shameful speech involving culturally disapproved themes - vulgar speech, obscene speech, dirty talk (Louw-Nida). “Speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, *obscene speech, dirty talk. Aischrologia* might properly be defined as story-telling involving such unseemly deeds as adultery or pederasty” (BDAG).

**3:9.** “Never.” The “never” comes from the present imperative of “not.” It is more than just “do not lie.” For one thing, notice how lying is not in the list of sins in verse 8, but is listed separately and has its own imperatives. Lying is a very harmful and hurtful sin that cannot be a part of a Christian’s life.

**“since you have put off.”** At first reading this seems to be a kind of built in contradiction, for if you have put off the old man and its practices, why do you need to be told not to lie? We have put off the old man nature in a spiritual sense, for we have died in Christ. However, our flesh and old nature still exert an influence in our lives, and we

must be aggressive to live in the flesh in a way that matches the work that Christ has done in us.

**3:11.** The Greeks were very proud and prejudiced, and thought of others who did not speak Greek as only saying, “bar-bar.” Hence the onomatopoetic word, “barbarian” to describe one who was not familiar with Greek language and culture, and thus “uncivilized,” no matter how highly educated or morally cultured they actually were. Thus, “barbarian” as an English translation does a disservice. “Foreigner” will usually do, but in this case, it is contrasted with “Scythian” who were considered savage and barbaric even to “uncivilized” foreigners. “The savageness of the Scythians was proverbial” (Lightfoot, Colossians, p. 218).

**3:12.** “clothe yourselves.” The Greek means to put on clothes, or apparel, thus, “to dress,” and the middle voice indicates that we are to clothe ourselves. We have freewill, and if we are going to be like Christ by being compassionate, kind, humble, etc., we have to make a diligent effort. We can pray all we want to for God to make us like Christ, and He will help, but we have to do a lot of work also.

**3:13.** “must forgive.” The verb is not supplied, and although not completely necessary and therefore not necessarily an ellipsis, nevertheless, it seems logical to supply the verb, as many English versions do. Even those English versions which do not supply the verb “forgive,” often add words so the English reads easily. The Greek text is quite abbreviated, οὐκ ἔτι καὶ ὑμεῖς; literally, “so also you.” Even the KJV adds the word “do” to help complete the sense: “so also *do* ye.”

**3:14.** “bond of perfection.” The Greek is *sundesmos tēs tekeuitētos* (συνδεσμος τελειότητος), where *sundesmos* is a bond, something that hold things together, and is *tekeuitētos* “perfection,” or “perfectness.” The Greek noun translated “perfection” is *teleiotēs* (#5047 τελειότης), and it means “perfection; perfectness; completion, maturity. It refers to bringing something to a goal or an end state. It’s root word is *telos* (#5056; goal, finish, thus that which has reached its goal or end). Putting *teleiotēs* in the genitive case creates a couple different meanings, each of them true. When one phrase can be read in at least two different ways, and both are true, it is the figure of speech *amphibologia* is (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). There is no doubt that when God inspired Paul to write that He knew he was making sentence with multiple meanings, and now it is our joy to understand everything that God has packed into the verse.

One way of reading the Greek phrase “bond of perfectness,” is to see it as the figure of speech *antimereia*, in this case where a descriptive word (an adjective) is put in the nominative case as the subject of a genitive phrase. This is done for emphasis because in a sentence nouns naturally have more emphasis than adjectives. As an *antimereia*, the phrase means “perfect bond,” meaning that love is the perfect bond that unites all the godly attributes and also unites the people. Versions that have a reading such as “perfect bond” include the HCSB; ESV; NET; NIV; NJB; and NRSV.

Besides being read as an *antimereia*, the genitive can also be understood to be a genitive of production, and thus the phrase would mean that love is the “bond that produces perfection.” Hendriksen points out that this seems to be the most natural reading of the text based on the Epistle of Colossians itself. For example, in 2:2 Paul wants the Colossians to be united in love. He also point out the epistle points people away from the false teachers ideas of philosophy and knowledge, and also obedience to human regulations, and points instead to love as being what will strengthen and unite the people

and lead them to where they want to go. He writes: “Love, then, is ‘bond of perfection’ in the sense that it is that which unites believers, causing them to move forward toward the goal of perfection.”

No doubt both meanings are true. Love is both that which unites and binds things together, it is also that which leads us on to perfection, and indeed, helps us along the way to reach that goal. Given that, we felt it was best to leave the ambiguity of the Greek text in the English translation, and have it read, the “bond of perfection.”

**3:16.** “psalms.” The Greek word is *psalmos* (#5568 ψαλμῶς), and although the general meaning of the Greek word is a song of praise, in this context it no doubt refers to the psalms of the Old Testament, which have brought comfort and inspiration to generation after generation of believers.

“**hymns.**” The Greek word is *hymnos* (5215 ὕμνος), and in the Greek culture it was used of a song that praised gods and heroes. As it was used by Christians it referred to songs that praised and exalted God and Jesus Christ, extolling them and what they had done.

“**songs.**” The Greek word is *odē* (#5603 ὄδῃ; pronounced, “O-day”). In Greek, *odē* was wider in meaning than *psalmos* or *hymnos*, and referred to any song, ode, or even poems. Thus it was important to put the adjective “spiritual” with the word *odē* in order to properly delimit it for the believers. Far too many Christians spend time and money listening to music that is contrary to Christian beliefs, morals, and practices. It is important that we notice that this verse which speaks of the word of Christ dwelling in us “richly” is immediately conjoined with music. Music exerts a powerful influence on what we believe and how we act, and Christians must pay serious attention to what they hear.

**3:18.** “submit yourselves.” The Greek verb *hupotassō* (#5293 ὑποτάσσω) means to be subordinate, submit to, be subject to, to yield to one's admonition or advice. While the verb has the same form in both the passive and middle voice, it makes the most sense that this verse is middle voice, the women are to submit themselves out of their freewill (cp. Robertson, *Grammar*; Lenski, *Colossians*).

“**fitting.**” The Greek verb is *anekō* (#433 ἀνέκω), and it means fitting, proper, appropriate.

“**in the Lord.**” This is the common phrase and concept, sometimes represented by the Greek preposition *en* and sometime by *eis*, that indicates “in connection with the Lord” or sometimes even “in union with the Lord” (cp. commentary Rom. 6:3). It is very important when reading Colossians that we notice that when it comes to wives submitting and children obeying (v. 20), these things are to be done “in the Lord,” that is, in connection with the Lord. Thus, of the “wives” (v. 18), “husbands” (v. 19), and children (v. 20), only the verse about wives (v. 18) and the verse about children (v. 20) have the phrase “in the Lord.” The middle verse, about husbands (v. 19), does not have the phrase “in the Lord” because the husband is not being asked to submit to or obey a fallible human being.

Whenever someone is asked to submit to or obey another person, it is always upon the condition that what they are asked to do is right and godly. Thus, the woman submits, and children obey, “in connection with the Lord, Jesus Christ.” These verses (18 and 20) are not saying that it is fitting to the Lord that women and children submit or obey, no questions asked. Husbands have a responsibility to make sure that if their wives are being submissive, that they are being godly in their leadership, not worldly, asking

things of their wives that Jesus would not approve of. Similarly, parents have a responsibility before God to make sure that what they ask their children to do is godly, not sinful in any way. In accordance with this verse, wives have a responsibility not to submit to requests that are clearly outside the will of God, and children have a responsibility to not obey if the requests of the parents are clearly outside the will of God.

Since Christians expect to be able to live by the Bible they read, it is unfortunate that the same phrase at the end of verses 18 and 20, “in the Lord” (ἐν κυρίῳ), is almost always correctly translated “in the Lord” in verse 18 in our English Bibles, but is almost always translated differently in those same English Bibles at the end of verse 20. For example, the HCSB, ESV, NIV, and RSV, all end verse 20 by saying: “for this pleases the Lord.” The KJV, NAB, NJB, and YLT end the verse in ways that are similar in meaning. But this makes the verse say that it pleases the Lord when children obey, no questions asked, which is not at all what the verse is saying. God saw fit to put the conditional phrase “in the Lord” at the end of the verses about wives and children, and English translators should represent that in their translations.

The phrase “in the Lord” governs the verse instead of modifying a specific word. It brings the concept, “in connection with the Lord,” into the verse. Thus, we could translate verse 18 into English as it is, with the phrase at the end, but the meaning would be the same if we said, “In the Lord, wives submit...,” or “Wives, in the Lord, submit...,” or “Wives, submit yourselves, in the Lord, to...” That the phrase “in the Lord” governs the verse instead of modifying a specific word in the verse occurs in some other places in the NT as well as here. For example, Ephesians 5:8 says, “for you were once darkness, but now, in the Lord, *you are* light.” The idea is that it is only “in the Lord,” in association or union with the Lord, that we are light. Various versions place the phrase in different places in the verse, most having “in the Lord” at the very end of the verse. In Colossians 3:19, concerning the children, the phrase “in the Lord” is also a governing phrase instead of just modifying a single word in the verse. For more on submission, see the commentary notes on Ephesians 5:21 and 22.

**3:19.** “do not be harsh with them.” This phrase is seen by some commentators (cp. Lenski, Hendriksen) to be the figure of speech litotes (also called miosis), or “belittling.” In other words, the phrase is placed in the negative “do not be” so that we will see it in a much larger, and more positive light. In that case, although the vocabulary says, “do not be harsh,” our hearts say, “be totally good, kind, and considerate.”

**3:20.** “in the Lord.” This verse is not saying, as so many versions say, that when Children obey it is “pleasing to the Lord.” While it is true that if the parent’s request is godly it is pleasing to the Lord when the child obeys, the point of saying “in the Lord” in this verse is that sometimes parents ask children to do things that are clearly outside the will of God, but children are only required to obey when the parents are “in the Lord.” See commentary on “in the Lord” in 3:18.

**3:21.** “exasperate.” The Greek verb is *erethizō* (#2042 ἐρεθίζω), and it means to stir up, excite, stimulate, to provoke. A person can be stirred up for good (2 Cor. 9:2), or, as in this verse, in an evil sense. The essence of the verse is that fathers should not stir up their children by unjust or evil treatment, and thus “exasperate” fits well here (cp. HCSB). the Greek-English Lexicon by Louw and Nida has: “do not cause your children to become resentful,” which catches the sense well also.

**3:22.** “masters.” The Greek is *kurios* (#2962 κ<sup>ϰ</sup>ριος), “lords,” the same Greek word as “Lord” in verses 18 and 20. However, here it is properly translated “masters,” referring to the earthly owners of slaves, whereas in verses 18 and 20 it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The word *kurios* was used in a large number of ways in the Greco-Roman world, and referred to one who had authority. Thus, Lord, master, owner, are all good translations depending on the context, and when used in direct address, it was used like we use the word “sir” today (cp. Matt. 27:63). God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20, 22); a slave owner was called “lord” (Matt. 10:24); a landowner was referred to as “lord” (Matt. 13:27; 20:8; 21:40); a father was sometimes called “lord” by his children (Matt. 21:30); and Jesus Christ is called “Lord.”

“not only to win their approval when their eye is on you.” See note on Ephesians 6:6, where the same phrase is used.

**3:24.** “the reward, namely, the inheritance.” The Greek reads, “the reward of the inheritance,” which is a genitive of apposition. The NIV gets the sense of this passage, and it reads, “you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” In this verse, the “inheritance” we receive from God for the good works we have done is called an “inheritance.” This helps explain difficult verses such as Galatians 5:21 that says that flagrant sinners will not “inherit” the kingdom of God. It is not that they are saved, but that they will have no inheritance in Paradise.

The word “repayment” is from the Greek *antapodosis* (#469 ἀνταποδοσις), which only occurs here in the New Testament, but which Lightfoot points out is common word in both the Septuagint and the Greek classical writers. He says, “The double compound involves the idea of exact requital.” This “repayment” can be either good or bad depending on whether the work done was good or bad. That is not reflected well when *antapodosis* is translated “reward,” because we think of a reward being only for good done, which is not the case in this verse. Salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8), but the repayment we receive at the Judgment is in correspondence to what, and what quality, or work we have done.

**4:1.** “Masters.” The Greek is *kurios* (#2962 κ<sup>ϰ</sup>ριος), “lords,” here properly translated “masters” (see commentary on Col. 3:22). From the structure, this should have been the last verse of chapter three, because 3:18 is “Wives,” 3:19 is “husbands,” 3:20 is “children,” 3:21 is “fathers,” 3:22 is “servants,” and now 4:1 is to “masters.”

**4:4.** “make it clear.” The Greek is *phaneroō* (#5319 φανερω<sup>ω</sup>), to make it manifest, or reveal it. In this context, “make it clear” is a good translation, because that is what Paul was trying to do for his listeners (cp. ESV, NAB, RSV).

**“as I should.”** The Greek verb is *dei* (#1163 δε<sup>ι</sup>), pronounced “day”), and it means to be necessary, to be right and proper. Translators try to pick up the sense in different ways: “as I am required to speak” (HCSB); “as I ought” (KJV); “as I should” (NIV; NET; REV); “as I must” (NAB); “as it is my duty to do” (NEB). The point is that it is speaking up for the Lord is not just something that is “nice” to do, it is something we are obligated to do. He died for us, now we are his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20), and we must speak up on his behalf.

**4:5.** “Walk.” The Greek verb is *peripateō* (4043 περιπατ<sup>ω</sup>), and it means “walk,” but it was used idiomatically for “live,” as we might say, “live your life.” People walked everywhere, so “walk” came to mean “live.” The verb is present tense, active voice, so

the meaning is “Be walking,” continuously be “walking” (living) in wisdom. “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders” catches the meaning of the phrase.

**“making the most.”** The Greek is *exagorazō* (#1805 ἐξαγοράζω). It means, 1) to redeem by payment of a price and thus recover from the power of another; to ransom; 2) metaphorically, of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death 3) to buy up, to buy up for one’s self, 4) to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good.

The idea of the verse, combining *exagorazō* (“buy up, buy back”) with *kairos* (an opportune time, opportunity), gives us the mental picture of us buying up the opportunities to reach out to others or to bless others before those opportunities get away. Every shopper knows that truly good deals are short lived. If we do not move quickly, they are gone; other people have snatched up the good deal before us. We are to walk in wisdom toward outsiders, and when there is an opportunity to be a blessing and especially to lead them to Christ so they become “insiders,” we should quickly buy up that opportunity and not let it get away. Perhaps an expanded way to translate this verse would be: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, buying up your opportunities *to be a blessing*.” See commentary on Eph. 5:16.

**“opportunities.”** The Greek word is *kairos* (#2540 καιρός), and it refers to a fixed and definite time, an opportune or seasonable time; the right time. and means in this context, the “opportunity.” This is not the Greek word *chronos* (#5550 χρόνος), which usually refers to a period of time.

**4:6.** “always be with grace.” The Greek word for “grace” is *charis* (#5485 χάρις), grace, but it is in the prepositional phrase, *en chariti* (ἐν χάριτι). Hendriksen (Colossians) points out that at the time Paul was writing the phrase *en chariti* was used by the pagans as well as the Christians. However, when the pagans said “in grace” (with grace), they meant your speech should include witty and clever remarks. In contrast, what Paul means is the language we use should be the outflow of the grace of God at work in our hearts. This is why the REV went with “with grace” instead of “gracious,” like many other versions (HCSB; ESV; NET; NRSV). In English, “gracious” usually means marked by courtesy, tact, delicacy, and kindness. However, anyone who has been much exposed to “Southern hospitality” knows too well that “graciousness” can be devoid of any grace in the heart. Thus the REV went with “with grace.”

**“seasoned with salt.”** Often a metaphor like salt is hard to exactly describe. Christ said that we are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13). Salt preserves, heals (sometimes with a little pain, like putting salt in the wound), cleanses, adds flavor, and as one young man observed, “kills slugs.” Also, in the Greco-Roman world at the time of Christ, salt was quite valuable. There is no reason to believe that any of these meanings is excluded. When we speak to others, and in this context, to unbelievers, our speech is to be healing, but it is also might well be challenging, and it should be “worth its salt” to hear.

**“so that you come to know.”** The Greek verb *eidō* (#1492 εἶδω) means “know,” but in this case the perfect tense infinitive is an infinitive of result (Lenski; Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 1090), and thus pulls in the meaning of “so that” and “come to know.” Lenski has, “so that you get to know.” Verse 6 has to be understood as the conclusion and the “how to” of verse five. We are to walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of our opportunities with them. In that context, our speech with them should always be combined with grace, seasoned with salt for truth, cleansing, and

healing. If we will speak this way with people, we will come to know how to respond to them and the concerns or situations they bring up to us. If, in contrast, our speech is condescending, harsh, condemning, or “better than you,” the outsiders will not speak to us or share their hearts with us, and we will never get to know them or find out how to respond to them to reach them for the Lord.

**“respond.”** The Greek verb is *apokrinomai* (#611 ἀποκρίνομαι), and it means to answer, to reply, to continue speaking, and it can refer to the continuation of discourse, each person replying to the other as the conversation moves forward. Thus, while most versions have “answer,” that seemed too much like all we are doing is answering questions, which is not the case. The CJB, NAB and NASB have “respond,” which seemed more conversational. The NEB translates the last phrase: “study how best to talk with each person you meet.” While that translation is certainly not literal, it does carry much of the meaning of the phrase.

**4:10.** “received commands.” The scholars debate whether or not this is an “epistolary aorist,” or a standard aorist. If it is an epistolary aorist, then Paul was actually saying that you “are receiving” commands, which would be along with the letter itself, likely brought by those who were carrying the letter. On the other hand, if it is a standard aorist, then Paul, by some means, had already sent instructions to the Church at Colossae about Mark.

**“commands.”** The Greek word is *entolē* (#1785 ἐντολή), and means a command or commandment. Although many versions go with “instructions,” and that is certainly part of the semantic range of the word, *entolē* really does communicate a command or order, and shows Paul’s apostolic authority in action. When speaking by revelation and standing in the place of Christ on earth as an apostle, he could give commands to the Church.

**“welcome.”** The Greek word is *dechomai* (#1209 δεχομαι), receive, but in contexts such as this it does not just mean to “receive” in a formal way, but rather to favorably accept, or “welcome.”

**4:11.** “Jesus, who is called Justice.” “Jesus” is the English name of Joshua, and in Greek the name was *Iesous* (#2424 Ἰησοῦς; pronounced Ē-ā-soos). Joshua was such a very famous person that many Jewish boys were called “Joshua.” However, after the Christ was called “Joshua,” the Jews stopped using the name to avoid association with the Christians, and the Christians stopped using the name out of respect for Jesus Christ. Here is a man named Jesus who became referred to by another name: Justice.

“that.” The Greek word is *hina* (#2443 ἵνα), and in this context it is not clear whether it is a result clause (“in order that”), or rather also points to the context of the prayer: he is praying that you will stand mature....” It can actually be both, and so we left the English just “that.”

**4:12.** “Epaphras.” See note on 1:7.

**“struggling.”** The Greek is *agōnizomai* (#75 ἀγωνίζομαι; pronounced äg-ō-need'-zo-my), and it is used in 1:29 of Paul’s struggle to bring Christians to maturity in Christ (see note on “struggling” in 1:29 and 2:1). In this verse Epaphras is struggling in prayer for the believers in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Anyone who prays faithfully understands this struggle. First, prayer is itself warfare. God is a warrior (Exod. 15:3), and we help Him in the spiritual battle when we pray. Just as no soldier fights half-heartedly or carelessly, so we too should battle in prayer with great diligence. Second,

prayer is a struggle because we fight our flesh, which gets distracted or tired. We lose focus and it is a struggle to stay focused in our prayer life. Third, we struggle against frustration. Anyone who prays for a cause as great as the salvation of others or the movement of the Word of God in an area knows what it is to pray day after day and see little results. It is frustrating and can lead to us giving up in prayer. It is exactly why Christ “spoke a parable to them about the necessity for them to pray always, and not become discouraged” (Luke 18:1). Prayer can be a struggle, but it is a good fight and one we all need to stay engaged in.

**4:13.** “Indeed.” The Greek is *gar* (#1063 γάρ), which is usually translated “for.” However, there is no causal link between verse 12 and 13. Instead, this is what Greek grammarians refer to as a “confirmatory *gar*.”

**“works very hard.”** There is a variation in the Greek texts, with some reading *zelos* (zeal, concern), and some reading *ponos* (which is pain, distress, or hard work that causes that pain). Most scholars believe the reading *ponos*, which is more unusual and therefore more likely to be switched to a more common word, is the original. Epaphras worked very hard for the believers in Colossae, even causing himself some pain concerning them.

**4:15.** “Nympha, and the congregation that is in her house.” The Greek manuscripts vary on this verse, some making Nympha a woman, some a man, and some saying “her” house, some “his” house, and some even “their” house. The strongest manuscript evidence supports that Nympha was a woman. Furthermore, when there is disagreement between the manuscripts, one of the ways to determine the original is to ask which reading would be the most difficult, and which the most sense to create. In this case, if the original was Nymphas, and “his” house, it is very unlikely that scribes would change the masculine to a feminine. However, if the original was feminine, it can easily be seen that a later scribe would consider that so unlikely that he would change the feminine to a masculine.

**4:16.** “read.” Read out loud. Since only a small percentage of the people could read, it was very important that letters be read to the people so they could learn the Scripture.

**“among.”** The Greek is *para*, which is not normally “among,” however, in the context of reading a letter the meaning becomes “among” (cp. Peter O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary; Colossians*). The Church would assemble, and someone would read the epistle to them.

**“the letter from Laodicea.”** There has been much scholarly debate about the letter to the Laodiceans. Marcion (c. 85-160) taught that this was the letter to the Ephesians, and historically that position has been taken and defended by John Mill and John Lightfoot. However, it seems most likely that Ephesians was written after Colossians, which would rule out that interpretation. Some have suggested that the Epistle to Philemon is this letter, but Philemon lived in Colosse, not Laodicea, and the letter would have come directly to him. It is most likely that this letter has not survived (cp. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary; Lenski, Colossians*). Of course the debate then rages about “some of the Word of God being lost.” There is no reason to believe that every letter Paul wrote was the Word of God. In fact, Paul was likely an aggressive communicator, with contacts in churches all over the Roman world, and he certainly would have written many letters in his many years in prison (two in Caesarea, Acts 24:27; two in Rome during his first imprisonment there, Acts 28:30; and an uncertain

amount of time in his second imprisonment in Rome, from which we know he wrote 2 Timothy so he was allowed to write letters). Not all of these would have been the Word of God, and none of his letters except the ones we know to be the Word of God have survived.

**4:17.** “Archippus.” Mentioned here and in Philemon 2.

“service.” The Greek is *diakonia* (#1248 διακονία) and means “service,” and depending on the context refers to different kinds of service. Because it can refer to the lifelong call of a person to ministry, it can in some contexts be “ministry.” There is not enough context here in Colossians to really understand what Paul is referring to, and if he is making a general statement, like, “fulfill your ministry,” or if he is making a reference to a specific service or duty that Archippus was supposed to fulfill.